

The Quarterbreed

An Indian Reservation Tale by ROBERT AMES BENNET

FOLLOWING the killing of Agent Nogen and threats of an outbreak among the Indians, Capt. Floyd Hardy, U. S. A., goes to Lakota reservation as acting agent to quell the trouble. He is wounded from ambush, and falls in love with Marie Dupont, who nurses him. She neither accepts nor refuses his proposal of marriage, because she and Vandervyn are intimates. Hardy learns the Indians are disaffected because Marie's father, Jacques Dupont, a wily post trader, and Reginald Vandervyn, agency clerk and nephew of Senator Clemmer, have cheated them in an illegal tribal mine deal, and purposes to right the wrong. He makes friends with the tribesmen and calls a council at the mine. What occurs there—how desperate conspirators work against the captain—is told in this installment.

CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

Hardy was greeted with a murmur of welcome and admiration, and the crowd made a path through their midst to the inner ring of the chiefs. Followed by Redbear, Vandervyn and Olenna, he walked along the passage between the living walls of silent, furtive-eyed Indians, and seated himself on the blanket that had been spread for him beside old Ti-owa-konza. Shortly before the start down into the valley Vandervyn had again borrowed his superior's writing pad and fountain pen. He now sat down at Hardy's shoulder, with the pad and pen ready.

After a ceremonious silence the head chief's erier announced the purpose of the council. This was followed by declamations from three orators, whose main purpose seemed to be to give an exhibition of their ability in painting word pictures. When they had finished, Ti-owa-konza arose, and warmed the hearts of his people with an impassioned eulogy of their new friend, the chief of the Longfingers, who had come to be a father to the tribe.

Hardy then explained the good that had resulted on other reservations from the taking of land in severality, and advised that the council name a delegation of chiefs to go at once to Washington and ask for the confirmation of the new treaty. More than once during Redbear's interpretation of the acting agent's statements Olenna betrayed surprise. Ti-owa-konza noticed this sooner than Hardy. He spoke to his granddaughter. The girl cast a timid look at Vandervyn and was ready.

Her brother smiled cunningly and said: "It's all right. Tell him."

"What's that?" queried Hardy.

"Nothing—nothing, sir," quavered the girl. "Only, Charlie—he added something to what you said."

"I put in that you and Mr. Van would try to get them big pay for the mineral lands," boldly explained Redbear.

"Surely you've no objection to that, Captain," remarked Vandervyn.

"Was that all?" Hardy asked the girl.

"Yes, sir. He only—"

"Very well. I have no objection to the statement. But I now must decidedly insist upon an exact interpretation of what I say. Miss Redbear, you will tell me at once if your brother either fails to interpret what I tell him or makes any additions—"

"Yes, sir, if—" faltered Olenna. Her covert glance of appeal met with a reassuring smile from Vandervyn. She ventured to look up at Hardy, and her voice became steadier: "Yes, sir, of course. Only Charlie was just trying to help, and he won't do it again."

Hardy resumed his explanations and service. When he had finished, several more orators had to exhibit their eloquence. The council then proceeded to accept the acting agent's advice and name a delegation. As Ti-owa-konza insisted that he was too old to venture so long a journey among the white men, five of the younger subchiefs and headmen were chosen to represent the tribe.

During the closing ceremonies of the council Vandervyn leaned forward beside Hardy, and showed him an abbreviated but accurate memorandum of the proceedings.

"It's as well to have these things in black and white," he suggested. "We could get the chiefs to sign this before the council breaks up."

"Very good. A record may be valuable for future reference," agreed Hardy.

He rapidly read the writing, interpolated a few words, added a line, and gave it to Redbear to interpret. When the council acknowledged the accuracy of the memorandum, Hardy signed it, and asked the chiefs to add their marks, with Redbear and Olenna acting as witnesses. At this Vandervyn volunteered to serve as penman, and officially ordered Redbear to bring the chiefs over to a nearby bowlder, where they could more conveniently make their marks on the paper.

Hardy offered no objection to this. The council had finished its work, and there was nothing suspicious about Vandervyn's suggestion that the bowlder would afford an easy place for the chiefs to sign. He rose and returned to his mare, while the crowd stood off to the bowlder after their chiefs. He did not see Vandervyn lay out the papers on the top of the

can show cards and spades to the angels! I'm out for the good things of life, and I make no bones over it. But that doesn't prevent me from being a blooming benefactor as well. If you wish to know the real reason why I'm resigning, it's because I have planned to go on to Washington with the delegation, and pull wires to get the tribe a big slice of graft for their mineral lands."

Hardy saw the frank sincerity in his companion's eyes, and responded to the assertion with an instant apology: "Mr. Vandervyn, I beg your pardon for misjudging you. At times your conduct has been ill-advised, but I no longer doubt your good intentions."

"It takes an officer and gentleman to eat crow as if it were quail!" rallied Vandervyn with seemingly genial sarcasm. "Do I understand that my resignation is accepted?"

"If you insist."

"I do. Now that is settled. We make the return trip as equals," said Vandervyn, and, as if freed from all rancor by the thought, he fell into a mood of suave gayety.

CHAPTER XV.

A Lover's Promise.

When, midafternoon of the next day, the two white men and the pair of Indian police emerged from the canyon of Sioux creek into the agency valley, Vandervyn was still as gay and good-humored as at the start of the journey. He even volunteered to interview for Hardy with Marie.

"It is very kind of you to make the offer," replied Hardy in rather a stiff tone. "If Dupont is at home, may I ask you to send him to the office?"

"Certainly," replied Vandervyn, and all the way down to the agency he chatted genially. When they came to the level behind the warehouse, he waved his hand in friendly parting. "Slong. See you later. Be sure to chop off your whiskers in time for supper. You'll need to look your best."

Dupont soon clumped into the agency office, fairly oozing with jovial friendliness.

"Howdy! Howdy, Cap!" he greeted. "Marie, she says she'll look to see you at supper. Mr. Van says you wanted to see me. Anything I can do, Cap, just call on me. I'm ready to call quits now, if you are."

Hardy accepted the proffered hand, and exchanged a cordial grip.

"This pleases me very much, Dupont," he responded. "We will all now work together for the tribe. I give you my best wishes that you may win the mine."

"We got a fair show to, seeing as how you ain't going to let on about it in your report. Now, just tell me what I can do for you."

"Merely a few words as interpreter," said Hardy. "I wish one of the police at once to ride over to the railroad with these telegrams and letters. The sooner I receive instructions to send the delegation to Washington, the better."

"So," he said, fixing the younger man with a level glance, "your resignation—to take effect at once. It is dated yesterday."

"It would have been dated and presented a week ago if I'd had the slightest idea you were going to insult

rock, nor did he hear the smooth explanation that the agent wanted the chiefs to sign two copies of the memorandum. This statement was unhesitatingly interpreted by Redbear, and the chiefs, who knew by experience that most agency papers were signed in duplicate, made their crosses and thumb-prints as fast as Vandervyn wrote their names on the two papers.

Olenna ventured to whisper to her brother that the papers did not look alike. He hastily repeated the remark to Vandervyn. The girl cringed close to her grandfather. But Vandervyn showed no anger. He smiled at her in a manner that brought a blissful glow into her soft eyes, and explained that one paper gave the proceedings of the council in full, while the other consisted of brief notes. He then murmured to her something that at first brought a shadow into her joyous face, but in the end left her radiant with happiness.

When the leading men of the tribe had signed the papers and Redbear and Olenna had attested as witnesses, Vandervyn thrust the documents into his pocket and went to rejoin Hardy. As he handed over the paper that Hardy had signed, he remarked that, if there was no objection, Redbear and his sister would remain in the mountains with their grandfather until word should be received from the government for the tribal delegation to come on to Washington.

"You are ready to return to the agency with me?" asked Hardy.

"We can start at once, if you wish," assented Vandervyn.

"Very well," said Hardy. "The girl shall remain here, and you will come with me."

Vandervyn shrugged, smiled good-humoredly, and vaulted into his saddle.

Still doubtful of his companion, Hardy took the ponies of Redbear and Olenna in lead, and rode over to where the brother and sister stood in the midst of their grandfather's immediate family. When the girl confirmed Vandervyn's statement that she wished to remain in the mountains, he took ceremonial leave of the noble old chief, and rode off to rejoin his party.

During the brief interval Vandervyn's gay humor had disappeared. He met Hardy with a frown, and held out one of the letters that he had written that morning. Seeing that it was addressed to himself, Hardy tore open the envelope and read the brief note within.

"So," he said, fixing the younger man with a level glance, "your resignation—to take effect at once. It is dated yesterday."

"It would have been dated and presented a week ago if I'd had the slightest idea you were going to insult

me as you did yesterday," Vandervyn burst out angrily. "You'd have had it on the spot if I could have brought myself to borrow your pen and paper."

"I see," said Hardy. He reflected a moment, and remarked: "There seems to be no reason why I should not accept your resignation, if you insist upon my acting on it."

"I do," said Vandervyn. "I've had enough of your bullying. I'm a free man now—not your clerk."

"You will change your tone, sir, if you wish to ride in my company," said Hardy, with a cool self-control that checked the other's anger.

"Gad! if only you weren't such a self-righteous prig!" exclaimed the younger man. "You're so sure you

"Every little thing counts on promotion—like merit marks at school."

"You see!" agreed Hardy. "I can't pretend to altruism. I am ambitious to stand well in my profession. If I make a good showing when given detail, I put merit marks on my record, as Mr. Vandervyn has so aptly expressed it."

Marie's challenging gaze softened, and she looked thoughtfully down at her white hands.

"Isn't even self-sacrifice a form of selfishness?" she murmured.

The appearance of the Indian boy in the dining room doorway checked Hardy's reply.

During supper the girl remained unusually thoughtful and silent. Hardy discussed with Dupont plans for the instruction of the tribe in agriculture. The idea had occurred to him that the government might permit him to build an irrigation system for the farming lands of the tribe, using Indian laborers, and paying for the work out of money appropriated for the sale of the mineral lands. When Vandervyn chose to listen, it was with a half-amused smile that did not always cover the underlying cynical irony. Most of the time he devoted himself to an attempt to rally Marie out of her thoughtfulness. Instead of responding, she became more pen-

Just price for their mineral lands. Don't look so shocked, Miss Canada. It's the regular way such things are handled in all representative governments—ours, the Canadian and English parliaments, the German, the French—all the same."

The girl's eyes clouded. "I do not like to hear you speak in that cynical tone."

"Oh, it's not because I don't believe in democratic government. In despotic countries the regular procedure would be for the officials to take the bulk of the appropriation, and give the tribe the percentage—or nothing."

"I cannot believe that even your government will permit its officials to rob either the tribe or the people of the country," declared Marie. "There cannot be a majority of dishonest congressmen."

"No; the big majority are honest fools. They are managed by means of committees and the plea of party loyalty and log-rolling. But that's not my fault, sweetheart. You know I—"

"I know you've yet to receive permission to call me that!" broke in the girl.

Vandervyn bit his lip. "You forget I am going away."

"Back to Washington—and your fiancee!"

"Quite true. And I'm going to stay, unless there is some inducement for me to return here," he rejoined.

It was Marie's turn to bite her lip. "How can you say that, when you know that I—that I—"

"I told you how it was, and why I cannot break off with her until—He stepped nearer, his eyes aglow with passionate allurement. "You know I love you, only you, Marie! And you love me, sweetheart!"

Under the enticement of his soft eyes and pleading voice, all her reserve melted. Instead of eluding his advance, she swayed forward, and permitted him to take her in his arms. He crushed her to him, and showered kisses on her lips and blushing cheeks—upon her dusky hair when, overcome, she pressed her face against his shoulder.

He quivered with the joy of mastery and possession. "You are mine—mine! Say it!"

"I—I will marry you!" she whispered.

Submissive and loving as was the reply, it struck the ardent smile from Vandervyn's face. His embrace relaxed, and for a moment he stood staring over the girl's head, his lip between his teeth.

"I—love—you!" she murmured, quick to sense the change that had come upon him.

At the candid confession his eyes again glowed, and again he crushed her to him.

"You love me! You own it!" he cried. "You are mine!"

"Or no!"

With a sudden, violent thrust for which he was all unprepared, she burst from his clasp and sprang clear of him.

"What is it?" he muttered, staring at her, both bewildered.

"Oh!" she cried. "It was the way you—Oh! how could you?" She put up her hands, like a child, to hide the secret that flamed in her cheeks. "Go, please go! You have made me tell—And I have promised to marry you—when you come back."

"If I do come back," qualified Vandervyn in a flash of chagrin.

Marie drew herself up to her full height, the color ebbing from her face. Her voice was as cold as her eyes. "Do you wish to free me from my promise?"

"Never!" he burst out. "You'd give yourself to Hardy. He shan't have you. You've promised—you said it."

"Not now—not yet—not until you come back to me, free from your cousin. Leave me, I asked you to go."

When he perceived the look in her eyes, he picked up his hat and left the house without attempting to argue.

She closed the door, and hastened into her dainty little bedroom, to sink on her knees before the crucifix at the foot of her bed.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Fighting Chance.

Vandervyn was up before dawn. But Marie was up an hour earlier, and sent her father over to make sure that her lover came for the breakfast she had prepared for him. While he ate, she stocked his saddlebags for the trip, and gave the pinto a good feed of oats.

He tried to see her alone, and failed. She was too clever for him. But when he went out to mount, she permitted him a single parting kiss in the presence of her father.

Dupont had saddled one of his own ponies to "ride out" with the traveler. As they jogged down the road in the dim starlight, he bit off a "chaw" of plug tobacco, squinted at the vague form of his companion, and chuckled.

"What's the joke?" irritably queried Vandervyn.

"Tain't no joke, Mr. Van. Just the same, it tickles me to know you and Marie has agreed to hitch up."

"Who said anything about an agreement?" snapped the young man.

"Now, now, keep on your shirt!" soothed Dupont. "Marie won't never let you kiss her if she didn't intend to take you."

Vandervyn suddenly changed his tone: "I'm glad to hear you say it, Jake. You see, she does not altogether like the idea of keeping quiet about our engagement—our betrothal, you would say in Canada. But if Hardy should hear of it, he probably would notify my uncle. Then goodness sake and all."

"It's the only way to get the tribe

"Umm!" grunted Dupont.

"Mine and all!" repeated Vandervyn. "I've told you why. I'll fix it so we'll get the mine and maybe something else—and I'll fix Hardy!"

" Didn't know you was still so down on him. Wasn't it all smoothed over? You been acting that way."

"Wait and see me rub his fur the other way! I'll put over a game on him that—Vandervyn checked the disclosure, and began asking questions about the traits of the five chiefs chosen as tribal delegates.

Half an hour after sunrise Dupont came jogging back home, his heavy face set in a satisfied grin. The complacency of his look lessened when he entered, and saw the Indian boy removing the evidences of someone's solitary meal. He knocked at his daughter's door. After quite a delay he found her seated at the foot of the bed, with a little leather-bound book in her lap. Though her eyelids were swollen, she met him with her usual look of quiet self-possession.

"You let Cap eat alone," he remarked. "Don't call that being hospitable, do you?"

"If he had been more considerate, Reggie could have remained until the delegation leaves," coldly replied the girl.

"Well, we got to keep in with him till Mr. Van gets things fixed. You see, if he gets mad and reports on us to Washington, we'll git kicked off the reservation and barred from any chance of the mine."

"Did Reggie say that?"

"Yep. It's why, he says, he leaves it to you to keep quiet about the engagement. If you let on about it to Hardy, he's likely to git jealous and put Senator Clemmer next. That would queer the whole deal at this stage of the game."

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