

THEE-KIS-HO ; OR, THE WHITE SWALLOW.

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The young Indian seized her by the arm, a second plucked a brand from the fire, and cast it into the granary, and then the whole party, conceiving the men of the tribe to be upon them, commenced a rapid retreat, bearing with them their wretched and disconsolate captive. They were a party of ambitious youths, who, having lit upon the trail of the runner the year before, had tracked his steps, in search of scalps and glory. Alighting on the camp when deserted by all but the White Swallow, they had intended to hide in the huts until the return of the rest of the party; but suddenly startled by the cry which responded to that of Thee-kis-ho, they fled, believing the whole tribe to be upon them. Their haste had marred the object of their expedition, while their position became one, as they thought, of extreme danger. The part to be played by the young girl was most painful. If she revealed the absence of the men, the Athapascows would return, and capture the rest of the women; if she remained silent, she was doomed to be hurried away into captivity, all the more horrid because of her late day-dreams and visions. While dwelling on these thoughts, she found herself proceeding to a considerable distance from the camp in a south-easterly direction. The Indians moved with the utmost rapidity and silence towards a very broken, stony, and arid plain, the last spot which men would have been supposed to choose for a retreat. Suddenly they halted at the edge of one of those deep fissures met with sometimes in the prairies and in the plains of the West: this was their camp. Their victim was told to go down, and was then placed in a natural hollow, the Indians barring all exit. They next proceeded to light a small fire with some well-charred wood, that gave neither flame nor smoke, upon which they cooked their evening meal. A piece of meat was given to the girl, which she ate, strength being necessary to her. She had not abandoned all hope. There are a thousand chances between total despair, and between the fruition of hopes; and Thee-kis-ho, while crouching in her hole, strained every faculty of her mind for an idea out of which might come escape.

The Indians conversed with considerable volubility as soon as one had departed as a scout. There were no aged or experienced warriors among them to check their eagerness and levity. They expressed themselves in a dialect which the White Swallow partly understood. She could distinguish that they spoke with considerable disappointment about their failure, and that all seemed determined not to return home until they had obtained a sufficient number of scalps to excuse with the elders of the tribe their temerity and long absence. Much difference of opinion prevailed, but at last the whole party came to a resolution which can only be comprehended by those who know the Indian character. They resolved upon marching northward to the Coppermine River, to