

# THE QUARTERBREED

A Tale of Adventures on  
An Indian Reservation

By  
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CHAPTER XX—Continued.

Mumbling an apology, Dupont hastily unfolded the deed, skimmed through it, and grasped the fact that it purported to convey to him a full half-interest in the mine. He had started to read it over more carefully when an oath from Vandervyn caused him to look up.

The younger man pointed along the coulee bank to where the road topped the spur ridge of the butte.

"The devil!" he exclaimed. "What brings him back here?"

"Cap! It sure is Cap!" muttered Dupont. "Nom d'un chien! You don't think he's got on to the game, do you?"

"Wouldn't do him any good if he had."

"Then why d'you think he's—"

"To enter the contest!" divined Vandervyn. "There's time enough to wire Washington and have him put under arrest for disobeying orders."

"Hold on!" cautioned Dupont. "What if he does try his luck? In the mountains there ain't no horse nor mare neither can break up your pinto combine."

Vandervyn's face clenched. "You ought to know, I'll chance it if—"

"Ain't no chance to it," put in Dupont. "It's a dead clinch."

"He'll think he's going to do me," exclaimed Vandervyn. "Let him register. He's come back for the mine first; then Marie. I don't want her to see him or to know he has come back. You have your deed. Suppose you start at once."

"If she's willing, I'll see," qualified Dupont. "Look out you don't slip up. I'll tend to my end. So long—good luck!"

He rode off down the butte side of the coulee.

Vandervyn cantered straight across, and met Hardy a few yards below the tent of the commissioners.

"Good day, captain," he spoke in civil greeting. "I am surprised to see you back here. Have your orders been countermanded?"

"No," replied Hardy with equal civility. "I have resigned."

Vandervyn could not conceal his blank astonishment. "Not—not resigned from the army?"

"Yes. I telegraphed the war department, received an answer, and mailed my resignation and application for leave of absence to my commanding officer at Vancouver barracks. As an officer it was not proper for me to enter the contest."

"Ah!" Vandervyn's smile gave place to a look of pained surprise. "So you had to enter the contest. But do you think it quite honorable, captain, in the circumstances?"

"I do not care to discuss questions of honor with you, Mr. Vandervyn," replied Hardy with utmost coolness.

"That I can well understand," countered Vandervyn. "Knowing that we can make no protest, you intend personally to take advantage of the information that you pledged yourself to keep secret."

Hardy dismounted without replying, and placed himself at the end of the line of registering entrymen. The sun

not return until Vandervyn and the commissioners had left for the agency.

That evening he drew up the legal notices required in the posting of a mining claim, and paid three or four of the older prospectors to check them for errors. To all who inquired, he described the trail by which he had gone into the mountains, and frankly stated that he knew of none other that led to the nearest of the four prominent peaks which had been named as the corners of the mineral-land boundary.

The rest of the evening and most of the following day he spent in grooming his mare. He gave her no grass and little water, but a good allowance of oats. Both morning and afternoon he took her out for short rides up the coulee, and each time repeatedly climbed and descended the bank. He did not cross over to the reservation side, much less go to the agency.

The day set for the opening dawned still and clear, with the promise of burning heat by noon.

After breakfast the more uneasy spirits began wandering about the camp or idling with their packs. Nearly all the older and more experienced men gave their ponies a feed of oats, and stretched out to lounge in the shade of their tents.

Two hours before the time set for the start Vandervyn appeared, and crossed over to the camp. He was riding his pinto and leading a pack pony. When the old prospectors saw his heavy pick and shovel and large, poorly lashed pack of food and bedding, they cracked many dry jokes on the grand chances of the tenderfoot.

Their own picks and shovels were as light as such tools could be made without impairing their efficiency, and their packs were as lean as Vandervyn's pack was swollen.

Hardy alone divined the deceptive mockery of his rival's cumbersome display. But he was bound by his word and could say nothing. It was he, and not Vandervyn, who was looked upon with suspicion by the crowd. Soon there was a gathering of a mobile group, that rumbled awhile, and ended by presenting itself before Hardy as a committee of inquiry.

"You been agent at this here reservation," explained their spokesman. "We want to know if you've got a frame-up to have some feller meet you with your pack animals over in the mountains."

"No," replied Hardy. "There are four days' rations in my saddlebags. A poncho is all one needs in sleeping before a fire 'as time of year."

"You ain't got no tools," criticized a man who had been drinking.

"The same is true of several among you," Hardy rejoined.

One of the cowboys who was included in this remark called back resentfully: "You've been into the mountains. I bet you a blue chip you've got a good prospect spotted, ready for branding."

"I am not making any bets," said Hardy. "You have heard all I know about the trail. Mr. Vandervyn has made the trip several times. He was with me during the one trip I made. I have no objection to your questioning him about it."

There was some muttering over this. But Hardy's manner was so cool and quiet that the incipient mob left him, and straggled over to where Vandervyn had hired an expert to throw the diamond hitch on his ridiculous pack. Hardy turned his back on them, and set to grooming the satiny coat of his mare. His unconcern was well founded. Whatever means Vandervyn used, they were sufficient to satisfy the crowd. The muttering soon ceased, and the men dispersed.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Race.

The commissioners came down from the agency barely in time to make their identification of the contestants. Last of all Hardy and Vandervyn identified themselves and hurried over to the end of the waiting line. There was a scant five minutes remaining. Vandervyn was a quiver with eager excitement, and made no attempt to conceal the fact. He smiled and waved his hand to the commissioners, and looked about with sparkling eyes. There was no anxiety or envy or malice in his look. Never had he appeared handsomer or more boyish.

The other commissioners had climbed into the touring car. One of them held up his watch. Another commissioner arose, thrust a small pistol above his head with a melodramatic flourish, and fired.

At the signal the line of contestants wavered and plunged forward into the shallow stream. There were, however, quite enough hasty ones to raise a wild splashing and turmoil, as, whooping and yelling, they spurred their ponies through the water and whirled away at a gallop. Some wheeled up the coulee; a few rode straight across at the steep bank. Vandervyn, wildest and noisiest of all, headed downstream for the road, spurring his pinto. He was followed by a large bunch.

Hardy started after these last, holding his mare to her usual steady trot. When he came up the road to the head of the gulley, those who had gone before him were all quite a distance ahead, with Vandervyn still in the lead. Midway between the mouth of the valley and the agency, the long-striding mare began to pass ponies whose riders had thought better of their whirlwind start. Others were still loping in swift pursuit of Vandervyn.

Hardy walked the mare up the slope of the agency terrace. He saw nothing of Dupont or Marie, and the Indians had moved away with their tepees. But in the rear of the warehouse he caught a glimpse of two Indian policemen removing the load from Vandervyn's pack pony. His face clouded. He put the mare into a gallop.

All the way to the head of the valley Hardy held to a steady gallop. One after another, he passed the remaining leaders. The best of the ponies were no match in speed with the big thoroughbred.

At last only Vandervyn was ahead. As Hardy overhauled and forged past Vandervyn, the young fellow turned and met his gaze with a look of mocking hate. Hardy glanced back several times, prepared to fling himself flat alongside the pomel of his saddle. His uneasiness did not lessen when a few minutes later Vandervyn halted, and scrambled down from the trail to get a drink out of the creek. The crease in Hardy's forehead deepened.

Ahead, the walls of the canyon were sloping back into the widened valley where had been the first Indian camp. Dogs, Indians and tepees, all were gone. Only a brush-walled dance lodge remained to mark the camp site.

As the mare pounded past, she curved her outstretched neck toward the lodge and whinnied. Hardy heard no answer to the call, but his frown suddenly deepened.

He reached forward and stroked the mare's sleek neck. Hot as had been the race from the agency, she had not turned a hair. His frown relaxed. Yet his tight lips showed that he was still uneasy. He balanced himself in his stirrups, and began to ride as lightly as possible.

Ascending the mountainside, he was compelled to content himself with the mare's nervous, long-strided walk. But whenever the trail was not too steep or rough, he put her into a trot, and varied the pace with an occasional short gallop.

An hour passed. He was already well into the mountains. He came to a succession of steep climbs and descents that held the mare down to a walk. Presently he thought he heard hoofbeats behind him. He listened. He had not been mistaken. An unshod horse was coming up with him at a steady jog trot.

It seemed impossible that Vandervyn's pinto could have so recuperated from that whirlwind heading of the rush as to be able to take this steep trail at a trot. Hardy gazed back, expecting to see one of the cowboys. As he went down over a ridge crest, the rider came up the ridge back across the intervening gulch. The man snatched off his broad-brimmed hat to wave a salute. The sun glistened with a golden sheen on the unmistakable blond head of small breed.

At the first small break in the descent Hardy dismounted, unsaddled, and sponged out the mare's mouth and nostrils with water from his canteen. He then shook out and refolded his Navajo saddle blanket, and started to resaddle. But before he buckled the cinch-strap he shifted the pistol from his breast to a front pocket in his riding breeches.

He was vigorously grooming the mare when Vandervyn came jogging down through the thickets of tall brush that grew close on each side of the trail. He did not pause in his rubbing until the nimble-footed unshod pony ambled into view, less than a dozen yards up the trail. Then he glanced about, straightened, and stood staring. The pony was a pinto.

Vandervyn, smiling with insolent exultance, rode down to him, his right hand jauntily poised on his hip, over the hilt of his revolver. His eyes challenged his rival with an audacious, provoking stare. But Hardy looked only at the pinto. There was no sign of sweat lather on his rough coat, no weariness in his gait. He was fresh—

"Lots of come-back to a bronco, captain," purred Vandervyn. "Sorry to see that you've stove up your mare. She's too highbred for a rocky road like this. But you might take off her shoes and travel light, the way I've done."

The pony was now ambling down the slope past the mare. Hardy looked at the unshod hoofs. They were covered with a coating of clay mire from the bottom of the last gulch, and the beast's shuffling pace did not expose the under surface of the hoofs. Whether the pony had or had not been recently unshod could not be seen.

"Great horse, my little old pinto,"

mocked Vandervyn. "By-by! I'll tell Marie you'll be along later."

Hardy perceived in a flash why he had seen neither the girl nor her father at the agency. Swiftly he wheeled about to mount. Startled by the quick action, Vandervyn spurred his pony, and went down the steep descent at a gait far from easy on even a mountain-bred horse's knees. Hardy followed at a walk. The opposite rise was gradual. He let the mare take it at a slow trot. At the top was a fairly level stretch of trail. Vandervyn was far ahead. Hardy put the mare into a fast gallop. A few minutes brought her up so close behind the loping pinto that Vandervyn spurred his beast to sprinting speed. Hardy followed at an easier yet swift pace that again brought him near, as the pinto slackened to a lope.

A steep ridge made a break in the game. The pinto crossed it at a jog trot. The mare had to walk. Beyond was a long stretch of broken country that favored the pinto. He could jog over ground that held the mare to a walk, and canter where she could no more than trot. On such a trail he was fully equal to traveling at these paces for twelve hours at a stretch, all the time in the lead of the mare. Of this Hardy was as well aware as was Vandervyn.

Though he steadily lost ground, he kept on in pursuit, coolly studying the landmarks ahead and "lifting" his mare along over the heart-breaking trail. To have given way to the impatience that betrayed itself in his flashing eyes would inevitably have lost him the race by overstraining the mare. He held himself grimly in hand, and eased the going for his eager mount with consummate horsemanship.

When they reached better ground, Vandervyn was again far ahead. But Hardy had his reward for his restraint in the resilient stride of the mare as she swung into a full gallop. Up and down the long, easy slopes, around a curving mountainside, and along the level bench of a stream bank, she held to the cross-country racing pace that rapidly rolled up mile after mile of the trail.

In less than half an hour she brought her rider around a sharp bend only a few hundred yards behind the pinto. Vandervyn, over-confident, was jogging along the level when the sound of the approaching hoofbeats threw him into a half-panic. There was still a long stretch of easy trail ahead. He put his pony into a gallop. The long-legged thoroughbred, still running as smoothly as clockwork, continued to gain. Vandervyn began to swing his spurs.

The pinto started to pull ahead. Hardy held the mare to the same speed as before. It was a speed that he knew she could maintain for miles. He could see that the pinto was being forced to a killing pace—a pace that must strain if not break him before they came to the next rough ground.

On up the valley rushed the pursued, now barely holding his own. The cruel spurting and whip-slashing could not sting the falling beast to greater exertions. He was blowing hard; his rough coat was lathered with sweat. He began to lose.

At last the trail made a sharp turn, and started to zigzag up the mountainside. The pinto was staggering when he reached the foot of the ascent. The quicker and longer stride of the mare soon brought them up at Vandervyn's heels. The pitch of the mountain was too precipitous for Hardy to risk passing on the lower side of the narrow trail with the mare, and Vandervyn kept the pinto close to the upper side.

"You have no right to block the trail," said Hardy. "Allow me to pass."

Vandervyn looked over his shoulder with an insolent sneer. "Go on and pass, if you're in a hurry. You've got all outdoors to do it in. If there's not room enough, shoot me in the back and take the trail. I'll not get out of it for you."

Hardy did not reply nor did he attempt to force a passage. At last, twelve miles from the goal of the heartbreaking race, came the opportunity for which he had been waiting. The trail smoothed out in another easy stretch. For this he had been holding the mare in hand. He started at a canter, and gradually let her strike into her long, swift gallop. Vandervyn saw them coming, and at once put spurs to his luckless pony. As before, Hardy held the mare down to her best long-distance speed. The mare came up alongside the pinto and forged ahead.

Hardy eyed Vandervyn with utmost wariness. And, as before, at the head of the canyon of Sioux creek, Vandervyn turned in the saddle, and looked full at him with a hateful, mocking smile. He pulled in his staggering pony to a walk the moment Hardy swung into the trail ahead.

At once Hardy eased down the mare to a trot. Though he saw no third pinto waiting in the thickets, his eyes grew hard and cold with grim determination. He was examining his rifle

when a turn of the trail suddenly gave him his first view of the broken-topped mountain and the ridge-side where Redbear had made the second attempt to assassinate him. As he looked at the shattered summit, his hazel eyes flashed. He thrust the rifle back into its sheath, and drew the mare down to a walk.

Behind him he heard a muffled drumming of unshod hoofs. Vandervyn was coming up at a gallop.

When the mocking trickster came up behind Hardy, he reined in to a jog trot, and, as before, rode past him with his hand on his hip.

There were marked differences between the third pinto and the two first. He was taller and leaner, and one of his feet was white. But Hardy appeared to be too dejected to heed the fact. As the pinto ambled away in the lead, Vandervyn smiled, and looked back at his rival with all the hate gone from his face. "By-by again, old man," he bantered. "Sorry I can't stay to keep you company. The lady is waiting—and the mine. It may also please you to hear that I have a duly signed and witnessed contract with the tribe, giving me a fee of 20 per cent on all moneys appropriated in payment to the tribe for their mineral lands. Let's hear you congratulate me. Show you're game!"

But Hardy did not raise his eyes. As soon as Vandervyn was out of sight around the castellated rocks at the top of the ridge, Hardy stopped the mare and dropped from the saddle. His shapely mouth was curved in a resolute smile, and his hand was rapidly transferring from the saddlebags to his pockets a pocket ax, a handful of pistol cartridges and the legal notices for posting a mining claim.

He glanced up the slope, and, seeing no sign of Vandervyn, stripped off the mare's bridle, sponged out her nostrils and mouth with the last water in his canteen.

Hardy took the steep slope at an unhurried pace. He reached the place where he had found the bloody trail of Redbear. Up the cleft the climbing was not stiff. He came out on the valley slope, extremely hot and dry but not out of breath. Drawing an airline across to the opposite mountainside, where he had seen the light of Ti-owa-konza's campfire through the darkness, he started down into the valley at a jog as brisk as that of the third pinto. He was almost spent as he tottered through the pines up the last slope. The camp was gone, but he knew the nearest way to the spring.

He rested two or three minutes, repeatedly cooling his head in the spring and rinsing out his mouth, but drinking only a very few sips. Again refreshed, he half filled his canteen, and started on up the easy mountain slope at a steady jog.

Ten minutes brought him over the summit to the sharp pitch above the mine. He stared down at the terrace several moments, however, before he made out the figures of a man and woman waiting at the first turn of the trail. There could be no doubt that the two were Marie and her father.

It was no less certain that Vandervyn had not yet arrived. Even had he suspected his opponent's stratagem, he scarcely could have covered the seven miles of trail in as short a time as Hardy had taken to make the three miles across country.

The two watchers never thought to look about and up the mountain. They had not yet looked about when he came down upon the crest of the spur. A large, newly cut stake gave him a hint where one of the upper corners of the claim should be located. He cut his own stake, drove it, and tacked on one of his legal notices. Another stake indicated the other upper corner, and he swiftly repeated the making of his own stake and posting of the notice.

At the curb of the mine shaft he posted another notice. He was now in plain view from the cabin, but out of sight of the watchers down on the trail. On the terrace, as he was working the third stake into a bed of loose rocks, he heard an angry exclamation over near the cabin. Dupont and Marie had come around the end of the building, and were staring at him. In a frenzy of disappointed avarice, the trader reached for his revolver. Still more swiftly Marie flung herself upon him.

"No! no! you shall not!" she cried. "Leave it to him—he is so near! Let them play out the game!"

Hardy ran across to cut his last stake. Between the ax-blows could be heard the hoofbeats of a galloping horse. He tacked the notice on, chopped a small hole with his ax in the hard soil, and set it up. The mine was his own.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Owner of the Mine.

At that moment Vandervyn loped up over the edge of the terrace, waving his hat to Marie. Then he caught sight of Hardy, over beyond the girl, and the exultant yell died on his lips. He put the curb on his pony, and sprang off beside Dupont and the girl, his face frightful with rage.

His voice was high-pitched and light, almost airy: "So—he cut across afoot! He thought to do me!"

"Has, you mean?" snarled Dupont. "Got his notices posted. That's his last stake."

Vandervyn whirled and snatched his rifle from its saddle sheath. Marie caught her father's arm to drag him aside; but he was already backing away, his eyes fixed apprehensively on Hardy. It was time for bullets to come streaming from the automatic pistol. Hardy could have drawn and opened fire while Vandervyn was freeing his rifle.

To the astonishment of all three, Hardy made no attempt to "get the drop" on his opponent. Instead, he started to advance upon Vandervyn at a quick, deliberate pace, his hands hanging empty at his sides, his face calm and stern.

"Put down that gun!" he commanded.

Vandervyn was leveling the rifle. He took aim straight between Hardy's eyes. His finger kissed the trigger. The slightest twitch would have sent the bullet crashing through Hardy's brain, and the slightest sign of fear or hesitancy on Hardy's part would have caused that twitch. He was looking death in the face. Vandervyn was in a murderous fury.

Yet Hardy came on—quick, steady, absolutely calm. His gaze passed above the deadly muzzle, along the foreshortened barrel, to the narrow-lidded, bloodshot eyes of Vandervyn. His voice rang out again, clear and sharp with authority:

"Put down that rifle—put it down, sir!"

The muscles of Vandervyn's neck twitched. Along the top of the barrel he was glaring back at Hardy—glaring into those hazel eyes that met his fury with the clear, cool gaze of



The Trader Reached for His Revolver.

absolute courage. The sheer nerve of that steady approach to his rifle muzzle compelled him to pause. It disconcerted him; it struck a chill into the heat of his frenzy.

Still Hardy advanced, swift and steady, his gaze never so much as flickering. Now his eyes and forehead, close beyond the foresight of the rifle, appeared enormously enlarged to Vandervyn's distorted vision. Steadily Hardy put up his hand, took hold of the rifle barrel, and turned the muzzle aside.

"Ah-h-h!" gasped Marie.

Hardy drew the rifle out of Vandervyn's relaxing grasp.

"Stand aside, sir!" he quietly commanded. "I wish to speak alone with Miss Dupont."

Vandervyn had parted with his rifle as if dazed. At the sound of Hardy's voice a fresh wave of crimson flooded his face. He stepped back, and jerked out his revolver. Hardy leaped upon him like a panther, and struck the weapon aside. The heavy bullet whizzed past Hardy's head. A moment later, Vandervyn, though the younger and perhaps the stronger of the two, reeled away, clutching his lacerated trigger finger. Hardy stood with the revolver in his hand. He turned to Marie.

"May I ask for a few words alone with you?"

"No!" Vandervyn hoarsely forbade the girl. "You shall not speak with him. Jake, you're her father—tell her she shall not."

"You know she don't never mind what I say," mumbled Dupont. "Anyway, it sort of looks like Cap is running this here shindy."

Hardy had not glanced away from Marie. Throughout that supreme test of the will power and courage of her two lovers, she had stood tense and silent, as if spellbound. She now looked from one to the other, her face inscrutably calm, her black eyes fathomless.

"I will hear what Captain Hardy has to say," she said.

Hardy motioned her father and Vandervyn toward the mine dump. They obeyed.

"We are alone," said Marie.

Hardy smiled. "I won the race." "Was it fair, cutting across country?"

"Fair? Then you did not know of his scheme."

"What scheme? I do not understand."

"It does not now matter. I won the race and—the mine."

"Do you expect me to rejoice with you?" asked the girl. "It has cost my father his half of the mine."

"How so? He is not an entryman." "Reggie gave him a deed to a half-interest."

"I see," said Hardy. "Quite in keeping. The deed is absolutely void, and would have been no less so even had the grantor been first to reach here."

"You doubt his good faith?" The girl glanced past him toward the sullen figure of Vandervyn on the mine dump with her father. "So you thought it better to take it all yourself than to let him take it all?"

"Yes," agreed Hardy. "The girl's red lips curved in an ironical smile. "I do not go with the mine—necessarily." "No. But the mine necessarily goes with you—now," replied Hardy. (TO BE CONTINUED.)



The Devil! What Brings Him Back Here?

was far down in the sky when he came before the secretary's table, at the end of the line. Vandervyn rose from his easy seat to take a position behind him. The secretary hesitated and looked inquiringly at Vandervyn. He met with a nod to proceed.

"You wish to register?" came the curt question of the chairman.

"Yes," replied Hardy with equal calmness.

"Is an army officer entitled to enter the contest?" questioned the smallest commissioner.

"You need not debate the matter," said Hardy. "I have resigned my commission."

Again Vandervyn nodded, and there were no further objections raised. Hardy and he signed the register, and made their thumb prints, and were duly described in writing by the secretary.

Hardy at once mounted his mare, and rode away up the coulee. He did