

LONE WARRIOR by Bobbie Smith

EXCERPT

As the villagers gathered to watch Wind Ryder break the wild stallion, Marissa knew this was her only chance to escape. It would be dangerous, but she had to try. She moved to the back of the crowd without drawing attention to herself. Her heart beat wildly as she imagined herself free from the Comanche at last.

Wind Ryder smiled confidently. He reached down and patted the proud horse's lathered neck as cheers arose from those watching. Dismounting, he handed the reins to another warrior and went to speak with his father and Black Eagle. He looked around as they spoke and realized Shining Spirit was gone. Knowing how badly she wanted to escape, he went to look for her without a word to the other men.

Marissa tried not to get too excited as she stayed along the bank of the stream where the foliage was the heaviest. The terrain grew rockier, and she was glad. It made her trail harder to follow. She rushed on, thinking only of being reunited with her family.

And then the fierce warrior Bear Claw appeared before her. She tried to get away, but he grabbed her and brutally threw her to the ground.

"My father should never have given you to Wind Ryder," he snarled, groping her.

Marissa fought as violently as she could to escape. This was her greatest terror. Thoughts of Wind Ryder came to her. Her warrior hadn't abused her. She desperately searched the ground beside her and grabbed a rock, swinging it at him. Her blow caught him alongside his head and he viciously hit her.

"You will pay for that!"

Wind Ryder found her tracks near the stream and realized there was another set of tracks covering hers—tracks that belonged to a man. The realization that he was worried about her startled him. Just the thought that someone might harm her infuriated him. A vision of his golden captive played in his mind.

The sound of a distant cry came to him and he charged forward. The scene he came upon put him in a mindless rage. Wind Ryder threw himself at Bear Claw and knocked him away from Shining Spirit.

"She is mine! You do not take what is mine!"