

and she would not open her mouth with a word that could possibly implicate her unfaithful spouse as being the leader of that awful tragedy.

Trapper Dan and his wife were very much interested in the story of her captivity as given them by their pretty guest. She minutely related the details of her fight with the savages, how gallantly old Bruno had conducted himself, and how, finding herself overpowered at last, she would undoubtedly have been killed had not the old chief Watumni appeared at that moment and interceded in her behalf.

"After the first few months, I became somewhat reconciled to my fate, and it is likely I should have become quite as much a savage as any of them, had I remained with them much longer," the girl continued; and then she went on to relate how the old chief had made love to her, and that he was going to marry her, for which reason his wife, in her jealousy, had aided her in making her escape. "And now," she added, having concluded her narrative, "I must beg you to give me a description of the frightful massacre at Oak Dale; how you and your family managed to evade the blood-thirsty savages; and how my poor brother and Mortimer Gray lost their lives at their cruel hands."

"Lost their lives!" exclaimed the old trapper, in surprise. "Why, bless yer precious little heart they're jest as much alive as you be."

"Thank God!" she cried, her round face lighting up with an unexpected happiness. "And I have mourned them as dead for so long a time. The Indians told me they were dead, and I had no reason to disbelieve them. God has been most merciful to me, after all. Are they at Oak Dale? I must see them. I can not wait a minute."

"No, Miss Dessie," Mrs. Kingston replied, smiling as she gazed on the glad, happy face of her young friend, "your brother's been gone to San Francisco for some time. Mortimer keeps himself down to the store most o' the time. He's engaged to be married to jest the purtiest gal at Oak Dale. Mebby you remember her—Belle Randall, Harry Randall's sister."

Had the earth suddenly opened to swallow her, Dessie Watson could not have been more bewildered and agitated. For the first time in her life, her lips refused to utter a word. Her head grew dizzy, and she feared she would certainly faint.

"You're lookin' bad, Dessie," the old trapper said, becoming alarmed. "Mebby, bein' you're tired out, you'd better let the ole woman show you to bed."

"It is almost gone now," the girl said, with a strong effort to arouse herself from the strange, bewildering sensation, which had so nearly mastered her. "I have a favor to ask of you both—a favor

which I suppose you will deem odd and uncalled for. However, I must insist that you grant it, as it is a duty which I owe to myself as well as others."

She paused, and the old trapper, surprised at the sudden change in the girl's manner, and the cold, grating tone of her voice, said—

"Speak it out. Reckon there ain't much that my ole woman an' me can do for ye that we wouldn't—'is thar, ole woman?" he added, turning to his wife.

"Guess not. She knows that well enough; at least, she orter."

Dess required no further assurance, and she said: "I want you to keep the news of my return a secret. Not a soul at Oak Dale must know that I yet live. They believe me dead, and it is better that they should continue to think so. I shall write a letter to my dear brother, telling him all, and requesting him to have a home in readiness for me. In less than two weeks I shall join him. Till then I must beg you to afford me a shelter, and to keep my concealment a close secret." She looked up as she spoke, a strange, pitiable expression in her brown eyes, that the old trapper and his wife were grieved to witness.

"Dess, if you knowed how much my ole woman an' me loves you, you'd not try to deceive us," Mr. Kingston said, as he advanced to the side of his little friend, and, stooping down, gazed searchingly into the depth of her sad, brown eyes. "Tell me the truth, for I can read it plain enough in your purty face, an' confess that you love Mortimer Gray better 'n any livin' soul—better 'n your own brother, better 'n all the world."

If there was one virtue that Dess Watson loved more than another, it was that of truthfulness. Frankly and unhesitatingly she made her confession, without a quaver in her low, gentle voice.

"You have guessed the truth," she said. "I am not ashamed to admit that I loved Mortimer Gray—that I love him yet. He loved me once, and we were betrothed. I do not blame him for loving Mabel, or for marrying her. She is worthy of him, and I love them both."

The old trapper turned away with a choking sensation in his throat, while good-hearted Mrs. Kingston wiped away a tear that had crept slyly down her red, fleshy cheek.

"God knows I pity you, dear child," she said, earnestly. "Mortimer loved you once with his whole heart and soul. For a long time after he thought you dead and gone, he went about lookin' like a ghost, an' he's never appeared jest the same since. Mebby he loves Belle as much as he did you, an' mebby he don't. That secret's locked up in his own heart, an' I guess no livin' mortal 'll ever know all it holds. 'Pears to me, though, that you're not doin' jest right by him—