

# The Quarterbreed

An Indian Reservation Tale by ROBERT AMES BENNET

CHAPTER XXII—Continued.

"Be so kind as to explain. I understand that you were ordered to Alaska."

"Were you not told of my return as far as the butte?"

"Then your orders to leave were countermanded," Marie evaded the question.

His eyes darkened, and his face contracted as if from a twinge of pain. But he replied with quiet steadiness: "That is of no consequence. May I ask if you consider my word good?"

"Yes," the answer was given without an instant's hesitation.

He smiled gravely. "You cannot think I came back to win the mine for myself. You have my word that I will assign it to you as soon as I have the legal right."

"To me? But why?" The dilating eyes of the girl showed her utter surprise and astonishment. "Why? There, that last night at the agency, you showed that you despised me."

"Never that," he disclaimed. "I was bitter—harsh. But the suddenness of the discovery that you and he— Let us not talk of that. It is past. I would not have come back to trouble you, only— Again he stopped. "I had to come back and do this thing. It was necessary that you should become owner of the mine—sole owner. It is to be yours, not his. Promise me that you will never give him any share in it. That is all I ask."

"I will not promise unless you tell me your reason for asking it, and unless you tell me your reason for doing what you have done."

Hardy whitened. "Very well, then. It is simply this: If you own the mine, he will wish to marry you."

"If I— But he already wishes to—" The girl hesitated, and fell silent, her black eyebrows bent in thought.

"I do not seek to persuade you to the contrary," said Hardy. "All I ask is that you give me your promise to allow him no share in the mine."

Marie looked down. After a silence she answered in a low tone: "I promise."

"That is all," he said. "I must now be going."

"Wait," she urged. "You have not

told me why—why you have done this."

"Is it necessary?" he replied. "Please do not fancy it is because I am at all unselfish. You have promised yourself to him. Knowing that I no longer had even a fighting chance, I have merely sought to make sure that he—that you should have at least a fair opportunity to be happy. That is all."

He lingered a moment for a last look at her beautiful face, upon which had fallen the inscrutable stolidity of the Indian in her nature. No other expression could have so completely confirmed him in his belief that he had lost his fighting chance to win her. He faced about to return up the mountain the way he had come.

Marie stood as he left her, silent and immobile, following his brisk ascent up the path to the mine shaft with a wide-eyed gaze that perceived the objective image, yet at the same time seemed to be looking inward.

A purpling that shaded the blue-blackness of her eyes to violet-black alone betrayed the intensity of her emotion.

The receding figure had passed along the spur to the foot of the steep ascent up the mountain before the girl became aware that Vandervyn was close beside her. He started to pass behind, to where Hardy had dropped the rifle and revolver. In a flash of swift movement she sprang ahead of him and set her foot upon the rifle barrel.

"You shall not."

Her voice was low and seemingly tranquil, her face as stolid as before, but the look in her eyes made him hesitate. He glanced about at Dupont. The trader had turned his back on Hardy, and was staring fixedly into the valley at a party of Indians that had come down the far side and were pitching their camp in the meadow. It

was evident that he did not propose to be a witness to anything Vandervyn might do.

"Mon pere," quietly called Marie. He shot a startled glance at her, hesitated, and came over to them. Vandervyn's eyes were upturned to the figure on the mountainside in a look of hate that was not pleasant to see. Dupont followed the menacing stare, and then glanced away as if caught in the guilty act. Fast as Hardy was scaling the ascent, he was still within easy rifle shot and would continue to be for several minutes.

Vandervyn moistened his dry lips, and muttered hoarsely: "Take her into the cabin. She won't let me—do it."

Dupont coughed, and spoke in a husky voice. "Come into the cabin, Marie."

"No," she replied. "But listen, girl," he urged. "No one won't ever know, and we won't be looking. We can lay it on the same buck Indian what has tried to get him twice a ready. There's a lot of 'em just come into the valley— Don't look at me that way. The dirty sneak has took our mine away from us—he done it by a trick, cutting 'cross foot. Mr. Van can't afford to marry you if me and him don't get the mine."

"What if I should get it?" asked the girl, with no shade of change in her inscrutable calm.

Vandervyn whirled upon her, his face convulsed with jealous fury. "So that's it! You've sold yourself to him! You—!" He stopped, silenced by her look.

After a pause she quietly remarked: "He gives me the mine. He is going away, I do not know where. Instead of you, I am to be the owner of the mine. Do you wish to marry me?"

### CHAPTER XXIII.

A Wedding Postponed. Vandervyn's face darkened with suspicion.

"If you're not playing me then he has lied to you, in order to get away from us."

Marie's lips curved in a half-smile. "He gave me his word of honor. Do you doubt it?"

The young man's jaw dropped slack. He could not even pretend to doubt her statement or Hardy's word. He looked down, his brows knotted and eyes contracted with intense thought.

Dupont took the news in a far different manner.

"By Gar!" he exclaimed. "He's going to give you the mine? You're dead sure of it? By Gar! I call that mighty square of Cap. It's white! And me a-thinking he done it all to get back at us. It sure is white of Cap. Why, it's nearly the same like he had give it to me!"

"He named only one condition," remarked Marie.

Vandervyn started, and looked up at her. She met him with a level glance that told nothing of what she was thinking.

"One condition," she repeated. "It was my promise not to give you any share in the mine."

"Me?" queried Dupont.

"No."

"I see," threatened Vandervyn. "He thinks to force you from having anything to do with me."

"On the contrary, he seemed to think it would not prevent our marrying."

Vandervyn stared in bewilderment. Hardy's action seemed incredible. Then he thought he perceived the explanation, and rallied from his perplexity. His frown gave place to a cynical smile.

"O-ho, my lady! I see. You worked him with the soft pedal—the snaphed! The easy mark! He's just the kind of duffer to fall for the wall of a pretty girl with a tear in her eye and a quaver in her throat. Good for you, sweetheart! You beat him at his own game. He tried a bluff, thinking you'd be silly enough to throw me over for him. You called him, and he had to make good. The fool—to think you'd be soft enough to turn from me to him, just because he made a play to the galleries with his offer! Oh, what an easymark!"

"Is that exactly the right term?" calmly inquired the girl.

"None better!" exclaimed Vandervyn. "He made you promise not to give me a share in the mine. Mining property is real estate. An agreement in regard to real estate is not binding unless in writing."

Marie's tranquil face took on an expression of artless concern. "Oh, really? Then his promise to give me the mine is not binding."

"Don't worry," reassured Vandervyn. "He will keep his word. You are sure of the mine."

"But, of course, if I take back my promise, it will be no more than fair to give him the chance to take back his," she innocently remarked.

"Thank you for reminding me, Pere," said his daughter. She looked at Vandervyn with naive seriousness. "So you see I must keep my promise."

"Oh, I say now, don't be a— He detected something behind her look of childlike artlessness, and hastened to concede the point. "But of course if you feel that way about it! You will not have to break your promise after— The law will then make your property mine. So that is settled, sweetheart. Now comes the main question. When shall we be married?"

The girl quivered at the word. He stepped close, and looked into her eyes, his own glowing golden with ardor. She dropped her gaze, and drew back from him as if confused by the suddenness of his proposal.

"I must think," she murmured. "Would it not be best to wait until he has given me the mine?"

"Not when you have his word that he will do it. Anyway, there's no harm in naming the day. Come, make it an early one!"

The girl's rich color deepened with a blush.

"Not now!" she replied, struggling to recover her composure. "You must wait. Perhaps tomorrow—but now I—"

She glanced around as if looking for a way of escape. There was no promise of succor in her father's complacent grin. Her gaze darted down into the valley; it rested upon the encamping Indians. "Look," she murmured. "That is Thunderbolt's tepee. I am going down to see him. He should be told that he may be prosecuted if he hunts here now. It is no longer tribal land."

"There's no need, sweetheart," said Vandervyn. "I will see to it that no one interferes with the chief and his band."

"I shall go down and tell him," she insisted. "No, do not come with me."

He frowned at her willfulness, shrugged and turned to Dupont.

"Come into the cabin, Jake, and give me a drop of something," he urged. "I'm dry as a bone. . . That ride wasn't any joke!"

Marie was already hastening down the mountain slope into the valley. Where she came to the camp, she was received with pleasant greetings. The keen eyes of the Indians had long ago perceived and recognized the white people on the terrace.

The venerable figure of Ti-owa-konza appeared in the entrance of the biggest tepee. He disappeared. A moment later three women came out of the tepee, and one of them told the girl that the chief wished her to go in. She stooped and passed through the low opening.

The chief was seated at the far side of the tepee near an outstretched blanket form. There was no one else present. He beckoned Marie to come across to him. As she approached, she saw that the hair of the still figure before him was braided after the fashion of the maidens of the tribe. She bent over and touched his face that was so thin and pale that at first she did not recognize it. The large, sunken eyes opened and looked up at her with a startled gaze.

"Olna!" she exclaimed, and she knelt down beside the girl. "You are ill."

"No— Go away, please," begged the fretted girl. A slow flush reddened her wan face. She sought to turn from the visitor. "I want to be alone. Come, please, go away, please."

Marie looked up at Ti-owa-konza. He saw the pity in her eyes, and spoke softly in Lakotah:

"Rose who art white yet red, in the flower of the golden lily a worm is gnawing. The golden lily withers, Pluck out the worm, else she will fade and go from me."

He stood up and wrapped his blanket about him and went out.

An hour passed. Through the canvas wall of the tent those outside heard a low murmuring and at times the sound of sobbing. At last Marie raised the edge of the tepee and spoke to a group of women. One of them hastened to fetch from the fire a bowl of hot broth. She went into the tepee, and at once came out again without the bowl.

There followed another long wait. But no more crying could be heard, and gradually the sound of the low voices within the tepee died away to silence. Ti-owa-konza came back to the entrance, listened awhile, and noiselessly slipped aside.

Olna lay with her head on Marie's breast. Her eyes were closed. She had fallen into the peaceful, healing slumber of childhood. A smile hovered on her half-parted lips. The bowl beside her was empty.

Very gently Marie laid the sleeping girl's head upon a blanket roll, and rose to come across to the silent grandfather. They talked for several minutes in Lakotah—When she stepped past him and left the tepee, his face was still set in the stolid calm of the Indian warrior of his generation, but his proud old eyes were glistening with gratitude and stern joy.

The sun had set, and the twilight was already fading. By the time Ma-

rie's slow step brought her up to the terrace, the valley and mountain slope were dusky with the shadow of approaching nightfall. Within the cabin Dupont had lit one of the mine candles. The candlestick was an empty whisky bottle. Another bottle, not yet empty, stood on the rough deal table between the two men.

"Hello, girlie!" sang out Vandervyn, as Marie paused in the open doorway. He sprang up to come around the table to her. "I've been languishing for you all afternoon. Would've chased down the hill, only your dad said you'd get on your ear if I did."

"Yes," quietly replied the girl. She had raised her hand to shield her face from the candle, as if the light dazzled her. As she spoke, she stepped in and along the side of the table opposite him, apparently not seeing him. "Yes, I would not have cared to see you. I was nursing one of the girls down in the camp."

Vandervyn stopped short. "It wasn't anything infectious, I hope."

"No, I shall not suffer from the same trouble. But I am very tired. I



"I want to be alone. I am shamed."

see you and Pere have eaten. You might finish the bottle outside."

"How about a kiss to sweeten the toddy?" he suggested.

She burst into a tantalizing little laugh. "I fear you must take yours straight for a while, Reggie. You are still engaged to your cousin, I believe— Good night, Pere."

Dupont, heavy with food and liquor, mumbled a response, and stumbled into the dusk, reluctantly followed by Vandervyn. Marie flung their blankets out after them and barred the door.

In the morning Vandervyn was relieved to find that the night's rest had lightened her mood. She cooked a delicious little breakfast, and was pleased to be very gracious to him. The anxiety with which he had met her at the cabin door soon vanished. He fell into the gallantry of an accepted suitor who is very much in love and a bit uncertain of his conquest.

He waited until Dupont went to fetch the horses before he ventured to reopen the question of questions: "Sweetheart, you've had time to think it over and decide. Tell me, when is to be the happy day?"

"Yes," she murmured, "I have thought it over."

"You will name an early date!" he exclaimed, assured by the coy sweetness of her look.

Her smile faded, and she dropped forward in an attitude of humility that he had never before seen, her pride permit. She replied in a meek voice: "Oh, no, no! I must do what is just by you. Think what it would be like for you to take back with you as your wife a quarterbreed girl straight off an Indian reservation."

Vandervyn winced, rallied, and rejoined with ardor: "Let them think what they please, so long as you are my wife."

"That is most gallant and brave of you!" she murmured. "But—there is also Pere."

Vandervyn bit his lip. "Need he come along?"

Marie looked up, her eyes full of tender reproach.

"I did not think that of you, Reggie. How can I leave him here alone? You have never seemed to realize that I came back from Ottawa because I wished to be with him. Even before I went to convent I saw the traits in him that you see, but also I saw something more—the man that he might have been."

"Don't imagine I'm asking you to give him up," Vandervyn hastened to disclaim. "All I suggest is that we take our honeymoon trip alone."

"And leave Pere with no one to cook for him—leave him here! Can't you guess what would happen? Within a week—a fortnight at the utmost—he would marry the youngest and best cook within reach, a breed girl by preference—most likely Charlie's sister."

Vandervyn winced as if cut across the face with a whiplash.

"No—not her!" he stammered. "That—it would be impossible! She would be—I tell you, I will not stand for it—I cannot!"

"Of course that could not be permitted," sweetly agreed Marie. "I would not care to come back and find I had acquired a stepmother as young or younger than myself—no, not even if she were as clean and as good a girl as is Olna Redbear."

"Then—you—think—" hesitated Vandervyn.

"Listen, I have thought and thought, and now I have it all planned out. I must do what is just by you, yet, as you see, I cannot leave Pere here.

You may remember that I told you a little about the English people I knew in Ottawa. When I saw that you thought I was romancing, I said no more except in hints. I really was more intimate with Lady Verlaire than you will find it easy to believe. Her son and daughters were already married. She took a fancy to me. When I was to come home, she invited me to visit her in England. I had told her all about myself and Pere. We corresponded regularly. She has renewed her invitation more than once. The last time she insisted that I should come without further delay, and bring Pere with me."

"She did?" exclaimed Vandervyn. "Then why not all three of us go together?"

Marie drooped again in her attitude of meek humility.

"You are so generous, Reggie, to be willing to travel with Pere! But I cannot allow you to make such a sacrifice. No; there is a better way. I shall go alone with Pere to England, and then perhaps for a little visit to Paris with the sister of the mother superior of my convent. Pere has never forgotten his French-Canadian dialect, and I have been tinkering it into fairly good French. A month or two in Paris may correct his accent. It may also smooth down our roughnesses enough for us to venture over to Washington without putting you too greatly to shame before your friends."

"Two months—all that time?" complained Vandervyn.

"Indeed, no. It will be much longer," answered the girl. "I cannot permit you to marry a mere agency girl. Besides, if Pere does not wish to sell out his cattle business, I may have to wait for returns from the mine. It takes quantities of money to buy polish, and lots of time to put it on. We shall not reach Washington before November or December."

"Five or six months!"

"Yes. Aren't you willing to wait for me?" asked the girl, smiling.

The sudden change from meekness won a hasty assurance from Vandervyn: "Of course I am. It will be a fearfully long time to be without you, if you insist upon— But I could run over and see you in England or France."

"No," she refused. "I wish you to stay and work for the good of my people. Pere and I still are members of the tribe, you know, and I am deeply interested in the irrigation project laid out by Captain Hardy."

Vandervyn smiled in his most boyish manner.

"I am neither an engineer nor an army officer. Someone else must dig the ditches. I shall at once go on to Washington and prepare for the passage of the appropriation. It's going to slide through as soon as congress meets."

"And then I shall come over from Paris. You will break off your engagement with your cousin and we— No, no, sir! not a single kiss—not one until you are free, and I set the day. I am an heiress now, and must act accordingly. Besides, here is Pere with the horses. We must be starting."

### CHAPTER XXIV.

Tilting at Windmills. The early winter rains that followed an ideal Indian summer at the national capital were chill and sleety. But congress was now in session, and Washington was bright and gay with the activities of officialdom and official society.

One of the first events of the season had been a ball in honor of the superb French beauty and heiress, Miss Dupont. She had arrived with a matronly French lady well known in Parisian society; a tall, olive-tinted maid, who was said to be of Spanish or Hindu origin; and a male relative, Monsieur Jacques Dupont, who spoke French with a quaint sprinkling of western Americanisms. By those who saw him before they had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Miss Dupont, he was said to be quite "impossible." But after meeting her, they usually agreed with the general verdict that he was decidedly amusing and "picturesque."

Letters to the wives of three or four ambassadors opened to the heiress the doors of the most exclusive official society, and her wonderful beauty and charm carried all before her by storm. Men raved over her eyes; women over her French gowns. She soon had a suite of devoted admirers and suitors, among whom, despite his engagement to the daughter of his eminent uncle, Mr. Reginald Vandervyn was one of the most ardent.

All this had come to Hardy through society reports in the newspapers, and from the chance remarks of acquaintances. The remarks very seldom were made by persons fortunate enough to have attended functions graced by the presence of Miss Dupont. Hardy's neatly kept clothes were somewhat out of style, and his lodgings, in an old warren down on M street, were cheap and shabby.

There were still better reasons for the worldly wise to shun the company of the officer so lately distinguished for his services in the Philippines. It was whispered that the interests for which he had been diligently lobbying since midsummer were opposed to the interests of the pro-administration group of which the eminent Senator Clemmer was the leader. More openly the fact was bruited about that he was to be subjected to trial by court-martial on grave charges.

For he was still in the service.

Upon his return from the hard-won race for the mine, he had fled his claim with the commissioners, and journeyed on as soon as possible to the railroad. There he had sold his mare at a low price, but with the op-

tion of buying her back within a year. He had then started east, too intent upon his purpose to delay even for a telegram from Vancouver barracks, and never doubting that his commanding officer had granted him the customary leave of absence pending the acceptance of his unconditional and immediate resignation.

Great had been his consternation when, the day of his arrival in Washington, he had reported himself at the war department. Not only had leave of absence been denied him and all action on his resignation been suspended; he had been posted for desertion. However, his record on the one hand, and the indignant haste of the attack on the other, had brought about sufficient intervention by members of the general staff to cause several months' delay in the plan of his enemies to crush him. Action on the charges filed against him by the Indian commissioners and by his commanding officer had been postponed from month to month.

Meantime he had been placed under the nominal arrest of confinement to the limits of the District of Columbia, which left him free to pursue the ends for which he had come east. To his surprise, no contest had been filed against his mineral claim. On the contrary, he had soon found himself legally entitled to assign the mine to Marie. His carefully drawn and duly witnessed conveyance had started west in the next mail. Marie's note of acknowledgment stated the esteem and gratitude of the writer in the most correct and conventional of terms.

His progress toward the accomplishment of his second purpose had been far less smooth. In fact, after months of persistent endeavor, he could not be sure that he had made any progress whatever. He had not been barred from an inspection of the documents relating to the new treaty with the tribe, and among them he had found Vandervyn's alleged contract. It purported to appoint the young man attorney and tribal representative and to fix his compensation at twenty per cent of any moneys appropriated to the tribe in payment for the ceded mineral lands.

Hardy had at first considered the signatures forged. But examination with a microscope had shown him that the thumb prints were identical with those on the memorandum of the proceedings of the tribal council; he had been quick to perceive that his only chance of defeating the outrageous contract was to bring about either an executive or a congressional investigation. There had been no difficulty in divining the manner in which Vandervyn had obtained the signatures at the tribal council.

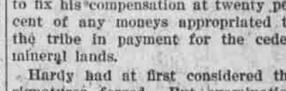
Yet so far his every move had been blocked. He had interested one man of official position or influence after another, only to be met later with evasion or procrastination or even outright rebuffs. One door after another had been shut in his face. At last he had found himself regarded as a crank, than which, in Washington, no more opprobrious term can be applied to a man.

With the opening of congress the influences opposed to him had at last been able to overcome the opposition that had delayed a trial of the charges against him. The afternoon that he came back to his shabby lodgings after a final attempt to obtain an interview with the chief of the Indian bureau, he was officially notified to appear the following morning for trial by court-martial.

He already knew the charges against him. They included desertion, failure to report at Vancouver barracks and, under the head of conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman, his contempt of the developed mine.

The nearness of the trial brought matters to a desperate pass with him. He must act quickly.

It was the night of the first ball at the White House. As usual, there was a great crush. Hardy, in conventional



The Fact Was Bruited About That He Was to Be Court-Martialed.

evening dress—not in official costume, as the regulations required—managed in some mysterious manner to obtain entrance. The secret-service men had no instructions with regard to him, and considerable time passed before anyone inimical to him heeded his obtrusive presence.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Remarkable Strength of Fly. By harnessing a fly to a tiny wagon an English scientist found it could draw 170 times its own weight over smooth surfaces.

Daily Thought. There is a best way to do everything, even if it be but to boil an egg.—Emerson.