

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 Lakotah 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 Oinna, 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-owakonzka. 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 crier 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-owakonzka arose, and warmed the hearts of his people with an impassioned eulogy of their new friend, the chief of the Longknives, 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 severalty, 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 Oinna betrayed surprise. Ti-owakonzka noticed this sooner than Hardy. He spoke to his granddaughter. The girl cast a timid look at Vandervyn and hesitated.

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

Hardy resumed his explanations and advice. 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-owakonzka insisted that he was too old to venture so long a journey among the white men, five of the younger sub-chiefs 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."

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.

Oinna 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 Oinna 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 Oinna 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 ceremonious 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

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 gaiety.

CHAPTER XV.

A Lover's Promise.

When, mid-afternoon 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 intervene 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.

"Sting. 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 see, 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."

"That's no lie. Mr. Van says the money can't be appropriated till congress meets, but the treaty is fixed up so the amount can be settled on and the reservation ordered divided up by the treaty commission."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hardy. "We may get the agricultural lands allotted in time for the planting of winter wheat. Come; we will send off these telegrams and letters."

Since the return of the party from the mountains, not one of the police but was more than willing to serve the new agent. Two of the younger men were soon cantering away down the valley on their best ponies, proud of the fact that they had been chosen to make the night ride to the railroad.

Hardy returned to the office with Dupont, and became deeply absorbed in discussing ways and means for the development of the Indians as farmers. When Dupont noted the hour, there seemed scarcely time for even one of the captain's quick-change toilets. Yet he appeared at the door of the Dupont house, spick and span and his beard clean shaven, without having required his hostess to wait supper half a minute.

As he entered in response to Dupont's hospitable bellow, there was a perceptible hesitancy in his manner. Marie was seated at the far end of the room near Vandervyn. She rose, and came forward to greet Hardy, her chin proudly uptilted.

"There seems to have been a general misunderstanding of motives, captain," she remarked with frank directness. "I still consider that you were unduly harsh, but I now understand that you meant well and perhaps had some excuse. Reggie says that we are all to work together for the good of the tribe."

"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 a 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-



sive. Hardy attributed the girl's half-somber quietness to his presence. As they left the supper table, he asked Dupont to come to the office.

Marie and Vandervyn followed them as far as the parlor, where the young man dropped into the easiest chair, with a disgusted, "Lord! he makes me weary—all that benevolent blather!"

"Of course he is doing it merely to help himself in his career," murmured Marie.

"Or to get the handling of the tribal funds," suggested Vandervyn. "There'll be a fat slice of graft for somebody out of all those millions."

"You really think that?"

"What else can you expect—government on one side and Poor Lo on the other? It's the usual thing. I expect to get my share."

"You?" exclaimed the girl, her eyes widening with a look of astonishment and reproach.

Vandervyn laughed amusedly. "Wait a bit before you dig up your tomahawk, Miss Sitting Bull. If I succeed in getting the tribe fifteen or twenty millions, instead of the five that was talked about, it strikes me they could afford to allow yours truly a slice little percentage as commission."

"Oh, Reggie, pardon me! Of course you should have good pay for proving yourself such a friend to the tribe."

"And to each member of the tribe!" he added, his blue eyes glowing golden with ardor. "I don't want all my pay in money. How about an advance royalty in—something else?"

He had risen, and was coming toward her. She blushed and retreated around the tea table.

"No, no," she remonstrated. "I told you we must wait until—until you are freed from your—cousin."

"Wait?" he rejoined. "You're trying to play me against that tinfoil hero. Do you think I'm going to stand for that? I'll have to go on at once, and fix things so that the delegation will not have to hang round the capitol all winter."

"You will have to leave before the delegation?" The girl was almost dismayed at the unexpectedness of the announcement.

"I'll have to go at once," repeated Vandervyn, frowning. "I thought of course he would have told me before sending his messages. I could have so worded them for him that the game would have started off without a hitch. As it is, he has messed things up in a way that will require the presence of a good lobbyist to pull off the game in any kind of shape to suit us."

a 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 and 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 fiancée!"

"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 allurements. "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!"

"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, half bewildered.

"Oh!" she cried. "It was the way you— Oh! how could you?" She put up her hands, like a child, to hide the scarlet 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 joggled down the road in the dim twilight, 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 wouldn't never have 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 goodbye mine and all."

"Urn!" granted 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 for 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 joggling 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 she called to him that he might enter. 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 get kicked off the reservation and barred from any chance of the mine."

"Did Reggie say that?"

"Yep. His way, 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 get jealous and put Senator Clemmer next. That would queer the whole deal at this stage of the game."

"I do not believe that Captain Hardy would do such a thing," declared the girl.

"All right. Mr. Van leaves it to you to tell him, if you want to. I ain't saying Cap mayn't be a straight-laced in everything else. But when it comes to being dead gone on a girl like you, and at his age, too—needn't tell me he won't do his level best to put Mr. Van out of the running any way he can."

The girl sprang up, her eyes aflame with a flare of unreasoning anger.

"He shan't not!" she cried. "Reggie is coming back!"

"He won't have no chance to if it leaks out about you and him going to get married."

"Married!" The angry scarlet of the girl's cheeks deepened to a rose. Notes of indignation and joy mingled oddly in her half-murmured prediction: "He will come back! That meddling shan't prevent!"

"You won't go and get Cap down on us, will you?" remonstrated Dupont.

"Wait and see," she replied.

When, at the usual supper hour, Hardy presented himself at the Dupont door, his bearing was reserved and somewhat diffident. Dupont, who was alone in the parlor, genially bade him enter. But Hardy lingered in the doorway until Marie appeared.

"Pardon me, Miss Dupont," he said, as he met her look of surprise. "I came to say that if you do not consider it worth while to board me, I can make shift for myself."

"Indeed, but you shall not!" exclaimed the girl with a graciousness that brought a glow into his grave face. "What should we do without your company at table?"

"You are very kind to say it."

She smiled. "Where have you been keeping yourself all day?"

"I rode up Wolf river to the falls. A canal to irrigate a large area could be led down from there, and later on

The Girl Sprang Up, Her Eyes Aflame With Unreasoning Anger.

I believe a dam could be constructed above the falls at a comparatively small cost. It would convert the valley above into a large storage reservoir, to hold the winter floods."

"You must show me your plans at the falls themselves!" declared Marie with an enthusiasm more gratifying to him than would have been a personal compliment.

"They went in to supper, earnestly discussing his plans for the betterment of the tribe.

Do you believe that Marie is as crooked as her father and lover? Will Hardy eventually be able to get a square deal for the Indians?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)