

Here, then, was an opportunity, and she would at least try to escape. The girl waited to hear no more. Throwing her rifle to her shoulder, a weapon which the savages invariably allowed her to carry, knowing her good marksmanship, she whistled to Bruno, and struck her pony a sharp blow. The animal bounded away, and she urged him on recklessly heedless of rocks, logs and underbrush which confronted her at every turn. She never paused to look back, but she heard a piercing scream from Nitia, which was followed by a hideous war-whoop from some of the braves, and she knew how utterly futile would be her attempt to escape. What could she do or say? She had no plausible excuse to offer for her sudden flight, and she knew the braves would surely kill her or inflict a punishment, compared with which death would be a happy relief.

Suddenly her pony jumped to one side, so swiftly as to almost throw her from his back. At the same instant a huge grizzly emerged from the chaparral, coming directly toward her. Bruno was at his head almost immediately, holding the fierce-looking beast at bay, thus affording Dess an excellent opportunity for a shot. She smiled as the idea struck her that here was the loop hole for escape from the vengeance of the savages. Aiming quickly, she fired, just as the Indians, wild with excitement, rushed upon her. The bear fell to the ground, with the report of her gun, with a bullet in his brain.

Turning around, the girl confronted her pursuers with an assumed smile of exultation on her face.

"Look, chief, can the braves do better?" and she leaned forward and patted her horse's neck, caressingly, while Bruno sniffed about the dead body of his shaggy antagonist.

The Indians looked at each other in mute astonishment. The proof of her innocence of the supposed attempt at flight was too strong for doubt. At length the apparent absurdity of their conduct dawned upon them, and one and all gave vent to mingled exclamations of approval of her conduct and amusement at their own foolish idea. Dess pretended to be greatly surprised, and demanded an explanation. This increased their mirth. Finally, the chief rode up close beside the girl, and while his braves commenced the work of divesting the huge grizzly of his outer covering, told her how he and his followers, thinking she was trying to escape them, had pursued her, determined to recapture her at any cost. At the conclusion of this brief recital, though her heart lay like molten lead in her breast, she laughed right merrily. She was surprised the next moment to think how lightly she had managed to treat the matter, and she thought how cunning and artful the two years which she had served in Indian captivity had ren-

dered her. For this she was sorry, but nevertheless, knew it to be her only resource.

"And Nitia; did she, too, think Naoma a fool?" Dess asked, as that individual slowly approached them.

At sight of the huge grizzly, Nitia gave utterance to glad and prolonged exclamations of delight, while the chief soon related to her how Dess had pursued the great beast and killed it. As he spoke, his eyes rested on the girl with an expression of coarse admiration that made her shudder. Nitia was quick to note the light that shone in the old chief's eyes, and her dusky brow grew black and sullen. Dess turned away and prepared to reload her rifle. Soon Watumni declared it time to return to the camp, and, leaving his braves engaged in cutting up and packing the grizzly on ponies, he, Nitia and Dess turned their horses' heads toward the lodges.

Dess was greatly displeased with the marked attention which the old chief persisted in bestowing upon her, and she would have gladly avoided him had it been in her power to do so. As they neared the wigwams, he rode up close beside the girl, leaving his wife behind, a dark, forbidding look on her face, and a dangerous glitter in her piercing black eyes.

"Watumni likes the white girl much," the old chief said. "He make her his wife very soon."

"Are you mad?" she asked, fiercely, looking him firmly in the eye as she spoke. "You have a wife and can not marry another."

Just then Nitia rode past them, giving Dess a warning look which the girl could not wholly understand. She knew only that it meant for her to be silent, what more she knew not.

"The chief's wife shall be Naoma's slave," the old chief said, utterly ignoring the girl's look of displeasure. "Naoma make brave squaw. No weak blood in white girl. All brave, wise. No Indian squaw like her, and Watumni loves her for that. One moon more and Naoma will marry with him."

At this he allowed his piercing black eyes to wander at large over the surrounding country, apparently considering the matter duly arranged.

Heartsick and despondent as she was, Dess could think of nothing to say or do that might possibly tend to soothe the ruffled feelings of Nitia, who she knew was exasperated almost beyond control. She was surprised, however, on reaching the lodges, to see that every sign of displeasure had disappeared from the Indian woman's face, who hastily dismounted from her own horse and advanced to lend her aid with the air of one who feels her inferiority.

Watumni looked upon Nitia's actions as indicating her approval of his approaching marriage, and a smile of exultation lighted up his dusky face as he watched his discarded wife lead Dess to their private wigwam, carefully bestowing upon her all the attention that would befit a slave to a superior.

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To be continued.