The Quarterbreed

A Modern Indian Reservation Story by Robert Ames Bennet

IN this serial you are given a picture of present-day American Indians on government reservations. The author depicts, too, the manner in which the original Americans have been exploited in the past by unscrupulous men with strong political influence. On the other hand, assuming that you have a taste for wholesome romance, you will enjoy the powerful love element in "The Quarterbreed." And Mr. Bennet's portrayal of the principal characters is as much a study as an entertainment. We feel sure our readers can look forward with pleasure to the perusal of each installment of the story.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

—1—

Under Fire.

In its spring freshness the usual dreary brown of the Montana range was tempered with a pleasant green. But the midday sun was blisteringly hot, and the rider turned his eyes to the snowy crests of the Little Paw mountains. The nearest of the rugged, pine-clad spurs were now only four or five miles away. He had almost reached the reservation. Wolf river marked the boundary. The rangy stride of his thoroughbred mare was as easy and unfaltering as when she had borne him away from the half-dozen shacks of the nearest "town" on the railroad, fifty miles back over the open range. But as they began to top the rise, he drew her down to her rapid walk, and took out his fieldglasses.

Hardly had he focused the powerful little binoculars when from across the coulee, a short distance downstream, came the crack of a high-power rifle. A moment later the shot was followed by three deeper reports from upstream. The first shot was smokeless. Not so the others. The bluish smoke puffs of their charges of black powder directed the gaze of the rider to the dozen or more swarthy, half-naked Indians crouching near the top of the coulee bank, across from the nearby butte. All were warily peering down the coulee.

The road ran obliquely across the narrow valley to a side gulley that gashed the far bank a hundred yards or so downstream. Back in the shelter of this gulley four or five ponies stood grouped before a buckboard. Above them a man was crouched under the edge of the bank. Another man lay behind a small bush, just outside the entrance of the gulley. A woman in civilized dress was coming around from the rear of the buckboard. The erect figure of the rider tensed with quick decision. He wheeled his mare out of the road, to cut down the sharp slope directly towards the Indians. His voice rang across the coulee with the clearness of a bugle call: "Ho, there! Cease firing!"

At his command, the Indians twisted about to glare at him in a half panic. Three or four started to slink away. But one swung his rifle around and fired. The bullet grazed the rider's coat collar. He flung up his right hand, palm outward. The reply to the peace sign was a second bullet, that cut the crown of his campaign hat.

Two bullets were enough to change the tactics of the rider. At a word from him and a touch of the rein, his mare swerved and plunged obliquely

"Ho, There! Cease Firing!"

down the side of the coulee. The Indians burst into exultant yells, and several opened fire on the fugitive as the mare leaped down to the coulee and dashed across the bottom toward the gulley.

Urged on by voice and spurless heel, the mare sprinted over the sandy level with the rush of a racehorse on the home stretch. Coming to the narrowed stream, she covered it in a single tremendous leap, and dashed on, unchecked, up into the gulley, safe out of reach of those whirring leaden hornets.

As they swept past the low bush at the entrance of the gulley, the rider looked down at the man behind it. He saw a blond, florid young fellow, whose blue eyes and small red-lipped mouth were ugly with hate. A glimpse, and he was past the outlier.

The woman, crouched just beyond, under the edge of the bank, was blazing away toward the Indians with an automatic revolver. An instant later he pulled up his mare alongside the buckboard and looked up with cool alertness at the third member of the party, under the brink of the bank. The man ceased firing and twisted his thickset body half about so that he could stare down at the newcomer. His close-cropped hair was grizzled, his face leathery and stolid. The cast of his features indicated French-Canadian blood.

The fusillade of the Indians had ceased the instant their view of the fugitive was cut off. Yet, after a single hard look, the man on the bank turned away to thrust his rifle up over the edge and shoot. The rider wheeled his mare and rode back past the skittish ponies. The woman had crept in from the entrance of the gulley to where she could stand upright without exposing herself to the fire of the Indians.

She came up the slope with an easy, springing step that told of youthful buoyancy. From under the hem of her neat gingham dress peeped the toes of small, blue-beaded moccasins. Having reloaded her pistol, she raised her head to look up at the rider. He was lifting his hand to touch his hat with perfunctory courtesy. Then he saw her face—calm, proud, vividly beautiful.

He removed his hat, with a sudden change in his manner that brought a gleam into the girl's blue-black eyes. The glare of the midday sun exposed the lines in his strong, plain face and the pallor under its tropical tan. From the white hairs that silvered his thick ruddy locks at the temples, his age might have been put at thirty-five or forty. But this sign of middle age was contradicted by the clear hazel eyes.

A trifle disconcerted by the girl's cool scrutiny, he brusquely demanded: "What is the trouble here?"

She looked from his cavalry puttees to his army saddle and the butt of his rifle. "I guess you needn't worry about your scalp," she assured him, her rich contralto voice as soft as it was sweetly mocking. "You came near getting a hair brand, I see. But you're safe enough now if you keep close."

The raillery brought a slight flush into his sallow cheeks. Yet his gaze did not flinch before her look of disdain. He asked another question: "Have they taken the agency?"

"No. We saw this bunch up the bank, Reggie cut loose at them before Pere could stop him."

"'Pere'? Ah—your father. The other man fired at them first, you say?"

"Can you blame him? He was along when the agent was shot down, last week. You may have heard of the murder."

"Yes. Still it was wrong for him to invite an attack, with a woman in his party."

"Oh, I'm only a quarterbreed, you know," replied the girl with ironical lightness. "Besides, Reggie thought the party was trying to head us off. Don't worry. Charlie Redbear crawled up the road half an hour ago. The chances are we can hold out until he fetches the police." A rifle shot punctuated the remark.

The rider looked over the coulee bank across at the jagged crest of the butte. "If they slip over there," he said, "this position will become untenable. The butte is the key to the situation."

He looked at the girl, between concern and swiftly growing admiration of her remarkable beauty. Her eyes were like blue-black diamonds. An almost imperceptible film of old-gold enriched the cream and rose of her cheeks. Her jet-black hair was of French fineness. The curve of her rather large mouth was perfect.

But the red lips were again parting in a disdainful smile. She replied without seeking to conceal her scorn: "If you're afraid they'll take the butte, you might get away by bolting down the coulee. We'll do what we can to draw their fire."

"You will?" he said. "Thank you for your suggestion. I believe I'll follow it. Kindly step aside."

She stood motionless, her eyes glittering with cold contempt of his cowardice. Unchecked by the look, he leaned forward in the saddle. The mare leaped away like a startled deer. Once clear of the gulley she swerved sharply and raced away down the coulee. The flight was so unexpected, so daring and so swift that the fugitive had been borne a good fifty yards down along the foot of the near slope before the Indians opened fire on him.

The girl had crept forward and crouched in the entrance of the gulley to peer after him.

"The coward!" she cried. "The coward! I hope they get him!"

But before one of the many bullets could find the leaping, receding mark, mare and rider shot out of sight behind a clump of willows. At once the firing ceased.

The blond young man under the bush glanced around at the girl and called jeeringly: "I say, Marie, how's that for a bobtail visit? Took him for a gentleman."

"Gentleman? That's the word," she mocked. "Conduct becoming an officer and gentleman."

"Officer?" he repeated. "You don't mean to say—"

"Yes," she asserted. "He's an army officer. I could see it sticking out all over him."

The man stared at her in blank amazement, but suddenly bethought himself to roll over and send a bullet pinging up the coulee.

The girl continued to peer down the river bottom. After several moments mare and rider dashed into view, racing directly across the coulee. Though the Indians at once opened fire, the mare had skimmed over the level and up into a gulley in the far bank before they could get the range.

Hopeful that one or more of the enemy might expose themselves during the excitement, the young man behind the bush had not looked around. As the firing ceased, he called scoffingly: "How about the strategic retreat? Does General Fabius make his getaway without casualties?"

"Le bon Dieu be praised! He has escaped," the girl mocked in turn. "We are saved. In a week or ten days he will return to the rescue with three troops of cavalry."

"If those sneaking coyotes have sent a delegation around to climb the butte from the upside, we'll get ours before Charlie can come back with the police," grumbled the young man.

"Yes. Our military expert saw that at once. He said this position would become untenable."

"So he ran, leaving a woman in the lurch—the skunk!"

"Well, he has gone. You'd better be thinking how to get us out of the hole you've got us into," suggested the girl.

"The Coward, the Coward! I Hope They Get Him."

"All I did was to knock up the dust in front of them. The way they came back at me proves they really were scheming to get us."

"Much you know about it," scoffed the girl. "Just because some of the tribe are feeling ugly is no sign that—"

"How about the murder of Nogen?"

"Well, how? You and Charlie both say there was only the one buck who did the shooting. No; if this bunch had been planning to get us, they'd have been out of sight under the edge of the bank or over on the butte when we first came along."

"Have it your own way—only toss me a bottle of beer, that's a good girl. I'm dry as a fish."

Recklessly he sat up and looked at her, his small mouth curving in a smile under the neat mustache. A bullet whizzed close over his head. "There! They've spotted your position. Come away!" Her voice quavered with concern for him.

The girl did not wait for him to reach her. Satisfied as to his safety, she went up the gulley to the buckboard and drew a canteen from the box under the seat. Her father glanced down and saw what she was doing. His face was powdered with dust. He spat and beckoned to her.

"Good! Bring it up. Bullet hit the edge of the bank."

The girl climbed nimbly up the gulley side with the canteen. Her father spat again, took a deep drink, and said: "Better git the ponies round behind the buckboard. Unless Charlie gits back soon, we may have to leave the ore and make a break for the agency."

"All right, Pere," cheerfully responded the girl. "There haven't any of them been hit so far, I guess. They may be willing to let us off with a big scare."

"I'll give them a scare and something more when the police come," declared the young man, who had taken a new position in the opening of the gulley.

"No, you won't," remonstrated the girl as she started down to him with the canteen. "When old Ti-owa-konza sent in word that he'd call it quits over the shooting of Nogen's killer he meant it. But this time you fired the first shot, and if you kill one of them, it will mean a blood feud, if not an uprising."

The young man snapped his fingers. "I don't give that much for the whole pack of coyotes!"

"Don't forget the mine, Mr. Van," protested the older man.

"Yes, and how about me?" asked the girl as she held out the canteen.

"That settles it," he replied. "To please you, I'll—what do you say?—I'll call it quits." Shaking a gush of water out over the spout, he lifted the canteen in gallant salute and carried it to his lips.

"Better hurry with them ponies, Marie," called her father.

She did not wait for the canteen, but walked swiftly up the gulley to the restive ponies. As she led the two saddle horses around to the rear of the buckboard, the young man called up to her: "Shorten my stirrups. That pinto is the best runner in the bunch."

"Can you make it bareback?" she asked.

"He can hold on to the harness," said her father. "Tie the tugs so they won't drag."

"Yes, I guess I can hold on. I'll try the calico mare."

"Any sign on the butte?" she inquired, her supple gloved fingers deftly freeing the harnessed ponies from the buckboard.

"Nothing yet," answered the young man. "I'm expecting a bullet soon."

"This ain't no joke, Mr. Van," complained the other man. He glowered at the butte. Suddenly his trained eyes caught sight of an object moving up the steep slope of a crag. He clapped his rifle to his shoulder, sighted it, paused—and lowered the weapon, with an astonished oath.

"Pere!" cried the girl. "What is it?"

"Wait!" he replied. "If it is—by Gar, if it is! Git ready, Mr. Van. Only don't shoot unless they rush us."

The report of a rifle came down from the butte crest. The young man lowered his rifle and peered over the edge of the gulley. At the same moment a whirl of yelling horsemen swept down the coulee bank opposite the butte, and went flying away up the valley in a wild race for the nearest grove of cottonwoods.

From the butte several shots cracked in rapid succession. The fugitive Indians yelled at their ponies in a frenzy of urgency, and dug their heels into the flanks of the straining beasts at every jump. The rifleman on the butte was firing towards them, not towards the party in the gulley.

"Hold on, Marie!" said her father, jumping down the bank to her. "We'll hitch up again, and cross over to meet him."

"Who?" asked the girl.

She had been too intent on her task to see what was happening.

"The man who ran away," he answered. "The joke's on you Mr. Van."

"How?"

Her father grinned as he bent to refasten a tug. "You took him for a quitter. He had the nerve to run their fire ag'in—and you thought he was heading back for the railroad."

The girl flushed. "He's not the man on the butte?"

"Yep. Jumped the whole bunch, first shot. We better hustle. It'll look good for us to cross over to meet him."

"Marie says he's an army officer," added the young man. "It will be as well to get the ore off the reservation. There's no telling what he has come for."

CHAPTER II.

—

The Acting Agent.

Within a few minutes the party had neared the top of the ridge. The thoroughbred mare came trotting up from the hollow on the other side. At sight of them her rider brought her to a stand. The older man spurred his pony up the round of the summit. "By Gar, that wasn't no bad play you made, partner," he called. "Taking the butte gave you the drop on 'em."

The man whose strategy had routed the Indians did not reply. The girl looked up at him with confident expectancy in her sparkling eyes. He did not move. The expression of his harsh features was severe, but there was a flush under the tropical tan on his cheeks.

She hesitated, her rich color deepening. Then her pique gave way to a more generous impulse. She drew the gauntlet glove from her right hand. Under his cold gaze her eyes again hardened with offended pride, and again they softened and glowed with frank approbation.

"Can you forgive me?" she asked.

He bowed formally. "If you think there is anything to be forgiven."

"You know there is. I wish to apologize."

She stood up in the buckboard and held out her hand to him. It was very white and shapely. He bowed over it with grave courtesy, as he took it in his nervous clasp.

"You have no need to apologize, Miss ——"

"Dupont—Marie Dupont."

"None whatever, Miss Dupont," he went on. "I should have explained my intentions."

"Why didn't you make for the butte first thing, instead of crossing the coulee?" broke in the blond young man.

"I did not wish to shoot until I understood the cause of the trouble. There was also the chance that they would cease firing when I rode towards them."

"That was nervy of you," remarked the girl's father—"that and making the second run when they'd come so near gitting you the first time."

"You are Jacques Dupont, the Indian trader?"

"That's me—only they make it 'Jake' this side of Ottawa. Marie guessed you're an army officer."

"Captain Floyd Hardy, United States cavalry," stated the newcomer as he raised his glasses.

The blond young man straightened out of his insolently careless pose, and spoke in the tone of a gentleman: "Pleased to meet you, Captain Hardy. You were in command of the Philippine constabulary force that suppressed the recent insurrection in the Sulu islands. You received favorable mention from congress. I am Reginald Vandervyn of the Vandervyns of Staten Island. Senator Clemmer is my uncle."

The captain responded to the introduction with a curt bow.

"See anything of the p'leece, Cap?" asked Dupont.

"Yes. They should be here in a few minutes."

"I see them," said the girl. "They're coming down the slope this side of the Sioux Creek divide."

"They're slow," growled Vandervyn. "I'll ride back and head them 'cross country. They have good horses. They shall run out every buck in the bunch."

He spun his pony about to sprint down the road into the coulee. Hardy uttered a stern order: "Halt!"

Angered at the command, and still more at the impulse that compelled him to obey it, Vandervyn twisted about in his saddle to face the officer with a challenging stare.

"Keep that talk for your inferiors," he said. "I am acting agent of this reservation. What I say goes. I'll have those bucks trailed till every one of them is in the guardhouse or feeding the crows."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Vandervyn," replied Hardy, and he drew an official envelope from an inside pocket. "You are only the chief clerk on this reservation. I have been detailed to serve as acting agent."

"You?" cried Vandervyn. "Why, it was all fixed for me to be appointed agent. My uncle wired me that my name would go through for the promotion without a hitch. So you pulled the wires to cut me out?"

"I pulled no wires, Mr. Vandervyn," Hardy coldly met the accusation. "On my return from the islands, last month, I asked for a detail to active service in the open, preferably here in the northwest, on account of my health."

"Do you mean to say you did not ask for this place in particular?"

"No. The detail was given me because of the killing of the late agent and the reported restlessness of the tribe."

"You'll find these ugly bucks different from Moros."

"Perhaps," said Hardy. He looked at the two big, lumpy sacks that were lashed on the buckboard. "You had started for the railroad?"

"Pere and Mr. Van wished to ship out the ore," explained the girl.

"Ore?" inquired Hardy.

"Well, yes, it's a sort of ore," admitted Dupont. "You see, me and—"

"I'll make it clear to Captain Hardy in two words, Jake," broke in Vandervyn. He looked at the new agent with a frank, direct gaze. "You see, captain, some of the Indians have been getting ore back in the mountains. Jake trades them goods for it. The barter has been a good thing for them, and so far, I believe, Jake has lost nothing."

Dupont narrowed his shrewd gray eyes as if calculating. "Well, no, that's no lie, Cap. Take it in the long run, I ain't lost nothing. It might figure out I've broke even or mebbe some better."

Vandervyn winked at Hardy. "When an Indian trader admits he may have done some better than to have come out even, we can guess what that means."

"Nom d'un chien!" grumbled Dupont. "Ain't the risk to count?"

"It has been an unnecessary risk for you to keep your daughter on the reservation after the killing of Mr. Nogen," reproved Hardy. "I presume she is now going away, not to return until the trouble has passed."

"You are quite mistaken, Captain Hardy," said the girl. "I am going for the drive and to send off a mail order. We can rely on the police. Anyway, none of the tribe would hurt me."

Dupont scratched his head and muttered: "Well, mebbe so. You can't always tell what they'll do."

"Why, Pere," exclaimed Marie, "you know there's not the slightest danger to me."

"Well, mebbe not—to you," he acquiesced.

"Yet it will be advisable for you to remain away until I have the situation well in hand," said Hardy.

The girl's eyes flashed at the slight suggestion of dictation. "I'll do as I please, thank you," she rejoined.

"In this instance you may," agreed Hardy, "since your father admits that you are in no danger. Otherwise I would order you to remain away."

"You'd dare to order me?"

"Certainly. You should know the scope of the agent's authority. It includes the right to order off the reservation anyone not a member of the tribe."

The girl smiled mockingly. "You forget I told you I am a quarterbreed."

"Marie!" remonstrated Vandervyn.

"Mind your own business!" she flashed back at him. "I am not ashamed that I'm a member of the tribe, and I don't care how soon he knows it, even if he is an officer of your little American army."

She turned upon Hardy, flushed, defiant, haughty. "My mother was the granddaughter of Sitting Bull. What have you to say to that, Mr. West Pointer?"

"Nothing, Miss Dupont, unless—" he paused, smiled and continued—"unless it is to remark that I am glad the police are so near."

The girl's eyes flashed with anger. With a swift movement she bent over and snatched her driving-whip from its socket on the dashboard and stood poised, the whip upraised to strike. Dupont's heavy jowl dropped. Vandervyn swung his rifle around, his large blue eyes glinting with eagerness. Hardy faced the girl with no change in his smile. Had his steady gaze wavered for an instant, she would have slashed him across the face.

"You—you!" she whispered. "Twit me with the treacherous killing of my great-grandfather, would you?"

"Treacherous? How is that?" he asked.

"He was murdered—by the police!" she cried. "You know it."

"I beg your pardon," he replied. "I had not the slightest idea of alluding to what to you must be a painful occurrence. But, since you have referred to it, I wish to say that you are misinformed. Sitting Bull was shot while resisting arrest. The police were acting under orders. The man who shot the chief had first been shot by one of the chief's men."

The scarlet that flamed in the girl's cheeks deepened to crimson. Her gaze wavered. Instead of striking Hardy, the whip lashed down across the backs of the team. The young broncos plunged and jumped forward; they whirled the buckboard down the slope away from the river.

The girl's companions jerked their ponies about to gallop after her. Hardy spoke to them in peremptory command: "Wait! Dupont, I shall ask you to bring my baggage from the railroad. Here come the police. I shall detail four of their number to go with you as escort."

"We don't need no escort," said Dupont. "Do we, Mr. Van?"

"They will go in place of Mr. Vandervyn," explained Hardy. "I must ask him to accompany me to the agency."

The young man looked the new agent up and down with an insolent smile on his handsome, boyish face. "What if I do not choose to go back?"

"It would put me to the necessity of finding a new chief clerk," countered Hardy.

The other evidently had expected an arbitrary order. He bit his lip. It was plain that he was puzzled over the adroitly worded reply. Was it a threat or merely a statement due to misapprehension?

"If you wish to resign," added the captain, "may I request you to tele-

Hardy Uttered a Stern Order: "Halt!"

graph for your successor to be immediately appointed and ordered here?"

"I'd resign quick enough if I could," said Vandervyn. "You're the last man I'd let order me around if I could help it."

Hardy turned to the stolid-faced trader.

"Please remember my baggage. You had better ride on after your daughter. The escort will soon follow."

In the next installment Captain Hardy discovers conditions which lead him to believe there is a conspiracy on foot. Can you guess the nature of it?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

ANYTHING BUT A HIGHBROW!

The Average Man Naturally Flinches From the Reputation for Intellectuality.

No one really wants to be considered a highbrow. The term itself, as Van Wyck Brooks says, is derogatory. Here and there a person may be so superior as to be flattered by the derision of the herd. Undergraduates like to think they are. But a man has to be far gone in superiority before he relishes the notion of being avoided for its sake.

You cannot imagine a man like Nietzsche trying to prove that he had a heart any more than you can imagine him shooting the chutes at Coney Island. He is the kind of Olympian whose dignity seems to have been inherent. You would just as soon drink beer out of porcelain as slap a Nietzsche on the back. But the ordinary Olympian, certainly in America, is more anxious to show he is gregarious than to protect his reputation for superiority and intellect.

You do not have to slap him on the back; he slaps you. If he is running for office, in particular, he wants it to be known that blood, not ice water, flows through his veins. He yearns to indicate that he is a good fellow. He tells funny stories, has himself photographed playing pinochle, is discovered by his interviewer sitting at the organ singing, "Home, Sweet Home." A man may have the temperament of a hermit crab in private life; in public life he must smile cheerily when a boilermaker crushes his fingers and bellows: "Tommy, put it there."—New Republic.

Food Frauds in Belgium.

Official analysis of some of the food surrogates in Belgium is disclosing some extraordinary frauds. The director general of the public health service has found that some of the substitutes for oil, which is no longer obtainable, are worthless concoctions that cost the manufacturers only a few cents per liter, but are sold to a gullible public at fancy prices.

One "oil sauce" was found to be 99.25 per cent water, with the remaining .75 per cent an extract of gum. A "mayonnaise" in fancy packing and "highly recommended," was found to contain 86 per cent water, 1.30 per cent oil, 10.70 per cent starch and 2 per cent ash. An invalid's food advertised as "meat extract, extra quality," was made of 65 per cent water, 15 per cent burnt sugar and 20 per cent salt.—Amsterdam Dispatch.

Euphemism.

We read of "lively artillery battles" in the war reports. Thus is the business of wholesale killing dressed in the language of graceful felicity.—Portland (Ore.) Telegram.

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Mrs. Alice Barnard, W. Caroline St., Fenton, Mich., says: "Kidney trouble came on me gradually with pains in my back and hips. I got dizzy and nervous and nights was restless. Mornings, I was hardly able to do my work. When I saw Doan's Kidney Pills advertised, I got a supply and they soon gave me relief. That happened several years ago and I have had little kidney trouble since."

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"Well, Mr. Pulitzer sent for his dozen best reporters and special writers and, lining them up before him, said:

"'Those who understand golf stand on the left; those who are ignorant of it, on the right.'

"The stays separated themselves accordingly. All understood golf but three—three very excellent writers.

"'You three chaps will cover the tournament,' said Mr. Pulitzer, with his nervous smile. 'I want all our readers to enjoy our story of this event, and, since most of them are ignorant of golf, what interests you three will be sure to interest them.'"

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Like the Dodo.

According to the last census the turkey population of the country has fallen off greatly in recent years. One statistician records the sad prediction that the popular bird will before many years be "as scarce as the dodo."

This Winter.

"Did the water pipe burst?"

"Yes, and the landlord charged extra because it makes a rink."

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