

CHAPTER XXIV-Continued. -13-

president, that he failed to see Marie until she spoke to him. The first sight of her bewildered him, and his bow did not altogether hide the effects of the offer." the delicious shock given him by her dazzling beauty. But he quickly recovered his self-possession when he saw that she was with Vandervyn, replied. That young man, though more boyishly handsome than ever, bore himself with rather a sullen air. He met Hardy's clear gaze with a forced smile. The smile became still more forced May I ask you to take me back to when the girl transferred her hand him?" from his arm to Hardy's.

"Only a very few minutes," she soothed the disappointed lover.

"Whatever you say!" he deferred to dent.

Hardy was gazing into the wonder-They were as inscrutable as when he a hearing." had last looked into their depths. He tried to speak calmly, but his voice plied.

"Do you know that you are by far the most beautiful woman here?"

Her long lashes drooped and rose look.

"So I have been told several times already-I wished a few moments aged to obtain several moments' conwith you, that I might thank you for your generosity. It has given me the great opportunity of my trip abroad and this visit in Washington."

"I am saving all the reports of your made me very happy."

Again the girl's lashes drooped. "That is good of you- It is quite necessary for me to become the rage-if I am to force a recognition from Reggle's relatives. He says that, fortunately, his flancee has become interested in another man who is quite as eligible as himself,"

Hardy's eyes contracted, yet he did not falter: "Since it will bring you happiness,

-wish him-good fortune." "You do?" The question was al-

most an exclamation. But the girl at once regained her quiet composure. "I do not understand. If you wish him good fortune, why then do you seek to prevent him from receiving his compensation as attorney for the tribe?"

"I said good fortune," replied Hardy. "Any money paid him on that contract would be tainted."

a much larger appropriation than oth- his officer judges with marked gravity. arwise would have been made?"

"The lands are fully worth the "The tribe should receive all the ap- tention to desert or to remain permapropriation. Honest lobbying would carry the bill through at a cost of a without leave, and showed the telefew hundred dollars. These supposed friends of the tribe want millions."

"Do you wish to deprive me of the share that I would receive through

"Yes-of every dishonest dollar," said Hardy, his mouth stern, though his eyes besought her to forgive his harshness. "You have enough already."

"Are you certain?" she rejoined. "You may have heard that mines often pinch out or run into valueless ore-You can guess why Pere and I have told no one, least of all Reggie." Hardy remained unshaken. "If he

as worthy of you, that will make no difference to him."

"But myself? I am already used to luxury," pleaded the girl.

"Down in your heart you know the values in life that are real," he said. "You do not wish for wealth gained through fraud."

"I have not admitted that there is any fraud in the contract." "Perhaps it is as well," he remarked.

"You should not doubt your future husband." She flashed him an odd, quizzical

believe in him if I am to be happy, must I not?"

"Yes," agreed Hardy. laughter.

"That is so good of you to say it, dollars? I understand that, for some strange reason-or unreason-you in coming to Washington. have refused your pay as captain."

"My resignation has not been with- without rendering its findings, he left ing. draws, and I am engaged in a private the courtroom ten years older in ap-"My resignation has not been withenterprise. I cannot draw pay as an pearance than when he entered. The but raised his finger. "One moment. officer in the service," explained regretful, commiserating glance of the Hardy.

"Few would be so quixotic," she arconsidered a wrong to others is not to hard. To be cashiered was almost unbe considered a private enterprise."

"I must beg to differ with you, Miss

"Very good of you to offer. However, I believe I have enough left to Point. He, in turn, was so intent upon ma- last me through. And in any event, I neuvering to have himself spoken to could not impose on your generosity. by that most genial of hosts, the The money would be used against him -which, you see, would hardly do."

> "Then you refuse any loan?" "It was most kind of you to make

"Don Quixote de la Mancha!" she murmured.

"Tilting at machine windmills!" he

ness or satire in his wit, her chin lifted to the angle of offended pride, "That is sufficient, Captain Hardy. dent's military aide.

Vandervyn was waiting for her near him, she gave Hardy a look of half- aide with cold severity. relentment. "You must understand, to a sharp-eyed man near the presi- dictates, though I confess that lobbying is far from agreeable to me. I ful blue-black eyes of his companion. he has been so kind as to promise me

"I cannot wish you success," he re-

She gave him a quizzical glance and turned away with Vandervyn.

Standing in the eager, jostling crowd that waited for a word or even magistrate.

She was still beside the president when the sharp-eyed man to whom seat. Vandervyn had spoken came around social triumphs," he said. "They have beside Hardy and murmured a few words in his ear. Hardy looked him the executive offices of the president, tain probably believes in the saying in the eye, bowed, and quietly started to move away. The man followed him until he had left the White House.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## Condemned.

The court-martial began its session at nine in the morning, and the trial of Hardy was over before three in the afternoon. Vandervyn testified to the suppression by the accused of the existence of the developed mine and of Redbear's misconduct.

of his actions were as brief as they were cold and dry. Acting as a civil officer, he had considered the question of withholding any mention of the mine as a matter within his discretion. ent. When interrogated whether he had not Marie arched her black eyebrows. fact, unaccompanied by any explana- presence of the commander in chief of "Is it not true that he will get through tion of his motives, was received by the army and navy.

The other charges were far more serious, and he opposed them with amount agreed upon," stated Hardy. vigor. He denied emphatically any innently absent from his proper duties



"I Could Not Impose on Your Generosity."

look. "No, I cannot doubt my future gram from a high official in the war husband now, Captain Hardy. I must department that led him to believe his resignation and application for leave of absence would be at once favorably Vandervyn contract. He spoke delibacted upon by his commanding officer She uttered a gay little trill of at Vancouver barracks. This, in some circumstances, might have been considered sufficient excuse for his con-Captain! It makes me feel that I duct. But his refusal to explain his really must do something for you in reason for taking advantage of his sereturn. May I not offer you a little cret knowledge of the mine perceptibly Hardy stopped. loan of, say, three or four thousand influenced the members of the court to doubt the statement of his purpose

Though the court-martial adjourned most friendly of his judges seemed plainly to indicate what would be the qued. "Most would make the excuse findings. The thought of voluntarily quest is that all the witnesses in the that an attempt to frustrate what they resigning from the service had been case be examined."

endurable. Yet he walked out with his back about your charges." straight and his head well up. He The aide appeared and immediately dervyn. pass. But the little went directly to the White House and went out again at a sign from the

against Vandervyn's contract. This he lowed. addressed to the president and stamped for mailing. He wrote nothing with regard to his own case.

set for the reconvening of the court- against your Indian contract." martial had already come. He sprang

The worn soles of his highly pol- tures to my contract are forged?" ished shoes beat a tattoo on the carpetless old stairs by which he descended to the street. He did not turn to go in for a belated breakfast at the meager table of his landlady. He hastened along the few feet of narrow hall to the street door. As he drew it open, another man in uniform stepped into the doorway and confronted him. The other officer saluted. Though there was no trace of bitter- Hardy responded mechanically. For all his cool look, he was astonished. The man before him was the presi-

"Captain Floyd Hardy?" "At your service."

"You should now be in attendance the president. As they approached upon the court-martial," stated the

"I shall explain to the court," reher caprice, and he drew back to speak Captain, that I must do as my heart plied Hardy. "If not delayed, I shall be only a few-

"You will come with me," interrupthave already met his excellency, and ed the aide, still more severely. "Your conduct has been brought to the attention of the president. It is to be seen, sir, whether you will continue to refuse to answer the inquiries of your superiors."

Hardy went white, but his law set firm with grim resolution. He stepped out beside the aide, and crossed the again to disclose the same inscrutable a nod from the president, he fully ap- sidewalk to the waiting motor. As preciated the ease with which, in the they were whirled away over the sleety midst of so great a crush, she man- asphalt, the aide sat with more than military stiffness, his head and body versation apart with the nation's chief half averted from his companion as if to avoid contamination. Hardy sat as stiffly at the other extreme of the

The ride was short. The car made a sudden turn, and curved around to dier-until recently-the gallant cap-Hardy looked at his companion, per- that all is fair in war and love." plexed. The face of the aide showed | Marie lowered her eyes. The presionly the stern watchfulness of one dent looked thoughtful. "Of course, who has a reputedly dangerous pris- Mr. Vandervyn, there can be no quesoner under arrest. At the entrance he tion, when it is a matter of your word stepped behind, as if apprehensive that against his. Yet were there any other Hardy might attempt to escape. A witnesses than yourselves and the Indoorkeeper conducted them along a dians?" corridor into a small waiting room. reappeared in a few moments and signed to Hardy to enter.

Hardy stepped into the room, and ter." the door was closed behind him. The Hardy's statements in explanation side and the doorkeeper had remained outside. Hardy looked around with a frown of perplexity. Across the room a man sat writing at a businesslike desk. There was no one else pres-

The man turned in his swivel chair to enter the contest and win the mine ture. Hardy's hand went up in salute for himself, his bald admission of the as he stepped forward. He was in the I supposed it loaded, and shot him in

The president looked him up and down with a severe glance.

"You are Captain Floyd Hardy?"

"Yes, sir." "The same who suppressed the late

insurrection in the Sulus?" "I happened to be in command at

the time, sir." "After that you obtained a detail, your conduct in discharge of which has resulted in your trial by courtmartial on serious charges. I have before me the findings of the court. The circumstances are exceptional. Be-

cause of your record and of certain statements that have been presented to me, I have been persuaded to give you an opportunity to explain your conduct." Hardy saluted. "Permit me, sir, to

first present for your consideration a matter relating to the interests of the tribe which-"Stop!" ordered the president.

"Others are waiting for interviews. I can give you only ten minutes. If you expend them on this other matter, you will have no further opportunity to state your own case."

"The evidence before the court-martial covered the facts, sir. If those facts sustain the charges against me, then I am guilty, and desire no clemency. That is all I have to say on my own case, sir. With regard to the matter which I desire to present-"

"Sit down!" ordered the president "You have nine minutes. Be brief." Hardy seated himself and proceeded to present his argument against the erately, but with a conciseness that covered what he had to say fully and clearly, in words as forceful as they were few. The president listened attentively, but with no change in his expression. At the end of eight minutes

The president showed a trace of sur prise. "Is that all you have to say? There is still a minute." "That is all, sir," replied Hardy, ris-

The president touched a call button, What if I should confront you with witnesses?" "As I have stated, sir, my only re-

"There are some already at hand.

You shall see what they have to say

refused. He went to his lodgings and young man stopped short, but, meetspent the remainder of the day and ing the president's cordial smile, came half the night drafting and redrafting forward with easy assurance. Marie a concise statement of his argument did not look at Hardy, as she fol-

The president addressed Vandervyn: "Captain Hardy has declined to ask for elemency. I have decided to sus- tures to your contract were obtained When, near morning, he at last fell tain the findings of the court-martial. asleep, he was so near exhaustion that In the face of all this, he has had the he did not waken until late. The hour temerity to make a charge of fraud tribal council."

Vandervyn nodded: "Captain Hardy into his uniform with a celerity that is too skilled a strategist not to realize might have reminded a know officer that the best way to shield himself is of reveille in cadet barracks at West to raise the cry of 'stop thief!' against others. Does he allege that the signa-

"The signatures are genuine. They were obtained by fraud," bluntly charged Hardy.

"My word is as good or perhaps somewhat better than that of a cashlered officer," rejoined Vandervyn.

stated rather than inquired. "Most emphatically," pleasantly

"You deny the charge," the president

agreed Vandervyn. He looked significantly from Hardy to Marie. "As a sol-



"My Word's as Good or Better Than Cashlered Officer's,"

"Your excellency evidently has not He passed into the room beyond, but seen the contract," said Vandervyn. "It is duly witnessed by Charlie Redbear, the official interpreter, and by his sis-

"Ah, the interpreter, you say? This matter may be rumored in the house and even in the senate. It will be well for you to send for the man."

Vandervyn shrugged. "Can't do it, even to oblige you, Mr. President. The fellow has gone to the place where cold storage is unknown. My uncle told you about the affair. The fellow was drunk; he almed his 'gun' at me. self-defense. Hardy was present. He can't deny what I say, without forswearing himself."

Hardy met the president's look of inquiry, and bowed in confirmation of the statement. The president again looked thoughtful. "That leaves the man's sister as the only witness to the contract. It would be well if she could be produced."

The aide left the room. Vandervyn again shrugged. "Search has been made for her, Mr. President. All that could be learned from her Indian relatives was that she had been very sick and had gone away. Of course that meant to the happy hunting grounds. There was no other place that she could have gone."

The aide returned to the room leading a tall young woman who was dressed in a Parisian tailored suit that Vandervyn had last seen on Marie. She was gloved and heavily veiled, and she entered the room with perceptible timidity. Marie went to take her arm in a reassuring clasp and raise the vell. At no time since their coming to Washington had Vandervyn been given so much as a glimpse of Miss Dupont's reputed Hindu maid. This undoubtedly was the woman, and he looked at her with sharp curiosity as Marie raised the veil. Marie stepped aside and gave him a full view of the girl's face.

"Oinna!" he exclaimed. "Yes. Is it not a happy surprise? said Marie.

She smiled at the shrinking girl and drew her about to the president. "My dear, this is the great White Father of all Indians and of our tribehe is our father-your excellency, this is Mrs. Reginald Vandervyn."

The blow was given with merciless force. As Vandervyn gaped at Marie, her eyes flamed with a sudden upleaping of fierce exultance.

He gasped and choked out: "Youyou !-All these months-this-you-Indian!"

"Yes, Indian-to you, even as she was Indian to you!" cried the girl. ator Clemmer an hour ago. The treaty "You have been so eager to marry a appropriation bill will be passed with 'breed girl-here is one, already your wife!"

"It's a lie-a black lie!" denied Vandervyn. "I never married her!" "You took her by tribal custom, and

you told her that you were taking her legally according to the common law." "She cannot prove I lived with her read. openly as her husband," rejoined Van-The president looked at the shrink-

his wife?"

"No, no, sir!" she disclaimed.

don't want him any more." "I am pleased to hear you say that," replied the president. He turned to Vandervyn, "I understand this witness is prepared to testify that the signaon the false representation that it was a second copy of the minutes of the

"It's a lie!" hoarsely replied the young man. "Hardy knows nothing about it. There's only her word against mine."

"We can send for the Indian witnesses, if necessary. Another matter -at the inquest you testified under oath that a certain Indian killed Agent Nogen, and that you and Redbear then killed the murderer. When you shot Redbear, you rode off, certain that he was dead. He lived long enough to confess himself the murderer of Agent Nogen. Why did you perjure yourself

at the inquest?" "You can't prove it," defiantly challenged Vandervyn. "I stand by my testimony. This squaw and Hardy have hatched up the lie between them. Even if Redbear made such a confession, it is only hearsay and not legal

evidence.' "Your friend Redbear seems to have enjoyed shooting at agents," remarked the president. "He also confessed to having made the two attempts on the life of Captain Hardy. In view of your perjured testimony at the Nogen inquest, one is led to infer a not improbable connection between those attempts and your enmity to Captain Hardy. But the point at present is of the tribe, I owe to you for your whether you still insist upon the val- services. I shall therefore return the idity of your contract. Do you wish an official investigation that will take the evidence of the Indian witnesses?"

A cold sweat was gathering on Vandervyn's forehead. He looked at Marle, She turned from him, afraid that he might misconstrue the womanly softness into which her flerce resentment had melted. He wheeled about, and left the room, sullen, unrepentant, defiant,

"A very great pity," commented the president. "Young and clever, handsome, well educated, good social standing-yet all wasted! Courage-misdirected; no sense of shame; unmoral, rather than immoral. He will ride hard to still harder falls than this one, or else to what the world calls success. But I am too busy a man to moralize. If you will pardon me ladies, there is to be a cabinet meet-

He bowed to them, and then confronted Hardy. "Sir, I warned you that if you did not speak in your own defense, you would have no other opportunity. I shall not reverse my approval of the findings of the courtmartial."

Hardy had stood an amazed and lumfounded spectator to the rejection and disgrace of his rival. But throughout it all Marie had never once looked at him. If her scornful casting off of Vandervyn had roused any hopes for himself, they must have been dashed when she led Oinna away without favoring him with so much as a glance of recognition. There was a slight stoop in his shoulders as he saluted the president.

"If the sentence approved by your excellency does not make association with me scandalous," he said, "I beg leave to express my thanks for the intimation that you will invalidate the fraudulent contract."

Without replying, the president abruptly faced about to his desk. Hardy again saluted, and marched from the room as if on dress parade.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## The Sentence.

In the anteroom the doorkeeper waved Hardy to a door on the right. It led him into a stenographers' room He saw the flounce of a woman's skirt behind a revolving bookcase near the far end of the room, and paused. Someone stepped into the room after him, and touched him authoritatively on the shoulder.

"One moment, Captain Hardy-

your sentence." He turned and faced the president's alde with the clear, unflinching gaze of a brave man about to be shot. The aide saluted with punctilious formality. Hardy responded with equal formality. The aide presented an official document, saluted, and withdrew from

the room.

For a long moment Hardy stood with the decree of his fate slowly crumpling in his hand. His eyes were fixed on vacancy. Doubtless he was seeing the years of soldierly comradeship and duty that now lay in the past and the vision of the career to which he was to have given the utmost of his powers. He had always loved his profession-and now-

The woman whose skirt he had seen was in front of him before he became aware of her presence. He found himself looking into the cool, half-mocking face of Marie.

"Are you afraid to read your sentence?" she taunted. "Had it not been for you, he would have had the mine and a million from his contract and me. The president conferred with Sena clause that no commission is to be paid for the services of any tribal agent or representative. He has lost everything. And now-I am waiting

to see you read that paper." Hardy drew himself up, opened the envelope, took out the document and

As Marie saw the look of blank ineyes flashed under the lowering veil of of my mother." sent in a written application for an president. He returned with Vander- ing Oinna with kindly gravity. "Do their long lashes. He stared up at her, I

interview with the president. It was vyn and Marie. At sight of Hardy the you wish him to acknowledge you as but was too dazed to perceive the

change in her expression. "Acquitted - honorably - on all charges!" he murmured. "On all charges-! Honorable mention recommended-Approved-the President."

Marie smiled with cool condescen-

"Merely a question of doing justice to you, Captain Hardy. When a man has done his duty, however harshly, it is the duty of others to see that he, receives just compensation. I take credit for having helped to bring this about."

"You?" he exclaimed. "Of course, though, if you really did not love

"That does not follow. You must know I did love him. But to find that I had for rival another 'breed girlone not half so beautiful as I-I could not endure the thought. You have seen the proof that there is a good deal of my mother's red grandfather in my blood. No, I had to give him up, and I have decided to marry another man." "Another!" echoed Hardy.

"Will you not congratulate me?" she asked.

He rallied. "I congratulate him. After what has happened, I feel confident that you must have chosen some-

one more worthy of you." "He is!" declared the girl, her glorious eyes melting with tenderness. "He is far more worthy of me than I

am of him!" With an effort she recovered her cool

composure. "But now, before going, I wish to take this opportunity to discharge in a way the obligation that, as a member mine to you."

She held out a document. He stepped back. "No, Miss Dupont," he said. "I can-

not accept it." "You must. I took it from you. Though I have used the income from it not altogether for personal gratification, you must realize that my pride will not permit me to keep it any longer. Let me add that it has not pinched out, as you may have inferred from what I said at the ball. It is a

bonanza." "I regret that I cannot accept it," he replied. "A captain's pay is quite suf-

ficient for a-bachelor." Marie gave him a mocking glance. Really now, Captain Hardy, you do not expect me to believe you will long

remain unmarried?" He tried his best to conceal how her frivolity tortured him. "You may not believe it, Miss Dupont. Yet it is true.

"It is not," she contradicted. "When we were abroad, Pere and I went to Monte Carlo. I fancy the gambling spirit infected me. Let us settle the ownership of the mine with a wager. If you do not marry this year, I agree to keep it. But if you marry within that time, you will accept it back from

me on your wedding day." "It is not fair for me to bet on a certainty; but if you insist, I agree to the wager," said Hardy.

"Then be prepared to take the mine week from today," she bantered. He tore his gaze away from the lovely face whose gay smile appeared

so heartlessly mocking. "You-cannot realize-how this-" She handed him another sealed en-

velope. "Here is the order detailing you to special service with the general staff for the winter. You will then be required to return to the reservation and carry out all the plans recommended by you for the civilizing of the tribe. Your mare is in the same stable as the thoroughbred that I have bought to use as her riding mate."

The changed tone in the girl's voice compelled Hardy to look up. In her radiant eyes he saw a look that could not be mistaken. The smile that had seemed so mocking was now tenderly teasing.

"Marie-you-" he stammered. "Are you certain it is-love-not a passing feeling of pity?"

"Pity! For you?" she cried. "Do you think I could dare pity you?-a man like you! I could not have been so presumptuous even had those treacherous conspirators succeeded in crushing you. Do you think it was pity that made me live a lie all this time-that forced me to flout you and accept his detestable attentions?"

Her voice sank to a note of deep humility.

"I know how very unworthy of you I am. Yet I hope I am not so unworthy as that first day at the coulee, when I scorned you, and you, with your skill and courage and moderation, saved us without harming those whose attack he had wantonly brought upon us. I was a coquette—a coquette infatuated with the kind of man with whom a coquette deserves to be infatuated. But I was not altogether frivolous. I soon perceived your immeasurable superiority over him. Only my head could not overcome the fascination that had bound my heart. My soul sought to free itself from the spell-I struggled and prayed- Yet not until there at the mine, when you showed yourself the bravest, the most generous-"

She flung out her arms to him in piteous appeal. "Captain! My captain! Say that you do not think mealtogether what he-thought me!"

Hardy drew her hands together, and bent to kiss them with reverent pas-

"Dearest," he replied, "you forget that other day in the coulee-that day when you thought me dying. I gazed credulity that came into his face, her up into your eyes, and I saw the look

(THE END.)