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CHAPTER XX-Continued.

\_\_11\_\_\_ Mumbling an apology, Dupont hastily 'unfolded the deed, skimmed it purported to convey to him a full 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 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 cleared. "You ought to know. I'll chance it if-" "Ain't no chance to it," put in Du-

pont. "It's a dead cinch." "He'll think he's going to do me," ex-

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."

blank astonishment. "Not-not re- a committee of inquiry. signed from the army?"

"Yes. I telegraphed the war departThat evening he drew up the legal When he came up the road to the head

named as the corners of the mineral- vyn. land boundary.

the following day he spent in groom- ing of Dupont or Marie, and the In-Dupont. "Nom d'un chien! You don't ing his mare. He gave her no grass dians had moved away with their teof oats. Both morning and afternoon house he caught a glimpse of two Inclimbed and descended the bank. He clouded. He put the mare into a gal- slackened to a lope. did not cross over to the reservation lop.

side, much less go to the agency. ourning heat by noon.

spirits began wandering about the oughbred. amp or fidgeting with their packs.

the shade of their tents.

Two hours before the time set for eral times, prepared to fling himself Vandervyn. ulted Vandervyn. "Let him register. the start Vandervyn appeared, and flat alongside the pommel of his sad-He's come back for the mine first; crossed over to the camp. He was dle. His uneasiness did not lessen poorly lashed pack of food and bed- The crease in Hardy's forehead deepding, they cracked many dry jokes on | ened. 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 Dogs, Indians and tepees, all were their packs were as lean as Vander- gone. Only a brush-walled dance

vyn's pack was swollen. Hardy alone divined the deceptive As the mare pounded past, she curved Vandervyn was again far ahead. But mockery of his rival's cumbersome dis- her outstretched neck toward the Hardy had his reward for his restraint play. But he was bound by his word lodge and whinnied. Hardy heard no in the resilient stride of the mare as and could say nothing. It was he, and answer to the call, but his frown sud-

not Vandervyn, who was looked upon denly deepened. with suspicion by the crowd. Soon | He reached forward and stroked there was a gathering of a moblike the mare's sleek neck. Hot as had level bench of a stream bank, she held group, that rumbled awhile, and ended been the race from the agency, she to the cross-country racing pace that at a stendy jog. Vandervyn could not conceal his by presenting itself before Hardy as had not turned a hair. His frown re- rapidly rolled up mile after mile of

vation," explained their spokesman. self in his stirrups, and began to ride brought her rider around a sharp several moments, however, before he We want to know if you've got a as lightly as possible. frame-up to have some feller meet you leave of absence to my commanding with your pack animals over in the "No," replied Hardy. "There are four days' rations in my saddlebags. A poncho is all one meeds in sleeping and varied the pace with an occasional before a fire this time of year." "You ain't got no tools," criticized a

not return until Vandervyn and the | Hardy started after these last, hold- | ch?" mocked Vandervyn. "By-by ! I'll commissioners had left for the agency. ing his mare to her usual steady trot. tell Marie you'll be along later." Hardy perceived in a flash why he notices required in the posting of a of the gulley, those who had gone be- had seen neither the girl nor her fathrough it, and grasped the fact that mining claim, and paid three or four fore him were all quite a distance ther at the agency. Swiftly he wheeled the lead, Vandervyn smiled, and foreshortened barrel, to the narrowof the older prospectors to check them ahead, with Vandervyn still in the about to mount. Startled by the quick half-interest in the mine. He had for errors. To all who inquired, he lead. Midway between the mouth of action, Vandervyn spurred his pony, hate gone from his face. "By-by again, His voice rang out again, clear and started to read it over more carefully described the trail by which he had the valley and the agency, the long- and went down the steep descent at a gone into the mountains, and frankly striding mare began to pass ponies gait far from easy on even a mounstated that he knew of none other whose riders had thought better of tain-bred horse's knees. Hardy folthat led to the nearest of the four their whirlwind start. Others were lowed at a walk. The opposite rise prominent peaks which had been still loping in swift pursuit of Vander- was gradual. He let the mare take it

> Hardy walked the mare up the slope | ly level stretch of trail. Vandervyn The rest of the evening and most of of the agency terrace. He saw noth- was far ahead. Hardy put the mare into a fast gallop. A few minutes brought her up so close behind the lopand little water, but a good allowance pees. But in the rear of the ware- ing pinto that Vandervyn spurred his beast to sprinting speed. Hardy folhe took her out for short rides up the dian policemen removing the load from lowed at an easier yet swift pace that coulce, and each time repeatedly Vandervyn's pack pony. His face again brought him near, as the pinto

> A steep ridge made a break in the game. The pinto crossed it at a jog All the way to the head of the val-The day set for the opening dawned ley Hardy held to a steady gallop. One trot. The mare had to walk. Beyond still and clear, with the promise of after another, he passed the remaining was a long stretch of broken country leaders. The best of the ponies were that favored the pinto. He could jog After breakfast the more uneasy no match in speed with the big thor- over ground that held the mare to a walk, and canter where she could no At last only Vandervyn was ahead. more than trot. On such a trail he

> Nearly all the older and more experi- As Hardy overhauled and forged past was fully equal to traveling at these enced men gave their ponies a feed of Vandervyn, the young fellow turned paces for twelve hours at a stretch, all oats, and stretched out to lounge in and met his gaze with a look of mock- the time in the lead of the mare. Of this Hardy was as well aware as was ing hate. Hardy glanced back sev-

Though he steadily lost ground, he kept on in pursuit, coolly studying the then Marie. I don't want her to see riding his pinto and leading a pack when a few minutes later Vandervyn landmarks ahead and "lifting" his him or to know he has come back. pony. When the old prospectors saw halted, and scrambled down from the mare along over the heartbreaking his heavy pick and shovel and large, trail to get a drink out of the creek. 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 Ahead, the walls of the canyon were sloping back into the widened valley mare. He held himself grimly in hand, and eased the going for his eager where had been the first Indian camp. mount with consummate horsemanship. lodge remained to mark the camp site.

laxed. Yet his tight lips showed that the trail. "You been agent at this here reser- he was still uneasy. He balanced him- In less than half an hour she

his feet was white. But Hardy apstay 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 at a slow trot. At the top was a fairthe 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

to a walk.

oming up at a gallop.

with his hand on his hip.

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 rapdly transferring from the saddlebags to his pockets a pocket ax, a handful of pistol cartridges and the legal noices 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 unnurried 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 When they reached better ground, last slope. The camp was gone, but he knew the nearest way to the spring. He rested two or three minutes, repentedly cooling his head in the spring she swung into a full gallop. Up and and rinsing out his mouth, but drinkdown the long, easy slopes, around a ing only a very few sips. Again re-

curving mountainside, and along the freshed, he half filled his canteen, and started on up the easy mountain slope Ten minutes brought him over the

summit to the sharp pitch above the mine. He stared down at the terrace aside.

when a turn of the trail suddenly gave To the astonishment of all three, him his first view of the broken-topped Hardy made no attempt to "get the mountain and the ridge-side where drop" on his opponent. Instead, he Redbear had made the second attempt started to advance upon, Vandervyn to assassinate him. As he looked at at a quick, deliberate pace, his hands the shattered summit, his hazel eyes hanging empty at his sides, his face flashed. He thrust the rifle back into calm and stern. its sheath, and drew the mare down

"Put down that gun !" he commanded.

Behind him he heard a muffled drum-Vandervyn was leveling the rifle. He ming of unshod hoofs. Vandervyn was took aim straight between Hardy's eyes. His finger kissed the trigger. When the mocking trickster came The slightest twitch would have sent up behind Hardy, he reined in to a the bullet crashing through Hardy's log trot, and, as before, rode past him brain, and the slightest sign of fear or hesitancy on Hardy's part would

There were marked differences be- have caused that twitch. He was tween the third pinto and the two first. looking death in the face. Vandervyn He was taller and leaner, and one of was in a murderous fury.

Yet Hardy came on-quick, steady. peared to be too dejected to heed the absolutely calm. His gaze passed fact. As the pinto ambled away in above the deadly muzzle, along the looked back at his rival with all the lidded; bloodshot eyes of Vandervyn. old man," he bantered. "Sorry I can't 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, lose 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

"Ah-h-h !" gasped Marie. Hardy drew the rifle out of Vander-

ment, received an answer, and mailed my resignation and application for officer at Vancouver barracks. As an mountains." 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 intend to enter the contest. But do you think that 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 I bet you a blue chip you've got a good can make no protest, you intend per- prospect spotted, ready for branding." sonally to take advantage of the inforkeep secret."

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



What Brings Him Back "The Devil! Here?"

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

curt question of the chairman. "Yes," replied Hardy with equal

curtness. "Is an army officer entitled to enter

che contest?" questioned the smallest commissioner.

"You need not debate the matter." mission.

retary.

and rode away up the coulee. He did bunch

man who had been drinking. "The same is true of several among

you," Hardy rejoined. One of the cowboys who was includ-

ed in this remark called back resonantly: "You've been into the mountains.

"I am not making any bets," said mation that you pledged yourself to Hardy. "You have heard all I know about the trall. Mr. Vandervyn has made the trip several times. He was with me during the one trip I made. I have no objection to your questoning 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 nostrils with water from his canteen. crowd. The muttering soon ceased, and the men dispersed.

### CHAPTER XXI.

### The Race.

The commissioners came down from the agency barely in time to mare when Vandervyn came jogging make their identification of the down through the thickets of tall brush contestants. Last of all Hardy and selves and hurried over to the end of bing until the nimble-footed unshod and take the trail. I'll not get out the waiting line. There was a scant pony ambled into view, less than a of it for you." five minutes remaining. Vandervyn was a-quiver with eager excitement, glanced about, straightened, and stood tempt to force a passage. At last, and made no attempt to conceal the staring. The pony was a pinto. fact. He smiled and waved his hand

to the commissioners, and looked about with sparkling eyes. There was no his easy seat to take a position behind Never had he appeared handsomer or more boyish.

The other commissioners had "You wish to register?" came the 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 shallow stream. There were, however, shoes and travel light, the way I've wariness. And, as before, at the head "Got his notices posted. That's his quite enough hasty ones to raise a done."

seid Hardy. "I have resigned my com- wild splashing and turmoil, as, whoop-

made their thumb prints, and were at the steep bank. Vandervyn, wild- beast's shuffling pace did not expose At once Hardy eased down the mare on Hardy. It was time for bullets to

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, 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 He began to lose. the intervening gulch. The man

snatched off his broad-brimmed hat to wave a salute. The sun glinted with a side. The pinto was staggering when golden sheen on the unmistakable he reached the foot of the ascent. The blond head of Vandervyn.

At the first small break in the deand sponged out the mare's mouth and too precipitous for Hardy to risk He then shook out and refolded his row trail with the mare, and Van-Navajo saddle blanket, and started to dervyn kept the pinto close to the resaddle. But before he buckled the upper side. cinch-strap he shifted the pistol from his breast to a front pocket in his rid-

ing breeches. He was vigorously grooming the

that grew close on each side of the dozen yards up the trail. Then he

She's too highbred for a rocky road forged ahead.

Hardy at once mounted his mare, pinto. Ho was followed by a large cently unshed could not be seen. grew hard and cold with grim deter- opened fire while Vandervyn was free- with you-now," replied Hardy.

bend only a few hundred yards behind the pinto. Vandervyn, over-confident, was jogging along the level when the threw him into a half-panic. There ther. 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 could see that the pinto was being must strain if not break him before On up the valley rushed the pursued, now barely holding his own. The cruel spurring and whip-slashing could not sting the failing beast to greater exertions. He was blowing hard; his rough coat was lathered with sweat.

At last the trail made a sharp turn, and started to zigzag up the mountainquicker and longer stride of the mare passing on the lower side of the nar-

"You have no right to block the him. 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 Vandervyn identified them- trail. He did not pause in his rub- not room enough, shoot me in the back horse. He tacked the notice on,

Hardy did not reply nor did he at twelve miles from the goal of the

Vandervyn, smiling with insolent ex- heartbreaking race, came the opportuultance, rode down to him, his right nity for which he had been waiting. hand jauntily poised on his hip, over The trail smoothed out in another anxiety or envy or malice in his look. the hilt of his revolver. His eyes easy stretch. For this he had been challenged his rival with an audacious, holding the mare in hand. He started his hat to Marie. Then he caught sight provoking stare. But Hardy looked at a canter, and gradually let her of Hardy, over beyond the girl, and only at the pinto. There was no sign strike into her long, swift gallop. Van- the exultant yell died on his lips. He climbed into the touring car. One of of sweat lather on his rough coat, no dervyn saw them coming, and at once put the curb oa his pony, and sprang weariness in his gait. He was fresh- put spurs to his luckless pony. As off beside Dupont and the girl, his face "Lots of come-back to a bronco, before, Hardy held the mare down to frightful with rage. captain," purred Vandervyn. "Sorry her best long-distance speed. The His voice was high-pitched and light,

to see that you've stove up your mare. mare came up alongside the pinto and almost airy: "So-he cut across afoot! wavered and plunged forward into the like this. But you might take off her | Hardy eyed Vandervyn with utmost

of the canyon of Sloux creek, Vander- last stake."

The pony was now ambling down vyn turned in the saddle, and looked Vandervyn whirled and snatched his ing and yelling, they spurred their po- the slope past the mare. Hardy looked full at him with a hateful, mocking rifle from its saddle sheath. Marie to let him take it all?" Again Vandervyn nodded, and there nies through the water and whirled at the unshod hoofs. They were cov- smile. He pulled in his staggering caught her father's arm to drag him were no further objections raised, away at a gallop. Some wheeled up ered with a coating of clay mire from pony to a walk the moment Hardy aside; but he was already backing Hardy and he signed the register, and the coulee; a few rode straight across the bottom of the last gulch, and the swung into the trail ahead.

duly described in writing by the sec- est and noislest of all, headed down- the under surface of the hoofs. Wheth- to a trot. Though he saw no third come streaming from the automatic sarily." stream for the road, spurring his er the pony had or had not been re- pinto waiting in the thickets, his eyes pistol. Hardy could have drawn and "No. But the mine necessarily-goes

"Great horse, my little old pinto, mination. He was examining his rifle ing his rifle.

made out the figures of a man and yn's relaxing grasp. woman waiting at the first turn of "Stand aside, sir!" he quietly comthe trail. There could be no doubt sound of the approaching hoofbeats that the two were Marie and her fa-

> 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 his face. He stepped back, and jerked miles of trail in as short a time as out his revolver. Hardy leaped upon Hardy had taken to make the three him like a panther, and struck the miles across country.

The two watchers never thought to look about and up the mountain. They later, Vandervyn, though the younger he knew she could maintain for miles. had not yet looked about when he and perhaps the stronger of the two, came down upon the crest of the spur. reeled away, clutching his lacerated forced to a killing pace-a pace that A large, newly cut stake gave him a trigger finger. Hardy stood with the hint where one of the upper corners revolver in his hand. He turned to they came to the next rough ground. of the claim should be located. He Marie. cut his own stake, drove it, and tacked "May I ask for a few words alone on one of his legal notices. Another stake indicated the other upper corner. 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 soon brought them up at Vandervyn's rocks, he heard an angry exclamation scent Hardy dismounted, unsaddled, heels. The pitch of the mountain was 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

> "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 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

He thought to do me!"

"Has, you mean !" snarled Dupont.

away, his eyes fixed apprehensively ical smile.

manded. "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

weapon aside. The heavy bullet whizzed past Hardy's head. A moment

with you?"

"No !" Vandervyn hoarsely forbade and he swiftly repeated the making 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 beyed.

"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 halfinterest."

"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

"Yes," agreed Hardy.

The girl's red lips curved in an iron-

"I do not go with the mine--neces

(TO BE CONTINUED.)