

THE QUARTERBREED

A Tale of Adventures on
An Indian Reservation

By
Robert Ames Bennet

The two preceding installments described the rescue of a quarter-breed girl and two men from an Indian attack at the edge of Lakotah Indian reservation, by Capt. Floyd Hardy, U. S. A., the new Indian agent. The rescued ones are Reginald Vandervyn, nephew of United States Senator Clemmer and agency clerk, Jacques Dupont, post trader, and his daughter, Marie. Vandervyn tells Hardy of disaffection among the Indians, of the murder of Nogen, the last agent, and of his having been promised the agency. Hardy calls a council of chiefs at the agency. Redbear, the halfbreed interpreter, brings his sister, Olnna, to the valley. Captain Hardy accepts a dinner invitation from the Duponts and learns something which amazes him and causes all sorts of trouble.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

The hostess signed her Indian boy to take the box into the parlor, together with the ice bucket, in which was still left a bottle of champagne. As he obeyed, she bowed her dismissal of the guests from the table.

"I shall now permit myself to be fatigued," she said. "Good evening, Mr. Vandervyn. Good evening, Captain Hardy."

Vandervyn nodded, and followed Dupont with a nonchalant bearing that drew attention from the slight uncertainty of his step. Hardy lingered for a word of appreciation: "This has been a most enjoyable evening, Miss Dupont."

She chose to disregard the sincerity and warmth behind the formal phrase. "You are very kind, Captain Hardy. But pray do not overestimate. Where all else is off-color, three-quarters white seems dazzling."

"Believe me, it is not a question of contrast or comparison," he protested. "Not even in New York or Washington."

"You flatter me. And now, as I am tired—"

He bowed and left her, concealing the sting of her polite rebuff under his grave smile. The Indian boy, who was standing at the parlor door, closed it behind the guest at a sign from Marie.

Dupont took the drink that he had poured out for himself and undertook the perilous operation of opening the champagne. He fumbled the bottle and would have dropped it had not Vandervyn jumped up and taken it from him. Thrust aside by the younger man, he lurched and sat down in a chair near Hardy.

"Shellptry—ben in ice," he explained with solemn emphasis. He threw back his head and burst into an uproarious laugh. "Shellptry—like that go-mouche Redbear. Him trying to smother me down—zif that'd give him a show with Mr. Van! An' me the squarest trader in the U. S. I! Why, last time I got goods on credit, they shent me a skeeshule to list my li'bilities, 'n' I jush took my pen in han' 'n' wrote 'cross the shere lish, 'I don't owe no man nushin'." He again drew back his head and let out a hoarse laugh.

"Poor grammar, but rich rhetoric, Jake," remarked Vandervyn as he filled the champagne glasses. "You told me they gave you the credit you asked for."

"I got the goods," said Dupont, pulling himself together and sobering his tongue with an effort. "Nothing like being on the square. That's what makes me sore at them there chiefs, Cap. Won't let me help out the bucks and squaws what's aching for work—good pay in trade goods, and us taking all risks on the ore smelting out N. G. What'll the tribe do after they git their last issue next spring? That's what I'd like to know."

"Yes, captain," said Vandervyn. "Next spring will come the last issue of goods that is provided for in the government treaty with this tribe. They will be in a bad fix if something is not done to get them used to white ways."

"How about a new treaty, to partition the reservation and give land in severalty to each head of a family?" suggested Hardy.

"That would take a long time to bring about, and meantime the young bucks should be taught to work. Why wouldn't it be a good idea for us to take charge of the mine—pay all who want to work at fair wages, and take the risk of getting our money back out of the ore shipments?"

As Vandervyn made the suggestion, he smiled ingenuously, and his handsome, flushed face shone with philanthropic enthusiasm. Hardy's face lighted with a responsive glow. He smiled into the boyish blue eyes.

"The proposal does you credit," he responded. "You may count on me to contribute my share."

"You will, will you, Cap?" exclaimed Dupont. He reached out his thick-fingered hand. "You're in, hey? Put it there, old pard! Just you make them damn ki-yi-savvy—they've got to hustle for what we give 'em, like Nogen done, and we'll round up fifty thousand apiece before snow flies."

"What's that?" demanded Hardy, instantly stiffening to stern rigidity.

He failed to catch the furious glance from Vandervyn that sent his half-fuddled host lurching over to the whisky bottle. When he did turn, the chief clerk met his hard glance with a knowing wink and a chuckling comment: "Spilled!"

Hardy did not smile. "Explain," he ordered.

"Oh—you mean Jake's pipe dream that this low-grade stuff may some time turn into a streak of solid gold. But of course you wouldn't stand for the three of us dividing up the proceeds, even if it did turn out a bonanza?"

"Certainly not."

"Your idea would be to give all the profits to the tribe, even if we had bought the ore and taken the risk of its turning out worthless?"

"I am the acting agent, not a trader."

"Nom'chlen!" muttered Dupont.

"That ain't no way to treat a white man, Cap. Won't you let 'em trade me no more ore?"

"I shall investigate before I decide," said Hardy, and he rose to leave. "Good evening, Good evening, Mr. Vandervyn."

He went out. Dupont gaped after him, and grunted incredulously: "Fifty thousand—made it fifty thousand, and he didn't jump at it!"

"Told you so," snapped Vandervyn. "But we'll fix him yet—two more cards up our sleeve. If one fails to take the trick, we'll play the other. We're not going to be bluffed out at this stage of the game."

Dupont caught at the whisky bottle with a shaking hand. "No, by Gar," he protested. "We don't play that other card, Mr. Van. I quit first."

"Oh, well," replied Vandervyn, "if you're going to throw down, I shall not try to play it alone. But you're in on the next play."

Dupont grunted, and poured himself a full glass of whisky.

CHAPTER V.

By-Play.

Sunrise found Vandervyn riding down the valley on his nimble-footed pinto. He left the road and cantered across into the bend where Redbear had pointed out his new house to Hardy. When Vandervyn rode up, Redbear was shoveling clay upon the uncovered brush that at one corner of the roof. The halfbreed did not stop work until his visitor drew rein almost within arm's reach. Vandervyn met his civil greeting with a cynical smile.

"So you've builded you a home, Charlie. How's your sister Winna? That's the name, isn't it?"

"No, we say it O-ee-nah. The school people made her get up at four. I told her to sleep all day, if she liked."

"Come up the creek. I want to tell you something," replied Vandervyn. When they had gone beyond earshot of the cabin, he stopped his pony and faced the uneasy halfbreed with a look of sympathetic concern. "Charlie, it's all up."

Redbear's face turned a mottled gray.

"All—all up?" he gasped.

"Amounts to the same thing," answered Vandervyn. "We sounded him last night. He won't sit in to the game—the board-backed fool! No chance



"It's Up to Us to Bluff Him or Throw Down."

to deal with him, and you know what that means. Next thing, he'll have it all out of the chiefs—the mine—everything."

"No, no, Mr. Van! He can't find out. They don't know about what you and me—Nobody saw us—nobody. If there'd been a fresh track anywhere inside a quarter-mile, I couldn't have missed it."

Vandervyn shrugged. "I'm not so sure of that. You are not a full-blood tracker. But what if that is covered?

It's bad enough. As soon as he finds out about the mine, he will kick the whole bunch of us off the reservation. That's the kind of fool he is."

"He can't put me off. I'm a member of the tribe."

"Yes, and Jake is a member by marriage. Lots of good that will do you both—in the guardhouse."

Redbear cringed at the word. "But my sister—He won't put me in."

"Wait and see when he finds out how things have been going here. Let him find out anything against you, and it's Charlie in the jug, with his job gone glimmering."

The halfbreed looked up, his eyes desperate, his face set in the grin of a cornered rat. He muttered a curse.

"That's it, boy!" encouraged Vandervyn. "Don't lay down. We're with you. But remember, we've got to make a bluff. It's up to us to bluff him off, or throw down."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Van."

"Here it is, then. He doesn't know a word of Lakotah. The tribe doesn't know English. You are the interpreter. Get that?"

Redbear shook his head. "No, I don't."

"Yes, you do, Charlie. We've already told Hardy that there is a lot of bad blood stirred up. It will be easy to translate the talk of the chiefs that way. You can start in by telling them how he pacified the Moros. He killed nearly as many of them as there are members of this tribe. The chiefs he put in jail. All the rest he moved to another island—you can say, to another reservation."

"But if that is a lie—"

"It isn't. It's exactly what happened. The Moro head chief was kept in jail until he was hung. Be sure to tell that to old Thunderbolt. If it falls to warm him—"

"Hoganny-hunk!" gasped Redbear. "They once put him in jail for a week. If I tell him, it will make him fighting mad."

"That's what we want. I'll post you to interpret what he says, in a way that will get Hardy's goat. No man has nerve to stand up to a whole tribe. He will have to quit. Then the job comes to me. You know what that means."

"You promised me a full share."

"Yes, and that means a third of the net proceeds, now that Nogen is out of the way. Only, remember, you get nothing—none of us gets a cent more out of it—if Hardy stays. It's up to you now, Charlie. You turn the trick and get your share; or you fall down, lose share and job, and go to the guardhouse on your way to the federal penitentiary. Which is it to be?"

Redbear's ratlike grin had changed to the grimace of a rabid coyote. "Curse him!" he snarled. "I'll make him run clean to town."

"Good boy!" praised Vandervyn.

"Had your breakfast? Yes? Then trot up to the agency and pass the time of day to the chiefs as they come in. It will help things along to post them beforehand. Don't forget that Hardy is a cold-hearted army martinet who despises Indians. He is planning to stop all issue goods, and intends to punish the chiefs for the killing of Nogen. But if he leaves the reservation, I become the agent. I will make no trouble over Nogen, and will see that the government keeps giving issue goods to the tribe for a long time. That's the talk. Now trot along and get them screwed up."

"Olnna?" said Redbear.

"Don't waste time going back," replied Vandervyn. "I'll stop and tell your sister not to expect you home until after the council. Get busy—Wait. We can work in the police. Tell them they are ordered to wait at the guardhouse until the council is under way. They are then to march around and post themselves behind Hardy, fully armed. If the chiefs get angry, they are to close up around Hardy. Are you on?"

Redbear responded with an eager nod, and started off at a jog trot. Vandervyn smiled, turned his pony about, and rode back to the cabin. Without dismounting, he reached down and knocked the door opened a scant inch and Olnna peeped out at the visitor.

"Lo," he said in an indifferent tone. "I brought word to your brother that he was wanted at once. Told him I would let you know. He will not be home until after the council."

"Thank you, sir," murmured the girl. "No trouble at all," replied Vandervyn. "You don't happen to have a drink of good water handy, do you?"

Instinctive hospitality overcame the girl's shyness. Her tall young figure and handsome face appeared as the door swung open.

"I boil the water. Do you like tea?" she asked in a flutellike voice.

"All right."

When she returned to the door, he was tightening his saddle girth. He kept her waiting several moments before he turned to take the cup of tea.

The hand that held the cup was rough from hard work, but the girl's cheap calico dress was neat and clean and it covered a form as supple and erect as a reed. Unlike her brother, she had inherited only the good features of her

parents. The blend of types apparent in her face was far from unpleasing.

She kept her soft brown eyes shyly downcast. Yet she must have watched him covertly through her long lashes. The tea was hot. He sipped it slowly and gloated on the girl's confusion. Unable longer to endure the strain, Olnna at last faltered in timid desperation: "You—you are Mr. Van. Charlie—he said you and he are partners."

"Partners?" repeated Vandervyn with a quick frown. "He said that?"

The girl shrank back. "Please, sir, he didn't mean anything wrong."

"What more did he say?"

"Nothing—only that. Please, it's only his way of talking."

"That's all right. Don't be afraid," Vandervyn reassured her with a quick change to smiling friendliness. "I am Charlie's best friend."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! He is my only brother. We have nobody else; only ourselves."

In her gratitude the girl forgot her self-consciousness. She raised her soft eyes and looked full at Vandervyn. He smiled and bent nearer. Though she blushed scarlet, she was unable to turn her gaze away from his ardent blue eyes.

"O-ee-nah," he drew out her name in the caressing tone that he would have used in fondling a pet dog.

She smiled even as she trembled. He came closer. Her gaze wavered and sank before the look in his glowing eyes, and she shrank back. He sought to put his arm about her, but she sprang clear with the agility of a startled doe.

"Oh, come now!" he urged. "Just a kiss. What's the harm of a kiss?"

The girl had retreated into the cabin. He blocked the door. There was no way for her to elude him if he wished to press his vantage.

"No, no, please!" she begged. "At school they told me only bad girls let men kiss them."

"Bah!" he scoffed. "What do those old fossils know about it? His voice deepened to an alluring richness. "Come. I will not hurt you, Olnna. Give me a kiss."

"Let me—let me out!" she panted. "Not unless you pay toll."

She looked around for some way of escape. There was none. She stared wildly out through the window and then looked at him over her shoulder. The sudden stillness of her pose checked and disquieted him. Was it possible that she had seen her brother returning?

He sprang outside and around to the corner of the cabin. A short distance away he saw Marie Dupont riding across from the road at a smart canter. He waved his hat to her and faced about just as Olnna was gliding from the door.

"Stop!" he called in a tone that forced the girl to obey. "Don't be silly, Olnna. You have my word for it I meant no harm. If you run now, Miss Dupont will think we have been doing something wrong."

"Oh, I don't want her to. She was good to me. Don't let her think bad of me," implored the girl.

"Then go in and get her a cup of tea. Quick—here she comes."

The girl disappeared as Marie's pony swung around the corner of the cabin. Vandervyn stooped to fiddle with his stirrup leather. He straightened, and was staring past him toward the door of the cabin, her cheeks ablaze and her eyes flashing with anger.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, glancing over his shoulder with well-feigned surprise. "What's the matter?"

"You ask that?" she cried. "I met Charlie half way to the agency. He said you were riding out of the valley."

"Yes. Stopped here to get a drink from his sister. They have only creek water. I've had to wait while she boiled some for tea. But it was a lucky delay—you're here. You'll ride with me?"

"I wish to speak to that girl," replied Marie.

"Going to hire her for a kitchen maid?" he asked, and he called over his shoulder in a rough tone: "Hurry up in there. You're keeping Miss Dupont waiting."

"You should not speak that way to Olnna. She is not a dog," reproved Marie. "See; you have frightened her—It's all right, Olnna. Mr. Van didn't mean to be cross."

The girl had stopped in the doorway, her eyes timidly downcast. Without looking up, she came around to Marie and offered her the cup of lukewarm tea that she had brought in obedience to Vandervyn's command. Marie took a sip and paused to peer down into the dark brew.

"Merd!" she cried. "It is half sugar."

"You were good to me," naively explained Olnna.

Marie laughed and handed back the offering.

"You child! Drink it yourself. I can guess how few sweets you've had at school. Come on, Reggie."

Vandervyn mounted, and their pines started off on a lops. The young

man kept his eyes to the front. But Marie soon glanced about.

"Look!" she said.

He turned and saw Olnna with the big granite-ware cup to her uplifted lips, draining the moist sugar from the bottom. The action was laughably childish, but the girl's attitude was the perfection of grace. Marie caught the look that flitted across Vandervyn's face, and her eyes flashed.

"So I was right!" she exclaimed. "You were flirting with her."

"Flirting with her?" he wonderingly queried, and he turned sideways in his saddle, to stare wide-eyed at his companion, from the tip of her dainty riding boot up to the feather felt hat on her coal-black hair.

Under that prolonged scrutiny the scarlet of the girl's anger changed to rose, and her eyes sank as coyly as had Olnna's. He smiled. The girl was good to look upon.

Mid-morning was past when they walked their ponies up the slope of the terrace. The bare level, back of the warehouse, was dotted with groups of stolid, half-naked Indians.

"Look!" exclaimed the girl.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Don't you see? There is not a woman or child among them. Let us go and find out what Pere thinks of it."

CHAPTER VI.

Thunderbolt.

But Dupont was not at home. When they failed to find him either in the store or the living rooms, Marie stepped to the door for another look at the Indians, and then calmly went in to prepare a noon dinner.

Vandervyn sauntered over to the office. On the way back he observed Redbear, out back of the warehouse, drifting unobtrusively from one group of Indians to another. Hardy was at his desk in the office, intent on the government treaty with the tribe.

At noon, as the head chief of the tribe had not yet arrived, Hardy and Vandervyn started to go for their midday meal. As they rounded Hardy's cabin, they were overtaken by Dupont, who came from the direction of the stable. His face was as stolid as the faces of the chiefs and headmen among whom he had passed.

"Well, Jake, what's the good word?" inquired Vandervyn.

The trader gloomily shook his head. "Ain't none, Mr. Van. No women, no children, no old men—just bucks. No trading—I been over to the p'leece camp. Ponies all in; tepees down. They're gitting ready to slip down creek."

"Do you mean they expect trouble?" asked Hardy.

"Well, it kind of looks that way," answered Dupont.

"Explain," ordered Hardy.

"You remember I told you there was a lot of bad blood stirred up. It all turns on whether Thunderbolt feels the same—that old Ti-owa-konza, the head chief. If he's feeling bad, we'd better look out."

"I am confident there will be no trouble," said Hardy. "We have only to find out the cause of the ill feeling and remove it."

"If it can be removed," qualified Vandervyn.

"Better figure on letting the warehouse go and piling into my place, Cap, if they start to ki-yi," suggested Dupont. "I'll show you how I got it all loopholed. Water inside and a lot of grub and ammunition—we can hold it agin the whole tribe, if the p'leece don't go back on us."

"They will not, nor will there be any outbreak," insisted Hardy. "Do not needlessly alarm your daughter."

"Can't scare her," grunted Dupont. They were now almost at the house porch. Marie appeared in the doorway, aglow with animation.

"Good day, Captain Hardy. I fear we had breakfast too early for you. Pere, you look sober as an awl. You can't be afraid of an outbreak. What if they do turn loose? I have everything ready—all the loopholes opened and the meat brought in from the ice-house. It will keep in the cellar."

Hardy followed the others into the parlor, and looked at the slots cut through the wallpaper to expose the loopholes, from which the chinks had been removed.

"Miss Dupont," he said, "you are a very brave young lady."

"Yes, it took courage to cut my wallpaper," she replied.

"And all for nothing, I feel sure," he declared.

"Well, it's best to be ready, in case," muttered Dupont.

The girl's eyes sparkled. "I wouldn't mind a day or two of fighting. What fun it must have been in the old days!"

"I have no doubt we could defend the house," remarked Hardy. "We could hold out until the arrival of troops. But there will be no uprising, no trouble."

"Oh, captain!" protested Marie. They passed on into the dining room, where the silent Indian boy at once served dinner. It was a plain family meal. But the china and plated ware were artistic, the table linen was clean, and the food very well cooked.

Dupont was still gormandizing when Redbear came with the news that Ti-owa-konza had at last reached the agency. The halfbreed looked so worried that Vandervyn rose from the table as quickly as Hardy. Dupont paused with a slice of pumpkin pie upraised in his hand.

"What's the rumpus, Charlie?" he asked. "Old Thunderbolt ain't gone on the warpath, has he?"

"No, he looks quiet now. But one of the headmen told me he said he would wipe out the agency if the new agent didn't do what he wanted."

Dupont muttered one of the two

oaths ever ready on his tongue: "Nom d'un chien! Cap, you sure ain't going to risk all our scalps by bucking his game?"

"I shall see what he wants, and then do what I consider right," replied Hardy. "Miss Dupont, I ask you to stay close indoors. May I ask you to have your Indian boy take my mare down to Redbear's sister, with orders for her to escape if she hears any firing? Mr. Vandervyn, you may remain here or join myself and Redbear, as you prefer."

"I'll go along with you, captain. You may have to fight your way back here."

Hardy nodded in approbation of the spirited reply, bowed to Marie, and started for the agency buildings with a step that was brisk yet dignified. The Indians had assembled for the council in a semicircle, three rows deep, facing the rear of the warehouse. Hardy went first to his cabin, where he "broke" his rifle and put a piece of the mechanism into his pocket.

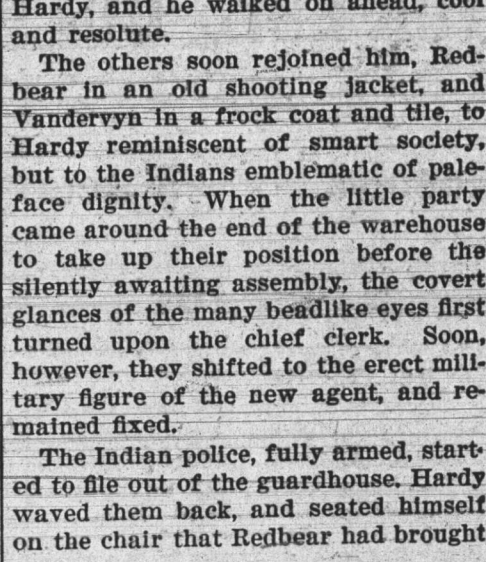
"There shall be no display of weapons on our part," he ordered. "You will not take your rifles. At close quarters your revolvers will be more effective. Carry them concealed."

"We will put on coats," said Vandervyn. "Come to my cabin."

"Meet me at the office," directed Hardy, and he walked on ahead, cool and resolute.

The others soon rejoined him. Redbear in an old shooting jacket, and Vandervyn in a frock coat and tie, to Hardy reminiscent of smart society, but to the Indians emblematic of paleface dignity. When the little party came around the end of the warehouse to take up their position before the silently awaiting assembly, the covert glances of the many headlike eyes first turned upon the chief clerk. Soon, however, they shifted to the erect military figure of the new agent, and remained fixed.

The Indian police, fully armed, started to file out of the guardhouse. Hardy waved them back, and seated himself on the chair that Redbear had brought



The Bare Level Was Dotted With Stolid, Half-Naked Indians.

from the office. With a calm, direct gaze, Hardy studied the appearance of the triple row of Indians. To an inexperienced eye they could not have appeared more peaceably disposed. But Hardy's keen eyes noted that the blankets of some of the men in the rear were hunched out over well-filled quivers of arrows. Here and there on the ground beside the subchiefs who formed the front row a muzzle of a rifle thrust from under the outspread blanket ends.

Hardy at last fixed his gaze on Thunderbolt, who sat in the center of the row of subchiefs, and after a deliberative silence that accorded with the Indian idea of etiquette, spoke to Redbear: "Tell them that I am pleased to meet in council with the head chief and subchiefs and headmen of the tribe. I am here to find out what has troubled the tribe and to see whatever is wrong shall be made right."

Redbear glanced at Vandervyn, who stood behind Hardy. The eyes of the chief clerk narrowed, and his small, red mouth straightened. Redbear drew in a quick breath, faced about, and addressed the assembly. What he said took several moments to deliver.

The hush that followed seemed to quiver with suppressed hostility, though the faces of the Indians remained stolid. At last old Ti-owa-konza ventured a response. His tone and bearing were mild. He first spoke soothingly to his fellow councilors, and then addressed Hardy in dignified remonstrance. When he sat down again, Redbear stood silent, uneasy and vacillating.

"Interpret," ordered Hardy.

"I—I—it isn't easy. You mightn't like it," mumbled the halfbreed.

"Never mind that. Proceed."