

"INTO A STRANGE LAND":
WOMEN CAPTIVES AMONG THE INDIANS

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

Once captured, white women were inducted into Indian society through a process of benevolent education. Contradicting the fearful expectations of most captives, the Indians of the Eastern Woodlands displayed genuine regard for the well-being of their prisoners. Transformed physically by moccasins, feathers, jewelry, and paint, white captives were welcomed into Indian society and adopted into families to replace members lost to disease or war. As members of the tribe, the captives were treated with humanity and concern by their new relatives, assuming a rank in society equal to that of the individual they had replaced. Instead of abusing female prisoners sexually, the Eastern Woodlands Indians treated them as potential daughters or sisters.

Women captured by Indian tribes west of the Mississippi were more frequently subjected to sexual abuse than women taken in the Eastern Woodlands. Traveling with the Indians in the Great Plains, Great Basin, and Southwest, these women initially endured a "severe apprenticeship." Burdened with work and deprived of food, they were only eventually adopted. Unlike the Indians of the Eastern Woodlands, the western tribes were largely unable to acculturate white captives completely into Indian society. Contrary to the dire expectations of most women, however, sexual relations were generally not inaugurated between captive and captor until the two were united in marriage according to the customs of the tribe.

Often the text of the captivity narrative reflected the intensely personal attempts of female captives to come to terms with their experiences and at the same time to re-enter white society. The subsequent struggle of most returning captives reflected their failure to fit neatly into any of the roles which society accorded to women. Depicted in narratives as humane and civilized, the Indians likewise failed to fit within the stereotype of the savage provided by white society.

INTRODUCTION

It would be unaccountable stupidity in us not to maintain the most lively and awful sense of Divine Retribution which the most Holy God has seen fit to dispense to me, my Family and People in delivering us into the hands of those that Hated us, who Led us into a strange Land.

- REVEREND JOHN WILLIAMS, 1707

The "strange Land" that was America was an intimidating place to the "Puritans" of Deerfield, Massachusetts. **"INTO A STRANGE LAND":** WOMEN CAPTIVES AMONG THE INDIANS

children by a raiding party in February 1704, the Puritan minister declared upon his return that he had been redeemed from the perils of the wilderness only through the providential "wonders of Divine Mercy."¹ Thankful that his body and soul were still intact after two years among the Indians and the French, Williams concluded that his captivity had been divinely ordained in order to punish his faults and strengthen his faith.

Death, after all, was the primary reason that America had been founded by the Puritans in the first place. Both the English and the French founded their colonizing efforts in

¹ John Williams, "The Restored Captive Returning to Zion," in *Essays on the History, Customs, and Captivity and Redemption, 1675-1710*, ed. Alden F. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1951), 167.

INTRODUCTION

It would be unaccountable stupidity in me not to maintain the most Lively and Awful Sense of Divine Rebukes which the most Holy GOD has seen met . . . to dispense to me, my Family and People in delivering us into the hands of those that Hated us, who Led us into a strange Land.

- REVEREND JOHN WILLIAMS, 1707

The "strange Land" that was America was an intimidating place to the Reverend John Williams of Deerfield, Massachusetts. Captured along with his wife and children by a raiding party in February 1704, the Puritan minister declared upon his return that he had been redeemed from the perils of the wilderness only through the providential "wonders of Divine Mercy."¹ Thankful that his body and soul were still intact after two years among the Indians and the French, Williams concluded that his captivity had been divinely ordained in order to punish his faults and strengthen his faith.

Faith, after all, was the primary reason that America had been invaded by Europeans in the first place. Both the English and the French launched their colonizing efforts in

¹John Williams, "The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion," in Puritans Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption, 1676-1724, Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, eds. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1981), 169.

the New World with the intention of introducing the Indians to the glorious benefits of civilization and Christianity.² This desire to extend the perimeters of the Christian Church in order to educate and encompass savage souls was outlined in many of the colonial charters granted by English monarchs in the seventeenth century. The French crown dispatched Catholic missionaries to Canada clad in cumbersome robes and burdened with altar vessels, cruxifixes, and painted statues of the saints. Characteristically self-assured, the English Protestants likewise set out to dispense goodwill and the gospel among the American natives, confident that the Indians would convert to Christianity once they were exposed to "the blessings of improved life and the light of religion."³

It confounded the English that few, if any, Indians took them up on their offer. Most of the Indians educated by the English were enclosed within classroom walls only reluctantly, and frequently by force. Those who survived the academic exercises and European fevers, poxes, and agues to which they

The first good opportunity of escaping again into the Woods.

²See James Axtell, The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 23-32, 131-178 and The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 169; K.G. Davies, The North Atlantic World in the Seventeenth Century, Volume IV in Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion, ed. Boyd C. Shafer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 278-282; Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 46-48.

³Reverend William Smith of Philadelphia, quoted in Axtell, The European and the Indian, 170.

were exposed in captivity usually ran away as soon as they could, returning to native society and resuming their Indian identities. . . . Few were transformed into the civilized Englishmen that monarchs and missionaries envisioned. It was nearly incomprehensible to the English that the "easy and unconstrained . . . savage life" could be more attractive than a pious and ordered existence far from the "Dark places" of the wilderness.⁴

While the English were largely unsuccessful in their attempts to convert the Indians to Christianity, the Indians were relatively successful in converting the English to the native "Manner of living."⁵ English captives of the Indians, especially those who were taken from their families as children, often adopted Indian society as their own. When "ransomed by their Friends" and returned to white society, many former captives "in a Short time . . . became disgusted with [the English] manner of life." Benjamin Franklin noted with amazement that many of these discontented Europeans took "the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there was no reclaiming them."⁶

⁴Axtell, The European and the Indian, 170; Axtell, The Invasion Within, 190, 193-196; Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi America (1702), quoted in Puritans Among the Indians, 21.

⁵As noted early on by Cadwallader Colden in his History of the Five Indian Nations of Canada (1747), quoted in Axtell, The European and the Indian, 171.

⁶Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, in Leonard W. Larabee, ed., Whitfield J. Bell, assoc. ed., et al., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (New Haven: Yale

Most of the English colonists captured by the Indians differed little, if at all, from their fellow colonials. Those who were most frequently adopted and assimilated into Indian society, however, were children and young women. Although the Canadian Indians raided New England for captives to hold for ransom, most of the Indians of the Eastern Woodlands captured English settlers to replace members of their families lost to disease or war. By deliberately taking women and children as captives, the Indians maximized the possibility that their prisoners would willingly accept adoption into the tribe. Young and impressionable, the captives were introduced to Indian life through a comprehensive educational process. In the end, the whites dressed, spoke, and (in the opinion of many colonists) even looked like Indians. Rather than converting the Indians to Christianity, many of the whites themselves had been converted to "the Indian style of life."⁷ To Englishmen bent on a civilizing mission, the transformation of their countrymen and women into white Indians was as annoying as it was unexpected.

Not every captive left a narrative describing the experience of capture, education, and adoption. Some white Indians never returned to their native society; others who did return were unable, or unwilling, to record their stay among

University Press, 1959-), 4: 481-482.

⁷James Levernier and Hennig Cohen, eds., The Indians and Their Captives (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 121.

the Indians. As the American frontier expanded to the west, the captivity experience changed, incorporating a lengthy apprenticeship that preceded adoption; nevertheless, many white captives returned to write their narratives with the conviction that Indian life, although often physically trying, was characterized by a genuine regard for captives as adopted members of society.

Writing a narrative in "her own words" eased, at least in part, the problems of readjustment and reacceptance particular to female captives returning to white society. Once they returned from Indian captivity, most white women "seemed compelled, like Coleridge's ancient mariner, to recite their tales."⁸ By carefully recording their journeys from captivity to redemption, these women attempted to eliminate any doubts concerning their conduct in the "squalid and dark *Wigwams*" of their captors. By detailing the process of conversion most captives underwent, these narratives acted as both personal and public explanations of women's lives among the Indians. Even so, former captives faced a generally skeptical audience in white society, which often suspected them of becoming much "too like . . . the Indians." Contrary to popular perceptions of Indian barbarity, however, most narratives argued convincingly that the Indians "behaved with the utmost charity

⁸Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, "Cups of Common Calamity: Puritan Captivity Narratives as Literature and History," Puritans Among the Indians, 14.

and modesty" towards captive women.⁹

Although they had returned safely to the familiar surroundings of white society, former captives found it nearly impossible to forget their months in the wilderness. Even Mary Rowlandson, the most self-righteous of Puritan prisoners, was troubled after her redemption in 1676 by persistent memories of the eleven weeks she spent among the Wampanoags. "I can remember the time," she confessed, "when I used to sleep quietly without workings in my thoughts, whole nights together; but now it is other wayes with me." Rowlandson reluctantly admitted that in the solitary hours "when all were fast around" her and "no eye [was] open," her mind lingered "upon things past."¹⁰ Recounting the "sober facts" of their captivity enabled women to contemplate the significance of their sojourn in the "strange Land" of the Indians. For some, an account of their "Afflictions and Deliverance" served as an instructional "Memorandum" of divine mercy, illustrating "the Sovereignty of God" even under "the most heart-sinking Tryals." For others, the captivity narrative was an intensely personal reflection on their transformation as adopted members

⁹Cotton Mather, India Christiana (1721), quoted in James Axtell, The European and the Indian, 170; Increase Mather, The Necessity of Reformation (1679), quoted in Puritans Among the Indians, 14; John Gyles, "Memoirs of Odd Adventures, Strange Deliverances, Etc.," in Puritans Among the Indians, 111.

¹⁰Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God," in Puritans Among the Indians, 74.

of "the tawny Indian race."¹¹

Writing an account of the captivity experience may have allowed women like Mary Rowlandson to understand more completely the lasting effects of their ordeal. A reading of these narratives can in turn reveal the everyday realities of life for both the Indians and their captives in "the vast and howling wilderness." This approach to understanding the process of conversion that female captives underwent among the Indians is one-sided, but valuable nevertheless: while outlining a woman's place among the Indians of the Eastern Woodlands and the American West, these narratives also provide an insightful commentary on the "Humanity and Civility" these women found as adopted members of Indian society.¹²

¹¹Elizabeth Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," Puritans Among the Indians, 231; Massy Harbison, A Narrative of the Sufferings of Massy Harbison (Pittsburgh: D & M McLean, 1828), 37; John Williams, "The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion" (1707), Puritans Among the Indians, 1; Mary Rowlandson, "The Preface to the Reader," Narratives of North American Indian Captivities (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1977), vol. 1, title page, ii-iv; Levernier and Cohen, eds., The Indians and Their Captives, 121.

¹²Mary Rowlandson, "A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," Narratives, vol. 1, 10; Elizabeth Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," Puritans Among the Indians, 233.

CHAPTER I

"Hurried Up and Down the Wilderness":
Women Captives Among the Eastern Woodland Indians

"Now away we must go with those barbarous wretches," lamented Mary Rowlandson, "with our bodies wounded and bleeding and our hearts no less than our bodies." Her account of capture by the Wampanoags in 1676 compared the experience to "a company of sheep" being "torn by wolves." The Indians were "hell-hounds . . . roaring, singing, ranting, and insulting," ready to tear the "very hearts" out of the inhabitants of Lancaster, Massachusetts with their "glittering weapons."¹ Rowlandson's account, like many others, emphasized the merciless nature and brutal actions of the Indians. To women snatched from their homes and their families and thrust into "long and doleful captivity," the Indians were "Atheistical, proud, wild, cruel, barbarous, brutish, (in one word) diabolical Creatures." When confronted with "nothing but Wilderness, and Woods, and a company of . . . Heathen," most captives agreed that the unfamiliar environs of the Eastern Woodlands bore "a lively resemblance to hell."²

¹Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God," in Puritans Among the Indians, 35.

²Captive Jemima Howe, in Samuel G. Drake, Indian Captivities, or Life in the Wigwam (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1851), 157; Mary Rowlandson, "The Preface to the Reader," in Narratives, vol. 1, iii; Mary Rowlandson, "A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," Narratives, vol. 1, 16, 3.

often "Howling, shooting, shouting, and roaring," the Indians of the Eastern Woodlands periodically raided white settlements, taking both prisoners and plunder. Frequently these attacks took place "between daybreak and sunrise," when unsuspecting settlers were ill-prepared to counter Indian aggression. "Awakened from their slumber by the hideous yells of savages," many women were pulled out of bed, taken from their houses, and led "fainting and trembling" into the wilderness. The Indians who took Sarah Gerish from Dover, New Hampshire in the summer of 1689 hurried her out of bed and along the trail "with no more than one stocking upon her."³ Other women, like Susannah Johnson of Charlestown, New Hampshire, found themselves "in the last days of pregnancy" when the Indians attacked. Roused from her bed before dawn, Mrs. Johnson was given a plundered dress and led, along with her three children, into captivity. Less fortunate captives embarked on the arduous journey to the Indian camp dressed only in a nightgown.⁴

Although considered to be "weak and defenceless," women

³Captive Elizabeth Heard, in Drake, *Life in the Wigwam*, 71; Massy Harbison, *A Narrative of ... Massy Harbison*, 39-40; Captive Sarah Gerish, in Drake, *Life in the Wigwam*, 69.

⁴As many as one-fifth of adult female captives from northern New England were pregnant or "newly delivered of a child," according to Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982; reprinted by Oxford University Press, 1983), 205; Captive Susannah Johnson, in John Frost, *Indian Battles, Captivities, and Adventures, From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York: J.C. Derby, 1858), 142-143.

often actively resisted capture. Mary Rowlandson, the wife of a Massachusetts minister, staunchly maintained that she would rather be killed by the Indians than taken alive as a captive; "when it came to the trial," however, "her mind changed." After hearing "the noise of some guns" and seeing "several houses . . . burning and the smoke ascending to heaven," Rowlandson's courage waned; as a result, she reluctantly "chose to go along with those . . . ravenous beasts." Other women were less intimidated by the "guns, spears, and hatchets" of the Indians and attempted to save themselves and their children from all the "cruelties and misery" of captivity. In May 1791, three armed Shawnees burst into the home of Mary Kinnan in Randolph County, Virginia and killed her husband. Despite "the flash of muskets," she picked up her daughter and attempted to escape, running "with the swiftness of the wind." When such a daring escape attempt was impossible, women employed other tactics to protect themselves and their families from harm. Mrs. Brown and her maidservant were alone at home on the Virginia frontier when Indians attacked in the spring of 1789. Unable to flee, Mrs. Brown "caught hold of the muzzle" of the Indian's musket and begged him not to kill her, but instead to take her prisoner. She then picked up her young son and promised that, if he was allowed to live, "he would make a fine little Indian after a

1789, Narrative of a Journey with a Review of the State of the Society and Removal of the First Settlers of the Western Country (Pittsburgh: John S. Ritenour and Wm. T. Lindsey, 1812; reprint ed., Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Publishing Company, 1976), 226-227.

while."⁵

These efforts on the part of women to repel Indian attacks were sensationalized in narratives which recounted the undesirable consequences of feminine wrath. The "singular prowess" of one such woman "in a combat with some Indians" was printed and distributed as a broadside in 1779 after being "related in a letter to a lady of Philadelphia." The account graphically demonstrated how Mrs. Experience Bozarth "acquitted herself in defence of her own life and that of her husband and children." According to the narrator, the whole grisly affair lasted no more than three minutes; in that brief span of time, Experience easily dispatched several Indians who were raiding her home in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. After she "took up an axe" and "cut out the brains" of an unfortunate Indian with only one blow, she inflicted "several large cuts" on another, "some of which let his entrails appear." Taken from Haverhill, Massachusetts, during King

⁵William Walton, A Narrative of the Captivity and Suffering of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, who were taken by the Indians in the Spring of 1780 (Philadelphia: John Richards, 1848), 29; Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God," in Puritans Among the Indians, 53, 35; Massy Harbison, A Narrative of ... Massy Harbison, 47; Boyd Stutter, The Kinnan Massacre, Including the True Narrative of the Sufferings of Mary Kinnan (first printed 1795; reprint ed., Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Publishing Company, 1969), 4; Joseph Doddridge, Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars of the Western Parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania from 1763 to 1783, inclusive: Together with a Review of the State of Society and Manners of the First Settlers of the Western Country (Pittsburgh: John S. Ritenour and Wm. T. Lindsey, 1912; reprint ed., Parsons, West Virginia: McClain Publishing Company, 1976), 226-227.

William's War, Hannah Dustan likewise escaped from "a whole army of Indians" by wreaking vengeance on her sleeping captors with a hatchet. Although they were anxious to return to white society, Dustan and her fellow captives Mary Neff and Samuel Lennardson lingered just long enough to "cut . . . off the scalps" of the ten dead Indians and bundle them up for the journey home. Apparently, substantial material rewards accompanied such a dramatic physical and spiritual redemption. The Massachusetts General Assembly awarded "poor Dustan" £50 for her success in ridding the province of so many "formidable savages." Governor Francis Nicholson of far-away Maryland also applauded Dustan's bloody escape, rewarding her with a "very generous token of his favor." When Hannah Dustan visited Boston in April 1697, a month after her triumphant return, Cotton Mather honored her with a sermon at his church and Judge Samuel Sewall entertained her. To those who saw the Indians as a tangible threat to the maintenance of Christian order in the wilderness, it mattered little that six of the ten scalps their heroine turned in for bounty had previously belonged to Indian children. Few women, however, were as zealous in their efforts to fend off Indian attack as Experience Bozarth and Hannah Dustan; rather than striking "home-blows with hatchets," most female prisoners resigned themselves to being led by their captors into "the vast and

Journe in Frost. Indian Captives, 144; Walton, Narrative of the Captivity of Benjamin Gilbert and his Family, 18; Francis Kelly, F.R.S., Journal of a Tour in Unsettled Parts of North America in 1788 and 1789, ed. Jack S.L. Holmes (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), 143.

howling wilderness."⁶

Once captured, the women were forced to remove their loose garments and exchange their hard-heeled shoes for more practical moccasins, "the footwear of the forest." Carefully crafted from smoked deer skin, these "mockasons" were especially "soft and pleasant to the feet" during the captives' trek to the Indian village. In addition, the captives' new shoes were "finished oftentimes in a very curious manner with wampum and porcupine quills."⁷ Some captives were disdainful of their newly-acquired "Indian shoes," complaining that their feet were still "pricked with sharp stones and prickly Bushes sometimes" and at "other times [were] pinch'd with snow, cold, and ice." For many women, long-distance travel was difficult and keeping the desired pace along the trail was nearly impossible. Hannah Swarton, captured at Casco Bay by the Abenaki in 1690, recalled that she struggled on foot "over steep and hideous mountains" and through "swamps and thickets of fallen trees" with a heavy

⁶Joseph Pritts, "Incidents of Border Life," in Narratives, vol. 57, 171-172; Mary Rowlandson, "A True History of the Captivity ... of ... Mary Rowlandson," Narratives, vol. 1, 10; Cotton Mather, "A Narrative of Hannah Dustan's Notable Deliverance From Captivity," Puritans Among the Indians, 161-164; Ulrich, Good Wives, 167-168; Levernier and Cohen, The Indians and Their Captives, 156-157.

⁷Axtell, The European and the Indian, 180; Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 144; Walton, Narrative of the Captivity ... of Benjamin Gilbert and his Family, 32; Francis Baily, F.R.S., Journal of a Tour in Unsettled Parts of North America in 1796 and 1797, ed. Jack D.L. Holmes (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 143.

pack on her back.⁸ Plagued by hunger and fatigue, the captives were pushed and pulled through the "bushes and underbrush" along the trail, sometimes losing their shoes and their bundles in the process. Most feared that if they failed to keep up with their "rigid masters" that they would be killed. "Many times," one captive recalled, "I thought I could go no further." "Ready to be frozen and faint from want of food," many women lamented that in their weakened condition they provided easy "prey for bears and wolves."⁹

Unable to communicate with their captors and "scores of leagues from any plantation," these women were dramatically confronted with the realities of life on the march. Despite their harsh surroundings, the captives' journey to the Indian encampment was frequently marked by acts of kindness by their captors. Unable to keep up with her fellow prisoners, one woman showed her "bleeding and blistered feet" to the warrior who had captured her. "Convinced that repose was absolutely necessary" to her recovery, he spread a blanket on the ground and "made the whole party lie down."¹⁰ Other captives

⁸Hannah Swarton, described by Cotton Mather, "Magnalia Christi Americana" (1702) in The Indians and Their Captives, 33, 35.

⁹Walton, Narrative of the Captivity ... of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 46-47; Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 143; Hannah Swarton in Mather, "Magnalia Christi Americana," The Indians and Their Captives, 33; Sarah Gerish in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 70.

¹⁰Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 145; Sarah Gerish in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 70; Elizabeth Hicks, "A True Romance of the American War of Independence," Narratives,

agreed that the kindness they received from the Indians was "far greater" than they had expected "from those who were so often distinguished for their cruelties." Elizabeth Hanson recalled that an Indian carried her baby so that she could keep up with the other captives along the trail; when she lost her footing in "steep places," her captor unexpectedly "shewed some Humanity and Civility" by lending her his hand for support. Another woman was given a horse by her captor so that she could more easily travel with "the rest of the company" to the Indian camp and not "perish in the woods."¹¹

Such "acts of Indian benignity" dramatically contradicted the fearful expectations of female captives. When one woman was overcome by "the pangs of childbirth" along the trail, her captors showed "some humanity" by constructing a makeshift "booth" for her to rest in and, after she delivered, presenting her with "some articles of clothing for the child . . . a needle . . . two pins, and some bark to tie the child's clothes." That night the new mother was given "porridge and some johnny cakes . . . in a little bark" and "a cup to steep some roots in"; when travel resumed the next day, she and her newborn child were carried in "a bier" to their destination. When captives were ailing, the Indians were

vol. 104, 40.

¹¹Captive Isabella McCoy in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 145; Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Introduction," Narratives of North American Indian Captivity: A Selective Bibliography, ed. Alden T. Vaughan (New York: Garland Publishing Company, Inc., 1983), xv.

generally "very kind to them." "Seized with a chill," Elizabeth Gilbert was "administered some flour and water boiled" by her captors, which "afforded her some relief." When her sister Rebecca also fell ill, the Indians expressed their concern by brewing "a plentiful decoction of some herbs, with which they bathed [the two sisters] frequently."¹² Faced with the difficulties of arduous travel, many women failed to recognize the Indians' genuine regard for the well-being of their captives. The Indians treated even disobedient captives with remarkable toleration. Feeling "weary of life" on the trail, Massy Harbison mustered "the full determination" to make her captors kill her, "thinking death would be exceedingly welcome." Mrs. Harbison was walking in a train of Indians with a powderhorn on her shoulder when she decided to free herself from the "cruelties and misery" she had the prospect of enduring in captivity. She threw the powderhorn on the ground, closed her eyes, and "expected every moment to feel the deadly tomahawk." To her surprise, the Indians picked up the discarded powderhorn, cursed her carelessness, and put it on her shoulder again. She removed her burden a second time and threw it on the ground; the Indians again

¹²Walton, Narrative of the Captivity . . . of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 58-59, 48, 147; Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 147. Captivity narratives have frequently provided a fertile source for writers of fiction. For example, Mrs. Johnson's captivity and the "imagined adventures" of her younger sister Miriam Willard were the subject of Elizabeth George Speare's melodramatic Calico Captive (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1957).

returned it to her "with an indignant and frightful countenance." Undaunted, the rebellious captive threw the powderhorn a third time, making sure to aim it well away from the path and over some nearby rocks. Instead of killing her, the Indians retrieved the lost powderhorn and congratulated their captive on a job "well done." In the opinion of her captors, Mrs. Harbison had shown courage and, as a result, would make a good Indian. The warrior who had forced her to carry the powderhorn, on the other hand, was "a lazy son of a bitch" and "might carry it himself." Harbison attributed the Indian's leniency not to kindness but to "the indulgent care of a gracious God" who, despite her recklessness, continued to preserve her "from the tomahawk and the scalping knife."¹³

Most women found a night spent on the trail with their captors to be an extremely "dreary situation." Most captives complained that they were forced to sleep on "the damp ground" with only "the sky for a covering," although some were given blankets by the Indians to construct makeshift beds for themselves and their children. Other less fortunate women were firmly bound with cord or rope by their captors during the night to discourage escape attempts. One woman recalled that her hands were tied behind her, while another captive slept "much to her mortification, between two Indians, with a

¹³Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976), 151-152; Massy Harbison, A Narrative of ... Massy Harbison, 47-48.

cord thrown over her and passing under each of them." Most Indians, however, attempted to make their captives as comfortable as possible during the difficult journey to camp. One captive travelling from New Hampshire to Canada recalled that every night "the head man" would "make up a little couch of leaves for her to sleep on" and "cover her up with his own blanket." As a result, she was always able to sleep "undisturbed till morning."¹⁴

While the captives grimly accepted the floor of the forest as a mattress, their stomachs initially rebelled against Indian trail fare, which included "nuts, berries, roots . . . parched corn . . . horseflank, semi-raw venison, and moose." During the eleven weeks she spent with the Wampanoags, Mary Rowlandson drank broth boiled from a horse's leg and ate tree bark. Hannah Swarton reluctantly ate "*Groundnuts, Acorns, Purslain, Hogweed, Weeds, Roots, and sometimes Dogs Flesh*" while she was being "hurried up and down the wilderness." Equally desperate, Elizabeth Hanson salvaged the "Guts and Garbage" of the beavers that her masters had eaten. One prisoner concluded that roots and plants which she once would have thought "not fit for food" provided the makings of a "dainty dish" in her present difficult circumstances. Although their food on the trail was

¹⁴Ibid., 49; Walton, Narrative of the Captivity . . . of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 115; Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 146; Isabella McCoy in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 145.

frequently of poor quality and in short supply, the Indians shared it with their captives, who generally "relished [it] very well." As one captive of the Shawnee recalled, the Indians always "seemed desirous that she should partake of whatever they had to eat." Mary Jemison likewise had fond memories of eating well on the trail, because one afternoon her Seneca captors "killed a deer . . . and roasted it whole." Mary remembered that, along with another captive, she was given a share of venison and "some bread." Together with their captors, the two girls "made a good meal."¹⁵

With "provisions . . . so scanty," many captives complained of hunger despite their captors' generosity. Far removed from their own kitchens and gardens, some women expressed outright disgust at the "insipid and unsavory" types of food that were available for their consumption. One captive recalled that all she had to eat were "wortle berries" and "a kind of *Wild Cherry*"; when she was finally given a piece of roasted eel, it seemed to be "the most savory food" she had ever tasted. Along the trail, she quickly cultivated a taste for bear, turtle, fish, and "*Moose's liver*," which was an especially "sweet morsel." The captives, like the Indians,

¹⁵Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 180-181; Vaughan and Clark, "Cups of Common Calamity," *Puritans Among the Indians*, 12; Elizabeth Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," *Puritans Among the Indians*, 238; Margaret [Pauleel] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," *Narratives*, vol. 108, 14; James Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mary Jemison* (Canadaigua: J.D. Bemis and Company, 1824; reprint ed., New York: The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1950), 32.

learned to take advantage of whatever nourishment came their way. As a result, they consumed wild onions and apples, turnip tops, paw-paws, maple sugar, and the occasional hedgehog. When food supplies were especially scarce, the captives chewed "young cane stalks," sassafras leaves, and "some other plants" for their juices. When more substantial foodstuffs were available, the Indians usually ate out of the kettle first, then "wiped their spoon on the sole of their moccasins" and handed the cleaned utensil and the common bowl over to the captives. The fact that there appeared to be only "one spoon for the whole company" disgusted some captives; hunger soon reconciled the others to "this Indian custom," and they "learned to disregard the want of English cleanliness in the use of the spoon and kettle."¹⁶

When the captives finally arrived at the Indian village, they were presented "in a triumphant form, and decorated to every possible advantage." Each captive was painted and feathered according to Indian fashion. Once their cheeks, chins, and foreheads had been decorated with "a dash [of] . . . vermilion" mixed with bear grease, they were taken by the hand and marched through the gauntlet. After seeing "a cloud of

... the Indians commonly used "clubs and stones" to

¹⁶Jemima Howe, in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 159; Hannah Swarton in "Magnalia Christi Americana," The Indians and Their Captives, 33; Walton, Narrative of the Captivity . . . of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 50-51, 53, 56, 135; Mrs. Cunningham in Wills De Haas, History of the Early Settlement and Indian Wars of Western Virginia (Wheeling: H. Hoblitzell, 1851), 286; Isabella McCoy in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 145; Captive Frances Scott in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 341.

savages, of all sizes and sexes" descending upon the arriving captives, one woman expected to receive a "severe beating." She was "agreeably disappointed," however, when the welcoming Indians merely tapped her lightly on the shoulder. For some captives, the running of the gauntlet, while intimidating, was "a rather extraordinary mode of making friends welcome." Barbara Leininger and Marie Le Roy, for example, were greeted at the Delaware Indian village of Kittanning with "three blows each, on the back . . . administered with great mercy." The two captives concluded that they were beaten by their captors for appearances only, "merely in order to keep up an ancient usage, [and] not with the intention of injuring us."¹⁷

For others, introduction to Indian society was a more trying ordeal. Captives were generally ordered to run through a gauntlet of villagers armed with ax handles, tomahawks, hoop poles, and switches. Although some captives were spared, others were beaten "with great severity." One woman recalled that she and her fellow captives were treated "in an unmerciful manner" by the Delawares upon their arrival in camp, having their hair pulled and their faces scratched as they ran the gauntlet. According to one chronicler of captivities, the Indians commonly used "clubs and stones" to "beat and bruise" the newly-arrived captives for revenge on

¹⁷Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 156-157; Elizabeth Hicks, "A True Romance of the American War For Independence," Narratives, vol. 104, 42; "Narrative of Marie Le Roy and Barbara Leininger," quoted in Axtell, The European and the Indian, 186.

the behalf of dead relatives. As a result, prisoners were often "sorely beaten and abused" until the Indians grew weary and assuaged their grief. These blows, one captive lamented, were meant to "be borne without complaint."¹⁸

The ordeal of arrival continued when the weary prisoners were "obliged to sing and dance" in the center of the village. "Little did we expect," remarked one astonished woman, "that the accomplishment of dancing would ever be taught us by the savages." Every prisoner "that could move" was expected to participate in the "war dance," taking "awkward steps . . . round the fire." "The best dancer," one observer concluded, "was the one most violent in motion." To prepare for this event, each captive was taught an Indian song on the trail and practiced it on the way to the camp. Many years later, Mrs. Johnson recalled that her song was "Danna witchee natchepung" and her son's was "Narwiscumpton." Although some captives found the experience to be "very painful and offensive," the performance of such ceremonial songs and dances firmly placed captives within the distinctive framework of Indian culture.¹⁹

Once settled in the camp, the captives were dressed "in

¹⁸Richard VanDerBeets, "The Indian Captivity As Ritual," American Literature, 43 (1972): 554-555; Axtell, The European and the Indian, 185; Captive Mrs. Bard in Charles McKnight, Our Western Border (Philadelphia: J.C. McCurdy and Co., 1876), 225-227; Walton, Narrative of the Captivity . . . of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 62-63.

¹⁹Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 156-157.

complete Indian style" and decorated with feathers, jewelry, and paint. The captives' wedding rings were taken away, as were their own clothes. The loss of these reminders of home and family undoubtedly widened the gap between the captives and the world they had left behind. Although most women initially resented "being put . . . into Indian dress," others delighted in their new-found finery. Young Frances Slocum recalled that her captor made her look "very fine," dressing her hair "in the Indian fashion" and adorning her with "beautiful wampum." One long-suffering captive complained that the Indians gave her "no stockins"; as a result of this "want of cloathing," her feet and legs were constantly "pinch'd with cold." The "short clothes" most captives were given reached "a little below the knee," and were usually worn over "Leather Stockins," or leggins. As a result, some women protested that dressing "after the Indian manner" was immodest and improper, as well as uncomfortable. Nevertheless, some captives appreciated the unconventional beauty of their new outfits. One captive was especially fond of a coat covered with drawings of "deers, wolves, bears, [and] fishes," although she became "much distressed" when her captors painted her cheeks in an effort to "make her look as handsomely as themselves." Once dressed in their "suits of Indian clothing," the captives dramatically moved another step away

from their "former way of life."²⁰

After being dressed in Indian clothes, the captives were conducted to their new homes and presented with gifts of welcome. Seated in the center of a Seneca wigwam, one woman was surrounded by "all the Squaws in the town," who immediately "set up a most dismal howling, crying bitterly, and wringing their hands." Although she was "terrified . . . at the appearance and actions of the company," the captive realized "at the close of the ceremony" that she had been adopted into the tribe in the place of a slain warrior. After expressing their grief, the Indians employed "every means" to insure the "consolation and comfort" of their new relative. For this captive, adoption was "a happy lot." "They seemed to rejoice over me," she later recalled, "as over a long lost child."²¹

Separated from their own families, some women undoubtedly

²⁰Seaver, Life of Mary Jemison, 35-36; Walton, Narrative of the Captivity . . . of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 38, 142; Captive Mrs. Davis in John Frost, Thrilling Adventures Among the Indians (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1851), 45-46; Hannah Swarton in "Magnalia Christi Americana," The Indians and Their Captives, 33; Captive Frances Slocum in J. Norman Heard, White Into Red: A Study of the Assimilation of White Persons Captured by the Indians (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1973), 18; Elizabeth Hicks, "A True Romance of the American War for Independence," Narratives, vol. 104, 48; Captive Frances Noble in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 168.

²¹Walton, Narrative of the Captivity . . . of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 60, 62; Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 157; Seaver, Life of Mary Jemison, 36-39; the connection between mourning and captive-taking is discussed by Alden T. Vaughan and Daniel K. Richter in "Crossing the Cultural Divide: Indians and New Englanders, 1605-1763," American Antiquarian Society Proceedings, 90 (1980): 72-77.

found the ceremony of adoption to be "tedious and very distressing." During the adoption ceremony of twenty-year-old Elizabeth Peart, the apprehensive captive was "obliged . . . to sit down with a young man, an Indian." Peart became worried when "the eldest chieftain of the family repeated a jargon of words which she could not understand." Fearing that the ceremony constituted not adoption but "the Indian form of marriage," the already-married captive experienced "a great agitation of mind" and "determined at all hazards to oppose any step of this nature." "When the old Indian had concluded his speech," however, she was introduced "in the Indian style" not to a husband but to the family who had adopted her. Despite Peart's "dreadful embarrassment," her new parents, brothers, and sisters received her "very kindly" and "made a grievous lamentation over her, according to their custom."²²

After being adopted, the captives assumed their assigned places in Indian society. Women were usually captured in order to be adopted into the tribe, thereby filling the places of members lost to disease or war. One captive remembered that she was adopted by an Indian couple who had recently lost their child. After renaming the captive for the infant she replaced, the Indians treated her "in all respects as their own." After being adopted into a Shawnee tribe, another captive was called "Yellow Gold" after the chief's deceased

²²Walton, Narrative of the Captivity . . . of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 113-114.

daughter. As a member of the chief's family, she was given a cabin and was instructed by her adopted father to "be contented and fear no one, and not to be ordered by any of the women" of the tribe.²³

Like many women, Susannah Johnson found her adoption into an Indian "house of high rank" to be an "unnatural situation." Despite her initial misgivings, Johnson defended the humanity of the process upon her return to white society. "Those who have profited by refinement and education," she argued, "ought to abate part of the prejudice, which prompts them to look with an eye of censure on this untutored race Do they ever adopt an enemy and salute him by the tender name of brother?" Adopted by two Seneca women, Mary Jemison served as a replacement for their brother, who had been killed in "Washington's war." She later recalled that she "was ever considered and treated by them as a real sister, the same as though I had been born of their mother."²⁴

Adopted captives were treated by their new relatives with "the utmost humanity and attention." The Indians expressed genuine concern for the captives, who frequently regretted "their hour of redemption, and refused to leave their red

²³Frances Slocum in Heard, White into Red, 18; Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 159; Margaret [Paulee] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," Narratives, vol. 108, 19.

²⁴Frances Slocum in Heard, White into Red, 18; Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 159; "Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Johnson," quoted in Axtell, The European and the Indian, 190; Seaver, Life of Mary Jemison, 38, 39.

brethren to return and mingle with the whites." One chronicler of captivities marvelled that an Indian would "divide his last morsel with an adopted son or brother" during times of want and would "readily risk his life in defence" of adopted family members during times of danger. As adopted members of the tribe, captives were well-treated by the Indians. The attachment of the Indians to their captives was, as one adopted member of a Shawnee tribe recalled, "ardent and affectionate." Another captive remembered that her Indian father took "much care to see that she was comfortable" at all times, spreading a blanket over her at night and tucking it "under her feet and about her, so that she need not suffer with the cold."²⁵

The life of a captive could even be saved from certain death through the intervention of a member of her adopted tribe. Margaret Erskine was the prisoner of Wabapusito, the favorite son of White Bark, a Shawnee chief. After the young warrior was killed while raiding a Kentucky settlement in 1782, the grieving chief ordered that all of his son's belongings be destroyed. "In accordance with the custom of the tribe," White Bark commanded that Mrs. Erskine and her child,

just as "ferocious, cruel, and vindictive" as their spouses.

²⁵Alexander S. Withers, Chronicles of Border Warfare, or a History of the Settlement by the Whites, of North-Western Virginia; and of the Indian Wars and Massacres in that Section of the State; with Reflections, Anecdotes, &c. (Clarksburgh, Va.: Joseph Israel, 1831), 31-32; Margaret [Paulee] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," Narratives, vol. 108, 31-32; Walton, Narrative of the Captivity ... of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 138.

as captives, should be burned in the deceased warrior's wigwam along with his other possessions. "When her fate seemed sealed and the arguments all concluded," another Indian offered to redeem the captive. At a meeting of the tribal council, he "held up his gun and with an impassioned appeal declared that he would give *this* treasure, so dear to an Indian heart, for her life." Saved from death, Mrs. Erskine "lost no time" in conveying "her deep sense of gratitude [to the warrior] for his generous and magnanimous act." In her opinion, the kindly Indian was "the finest specimen of manhood conceivable." "Though a savage," she exclaimed, "his traits of character would do honor to any man."²⁶

All women served an important purpose in Indian society by performing "menial and laborious offices." As a result, most white captives found working alongside Indian women in the fields and at home to be a trying experience. One captive, who was bought by a Delaware squaw, complained about the difficulty of the work and the general ill-temper of her female employer. Indian women, she complained, were not useful (as white women presumably were) in "polishing and improving the rough manners of the men"; instead, they were just as "ferocious, cruel, and obdurate" as their spouses. This disgruntled captive concluded that Indian women lacked the "benevolent disposition and warm sensibility to the

²⁶Margaret [Paulee] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," *Narratives*, vol. 108, 22-23, 25-26.

sufferings of others" which marked the feminine character in more "civilized climes."²⁷ On the other hand, Mary Jemison found her adopted Seneca sisters to be kind and good natured, "peaceable and mild in their dispositions," and "temperate and decent in their habits." She later recalled that they were not demanding taskmasters, but instead were "very tender and gentle" towards her. The work Mary Jemison performed as a captive was "not severe" and, in her opinion, was "probably not harder than that of white women." Indeed, Jemison argued that the cares of Indian women were "not half as numerous, or as great" as those of white women in general.²⁸

Upon their return to white society, some women complained that they had been forced to perform the "Labour and Drudgery" which customarily fell to "the Share of the Women" in Indian society. In retrospect, the tasks assigned to women in the village may have seemed more severe than they were in reality. Indian women and captives took care of the village children and did "light work about the house." They were also employed in bringing water, cutting and carrying wood, milking cows, and caring for horses, as well as planting and gathering corn and other vegetables. One captive of the Senecas recalled that when she tended the corn, her children were allowed to

²⁷Stutter, The Kinnan Massacre, 8-9.

²⁸Seaver, Life of Mary Jemison, 46-47. Jemison's view of women's work among the Indians was probably correct, in the opinion of Axtell, The European and the Indian, 202, and Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 56.

stay in the field with her. With "no master to oversee or drive" them, the women could generally hoe and harvest the crops "as leisurely as [they] pleased." Female captives also assisted Indian women in "their cooking operations," pounding "hommony" and "somp" and gathering wild fruit. The captives soon learned how to boil the hominy and make it into cakes to bake in the ashes. With only "a block and pestle, a small kettle, a knife or two, and a few vessels of bark or wood," the captives prepared meals from "the game that was taken by the Indians."²⁹

Captives were also instructed by Indian women in the art of preparing and dressing the skins of animals. Once finished, these skins were used to make both clothing and shoes for the tribe. Although Mary Jemison professed to be ignorant such "domestic arts" as sewing and weaving, many other captives were employed by their adopted tribes in various kinds of needlework. While a captive among the Shawnee, Margaret Erskine made calico shirts and other garments for the Indians and was paid for her efforts in trinkets. With her profits, she purchased corn and meat from her captors and "lived as comfortably as a prisoner would admit." Her knowledge of sewing was regarded as "a great

²⁹Seaver, Life of Mary Jemison, 39, 47-48, 142; Walton, Narrative of the Captivity . . . of Benjamin Gilbert and His Family, 56, 116-117, 143; Stutter, The Kinnan Massacre, 9; Elizabeth Hicks, "A True Romance of the American War for Independence," Narratives, vol. 104, 49-50; Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, 52.

accomplishment" among the Indians, as "none of their women understood it."³⁰

Perhaps the greatest fear of the captives was that, as adopted members of the tribe, they would eventually be forced to marry their captors. Despite their apprehensions, redeemed captives uniformly insisted that their Indian masters had not affronted them sexually. In Cotton Mather's opinion, the Indians' aversion to molesting their captives was "a wonderful Restraint" imposed by a benevolent God "upon the British Salvages." Omnipotent intervention aside, a combination of reasons contributed to the Indians' apparent lack of sexual interest in their female prisoners. As fair-skinned women, the captives were not especially attractive to the New England tribes, who believed that black, not white, was "the color of beauty." A more fundamental reason for the prisoners' unchallenged virtue reflected the purpose of taking captives, which was to secure new members for Indian families and clans. Warriors were strictly forbidden to violate their adopted relatives by an incest taboo, which inflicted "indelible disgrace" on anyone who had sexual relations with a captive. In addition, the use of violence to satisfy sexual desires was socially unacceptable and legally forbidden among the Indians. Sexual attraction between captors and captives was likewise tempered by the ethic of warrior continence, which prescribed

³⁰Seaver, *Life of Mary Jemison*, 47-48; Margaret [Paulee] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," *Narratives*, vol. 108, 19.

strict celibacy in wartime. A lapse into physical intimacy with wife or captive before battle could drain a man's strength, weaken his concentration, and point the way to misfortune and, at worst, death. Instead of abusing female captives, the Eastern Woodlands Indians treated them as potential daughters or sisters. "However rude" the Indians may have seemed "in other respects," captive women generally agreed that chastity was "a strong feature" of the Indian character. As a result, "the virtue of women in their power" remained intact.³¹

Captive testimony largely contradicted the widespread belief that the Indians raped women and forced them into marriage. Although many captives feared that they would be compelled to service their "swarthy companions" sexually, few seem to have detected any "insult or indecency" in the actions of their captors. The "base motives" to which women initially attributed their capture were, however, instrumental in constructing a wildly inaccurate perception of Indian behavior. Contrary to popular belief, capture did not reduce females to a "dreadful state of misery and wretchedness." Instead of chronicling the lurid details of "the fulsome embraces" they received at the hands of the Indians, redeemed

³¹Cotton Mather, Good Fetch'd Out of Evil (1706) in Puritans Among the Indians, 19; Axtell, European and the Indian, 181-182; Washburn, "Introduction," Narratives of North American Indian Captivity: A Selective Bibliography, xlvi; Withers, Chronicles of Border Warfare, 31; Margaret [Paulee] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," Narratives, vol. 108, 18.

captives consistently defended both their captor's innocence and their own. "Not one of them," wrote the generally uncharitable Mary Rowlandson, "ever offered the least abuse of unchastity to me, in word or action." Anticipating public skepticism, Rowlandson added that she spoke the truth, not for her own credit, but "in the presence of God, and to his Glory." Elizabeth Hanson likewise assured her readers that the Indians were "very civil toward their captive women, not offering any incivility by an indecent carriage (unless they be much overgone in liquor)." Hanson's narrative strongly implied that no Indian, sober or intoxicated, had ever molested her.³²

Some captive women undoubtedly "became the partners of Indian husbands" willingly. After being adopted into Indian society, these women married members of the tribe, gave birth to "hybrid offspring," and frequently were returned to white society against their wishes by well-meaning family members and government officials. Some female captives, like Frances Slocum and Mary Jemison, chose never to return at all. "Led reluctantly into the presence of fathers or brothers whose images were almost blotted from their memory," many who did return remained painfully out of place within the confines of

³²Captive Mrs. Painter in De Haas, History of ... Western Virginia, 206; Isabella McCoy in Drake, Life in the Wigwam, 145; Axtell, The European and the Indian, 181; Mary Rowlandson, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God," Puritans Among the Indians, 64; Elizabeth Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," Puritans Among the Indians, 35-36.

white society. Separated from their Indian families and confronted with "the shame of their real or fancied disgrace," these former captives found themselves caught between "dormant memories" and "more recent attachments." The difficulties of re-entry were especially harsh for those who returned to white settlements with their half-Indian children. Captured in 1758 on the Virginia frontier, one woman returned three years later with "an Indian son by a distinguished chief." Her husband "never maltreated her on this account," but harbored "a most bitter aversion" to the child, who "exhibited the appearance and disposition of his sire." Despite "attempts to educate him," the young Indian became rebellious, eventually enlisted in the army as a "common soldier," and never returned. For his mother, the required adjustment to the confines of civilization must have been even more difficult. Faced with disapproval and disgrace, many such women "hastened back to their warrior husbands," leaving behind a life in white society that was as foreign to them as life with the Indians was familiar.³³

³³Captive Mrs. Smith in De Haas, History of ... Western Virginia, 204-206; Francis Parkman, The Conspiracy of the Pontiac (6th ed., 1870) in The Indians and Their Captives, 153. Captives were not the only ones to acquire new spouses. Some women came home to find their husbands remarried. One such unintentional bigamist sent his second wife ("a very nice woman") back to her father, after advising her "to consider herself the same as before they were married." "Being a woman of good sense," the second wife was compensated financially by her erstwhile husband for the rest of her life. Jane Frazier, "Narrative of the Captivity of Jane Frazier," Narratives, vol. 109, 9-10.

While some white women remained with their Indian husbands, the majority returned from captivity anxious to explain and defend their life along "the Indian Trail." Re-entry into white society was especially traumatic for female captives, whose appearance had been altered dramatically during their stay among the Indians. Dressed "in complete Indian style," these prodigal daughters and wives must have appeared unfamiliar, even unrecognizable, to their families and friends. Their bare heads, sunburned faces, and moccasined feet were a shocking departure from proper female attire. Even when the paint was scrubbed from their faces and their leggings were replaced with stockings and skirts, startling differences separated these former captives from their neighbors and relatives. Returned to an unfamiliar society, children tackled the task of re-learning the language they had rapidly forgotten in captivity; grown women, however, were confronted with the even more arduous task of re-aculturating themselves to a largely unforgiving society.³⁴

Once at home, many women began writing narrative accounts of their captivity experiences. The "sober facts" of life among the Indians, one former captive recalled, were "too notorious to be denied, and too peculiar to be counterfeited." When published and presented to the general public, these

³⁴Richard Slotkin, Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800 (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 98; Seaver, Life of Mary Jemison, 36; Jane Frazier, "Narrative of the Captivity of Jane Frazier," Narratives, vol. 109, 9.

women's lives as adopted members of "the tawny Indian race" were, to a certain extent, explained and legitimized. Most narratives attempted to establish the captives' innocence and the Indian's "uncontaminated . . . moral character." One writer insisted that among the Senecas "chastity was held in high veneration, and a violation of it was considered sacrilege." Another "repeatedly asserted" that in her four years of captivity among the Shawnees "she was never offered any indignity or insult by an Indian." By emphasizing that their sexual purity was intact, redeemed captives calmed the fears of white society that women taken by the Indians were routinely raped and forced into marriage. Contrary to popular perceptions of Indian motives, most narratives argued convincingly that the Indians "behaved with the utmost charity and modesty" towards captive women. While maintaining that their Indian hosts were "commendable" in their attitudes and actions, women like Hannah Swarton and Mary Rowlandson staunchly defended their sexual conduct against any possible doubt. As a result, their narratives vividly recounted the dangers of the captivity experience while emphasizing the preservation of female honor among "the Dark places" of the wilderness.³⁵

³⁵Massy Harbison, A Narrative of . . . Massy Harbison, 37; The Indians and Their Captives, 121; Seaver, Life of Mary Jemison, 64; Margaret [Paulee] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," Narratives, vol. 108, 18; John Gyles, "Memoirs of Odd Adventures," Puritans Among the Indians, 111; Elizabeth Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," Puritans Among the Indians, 242; Cotton Mather,

Often suspected of sexual misconduct, women who had been captured by the Indians were likewise accused of distinctly unfeminine behavior. Many male authors prefaced their accounts of "the Heroism of a Woman" with the warning that the desperate actions of "the weaker sex" during captivity were naturally "bloody and revolting," never "pleasing or amiable." One writer observed that certain rare situations "rendered it necessary [for women] to fight or die" like men; in the opinion of society at large, however, women who acted like "Amazons" were overstepping the carefully-defined boundaries of proper female behavior. Praised by Cotton Mather as "an *Example* full of Encouragement," Hannah Dustan's bloody escape from captivity and subsequent notoriety as an "Indian killer" nevertheless struck a disquieting note in a world where social roles were largely defined by gender. Despite Dustan's "notable deliverance" and new-found celebrity, she resumed her more socially acceptable place as wife and mother with no visible reservations. A year after she returned to Haverhill with ten scalps in the bottom of her canoe, Hannah gave birth to her thirteenth child. It was Thomas Dustan, a farmer and bricklayer, who petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for a scalp bounty on his wife's behalf. Only Hannah's mark - a carefully-penned "H" - appeared as a testament to her actions. Skeptics later questioned whether a woman was

"Magnalia Christi Americana", Vaughan and Clark, "Cups of Common Calamity," Puritans Among the Indians, 21.

capable of carrying out such a "bold and bloody escape"; one writer, a Dustan descendant, adamantly argued that Thomas, not Hannah, had been responsible for the escape of "those poor prisoners." For many, however, the Dustan narrative confirmed the prevalent fear that women, once wrenched from Christianity and civilization, adopted increasingly masculine roles.³⁶

Lamenting the fate of those still held captive, one redeemed prisoner reported grimly that many women "had lost the English tongue" during their stay with the Indians. Separated from their families by language as well as distance, these women tread dangerously close to the line that separated civilization from savagery. "Unless something extraordinary prevent [it]," they would "turn [into] savages" and "be lost" forever to white society. The Indians' "prophane course of life," always a threat to the establishment of order in the wilderness, alarmed the American colonists even more as it actively encroached on the institutions of home and family. The world of the Indian was summarily declared by the European to be unchristian, uncivilized, and unacceptable. Female

³⁶David T. Haberly, "Women and the Indians: The Last of the Mohicans and the Captivity Tradition," American Quarterly 28, no. 4 (Fall 1976): 431-443; Captive Mrs. Davies in Frost, Thrilling Adventures Among the Indians, 43-44; Cotton Mather, "Humiliations Follow'd by Deliverances," Vaughan and Clark, "Cups of Common Calamity," Puritans Among the Indians, 6; Cotton Mather, "Hannah Dustan's Notable Deliverance From Captivity," Puritans Among the Indians, 161, 164; Kathryn Whitford, "Hannah Dustin: The Judgement of History," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 108 (1972): 308-309; Ulrich, Good Wives, 3-10. Hannah's mark, as it appeared in the Essex County Records, is pictured in the illustrations following p. 108.

captives, spirited away into the netherworld of the Eastern Woodlands, were dramatically transformed. Upon their return, some women were praised for surviving the ordeal with their faith and their chastity intact; others were suspected of sexual misconduct and indecorous behavior. For society as a whole, however, perhaps the most horrifying aspect of Indian captivity was the omnipresent temptation to "go savage." For women who "lov'd the Indian style of life," the self-proclaimed civilized world offered no place. It was much easier for white society to dismiss those women who found a place within "the tawny Indian race" as atypical than it was to unravel the unsettling question of why this "strange Land" was so attractive to those adopted into it. Women who chose to stay with their captors, or whose experiences contradicted accepted notions of Indian cruelty, provided a puzzle which few of their contemporaries could understand or cared to solve.³⁷

³⁷John Williams, "The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion," Puritans Among the Indians, 225; Vaughan and Clark, "Cups of Common Calamity," Ibid., 17, 14-15, 1; Levernier and Cohen, The Indians and Their Captives, 121.

CHAPTER II

"A Severe Apprenticeship": Women Captives Among the Western Indians

"The Indians quickly sprang into our wagons," lamented one western traveler, "filling the air with fearful war-whoops and hideous shouts." The attack was "a terrible and unexpected apparition"; without "a second of preparation or a word of warning," a party of 250 Indians "painted and equipped for war" raided the wagon train, taking both prisoners and plunder. Forcibly removed from their world and violently confronted with the world of the Indian, the captives perceived native customs as an indication of the uncivilized spiritual and social condition in which the "red scoundrels" lived. Popular opinion dictated that Indian ways should be shunned; the Indians themselves were to be feared, despised, and displaced. The captivity experience called these well-entrenched social and cultural values into question. Removed from the familiar guideposts of language and society, female captives were exposed to the ideas, practices, and temptations which they had been taught to condemn as manifestations of savagery. Old patterns were abandoned, usually reluctantly, in the interest of practicality. New patterns, adopted as instruments of survival, presented captives with an

intellectual dilemma.¹

Travelers venturing west of the Mississippi in the nineteenth century entered a "hostile and barren region," devoid of the comforting assurances of civilization and Christianity characteristic of the East. Despite fear of their "savage enemies," settlers were generally unprepared to deal with Indian aggression. Scattered settlements and struggling wagon trains offered little resistance to the raiding parties of the Great Plains, whose "hellish objects" inflicted "privations and hardships" on "captive white women." The Indians usually attacked with "a startling swiftness," catching surprised or sleepy settlers off guard. One woman recalled that she and her companions had "no time to think" before their wagon train was encircled by the Oglala Sioux seventy-five miles northwest of Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Occupied with the grueling practicalities of pioneer life, settlers were often disorganized and defenseless when confronted with Indian aggression. Mrs. Harris, traveling with her family along a Texas trail, was "seated in mournful silence beneath the shade of a wide branching hemlock, partaking of . . . humble faire" when she was "surprised and

¹Fanny Kelly, Narrative of My Captivity Among the Sioux Indians . . . in James Levernier and Hennig Cohen, eds., The Indians and Their Captives (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 94, 92; Thomas F. Dawson and F.J.V. Skiff, The Ute War: A History of the White River Massacre and the Privations and Hardships of the Captive White Women Among the Hostiles on the Grand River (Denver: Tribune Publishing House, 1879; reprint ed., with introduction by Michael McNierney, Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Publishing Company, 1980), 98.

surrounded" by a group of Comanches. "Perceiving our defenseless situation," she lamented, "the Indians made prisoners of us all."² "equal for savage warfare." The efforts of Women and children were often "alone and unattended" in camp and on the trail while men were occupied elsewhere "in various pursuits" necessary to the survival of the family. Frequently captives were taken by the Indians when the majority of men were away and sometimes when "none were on guard." "Meeting no resistance," raiding parties were easily able to make women their "helpless victims," in the opinion of a woman captured by the Sioux. The Apaches who abducted Larsena Page on the Arizona frontier attacked on washing day, when she and her Mexican servant were "quite alone." The Indians seized the two women as well as "everything they could carry off" from the homestead, including blankets, flour, and clothing. Urania White was captured when her Minnesota community was ambushed early one morning. "Secreted . . . on either side of the road in the tall grass," the Indians

²R.B. Stratton, Captivity of the Oatman Girls (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857; reprint ed., with foreword by Wilcomb E. Washburn, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 5; "Murder of the Whole Family of Samuel Wells, Consisting of His Wife and Sister and Eleven Children by the Indians," Narratives, vol. 33, 10-11; Dawson and Skiff, The Ute War, title page; Fanny Kelly, My Captivity Among the Sioux Indians, 92. Such an attack was depicted by Charles Wimar in the painting Attack on an Emigrant Train, described by Corlann Gee Bush, "The Way We Weren't: Images of Women and Men in Cowboy Art," in Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., The Women's West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 19-20. A detail from the painting is reproduced on the cover of the 1983 reprint edition of Stratton's Oatman Girls; Barker, "Providential Release of Caroline Harris," 23-24..

attacked the settlers with "guns, tomahawks, and scalping knives." The women, despite their courage, were "helpless, defenseless, and unprepared for savage warfare." The efforts of the pioneers were unavailing; "surrounded by bloodthirsty foes," they were "compelled to yield to the superior force" of the Sioux. The Indians attacked travellers already confronted with "every difficulty imaginable." Plagued by "jaded teams" and scarce provisions, families heading west were ill-prepared for the Indian attacks which resulted in the death of men and the delivery of women to a "most melancholy and terrible fate."³

Once captured, the women were forced by the Indians to remove their loose garments and their shoes. Most were separated from their children. A captive of the Missouri complained that she "was not privileged to embrace or nurse her infant. The child, once separated from its mother, was carried along "in a fur sack by one of their young squaws." Contrary to Caroline Harris's expectations, her Comanche captors allowed her to carry her "tender infant," which was "permitted at short intervals to draw nourishment from its wretched mother's breast." The majority of captives, however, were initially immersed in Indian society alone and remained

³Stratton, Oatman Girls, 5; "The Captivity of Mrs. Horn and Mrs. Harris" in John M. Hunter, Horrors of Indian Captivity (Bandera, Texas: The Bandera Bulletin, 1954), 4; Mrs. N.D. White, "Captivity Among the Sioux," Narratives, vol. 104, 397-399; "The Indian Captives," Narratives, vol. 76, insert; "Murder of the Whole Family of Samuel Wells," Narratives, vol. 33, 10-11.

isolated from their families and from each other. Olive Oatman, who with her sister Mary Ann was captured en route to California by the Yavapai, recalled that they "could not converse [among themselves] without exciting the fiendish rage" of their captors.⁴ Separated from both physical and familial comforts, female captives were violently and immediately placed within the unfamiliar framework of Indian culture.⁵ Deprived of shoes and unaccustomed to the harsh terrain, many captives lagged behind the desired pace and, as a result, were "pushed and hauled along." Anna Metzger and Caroline Harris, both taken by the Comanches, were each tied to horses and incorporated into the march to the main camp. The

⁴Eliza Swan, "An Affecting Account of the Tragic Death of Major Swan and of the Captivity of Mrs. Swan and Infant Child, by the Savages, in April last," Narratives, vol. 33, 4-5; Solomon Barker, "Interesting Narrative of the Sufferings of Mr. Joseph Barker and his Wife, to which is added the History of the Captivity and Providential Release of Caroline Harris," Narratives, vol. 33, 24; Stratton, Oatman Girls, 124.

⁵It is important to keep in mind that while Indian attacks on western settlers did occur, the accounts of these attacks were "often exaggerated, inaccurate, or even fictitious." (p. 191) In The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), John D. Unruh, Jr. mapped the locations of major Indian and white trail depredations and statistically estimated the number of overland emigrants killed by Indians and the number of Indians killed by overland emigrants from 1840 to 1860. His analysis revealed that "the emigrants killed Indians more frequently than they themselves were being killed, in almost every migration year." While the western Indians presented an increasing threat to overland travel from 1840 to 1860, Unruh concluded that their attacks did not follow "the normal Hollywood scenario" and stemmed in large part from the total disregard of some emigrants for the natives they encountered. (pp. 184-185, 189)

majority of women, however, struggled along on foot. "If I complained of my inability to keep pace with them," a captive of the Missouris recalled, "I was either unmercifully beat[en] or pulled headlong after them!" Most captives, after experiencing this ordeal, were nearly unrecognizable to their rescuers as white, civilized women. With hands and knees "cut to pieces by frequent falls" and faces "torn by the multitude of thorny bushes," the captives were plagued by hunger and fatigue. Urania White became so tired on the way back to the village that she sat down to rest. When her Sioux captor offered to help her up, she refused to move. The Indians put her child on a load wagon and started the train again. "If I did not 'puckachee'," she recalled, then "they would kill me and the baby also." "Taking hold of the end-board of the wagon," she completed the day's march.⁶

The captives' journey into "the pathless wilderness" was frequently marked by acts of kindness on the part of the Indians. Despite Annie Coleson's "utmost exertions," she could only "proceed at the rate of two miles in an hour and a half." Her Sioux captors "grumbled at this, and threatened all manner of terrible things"; "finding that I really did my best," she remembered with amazement, "they considerably

⁶Stratton, Oatman Girls, 127; Captive Anna Metzger in Hunter, Horrors of Indian Captivity, 53; Barker, "Providential Release of Caroline Harris," Narratives, vol. 33, 24; Eliza Swan, "An Affecting Account ... of the Captivity of Mrs. Swan," Narratives, vol. 33, 13; Mrs. N.D. White, "Captivity Among the Sioux," Narratives, vol. 104, 410-411.

lightened my load, by removing several articles, which they buried in the snow." Contrary to embellished and inaccurate accounts of cruelty, the Indians seem to have shown a genuine regard for the well-being of their captives. When the frail Mary Ann Oatman was unable to continue, "one of the stout Indians dislodged his pack, and putting it upon the shoulders of another Indian, rudely threw [her] across his back." Her sister Olive, reluctant to compliment this "Apache savage," recalled that he "bounded on" with "a vengeance in his eye." A captive of the Missouris complained that her feet "became so much bruized and scratched" from walking "that the blood dripped from them." Contrary to her expectations, her captor removed some of her packs and gave her a pair of moccasins.⁷

When they arrived at their destination, the returning Indians and their captives were greeted with "shouts, and dance, and song." Despite fears that they would be forced to run the gauntlet and engage in "other terrible things," most captives found themselves to be the objects of curiosity rather than malignity. One captive of the Sioux recalled that

They ran around us, screeching and yelling, while the boldest came very near and examined our hands, our clothes, our hair, and our faces, with the utmost

⁷Annie Coleson, "Miss Coleson's Narrative of her Captivity Among the Sioux Indians! An Interesting and Remarkable Account of the Terrible Sufferings and Providential Escape of Miss Ann Coleson, A Victim of the Late Indian Outrages in Minnesota," in David M. White, Popular Culture in America, 1800-1923: Captivity Tales (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 26-27; Stratton, Oatman Girls, 124; Eliza Swan, "An Affecting Account ... of the Captivity of Mrs. Swan," Narratives, vol. 33, 5.

minuteness; the result was probably satisfactory, as some of them, after this, screamed and shouted with the most obstreperous laughter.

Some captives found their introduction to the Indian community to be more harrowing than this, however. "Ushering into camp amid shouts and song," the Oatman girls were lifted on top of a pile of brush and bark and surrounded by "men, women, and children of all ages and sizes, some naked, some dressed in blankets, some in skins, some in bark." The Indians formed a circle and danced around the captives, inflicting blows which the Oatmans believed to be expressive of a "low, earnest, intense hate" for the whites. "Frequently on coming near us," Olive recalled, "they would spit in our face, throw dirt upon us, or slightly strike us with their hand."⁸

After enduring this initial rite of passage, the captives assumed their assigned places in Indian society. A captive of the Sioux recalled that she and her companions were "distributed among the Indians and generally adopted as members of the tribe." Urania White was the "big papoose" of Too-Kon-We-Chasta and his wife; she believed that her adoption saved her "from a fate worse than death" among the Sioux. "Strange as it may appear to some," she recalled thirty years after her release, "I cherish with kindest feelings the friendship of my Indian father and mother." Mary Schwandt was

⁸Stratton, Oatman Girls, 163, 132-134; Annie Coleson, "Captivity Among the Sioux Indians!" in White, Popular Culture in America, 34.

adopted by Snana, a Minnesota Sioux who had recently lost her seven-year-old daughter. Many captives were adopted into Indian families, replacing members who had died. Most were treated kindly, and returned to white society with fond memories of their adopted parents. Maria Caudle's Comanche mother slept beside her and treated Maria "as her own child." Like the majority of captives, Maria was taken from white society to assume a place in the Indian community which extended beyond that of a servant or a war prize. Olive Oatman, captured with her sister by the Yavapai and later sold to the Mohaves, mistakenly believed that she was to serve as a sacrifice. "It has been an unvarying custom," she maintained, "that if any of their number should be slain in battle, the lives of prisoners or captives must be sacrificed . . . up to the number of the slain . . . and that in the most torturing manner." This was not done to appease tribal gods, "for they had none"; instead, it was "a gift to the spirits of the other spheres." This assertion, however, may be more reflective of the anti-Indian bias of the Oatman narrative than actual practices. While the majority of the narratives comment on the day-to-day difficulties of life as a captive, few describe deliberate cruelty. Captives taken west of the Mississippi, however, undoubtedly experienced difficulties and deprivations reflective of the harsh environmental conditions

in which they lived.⁹

The accommodations offered to the captives were generally similar to those utilized by other members of the tribe. A captive on the trail with the Missouris complained that she had "nothing but the bare ground to lie upon"; other women complained that they were forced to sleep with a cord around their "ankles and arms" and an Indian on either side, "for protection of course." Once they reached the main camp, however, most captives were provided with a hefty bedspread made of "buffalo and wolf skins." The Oatman girls were surprised that the daughter of the Mohave chief shared her blankets with them. One captive of the Cheyenne was given a brand-new buffalo robe for her bed which, she recalled, "was large enough to cover me and tuck under my feet." She also had a blanket and a small pillow. "I was warm at night," the girl remembered, "for which I was grateful."¹⁰

Once settled in the camp, the captives were dressed in

⁹Henry J. Hibschan, "The Shetek Pioneers and the Indians," Narratives, vol. 104, 37; Mrs. N.D. White, "Captivity Among the Sioux," Narratives, vol. 104, 404; "Snana's Story" in Gary C. Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth, eds., Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 143; Captive Maria Caudle in Hunter, Horrors of Indian Captivity, 41; Stratton, Oatman Girls, 218.

¹⁰Eliza Swan, "An Affecting Account .. of the Captivity of Mrs. Swan," Narratives, vol. 33, 13; "The Captivity of Mrs. Horn and Mrs. Harris" in Hunter, Horrors of Indian Captivity, 83; Annie Coleson, "Captivity Among the Sioux Indians!" in White, Popular Culture in America, 24; Stratton, Oatman Girls, 127, 162; Grace E. Meredith, "Girl Captives of the Cheyenne," Narratives, vol. 109, 37.

"Indian garb, such as the squaws wore." Captured women frequently made their own "squaw suits," finding the task to be "extremely ludicrous" as well as difficult. One careless captive of the Sioux "failed to make hers as told, and consequently was ordered to rip it apart and make it over." Most captives were compelled to abandon their more traditional clothing for woolen blankets, bark skirts, and moccasins. Annie Coleson recalled that her Sioux captors gave her "a pair of leggings, lined with fur," while Urania White's adopted mother gave her "an old, dirty, strong-scented blanket" which she wore wrapped around her "in squaw fashion." Many captive women complained about Indian dress, lamenting the loss of their shawls, sunbonnets, and shoes. Olive Oatman believed that the "little dress" the Yavapai had was "needlessly and shockingly indecent." The Indians, she maintained, could be clothed in accordance with "the dictates of comfort and modesty" by "an industrious habit and hand." Some women, however, found their newly-adopted clothing to be modest and practical, as well as beautiful. Even the critical Olive delighted in the strings of beads and bits of red flannel which the Indians gave to her and her sister as rewards for singing.¹¹

The tattooing of Indian captives provided a visually

¹¹Captive Mrs. Webster in Hunter, Horrors of Indian Captivity, 26; Mrs. N.D. White, "Captivity Among the Sioux," Narratives, vol. 104, 405, 408; Annie Coleson, "Captivity Among the Sioux Indians!" in White, Popular Culture in America, 23; Stratton, Oatman Girls, 135, 175.

dramatic connection between the woman and the tribe. Olive Oatman believed that she and her sister were tattooed by the Mohaves so that they "could claim us in whatever tribe they might find us." As long as the captives were marked by the "Ki-e-chook," they belonged to the tribe and could be easily identified if they escaped. Olive recalled that the Mohaves "pricked the skin in small regular rows on our chins with a very sharp stick, until they bled freely." The lacerated parts of the face were then pricked again with sticks which had been dipped "in the juice of a certain weed" and "the powder of a blue stone." The captives, permanently marked, were therefore discouraged from escaping and encouraged to adopt the Indian way of life.¹² "From this circumstance," she

Captive women often found Indian food to be unappetizing and inadequate. One complained that she was offered only horseflesh and ground nuts at mealtime. Others recalled that they were too exhausted and distraught to eat the bean soup, cold meat, and ash-baked bread which was provided by their captors. "Food was offered me," one captive wrote, "but how could I eat to prolong a life I now loathed?" With their hearts "ready to break," many captives refused food, claiming

that which extended throughout the community, not only to its

¹²Stratton, *Oatman Girls*, 183. While Olive believed that she had been tattooed for purposes of identification, in general tattoos were considered to be a mark of beauty among the western Indians. Women belonging to tribes indigenous to the southern plains even tattooed their breasts. Jules B. Billard, ed., *The World of the American Indian*, revised edition (Washington, D.C.: The National Geographic Society, 1989), 90, 92, 296.

that they felt "neither sensations of hunger nor a desire to live." Some captives, however, found their diets to be satisfactory, if unconventional. A captive of the Sioux remembered that she received "a small portion of dried deer's flesh and a spoonful of whisky, which in her exhausted condition was exceedingly palatable and nourishing." Another was given "a small piece of broiled bear's flesh and some parched corn to eat." "We ate with a good appetite," Olive Oatman recalled; "never did the tender, well-prepared veal steak at home relish better than the tough, stringy piece of meat about the size of the hand, given us by our captors." One captive of the Mohaves was brought "some corn gruel in a hollow stone" when she was ill; "from this circumstance," she later wrote, "I learned to chide my hasty judgement against ALL the Indian race, and also, that kindness is not always a stranger to the untutored and untamed bosom." Many captives undoubtedly received "tolerable meals," for it was in the interest of the Indians to keep their captives healthy. Those who had been adopted into a tribe were treated as well as everyone else. The harsh plains and the subsistence strategy of the Indians, however, may have resulted in a shortage of food which extended throughout the community, not only to its newest members. Those women who were taken primarily to perform manual labor were generally given an adequate ration

Journal of the American Historical Association, 1881, 113; Stretton, *Indian Girls*, 126, 117, 28; Anne Selmon, "Captivity Among the Sioux Indians!" in *White, Female Captives in America*, 27, 23; Eliza Swan, "An affecting Account of the Captivity of Mrs. Swan," *Serials*, vol. 33, 11.

of food so that they could continue to be productive.¹³

Upon their return to white society, captives often complained that they had been "forced to do all manner of slavish work." Many of these chores reflected the necessity of hunting and gathering to the survival of the western tribes. Along with Indian women, female captives gathered seeds and berries, dug roots, skinned game, and dressed hides. The work which the captives performed was physically demanding and seemed to fulfill "the menial offices of drudgery to which savage custom consigns women." As a result, some captivity narratives voiced a violent dislike for assigned tasks and disrespect for ill-tempered employers. Like most weary prisoners, one woman lamented that the Sioux "put me to work and found plenty of it to do." Often captives would gather wood, bringing it to camp in bundles balanced precariously on their back. Anna Metzger recalled that her Comanche captors would secure a load of wood on her back by tying it with a lariat. "Whenever I fell under it," she lamented, "I was kicked and beaten as unmercifully as if I had been a donkey." "Unaccustomed to such work and traveling," many captives found the tasks assigned to them to be nearly impossible to perform.

¹³"Capture of Sarah and Eva Thomas" in Hunter, Horrors of Indian Captivity, 83; Robert Emmitt, The Last War Trail: The Utes and the Settlement of Colorado (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 213; Stratton, Oatman Girls, 126, 116, 88; Annie Coleson, "Captivity Among the Sioux Indians!" in White, Popular Culture in America, 27, 23; Eliza Swan, "An Affecting Account . . . of the Captivity of Mrs. Swan," Narratives, vol. 33, 11.

A woman taken by the Sioux was harnessed to a "sledge . . . with the weight of plunder upon it." Like many women living among the Indians, she found this to be a "severe apprenticeship." Some felt as though they were in a position of "unmitigated slavery" and complained that even the Indian children "very soon learned to drive us about with all the authority of an Eastern lord."¹⁴ Some of the work which white women performed in Indian captivity was reflective of traditional domestic skills. Captives were frequently employed in making garments and moccasins. One captive of the Cheyenne recalled that sewing relieved her mind "to some extent, from worry and discouragement." Often the women would string glass beads and sew them into colorful designs on clothing for members of the tribe. Catherine German made dresses and shirts for her Cheyenne captors, becoming adept at "using buffalo sinew for thread and a bone needle." The Indian men preferred her shirts, with their bone buttons; the Indian women showed their

¹⁴Captive Mary Boyeau in Heard, White into Red, 23; Stratton, Oatman Girls, 181-182, 194, 173; Meredith, "Girl Captives of the Cheyenne," Narratives, vol. 109, 40; Anna Metzger and "The Captivity of Mrs. Horn and Mrs. Harris" in Hunter, Horror of Indian Captivity, 55-56, 10; James T. DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker: The Story of her Capture at the Massacre of the Inmates of Parkers Fort; of her Quarter of a Century Spent among the Comanches as a Wife of the War Chief, Peta Nocona; and of her Recapture at the Battle of Pease River by Captain L.S. Ross of the Texian Rangers (St. Louis: DeShields, 1886), 30; Helen Mar Tarble, "The Story of My Capture and Escape During the Minnesota Indian Massacre of 1862," Narratives, vol. 105, 34; Annie Coleson, "Captivity Among the Sioux Indians!" in White, Popular Culture in America, 26.

appreciation for her skilled needlework by helping her complete her other chores. Captives were also taught the traditional arts of the tribe. Annie Coleson was "constantly visited" by the females in the Sioux village where she lived, who gave her lessons in "all their various accomplishments of basket making, embroidering leggins and moccasins, carving bows, and forming a thousand little ornaments, in which the Indian especially delights."¹⁵

The pervasive fear that the captives would be the victims of "the Indian's lust" was expressed graphically in the accounts written by redeemed captives as well as in the sensationalized, fictionalized narratives which the captivity experience fostered. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Indian captivity to white society was that women were in danger of being "consigned to the complete control of a fiendish set of men." Lorenzo Oatman, whose sisters had been captured by the Yavapai, worried that they were "suffering cruelties and abuse worse than death itself at the hands of their captors." Certainly the popular perception was that women captured by the Indians were destined to become "the victims of a brutal fate." Those who were captured, as well as the relatives they left behind, often maintained that death would have been preferable to "the most horrible of personal outrages" committed in captivity. The "heathen captors"

¹⁵Meredith, "Girl Captives of the Cheyenne," Narratives, vol. 109, 42-43; Annie Coleson, "Captivity Among the Sioux!" in White, Popular Culture in America, 35.

would surely "torment, outrage, and murder" the defenseless women; those who were spared in the initial attack were believed to be "doomed to a state worse than bondage" once they had been spirited off to the wilderness. It was feared that these female captives, forced by their "merciless lords" to abandon civilization for savagery, would remain permanently alienated from white society.¹⁶

Women captured by Indian tribes west of the Mississippi were more frequently subjected to sexual abuse than women taken in the Eastern Woodlands. Once taken in a raid, a captive usually became the property of the first warrior who claimed her. As prisoners, most women were initially required to work as menials and could be sold within or outside of the tribe by their masters. This "severe apprenticeship" preceded adoption into the tribe. To many female captives, death seemed preferable to a life which required submission to an entirely Indian perception of domestic duties. The idea of engaging in intercourse with an Indian was especially distasteful to most women, since the majority possessed highly-developed anti-Indian sentiments, as well as husbands at home. Although women who returned from captivity described the sexual abuse that their fellow prisoners had endured, few

¹⁶Mrs. N.D. White, "Captivity Among the Sioux," Narratives, vol. 104, 411; Stratton, Oatman Girls, 207, 241, 131-132, 96; Annie Coleson, "Captivity Among the Sioux Indians!" in White, Popular Culture in America, 21; Hibschnman, "The Shetek Pioneers and the Indians," Narratives, vol. 104, 20; Barker, "Providential Release of Caroline Harris," Narratives, vol. 63, 37-38.

admitted that they likewise had been physically intimate with their captors.¹⁷

Once captured, women lived in fear that they would be forced to perform "all the slavish offices which savagism and Indian custom assigns as the duty of a wife." Taken from a settlement on the Colorado frontier, Mrs. Meeker was riding along the trail with her Ute captors when "a villainous looking Indian ... made indecent proposals." Similar improper advances were recalled by a woman captured by the Sioux, whose master immediately removed her wedding band. The Indian told her that she and her children would not be killed; instead, the medicine man of the tribe had declared that "all the nice women" would be spared as "squaws for the Indian braves." Separated from their homes and families, many women believed that their "fearful bondage" as "drudges and slaves" would require the performance of sexual, as well as purely domestic, duties. White women were highly prized as captives; often considerable bounties were offered by "young sachems" to warriors who returned from a raid on a white settlement with suitable wives. Female captives, however, frequently made

¹⁷Heard, White into Red, 97-98, 100-101; Director John Ford effectively illustrated the options open to a female captive of the western Indians in The Searchers. After depicting a Comanche raid on the Texas frontier in 1868, Ford provided visually dramatic images of three white women taken by the Indians: one raped and killed, one hopelessly insane, and one adopted. The last (and youngest) captive was eventually found by her relatives and returned to white society. The Searchers, starring John Wayne, Jeffrey Hunter, Vera Miles, Ward Bond, and Natalie Wood. Warner Brothers, 1956.

troublesome spouses. Unwilling to perform menial tasks such as gathering and preparing food, these women likewise lamented the overall "state of misery and wretchedness" in which captivity had placed them. Their domestic drudgery, although onerous, was decidedly better than sharing the marital bed with "a barbarous and bloodthirsty" Indian. The thought of "becoming the [sexual] companion, and yielding to the fulsome embraces of a disgusting and detestable savage" frightened female captives, who anticipated and abhorred the Indians' "bestly will" and "lustful passions."¹⁸

The account of one woman's captivity and "providential release" dramatically reflects commonly-held fears regarding the motivations of the Indians and the fate of their victims. Once returned to white society, Caroline Harris argued that female captives were initially treated with "more lenity" by the Indians than male captives, because "in most cases" the women were ultimately "adopted by and made to cohabit with the chiefs or sachems!" Claimed by a Comanche chief as his squaw, Caroline claimed that she had been "compelled to cohabit" during most of her captivity "with a barbarous and bloodthirsty savage." As a "Christian female," she naturally would have "preferred death to [a] life" spent as the wife of an Indian. Contrary to her dire expectations, however, no

¹⁸DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 31; Emmitt, The Last War Trail, 212; Helen Mar Tarble, "The Story of My Capture," Narratives, vol. 105, 29-30; Mary Boyeau in Heard, White into Red, 23; Barker, "Providential Release of Caroline Harris," Narratives, vol. 63, 26-28, 39.

attempts were made to gratify any "brutal propensities" until she was united by marriage to a member of the tribe. Like the majority of women sexually involved with their captors, Caroline Harris was not raped; instead, she was identified by social rank and tribal ceremony as a wife before any physical contact was initiated.¹⁹

Before sexual relations were inaugurated, the captive and her captor were formally "united . . . agreeably to their Indian custom." In preparation for the marriage ceremony, members of the tribe settled down in "a circle on a mound of turf"; meanwhile, the recalcitrant captive was prepared for the festivities by "a half dozen or more squaws," who painted her face and arms with vermilion and decorated her hair with feathers. Feeling "like a lamb led to the slaughter," Caroline reluctantly held hands with a "young sachem . . . painted and decorated in a similar manner." One of the "most aged of the savages" took her hand and placed it in that of the Indian, and then took "a string of small glass beads" from the groom's neck and placed it on the captive's. After the presiding elder "muttered something in Indian," every member of the tribe rose, joined hands, and "began singing and dancing to and fro" around the couple. At a given signal, the elder and the groom seized the hesitant bride by the hands and "commenced a song and dance, similar to that which had just

¹⁹Barker, "Providential Release of Caroline Harris," *Narratives*, vol. 63, 25-28.

been performed by their savage companions." The bewildered captive, however, was "little disposed to yield to their will, or to participate in such amusements." After declining to participate in the post-nuptial celebrations, she was "led, or rather dragged" by her new husband to a hut, where she spent "eleven months in a state of bondage and misery that beggars description." Once returned to white society, Caroline complained that for "almost every day in the space of two years" she had been the object of her husband's "revengeful, as well as jealous and lustful passions."²⁰

Captive testimony often contradicted the popular conception of Indians as merciless savages who captured, ravaged, and killed women. As provisional or adopted members of the tribe, the captives were generally treated well by the Indians, even when they were openly disobedient. While attempting to escape, a captive of the Comanches lost her way and walked aimlessly in a "dark and solitary forest" for three days and two nights. She was found and brought back to camp by her Indian husband, who traced her wandering path by the imprint of her moccasins on dry leaves. "There was," she observed, "an uncommon degree of joy and satisfaction manifested by my Indian companion" when he found her far from the trail. Whether his reaction to her rescue reflected "a

²⁰Lillian Schissel, Vicki L. Ruiz, and Janice Monk, Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 17; Barker, "Providential Release of Caroline Harris," Narratives, 37-39.

degree of genuine love and regard" or "the high value that he set upon [her] as one subservient to his will," she claimed not to know or care to know. "In her view," although he had saved her life, her husband was "still no other than the same savage barbarian."²¹

Some narratives of women who returned to white society expressed the agony of sexual defilement, maintaining that their captors had placed them in a "dreadful state of misery and wretchedness" by abusing them physically. When former captives were themselves accused of sexual misconduct, most loudly voiced their contempt for Indian life in general and Indian men in particular. For those "compelled to cohabit with an Indian," this defense of their conduct was a necessary factor in their bid for reacceptance into white society. The specter of Indian lust, however, may have loomed larger in the minds of the captive women and the society they returned to than in the actions of the Indians themselves. Most women asserted in their captivity narratives that they never engaged in sexual relations with an Indian; perhaps more importantly, they implied that they never had felt any desire to do so.²²

The women depicted in captivity narratives were either "unlearned virgins" removed from the threat of abuse or unfortunate victims of Indian desire, forced to participate in the primary sin of the flesh. The possibility that these

²¹Ibid., 30.

²²Ibid., 26.

women actually desired attention from the Indians, or received it of their own free will, was not addressed in the narratives. On the contrary, the defense of chastity offered by many of these women was overwhelming. Olive Oatman wrote that "to the honor of these savages . . . they never offered the least unchaste abuse to me." The Los Angeles Star reassured its readers after Olive's release that she had "never been made a wife"; instead, "her defenseless situation was entirely respected during her residence among the Indians." When a captive of the Cheyenne was picked up by a brave and taken to his tepee, she "succeeded in making quite a commotion," kicking, screaming, and fighting him "like a tiger." To her amazement, she wrote later, the Indian put her down, refusing to take a woman against her will. "Although I never discovered who my would-be husband was," she recalled, "I have always had a grateful feeling toward the young Indian brave for his kindness in releasing me on that dark night." Once they had returned to white society, former captives were driven to maintain their innocence or defend their conduct. The admission that they acted on sexual desire and received physical pleasure was not an acceptable alternative.²³

"Once a captive has been incorporated into the tribe," a

²³Stratton, Oatman Girls, xii; Meredith, "Girl Captives of the Cheyenne," Narratives, vol. 109, 51-52; the repugnance directed at white women "spoiled" by sexual intercourse with their Indian captors likewise surfaced in folktales, according to Rayna Green, "Traits of Indian Character: The 'Indian' Anecdote in American Vernacular Tradition," Southern Folklore Quarterly 39, no. 3 (Sept. 1975): 238-239.

chronicler of the Indian wars commented, "we cannot wonder at her unwillingness to return to civilized life." Accounts of Indian barbarity often ended with the unhappy heroine refusing to re-enter white society. "With bitter tears," the unfortunate heroine of Thrilling Adventures Among the Indians "sent word to her father that her face had been tattooed, that she was the wife of a warrior, and that she could not meet the unflinching scorn which the knowledge of these circumstances would bring upon her should she return to her people." The unwillingness of female captives to deal with the uncompromising realities of white society often prompted them not to return. Those who did attempt to re-enter the life they had left behind sometimes paved the way with dishonesty. Olive Oatman's captivity narrative, written by a clergyman, maintained that Olive was never sexually intimate with her captors; instead, the pious account marvels in the preservation of her virtue among the brutality of the Indians. Despite her claims to chastity in captivity, Olive reportedly attempted "to flee back to her Indian husband and children." The former captive lived with Susan Parrish and her family for four years, "a grieving, unsatisfied woman who somehow shook one's belief in civilization." "We erased the tattoo marks from her face," Parrish recalled, "but we could not erase the wild life from her heart." Whether or not Olive was married to an Indian will never be known. Certainly Olive's account, once embellished by the Reverend R.B. Stratton, depicted its

heroine as a suffering virgin and her captors as oppressive, but not sexually abusive. Parrish's more personal account, if not reflective of the truth, nevertheless illuminates a popular perception of returning Indian captives as sexually defiled and spiritually demented.²⁴

"Never expecting to see a white person again," Anna Morgan married her Sioux captor. As a result of her Indian husband's kindness, Mrs. Morgan "began to think much of him"; when she heard that there were two white men in the camp to redeem her, she "did not care to see them." Despite her unwillingness to return to white society, she was set free in exchange for five Indian chiefs captured by the United States government. "After I came back," Mrs. Morgan recalled, "the road seemed rough, and I often wished they had never found me." She gave birth to a son only a few months after her rescue, who died in infancy. According to an acquaintance, Anna refused to adopt the appropriate attitude for a woman in her position. Disregarding a friend's well-meaning advice, she did not remember her captivity "as an awful incident well over, make a little income from rehearsing her story to interested writers, sell her photograph, marry a good man, and let time haze her memory." Instead, she considered her life among the Indians as "a disgrace," which a captivity narrative

²⁴Frost, Thrilling Adventures Among the Indians, 149-150; Lillian Schlissel, Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey, with a preface by Carl N. Degler (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 69.

would only make more infamous. Troubled by a past which she could neither alter nor deny, her mind "gradually failed . . . and she died in an asylum."²⁵

Often the text of the captivity narrative reflected an intensely personal attempt to come to terms with the experience and at the same time to re-enter white society. The process which contributed to the transformation of the captives, and their efforts to regain their previous spiritual status and personal worth, were often unsuccessful. Unlike the Indians of the Eastern Woodlands, the western tribes were largely unable to acculturate white captives into Indian society. Women captured by the Indians in the Great Plains, Great Basin, and Southwest were treated harshly, initially burdened with work and deprived of food and only eventually adopted. This adoption did not prevent the captives from being the first to be blamed in times of trouble and the last to be considered in times of want. The lives of the western Indians were undeniably foreign to white women; based on hunting and gathering, an existence on the Plains required relentless traveling and dictated almost constant deprivation. Unaccustomed to their physical surroundings, these women were also confronted with the potential dangers of sexuality.²⁶

²⁵Joanna L. Stratton, Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 124-125.

²⁶Fear of capture by the Indians prompted some frontier women to prepare for the worst. One mother sheared her daughter's hair to make her less attractive, while another carried cyanide capsules in a locket for herself and her

Native threats to chastity may have been real or imagined; certainly, a returning captive was required by society to present herself as a victim of rape or to confront the shame assigned to fallen women. ^{ugly consequences of prejudice,} Returning captives failed to fit neatly into any of the roles assigned to women in the West; they were not unlearned virgins, dutiful wives, or admitted prostitutes. Some adamantly maintained that they had not been sexually abused, while others yearned for the Indian husbands they had left behind. To a society intent on removing the Indians and establishing white settlements and schools, these women presented an uncomfortable reminder of Indian aggression.

Their captivity, while reflective of the Indian threat, likewise provided society with an unsettling exception to the existing division between Indian and white. Women captured by the western Indians returned to white society in varying degrees of purity: some had remained chaste, others had been raped, and some had entered willingly into marriage with an Indian. Those who had acknowledged and acted upon sexual desire, if forced to return to the whites, presented a fascinating and frightening example of "the wild life" and its "species of fierce passion." The attraction of Indian life was both implied and stated in captivity literature. Few women, however, were permitted to enjoy its pleasures without

children in case of capture. Elliot West, Growing Up With the Country: Children on the Far Western Frontier (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 35.

encountering the wrath of white society. The Indian life, while alluring, was unacceptable; returning captives were therefore forced to comply with the womanly ideal of white society or confront the ugly consequences of prejudice, ignorance, and hate.²⁷

- SUSANNAH JOHNSON, 1794

... she was taken up in Charleston, New Hampshire, before the ... her captors hastily ... presented her with clothes for the ... the Indians carried her ... where she was ... Upon her return to white society in ... the conduct of the Indians and the ... white settlers, she argued, cast "an eye ... out of unfounded prejudice, the ... white captives into their homes

²⁷Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, 69; DeShields, *Cynthia Ann Parker*, 31.

Mary captives shared Mrs. Johnson's conviction that the Indians treated their captives with "humanity and civility."

CONCLUSION

Captured in 1753 at the age of twelve, Mary Jamison was adopted by the Indians. Those who have profited by refinement and education ought to abate part of the prejudice, which prompts them to look with an eye of censure on this untutored race Do they ever adopt an enemy and salute him by the tender name of brother?

- SUSANNAH JOHNSON, 1796

Roused from her bed in Charlestown, New Hampshire, before dawn, Susannah Johnson was given a plundered shift and led along with her three children into captivity. Shortly afterwards she went into labor. Her captors hastily constructed a shelter along the trail for her to rest in and, after she delivered, presented her with clothes for the newborn child. After fortifying the captive's constitution with "porridge and some johnny cakes," the Indians carried her along the trail in a litter to their camp, where she was adopted into the tribe. Upon her return to white society in 1796, Mrs. Johnson defended the conduct of the Indians and the process of adoption. White settlers, she argued, cast "an eye of censure" on the Indians out of unfounded prejudice; the Indians, in contrast, welcomed white captives into their homes as new-found relatives.¹

¹Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 142-143, 147, 159. Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 159; Margaret [Pauline] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," Narratives, vol. 1, 69.

Many captives shared Mrs. Johnson's conviction that the Indians treated their captives with "Humanity and Civility." Captured in 1755 at the age of twelve, Mary Jemison was adopted into the family of two Seneca women to take the place of their recently deceased brother. "Ever considered and treated by them as a real sister," Jemison stayed with the Senecas her entire life, taking the name Dickewamis. The Indians welcomed her into the tribe, she later recalled, as if she were "a long lost child." For Mary Jemison and many other captives, adoption by the Indians, while initially traumatic, was ultimately "a happy lot."²

Even those captives who found life among the Indians to be an "unnatural situation" noted their captors' generosity and civility. The attachment of the Indians to their captives was, as one adopted member of a Shawnee tribe recalled, consistently "ardent and affectionate." After an Indian saved her life, one prisoner praised him as "the finest specimen of manhood conceivable." Although her rescuer was "a savage," the captive declared, his "traits of character would do honor to any man."³ Even those more reluctant to compliment their captors conceded that the Indians exhibited a genuine regard

²Elizabeth Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," Puritans Among the Indians, 233; Seaver, Life of Mary Jemison, 36-39. Jemison's Indian name meant "a pretty girl ... a pleasant, good thing."

³Susannah Johnson in Frost, Indian Battles, 159; Margaret [Paulee] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," Narratives, vol. 108, 31-32, 22-23, 25-26.

for the well-being of their captives. When the ailing Mary Ann Oatman nearly fainted on the trail, "one of the stout Indians dislodged his pack and . . . rudely threw [her] across his back." Her sister Olive, unwilling to acknowledge the kindness of this "Apache savage," recalled later that the Indian "bounded on" with "a vengeance in his eye." Although from some captives' perspectives the Indians "grumbled . . . and threatened all manner of terrible things," they nevertheless lightened cumbersome burdens, bandaged bleeding feet, shared meager food supplies, and carried infants in fur sacks. Contrary to their dire expectations, most captives agreed that they were well-treated by the Indians during their stay in the "pathless wilderness."⁴ Once at home, former captives argued that the Indians had treated them with humanity and civility. To their families and friends, however, women returning from captivity must have appeared anything but well-cared for. Dressed in Indian style, they must have seemed unfamiliar, even frightening, to their husbands and children. Their moccasined feet, bare legs, and painted faces were a dramatic departure from socially-acceptable feminine attire. Even when their braids were primly tucked into sunbonnets and their limbs were modestly covered with muslin, these women provoked both criticism and curiosity. With their lives as adopted members

⁴Stratton, *Oatman Girls*, 127; Annie Coleson, "Captivity Among the Sioux Indians!," 26.

of Indian society constantly subjected to curiosity and scrutiny, re-aculturating themselves to white society proved to be especially difficult.

Redeemed captives almost unanimously calmed the fears of white society that women taken into captivity by the Indians were routinely tortured, enslaved, raped, and forced into marriage. Contrary to popular perceptions of Indian motives, most narratives argued convincingly that the Indians behaved with "the utmost charity and modesty" towards captive women. While maintaining that the Indians possessed an "uncontaminated . . . moral character," women like Hannah Swarton, Mary Rowlandson, and Olive Oatman staunchly defended their own sexual conduct against any possible doubt. As a result, most narratives emphasized the preservation of female honor in a society where "chastity was held in high veneration, and a violation of it was considered sacrilege."⁵

Often suspected of sexual misconduct, women who were taken by the Indians were also chastised for their overly-masculine behavior. Hannah Dustan's bloody escape from captivity in 1697, while an example of divine retribution and providence for Cotton Mather, provided for others a resounding confirmation of their fear that women, when distanced from the influence of Christian benevolence, disregarded their

⁵John Gyles, "Memoirs of Odd Adventures," Puritans Among the Indians, 111; The Indians and Their Captiuvies, 121; Margaret [Paulee] Erskine, "Old Record of the Captivity of Margaret Erskine," Narratives, vol. 108, 18.

appointed duties. Perhaps the greatest fear provoked by female captives returning to white society focused on the dividing line between civilization and savagery. If white women could live among the Indians with a steadily diminishing regard for their socially-proper gender roles, then they could also abandon the framework of civilization altogether. By adopting Indian names and identities and learning the native language, captives accepted what their fellow settlers declared to be uncivilized, unchristian, and unacceptable. "Unless something extraordinary prevented [it]," they would be completely transformed into Indians and be lost forever to white society. The Indian way of life, always a threat in the eyes of the colonists to the establishment of European order in the American wilderness, alarmed white society even more as it encroached on the social institutions of home and family.⁶

Returning from Indian captivity, women offered a distinct, if unspoken, threat to white society. Women who chose to stay with their captors, or whose experiences contradicted popular perceptions of Indian cruelty, presented a disquieting dilemma to their contemporaries. Suspected of sexual misconduct and indecorous behavior, the captives sparked self-righteous speculation and moral disapproval, as well as providing ample fodder for writers of fiction. For white society as a whole, however, perhaps the most unsettling

⁶Haberly, "Women and the Indians," American Quarterly 28, no. 4 (Fall 1976): 431-443.

aspect of Indian captivity was the possibility that women who "lov'd the Indian style of life" could deliberately and permanently "go savage."⁷

Once they returned from captivity, women had to maintain their innocence or publicize their victimization, or suffer the consequences. The pious account of Olive Oatman's captivity among the Mohaves, written by a clergyman in 1857, marveled in the preservation of her virtue among the unquestionable brutality of the Indians. As a heroine, Olive was a suffering virgin; her captors, while oppressive, were not depicted as sexually abusive. Anna Morgan's captivity narrative, unlike Olive's, admitted sexual misconduct. "Never expecting to see a white person again," Morgan married her Sioux captor. Despite her unwillingness to return to white society, she was freed in exchange for five Indian chiefs captured by the United States government. "After I came back," Morgan lamented, "the road seemed rough, and I often wished they had never found me." She give birth to a son only a few months after her rescue, who died in infancy. Disregarding an acquaintance's well-meaning advice, Morgan did not remember her captivity "as an awful incident well over" nor set out to "make a little income from rehearsing her story to interested writers, sell her photograph, marry a good man, and let time haze her memory." Instead, unable to cope with

⁷Levernier and Cohen, The Indians and Their Captives, 121.

the harsh realities of life in white society, her mind "failed . . . and she died in an asylum."⁸

While most captives maintained that they had not been sexually abused by the Indians, others openly yearned for the Indian husbands they had left behind. All of these captives unintentionally provided white society with a tenuous link to "the wild life" of the Indians and its "species of fierce passion."⁹ In the end, the difficulties which women encountered in readjusting to their former lives stemmed only partially from the sexual issues raised by the captivity experience. The struggles of most returning captives reflected in part their failure to fit neatly into the role which society assigned to women. The Indians likewise failed to fit within the stereotype of the savage provided by white society. It was the threat of conversion, however, that ultimately disturbed white society the most. It seemed perfectly logical for the whites, in their infinite Protestant wisdom, to proselytize the Indians; for the Indians to adopt the whites and "bring [them] up in their own way" was apparently another matter entirely.¹⁰

⁸Stratton, Pioneer Women, 124-125.

⁹Schissel, Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey, 69; DeShields, Cynthia Ann Parker, 31.

¹⁰"Further Examination of Michael La Chauvignerie, Jun'r, 1757" in Samuel Hazard et al., eds., Pennsylvania Archives 3 (1853): 306, quoted in Axtell, The Invasion Within, 305.

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