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THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—Seeking death by drowning herself from the summit of Lone Mesa, to escape dishonor, a Navajo woman allows herself to be rescued by her suddenly sobered and repentant attacker. The girl is a self-appointed physician to the Navajo Indians, living on an Arizona sheep ranch with her brother, Serge, his wife, Lila, and their small daughter, Baba. For a year she has been engaged to Rodney Blake, wealthy New Yorker, but her heart is with the friendly Navajos and she evades a wedding.

CHAPTER II.—Sonya pulls Little Moon, wife of Two Fingers, a Navajo, through the crisis of an illness. Two Fingers is deeply grateful.

CHAPTER III.—In the desert village, shopping, Sonya again meets the man whose advances she had refused on Lone Mesa. He tells her he bitterly regrets his action and has never had a minute's peace since that day Sonya is affected, but unforgiving. She hears rumors of a border bandit "El Capitan Diablo," who crucifies his "double-crossers" and has a dire reputation as a desperado and murderer, vaguely connecting him with her attacker.

CHAPTER IV.—Sonya pays a visit to Little Moon and finds her well on her way to recovery. On her return she rides to the top of Lone Mesa. There she again comes upon the strange young man, but she no longer fears him. When he reiterates his sorrow over his misconduct she indicates forgiveness and assures him a man can always change for the better.

"It is very well," the girl said gravely, and knew he spoke the truth. There was to come a day when she would have ample and tragic proof of that, but it was just as well she could not see ahead.

From Chee wash she rode down along the levels of the sage to where the debouching canyon had given up its pitiful small caravan that day she had seen Mr. Satter from the school taking away the children.

On an impulse she turned and rode into this rugged cut that bisected the rising land. She rounded a far-in turn and came upon a habitation. For a time she sat on her horse and contemplated it—a red hogan set against the canyon wall. There was little sign of prosperity. No rug bloomed on its side and made loom, the hogan was bare of comforts, the beds on its floor being thin and scant. Evidently these Indians were very poor.

She did not call or move about, but sat still in her saddle, waiting. Presently her patience was rewarded, for a soft step sounded behind her and she turned to see the old buck, the squaw, and the littlest child of that pitiful drama in which she had participated.

She smiled at them, and when Sonya Savarin smiled, a window of her soul opened and disclosed a light. The family came carefully up to her.

"I come to see if all is well with you and yours," she told the man a Navajo.

"It is well with this one," he replied, touching the child, "but not with this one," touching the mother. Her heart runs away in water, and she does not eat."

And looking closer Sonya saw in finished sorrow that it was so indeed. The woman who had been plump and hale some weeks back, was now a scarecrow, her old vel-

vet jacket hanging loose on her form, her fragile eyes sunk in hollows. Her brown lips looked dry and hard.

For a moment the girl felt such a revulsion against the whole white race as to give her an actual nausea. Her hands ached to get hold of Satter's fat neck for one good minute.

"So," she said, "I see. Have you told her that the little ones will be coming home soon? Did the agent tell you when to go after them?"

"No," said the man, "and I do not know where to go."

"Oh," said Sonya under her breath, "the dirty beast!"

Aloud she said slowly, "Well, you tell her to look up to the east and before many days she will see her children coming. What is your name, Hosteen?"

The man hesitated, since the naming of one's own name is not good, but this was a desperate matter.

"I am Hosteen Nez," he said presently, "and she is Cactus Flower."

"And I am Sonya—Doctor Sonya—from down on the desert beyond



"I Am Hosteen Nez," He said Presently, "and She is Cactus Flower."

Lone Mesa, and I will see the man who took the children. Maybe four sleeps, maybe five. You tell her eat and get strong."

"I will tell her," said Hosteen Nez, and his eyes looked so deep into Sonya's that the girl's heart hurt with their probing.

"I will come again," she said and, turning Darkness, went back down the great cut of Blue Sand canyon as she had come.

That night, talking with Serge and Lila in the twilight patio with Baba asleep on her lap, she protested passionately against the treatment of the Indians by the whites in authority.

Serge smoked in silence, his dark eyes gazing out along the gray sage stretches that were turning purple

in the falling shadows.

"Kid," he said presently, "you're the best little scout ever, but I'm afraid that some day you're going to get yourself into a peck of trouble, messing in where you don't belong."

"Messing in where I don't belong!" cried the girl hotly. "Do you call helping that mother get her young ones back for the summer vacation messing in, when she's actually grieving herself to death in her ignorance and fear? Suppose it were Lila and Baba, for instance?"

Serge moved uneasily, knocked out the dottle of his pipe.

"Well, of course—"

"Yes, of course! That's it. That's always it from the white man's viewpoint. Well, old dear, you can just hold yourself in readiness to bail me out of jail, for I may need it. I'm going over to that school and get those youngsters and take them back to that hogan, if it's the last thing I do. School is already out for the season, and that fat Satter hasn't taken the trouble to return them or to even tell the father where to come for them. Can you beat that for sheer downright meanness? If you don't need the car, I'll take it and go over to the school sometime this week—maybe day after tomorrow. O. K., Serge?"

"O. K., honey. I'll begin looking round for bail in the meantime in case you find something you can use as an excuse to hop the school authorities."

Sonya was as good as her word.

On Wednesday of that week she took the disreputable old car and set out across the wild and lonely land in the general direction of the government school for which Satter was the gathering agent.

The large rooms were sweetly cool in the early summer heat, and she took off her hat and leaned back in her chair in grateful enjoyment.

She had not long to wait, for presently the superintendent, a Mr. Claude Spartow, came in briskly with extended hand.

"Why, Miss Savarin—Doctor Savarin, I should say, though the austere title don't seem to belong to a girl like you—this is a pleasure, I assure you! Come right into my office."

He led her into his private office, a spacious comfortable place, its walls lined with filing cases, and pulled up the deepest big chair.

"There!" he said. "That's better. Now relax. You must be tired."

"No," said Sonya, "I'm not, and I'm in somewhat of a hurry. I've come for the two children of the Indian, Hosteen Nez, over in the big cut beyond Lone Mesa, just on the line of the Reservation. This case is rather pitiful, Mr. Spartow, and I'd like to enlist your attention to it. Mr. Satter will remember. I came upon him taking the children, not so many weeks back—very near the end of the term—and the parents are 'wild Indians.' They don't understand either the necessity or the methods employed in the matter of giving up their children, and I begged off the littlest one from Mr. Satter. The mother had run herself nearly into collapse, hanging on the buckboard's tail. She is in a serious condition now, with her grief over their disappearance. Doesn't eat. Looks awful. And Mr. Satter had forgotten to tell them where to come for the children. It is rather hard, when you think of it, on parents, you know, either red or white. As it would take the Hosteen some days to get here and back with his horses to fetch them, I'd like to take the children to them myself. I will be responsible to you for them."

As the girl talked the man's sharp eyes regarded her with an alertness of expression that changed to guardedness as she mentioned Satter's lapse of memory. Now he leaned toward her, smiling.

"Why, how kind of you, my dear Miss Savarin!" he said. "Few

women of this day would take so much trouble for ignorant Indians. Of course you may take the little ones. But surely you're not starting back today? You'll stay with us for the night and get a good early start tomorrow, if I have my way."

"Oh, my, no!" said Sonya. "I'll get on my way as quickly as possible. Will it take long to get them ready?"

"If you really think you must go," he said regretfully, "I'll have them made ready at once. It won't take long."

The two were presently brought to her, their belongings in a neat bundle. They still looked as they had looked that day in the buckboard, like frightened quail.

Sonya smiled at them, took their unresisting hands.

Then she smiled at Spartow.

"I thank you, sir," she said gently, "and I shall not forget your kindness in letting me take them. I hope you'll ask Mr. Satter to tell the fathers next time, will you, please, Mr. Spartow?"

Mr. Spartow returned the smile with a look that promised to ask the government for a million-dollar loan if she thought it necessary.

And presently Sonya Savarin was driving down across the illimitable levels with joy in her heart and the hushed little Navajos huddled in against her with instinctive trust.

She was thinking what fun she would have watching Cactus Flower's haggard face when she took them in to the hidden hogan in the canyon.

CHAPTER V

Deep Things Begin to Glimmer.

THAT little matter proved almost more than she could stand, however, for the Indian mother, watching the east continually, since her previous visit, having taken her advice literally, collapsed at sight of her children, and Sonya had a brisk half hour in bringing her round again.

But all's well that ends well, and the girl finally rode away, leading her extra horse with a snaffle on her lips and the deep light in her eyes that Rod Blake called fanaticism.

Maybe it was, but it made her foolishly happy to see this poor family united again. And Hosteen Nez had looked over his woman's head at her exactly as Two Fingers had and called her Blue South Woman in the Sun. It was all he said, but it was pregnant with deep things, and Sonya knew it so.

So she opened her lips and sang. And then she came to the canyon's mouth and caught her breath sharply, for a man sat there on a golden horse. He looked like a young god with the sunlight on his hair, and his eyes as blue as the heavens, and the grave look on his handsome face.

"Forgive me," he said quickly, "for being in your trail again."

"Why?" she said as quickly. "It is free country."

"Yes, I know. But I promised to stay away."

"That was from Lone Mesa."

"The intent was everywhere. I meant it, too—was goin'—going to keep my word, but I seem to come back regardless."

Sonya sat and looked at him steadily, her sweet face grave, too. He bore her scrutiny quietly, though a muscle twitched in his cheek, and there was a seeming of strain in his face.

"I've thought a lot about you," the girl said presently: "why, I don't just know. I shouldn't, by all the rules of my life's game, but I have. Tell me—if you care to—where have you been since I saw you last? Where do you live?"

He moved in his saddle, laid his hands on his pommel.

"Miss Savarin," he said, "I can't tell you. A lot of places for th' first question—nowhere for th' last one. I told you before, I wasn't fit to talk to. I am a drifter, if you like

just goin' through th' country."

"Oh, no, you're not," said Sonya, "the day you came in the store you were familiar with the place and had been there before. Don't you think I know a few things. Well, we won't talk of that," she added gently, "where are you going now?"

"Why, nowhere. That is—I was just ridin' around for exercise, sort of. Un d'Oro, here, needs a lot of exercise."

He smiled and patted the shining neck at his saddle bow.

"Un d'Oro—Golden One," said Sonya. "What a lovely name. And what a wonderful horse. He's the most beautiful thing I ever saw done up in horsehide. You love him, don't you?"

The man's face lighted as with inner fire.

"Well—some," he said.

For a while they sat in silence, at a loss for something to talk about, and then Sonya told him about Cactus Flower and how Mr. Satter had taken her children.

"D—n!" he said flushing. "Excuse me—but some people just ain't human. I'd like to see that agent on—"

He stopped, and Sonya felt her heart contract, for she knew he had almost said "a cross."

What was this man? What was in the soul of him? What strange contradictions? What savageries and contritions, what sympathies and cruelties? What connection did he have with those awful retributions across the Border of which the Servant had hinted? What did the strange old man know about him? The henchman of Beelzebub he had called him—for no other in all this country answered to the description of the Blue-eyed One with Bronze-colored Hair. Sonya felt cold, as if a wind of portent had blown across her spirit. And swift on its heels a sadness came, the odd, unaccountable feeling of personal loss and sorrow which had assailed her that night at Myra's.

She shook herself, mentally and actually, and was angry at herself again, and when this man spoke she listened, forgetting.

"I'm a violent man, Miss Savarin," he said strangely, "and my life won't bear th' light—but a thing like that makes my blood boil. There ain't no manner of use hurtin' something that can't fight back, and a woman an' a child—well, they're set aside, somehow, like a starvin' kitten, or a dog that no one wants. No kind of a man would do them a harm—not an' be a man."

"You think that—honestly?" said Sonya. "Right from your heart?"

"Why, of course," he said surprised. "Don't you?"

"Yes, oh yes, a woman feels like that, but men are different. I just wondered."

"Have you been back to Lone Mesa?" he asked presently.

"No," said Sonya, "I haven't. I've been pretty busy. Housecleaning and sewing. Have you?"

"Twicet. At night. Watched th' moon come up across th' desert, and it was wonderful. A man can't describe it—like new life comin' to a dead world."

"I know," said Sonya, "I've seen it from there myself."

"Alone? My G—d, Miss Savarin, you shouldn't be goin' around this country by yourself like that!"

"Why not? I'm perfectly safe. Everyone knows me and there isn't a Navajo, drunk or otherwise, who'd say a word to me."

"Not th' Navvys, no, ma'am," he said painfully, "but they ain't all there are, you know."

How well she knew! But she was sorry the inference had been drawn.

"As for being drunk—will you believe me when I say I haven't touched a glass or a bottle since—since that day—on th' cliff? Every time I've tried, your face has come before me plain as plain—the white fury of it, the courage—G—d! I choke an' quit trvin'."

(Continued next week.)