## The Free Bress Short Story

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## AN APACHE CAPTIVE

DENNIS H. STOVALL

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the vale below. He was dressed in to escape with her from the Apaches. hair hung to his shoulders. Over his I will await you." sun-browned countenance came a look watched the Pima village, whose cluster days I will be here, at this hour," he The sun was already low in the west. of lodges and shelters dotted the east promised. bank of the Gila. -

and Swift Poot?" muttered the rider. He had been waiting for an hour,

Though it was a winter afternoon, in vale, swarthy, half-naked children romp-None of them was Nawasa.

Prequently, during the last six weeks, had a measure of companionship for they'll never stop till they run you down!" young Drannan. Nawasa was an unusual, as well as an attractive Indian girl. She spoke Spanish fluently, and knew Apache almost as well as she knew her own tribal tongue.

The sound of muffled footsteps, and rider to look around with a start There, under a drooping pion tree, not six paces off, stood Nawasa. She was afoot and had approached without his hearing her. Before he could speak a greeting, she put her ingers to her lips. He waited till she drew alongside his horse, then, asked in a subdued tone, "What's wrong Nawasa? Where is Swift Root?"

been set for him: vet he realized the the saddle. "When will I see you again?" moment she had vanished as she pany-"

the young Indian muttered: "Be not, afraid, my friend. I have a great truth -and a secret to reveal. No others ! must hear." His jet black eyes searched the thicket before he said another word.

"You no longer can be in the company of Nawasa. The chief has spoken. It is the law of the tribe; but Nawasa and I have a secret to reveal ... Again the Pima's dark orbs scanned the bushes and trees. He listened a while before

"Seven years ago the Apaches, whose lands spread into the red hills beyond the Gila, attacked a lone emigrant wagon on the Santa Fe trail. They thought it departed. How would be contrive to was the wagon of a Long Knife, or trader. Not till they had slain the bearded driver, his wife and his son, did they know they had killed a missionary-"

"A cruel and terrible thing!" mistake." said the Pima. "But there were two little girls in the wagon whom to a village on the upper Gila. The oldest still lives. The Apaches gave her the name of Night Bird, because she can sing to the stars of a God who loves all people, and of a Saviour who

came from Heaven long ago." the Pima's low-spoken revelation. "How far is it to the village where this white girl is held a captive?".

"Six hours ride." answered Swift Foot. days!" "She makes her home in the lodge of the chief. I have seen her there. Nawasa women are coming at once to the pinon knows her well. Three days from now woods," explained the Pima. she will come with the Apache women . "Which allows Jim Beckwith and his to gather pinon nuts. Nawasa will meet company only one day's start. Am I to her near their camp, and arrange for rescue the white girl' to-night?"

mean I am to talk to her?"

at sunset. You will see her hair, shining two crosses at an imaginary location

voice lower. "After you have seen Night will bring Night Bird under the t tends. So Newson and I have arranged -and then take Night Bird with you.

the saddle, and from the summit night that you see her under the big of the ridge, cautiously surveyed pine. You must ride long and fast-

To have faltered, or to have voiced pine, two figures emerged from the darker an objection would, he well knew, have shadows of the pinons. One was

Torn by a host of conflicting emotions. the blue Arizona skies. Down in the saddle and returned to camp. He felt ed in happy abandon on the open hours with Swift Foot and Nawasa... One meadow. Squaws puttered around huge thing he felt compelled to do and that kettles and kept slow fires burning. A was to have a confidential talk with old half dozen Indian girls mounted their Jim Beckwith, chief trader of the wagon pintos and rode off over the trail that company. He found an opportunity to "Long Knife" at the camp fire.

Beckwith listened soberly to the strange Roger Drannan had ridden up here from recital. When young Drannan daringly the trader's camp, three miles down the proposed rescuing the captive white girl, Gila, and waited for the girl and her he shook his gray locks and declared, brother to join him. By the custom of infr you take my advice, boy, you'll leave the tribe. Nawasa could not accompany that gal with the Injuns. I know the a "paleface," even for a short ride, with- Apaches! They are as relentless as out her brother. Such an arrangement hvenas! Once they get on your track

Roger Drannan and Jim Beckwith, in their association together on the plains, had fought their way through many perflous exploits. Never until this moment had the scarred and weathered old hunter even faintly suggested danger. To say the snapping of a dry twig, caused the that any task was impossible was not

through, Jim," the younger man inter- cautious murmur. "My brother waits for you!" she re- rupted: "And have my plans all laid. Two stealthy figures crept out of the plied in Spanish She pointed to a dense I'll take the girl down to Yuma, to the growth. Nawasa, who was leading the copse of mesquite, farther along the home of a mission preacher. They'll other girl, spoke to the plainsman, "Hereridge. "You'll find him there. Go at shelter and care for her I'm certain. she is! Night Bird-you will take! Quick Drannan could not believe a trap had the Anaches to attack. I'll have to do '-Senor!" value of caution. He bent lower from don't mind that. What I'm most con- Roger Drannan when he helped the capcerned about is the possibility of caus- tive wirl to a place behind him on his "On another day, Senor! Buenos!" In ing trouble for you, and the wagon com- horse. She hung her head, and seemed

Reaching the mesquite thicket, Dran- long arm over to thump the other with your friend as Nawasa is your friend. nan dismounted, tied his horse and his gnarled hand. "Don't you worry on We must hurry-if we escape!" stealthily pushed into the prickly tangle. my account. If you are set on takin' She continued to hang back as she He carried no other weapon than his that white gal away from the Apaches, kept her head bowed dejected. "I'm hunting knife. He had gone but a few I'll pull our outfit out of here in the not afraid, 'she sobbed in broken Engvards when he came upon the young mornin', which will give us a three days lish. "You are most kind to help me, Pima concealed in the brush. Swift start. We'll move on down the river, But you do not know-" Foot also, was unarmed save for the long while you walt .. You can join us later ... She turned then so that her features. bladed knife carried in his snake-skin that is, if you escape with a whole for the first time, were revealed to Dran-

in the firelight. "You almost make me wish I was young again! Yes-an' fired with the romance of youth! Youth is the time to venture and to accomplish! Good luck to you-boy! An' may God keep 'you-till we meet again!"

Never had the grizzled plainsman spoken with such feeling. Roger Drannan, himself a homeless derelict and wanderer, could do nothing more than mutter a heartfelt gratitude.

He was up, and rode off the next morning an hour before the wagon company spend the next three days of waiting, and keeping out of sight of the Pima village? He could not guess. He wanted to have the Indians believe he and Beckwith had left the country; but he want-"Even for the Apache it was a terrible ed Swift Foot and Nawasa to know he

Roger lay in hiding most of that day. they spared. The captives were taken In the late afternoon he waited in the mesquite thicket beyond the ridge. He was there only a short time when a buckskin pony came into the tangle.

with Swift Foot astride. "The Long Knife and the wagons have. gone!" he announced, before Drannan Roger Drannan was deeply stirred by could tell him. "That is good! You will

see Night Bird at sunset!" . "To-day?" exclaimed the young plains, nian. "You told me I must wait three

'Nawasa has learned the Apache

"It is arranged!" spoke Swift Foot. Drannan gasped his surprise. "You He then slid off his horse, and squatting or his heels began marking a diagram "No! at first," explained the Pima with his finger in the dust, One wavering "But you can see her from a distance. line indicated the Gila; another the Nawasa will bring her under a big pine, sand ridge on the east bank. He made like pure gold, and hear the music of several miles up the river. "This is a red rock hear a high bluff." he said, holding Swift Foot changed from guttural Pima his finger on the larger of the crosses. to broken Spanish, and dropped his There you will be at sunset. Nawasa Bird, you will know I have told you the pine for you to see? His finger shifted truth, that she is lovely to behold. She to the other cross. "Not till after darkis too beautiful and too good to be sold ness falls will you approach the tree. into slavery, as the Apache chief in- You will be on your horse, ready to fibe

Once more Roger grasped the Pima's hand, "It's all right!" he told her in and. He could not be sure that they subdued tone of infinite kindness. Swift Poot! I'll be on my way. All shall be done as you have said!

The Indian spoke no farewell. "Go! My brave friend! Happy am I to have known you. Nawasa will be with Night Bird at the big pine! An hour's leisurely ride brought Dran-

nan to the red rock under a towering bronze bluff on the bank of the Gila. He took a slow gait to spare his horse. HE LONE RIDER sat quietly in for you to take her away, on the same for the gruelling test of stamina and speed that later would come. He had no difficulty locating the tall pine.

The upper benches and ridges seemed devoid of any living things. Leaving his horse concealed in a convenient The tall plainsman rose to his feet thicket, Drannan carefully surveyed the of perplexity and uneasiness while he and grasped the Pima's hand, "In three surrounding wilds and patiently waited

marked him a coward in the mind of Indian girl he recognized as Nawasa. She led another girl into the subdued twi-light glow. Dranann held his breath. he went back to his horse, got into the and his heart pounded violently. For the first time in six years, since he was as if this were the end of his happy a small boy of thirteen—he beheld a cover the distance by early morning, and go go before the Apaches, come!" white woman! Her wealth of blond hair Her dress was no different from that of hoofs on the hard ground." the Apache women. Her face he could wound along the east bank of the river. sit alone that night with the grizzled not see. He soon caught the silvery us!" Night Bird fearfully gasped. notes of her voice as she started singing arr old hymn:

> "There is a land of pure delight, Where saints immortal reign, Eternal day excludes the night.

And pleasures banish pain." Night's velvet mantle lowered about song faded out. The two figures under nan aroused, and stood in a tense; listening attitude, when an Indian call floated up from below. The Apaches would soon be looking for their captive. They did not long allow her out of the

Mounting his horse, Drannan descended to the bottom of the deep gulch where he waited a few minutes longer in the "You may gu this Night Bird all thickening gloom. When he reached the right," he vouchsafed, "but what will pine, it was quite dark. The place, you do with 'er?. You can't bring her silent as a sanctuary, was empty. He here. An' you can't take her to the wondered if Nawasa and the white girl. Pimas. It's certain they don't want no frightened by the Indian call, had fled, fuss with the Apaches. So what do you While he sat motionless in the saddle, he heard the soft-treading of moccasined "I've thought -, the whole matter feet on the dry ground; then a subdued

There are too many soldiers at Yuma for : you must go! The Apaches come! Alerta

some fast running on my horse-but I! A strange emotion -swept through reluctant and fearful. "Don't be afraid" Jim Beckwith smiled as he reached a he said with quiet assurance. "I am

When they were seated close together, 'Till join you again, Jim. You may how ghostly white was her face. H saw, too, on her forehead the tribal tat-Jim Beckwith's sharp little eyes shone too of the sun and the lighting, indelbly

would ever meet again. "Good-bye, understand! I will take you to people of your own blood and kind! You will be protected and cared for-"

> "The senor speaks truly, Night Bird!" brought in Nawasa. "You can trust him -I know! Aleria! You should be on your way! The Apaches soon come! She clung to the white girl's hand for moment, sobbing: "Adjos-Night Bird: Senor! "Adios!"

Drannan felt the warm pressure

her fingers. He paused another second to touch his palm to her cheek. "Goodbye. Nawasa, brave one!" His horse leaned off into the gloom. Five milthe fleet mustang raced with scarcely nause, mainly through the pinons and dwarfed pines that fringed the east bank of the Gila. All the while the rider could feel the girl's trembling grasp, as

she ching to him behind the saddle. While his eyes were riveted on the tall ered with bunch grass and clumps of The Apaches are close behindprickly pear. Here the panting horse was allowed to take a slower pace. Dran- Pima, leaping from his mount, and passdid seem a golden glory as it fluttered safely eluded the Apaches, when he disin the light breeze around her shoulders, tinetly caught the distant drumming of

"They're coming! They will overtake

"No, they won't overtake us!" Drannan answered. "Hold on-and don't be frightened!" He leaned over in the saddle and spoke to his horse, patting the animal's hot neck

On, at swifter pace, the animal spedmile after mile, dodging the clumps of the hills when the final notes of the old prickly pear, leaping over boulders dashing across rock-floored coulers. cruel gait began to tell upon the animal's wonderful endurance. Never in all his years on the plains had Roger Drannan ridden any horse so hard. He knew this



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after us!" Night bird fearfully gasped as often as she ventured a backware

Racing down across the floor of sunken basin, Drannan for a time eluded the pursuing riders. He had twelve miles still to go, a distance his horse could not cover at such killing speed. Alf the way he had followed a familiar trail As he slowed up, to round a thucket of mesquite, a lone rider suddenly emerged from the copse, directly in front of him

The mustang slid to a quick stop while Drannan flung his rifle into position. He saw at a glance the lone rider was an Indian. The girl uttered a scared little cry-and clung to him more closely. "Amigo! . Friend-be not affaid!

called a familiar voice. "Swift . Foot!' Drannan - claculated.

put there by an Apache medicine man! one, noble, as it was could not much saddle and bridle, instead of the Indian Roger turned and took her trembling longer endure the terrific strair. When- surcingle and blanket. He had no timeever he glanced rearward, he saw the for explanation nor questions. shadowy forms of dusky riders upon his more the drumming of hoofs could be

ful act. He understood, also; what 1

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