

A STORY OF THE KLAMATH.

PART IV.

ENTERING the low, uninviting tent, which Dess was obliged to call home, she threw herself on the rude pallet, which served her as a bed, and gave vent to her pent-up feelings by indulging in a bitter fit of weeping. Bruno, perceiving his mistress' unhappy attitude, and hearing her deep, heavy sobs, approached her, rubbing his great, shaggy head caressingly against her shoulder, evidently endeavoring to soothe her to calmness.

"Poor, poor old Bruno!" the miserable girl said, as she drew the dog's head to her breast in a loving embrace. "You are the only friend I have to love in all the wide, wide world. My life is almost a curse to me now. I wish, oh, so earnestly, that I could die. Oh, Nitia! Nitia! take pity upon me and kill me outright! God will bless you for it, I know He will."

"Does Naoma not want to wed with Chief Watumni?" the squaw asked, while a strange, wicked light shone in her black eyes.

"I will take my life with my own hands, rather than marry him," Dess cried, vehemently.

"Then Nitia talk. Listen! Nitia no longer care what Watumni think," the Indian woman said, bitterly. "He no heart—no good heart. Many moons ago he loved Nitia as he now loves the pale-face Naoma. She good to him—good mother to the little children the Great Spirit took long ago to the happy hunting ground. When he sick, she nurse him; she always his slave; and now he wants a pale-face wife, and Nitia must be her slave, too. What does Naoma say?" the Indian woman added, her black eyes gleaming with aroused jealousy. "Must Nitia be a fool, and miserable, while he is happy in a new wife?"

"No, Nitia," Dess said, rising to her feet and approaching close to the side of the injured woman, "I would not if I were you. I am powerless to help you, I am powerless to help myself; but you can help me, Nitia, and so help yourself," and the girl's round face grew bright with a new-born hope, and her brown eyes sparkled with a new, a happy light.

"What does Naoma mean?" the squaw asked, evidently as enthusiastic as Dess herself. "Let her speak; Nitia is ready to do much."

Dess looked eagerly into the dark, uncomely face before her, fearful that the proposition which she was about to make would only be cast aside as unworthy of consideration. "You can aid me to escape, Nitia," she said, in a low, eager tone, and then almost breathlessly awaited the squaw's answer.

The Indian woman was silent for several seconds, enwrapped in serious thought. Then she spoke:

"Naoma shall go, and Nitia will go with her. She could not stay with Watumni's tribe, after she let the pale-face squaw get away."

In her joy, Dess seized the right hand of the Indian woman and covered it with kisses. "God bless you, Nitia!" she said, earnestly.

"Naoma not talk, not look glad, when Watumni see her. Him smart, plenty smart. Come, now, follow Nitia," and Dess and the Indian woman left the wigwam together, to join the chief and his braves at supper.

Watumni was greatly pleased with his wife's conduct. He was glad to see that she was not angry with him—not that he really cared, so far as her happiness was concerned, but he thought how much more faithfully she would serve her fair mistress, having no ill-feeling toward him or her. He gave expression to his thoughts in words, and Nitia fixed her eyes upon the ground, in order to conceal from him and his braves the jealousy and revenge which issued from their fiery depths. Her face was calm, however, and a smile played around her mouth as she said—

"Nitia love Naoma much. Nitia is glad."

"Nitia's heart is good, and Naoma love her," Dess said, pleasantly, and it was only by a strong effort that she managed to keep her joyous spirits from welling up to her lips in merry, rippling peals of laughter.

If the old chief had ever loved her—and he did, in his coarse, wild way—he loved her doubly now, as he gazed admiringly into her bright, radiant face. Indeed, she had become a favorite with all the savages. They had watched her as she frolicked around the camp fires, with old Bruno at her side; they had laughed to see her laugh; they had felt like playing when they saw her play; and they had listened in mute surprise to the merry old ballads which she had sung to them, though they could scarcely understand a single word she uttered. Then they had witnessed her daring feats as an equestrienne; they had admired the skill with which she handled the rifle; and, having learned to look up to her as one who was by far their superior, it came about that the girl did pretty much as she pleased, and the savages were content to have it so. It must not be inferred that she had ceased to mourn her sad fate in the least degree, or that she did not grieve over the death which she supposed her lover and brother to have met; but she was naturally so gay and light-hearted, that her true nature would assert itself at times, despite her unpleasant surroundings—just as the little brook will purl on, and the little birds chant their merry notes, unmindful of the tears and grief of the vast, cruel world.

Two weeks after the events as described above, Dess and Nitia retired earlier than was their custom,