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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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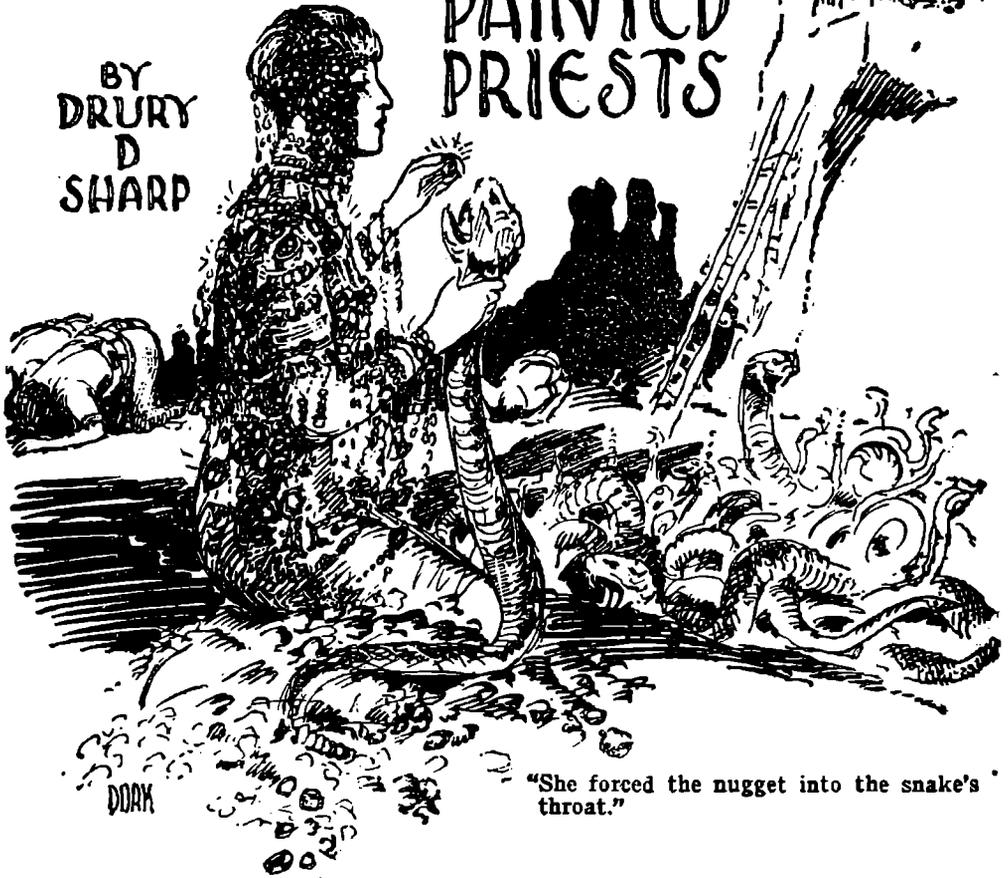
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The GODDESS of the PAINTED PRIESTS

BY
DRURY
D
SHARP



"She forced the nugget into the snake's throat."

MILTON was sweltering on the baked mud roof of a Hopi pueblo; one of those pyramid cities lost in the shimmering heat of the Painted Desert. The snake dance was on. The painted priests were chanting and circling upon the roof below, and he watched the mottled and white bellies of the squirming serpents as they dangled sulkily or whipped savagely about to free themselves from the sharp teeth of the dancers. The white bellies flashed their flag of death—rattlesnakes, big fellows most of them. And Milton watched for them among the mottled bellies of the harmless

prairie snakes. They were on the south roof of the ground floor and he was safe enough on the roof of the second floor above them, with only a rude pole ladder from roof to roof. But the sight sickened him, sent chills of revulsion through him, though he had seen their snake dance many times before.

A girl's head came cautiously over the north wall. She was creeping up carefully between the poles of a ladder which projected a few feet above the roof. She was a woman with green eyes and yellow hair and fair cheeks which flamed under the raw sun. He stared as though she

was a mirage or a vision. The last thing he expected to see climbing that wall was a white woman. As she saw him perched upon the parapet of mud bricks she stopped, astonished. She frowned as though disappointed, abandoned her caution and mounted the roof. Both thought themselves pioneers here, one hundred and fifty miles from the iron arteries of the world.

She spoke in a low tone which barely reached him above the pulsing chant beyond the wall.

"Will they let one watch?" she asked, reassuming her movement of caution and crouching below the parapet.

He grinned at her. "Are you afraid? You crept up like a shy ghost."

"I didn't want them to know I was here. I suppose it won't make any difference, now." She glanced at him meaningly.

"Oh, they don't care," he answered carelessly. "I've watched them a good many times. They do have some rites, though, which it would pay to creep up on, if one watched at all."

"I wanted to watch them without their knowing." She was still frowning. "I'm afraid they won't put on the whole show."

"You'll see enough," he affirmed with another grin, "You 'fraid of snakes?"

"No. I'm interested in them."

"Well, there are plenty of them down there," Milton said with a shrug of his gaunt frame. "I never did care much for this kind of a show, yet I always manage to be here each year. Guess I'm queer that way, looking at what I don't like to see. I always took in the snake shows back home. The girl in the glass case, and the big python crawling over her, ugh." He shrugged his shoulders again.

She winced. He studied her keenly.

"Yes, I'm that girl," she admitted, and bit the flesh of her lower lip. "That is why I am here. To find something new. I'm with the circus."

"You?" the question escaped him as an exclamation.

She still crouched under the parapet, peering over at the half-naked snake priests circling with the stamp of feet and the throb of drums. He talked on to make her forget his remark.

"Tell me, I've heard a lot about pythons—can they swallow a man whole, or is that a fable?"

"I don't know," she answered absently, looking with interest on the scene below. "I shouldn't wonder, though; I've seen common prairie snakes no bigger than that one"—she pointed to a snake—"swallow eggs. I saw one with a china egg in its throat one time; it gagged trying to crush it, and then kept swallowing it though its neck swelled out like a toothache."

"There are lots of things about snakes I don't know," he spoke to her again; but she did not hear. She was watching the weird scene below. The drone of the chant vibrated into their ears, the singing of the rattlers whined into their flesh, the glare of the white sun smote their brains, and the white teeth of the brown, naked dancers gleamed whiter clamped upon the scaly throats of the snakes.

Milton was nauseated. The girl did not seem so, but under some unholy spell. Her green eyes followed one large, sinuous serpent as it dangled from the brutelike mouth of a hairy but scrawny priest. Milton, torn between his disgusted abhorrence of snakes and his attraction to this woman who was interested in them, moved nearer her as she peered down upon the door of an open Kiva.

"Say, tell me," he drawled, "am I seeing things? Am I dreaming or awake?"

She thought he was speaking of the snake dance, but his eyes were on her. She did not look up from her downward gaze at the writhing length of that enormous snake in the mouth of the snake priest, but answered him with dreamy lassitude, as though she were only half awake or in a semi-delirium.

"It does seem unreal. See those fangs in his arm. He only shakes it off! He is unharmed! If I could only do that? I *can* handle them, but I must charm them. If I could only handle them like that!"

Milton recoiled involuntarily. She sensed it and turned a smile upon him—a strange, pensive smile which begged that she be not misunderstood. He felt an impulse which was primal, and which the civilized man fought to conquer. He stammered an apology; not exactly an apology, more an explanation.

"I just can't think—of you touching them." He shrugged his shoulders in a slight intimation of his thoughts.

Her eyes softened. She understood, and understanding him she seemed to find something which for the moment fascinated her even more than the twisting snake in the mouth of the priest, yet with a different kind of an influence, not mesmerism, just his awakening concern for her.

"Snakes aren't so bad as you think, when you know them. I felt much as you do, for a while, but they saved the life of one I love, and they have provided means for me when I thought there were no means, so why should I not like them?"

She was defending herself more than the snakes. He did not answer her, but sat in a moody silence listening to the hiss and whirl below, his only movement being to change about so that the sun could not strike the same side of his body for long at a time. She was interested in him,

and after a while tried to renew her defense.

"Don't you think it's our traditions which take hold of us like that?" she asked.

"Maybe," he answered, "but I believe one would loathe snakes if he had never seen them before."

"Not always," she said, raising a bare arm toward the exotic dancers. "Those men down there worship them!"

He was silent, and they listened to the wail and chant of the priests.

After a while she spoke again. "I wish I could see that huge rattler a little closer. I wish I dared go down close to them."

"Why don't you?" he asked with a quizzical smile.

"I would. But those priests! They look at each other so queerly from their black eyes. I'm afraid of them."

Milton stretched his legs upon the baked roof and then got up.

"Come. I'll go down with you."

THEY walked to the crude pole ladder which led from the roof above to the roof below. She did not tell him her name, nor he tell her his. He was thinking of the marvel that such a woman should exist at all, and wondered not at the lesser marvel that she should be in this particular place. And she was thinking of the snakes, wondering if they who had saved her in one crisis would crush her in the next, would draw a line between her and the man beside her.

He went over the wall first, stepping upon the ancient, sun-cracked rungs of the pole ladder, looking back at her with a smile, and she waited on top until he should step upon the hard clay of the roof below. With his eyes upon her he did not see the nest of snakes which crawled at the foot of the ladder, and looking at him she did not see them either until it was almost too late; and the

priests with their sacred dance and the attendants with their sticks and sacred meal were too devout to let their eyes wander from the back of the man ahead of them. There were dozens of snakes at the base of the ladder, harmless prairie snakes with tapering tails and slim heads, but one of the larger sullen ones had kidney-shaped splotches of brown upon its scaly flesh, and it coiled and lifted the thick wedge-shaped head which denoted the poisonous rattler, and darted its forked tongue and whirred its vibrant rattlers.

The chant was shrill and loud. She leaned over the wall and extended both her hands. She doubted if she could make him understand, and her very fear caught her voice and stifled it to a whisper as she motioned to him.

"Wait! Stop!"

The chant of the dance went on. The priests had not seen nor heard, but Milton had. He turned about upon his narrow perch and saw the wicked, lidless green eyes below him, eyes which held the concentrated venom of a thousand years' enmity with man, not soft, deep green eyes like hers above him. Milton swore under his breath, shivered a little, and climbed back to the roof above. Beside her again he tried to laugh easily, but could not hide his abhorrence of the insidious death he had escaped.

"I'll go first," she said, and was already upon the ladder.

"No you don't," he commanded, looking about the bare roof for a weapon. "That devil has its fangs!"

But she was going down, calmly smiling at him with a pleased assurance of her power.

"Stop!" he cried, leaning over and grasping her hand, his eyes on hers, and said hoarsely, "I'm not a coward. Come on back. I'll go first."

The low walls of the house were not longer than the length of her

arm above her head, and by now her feet were very close to the head of the big serpent, but she left her hand in his and descended another rung.

"It's all right," she said, her eyes still holding him. "Let me loose, please. It will strike if I can not see it."

Milton released her hand and stared with a perplexed fear, chilled to his soul. She stepped slowly and sinuously, lithe as the serpents themselves, picked up the big fellow and laid him upon her bare white shoulder, let him circle her white arms and coil about her whiter throat. Twice about her white throat she wound him and let his long brown body fall like a necklace of rusty gold down across her rounded breast and over the glistening sheen of her white dress, its tail weaving back and forth, its ugly head curved forward, sullen and stiff, like carved bronze. There was no hint of bravado in her actions. Every movement was the careless, yet trained action of long custom. She seemed hardly aware she was doing anything out of the ordinary, and she turned her green eyes invitingly to the man upon the roof, with the faint trace of a smile about the corners of her mouth. The bright Arizona sun caught the coils of her yellow hair, and the dry breath of the desert breeze wrapped her skirt close about her knees, and there was something about her which caught the imagination of the white man above and the copper men below.

A vibrant calm fell upon the worshippers, a calm more violent than the stamp of their feet or the throb of their drums, or the undertone of hissing snakes. And then priest and attendants, slowly, with upstretched arms and adoring faces, sank to their shaking knees, and prostrated themselves among the serpents.

"*Akkii! Akkii!*" they groaned, bare bronze backs toward the white noon sun.

Something had happened for which they had long waited and prayed. That bright American girl with the great snake about her neck and the white silk of her dress shimmering in the sunshine, appeared to them as some angel manifest from heaven, a fair goddess of the snakes, their messengers to those who reign above.

MILTON looked down in astonished, frozen amazement, half believing he had witnessed some marvel conjured by the priests below. There was something about this hot, dazzling sunshine which gave credence to the unreal. It wrought great lakes which vanished at approach, it built cities of walls and towers upon the bare and vacant table-lands, it mixed mystery with reality, and here was this girl, fair under a sun which withered and burned the flesh, coiled about with the snake-angels of the demon-worshippers below. So he stood there very much as spellbound as the priests, who were prostrate upon the lower roof with great snakes writhing and whipping about upon the hot, baked floor, whipping and coiling about, trying to release themselves from the clenched teeth of the priest and the outstretched hands of attendants, the whirl of their rattlers high-pitched and shrill. Yet not a brown face raised from the floor and not an outstretched hand upon that blistering roof so much as twitched as fangs sank into lean, muscular arms.

The grizzled old priest who had led the ceremonies rose slowly with his head low toward the ground, as though not daring a second look at the vision. She stood like some goddess of fine marble, with hair of spun gold and arms and face of alabaster. Even then not one moved other than the majestic old priest. The girl was transfixed more with amazement than any idea of having struck an attitude of proud superiority, while

he, bowing low, spread wide his hands in a gesture of abjection and worship, all the other bare copper backs prostrate under the burning sun.

With slow, august grace the old man retreated, one brown leg thrust back, the other bent in genuflection, the grace and precision of long-accustomed ceremonies, but also with an added touch of fear, wonder, worship! Backward, backward, step upon slow adoring step, until he reached the mouth of a rounded Kiva with a panel of fine polished granite before its door.

With a cry of high-pitched wailing, sad, yet with a tone of final, culminating triumph, a cry more wild and unforgettable in that unarticulated Hopi tongue, he swept back the Kiva door, and there tumbled into the sunlight such a hoard of dull, gleaming, yellow gold as caught the goddess' breath and left Milton gaping upon the roof.

And there were jewels, blue turquoises and red rubies, and sapphires and opals which sparkled and ran fire under the sharp sunlight; hand-wrought Navajo bracelets, and heavy crude necklaces of turquoise, great silver earrings and armlets, and golden anklets and bracelets of a curious antique Spanish pattern, bracelets with great blood rubies and scintillating diamonds; and there were long ropes of matched pearls, and old coins, and gold nuggets and dull heavy yellow dust; the long accumulation of long years of war and barter and search; several hundred-weight of sparkling, gleaming, flaming treasure!

Milton and the girl were too astonished to take in its meaning. Some hazy, dull idea that she was being worshiped had overpowered her, some idea that all this was intended for her, though it seemed more the wild delirium of the intolerable glaring sun than reality. Even then it never occurred to her what it might mean—

that it threatened her—that an influence was at work which might enslave her and destroy the man upon the roof.

The old priest, singing his wild chant, was now being echoed by the prostrate men. His brown, withered hands dived into the hoarded treasure and scattered basket after basket full at her feet in slow unison with his weird song. Gleaming, sparkling, glowing under the naked sun the various treasures fell about her, heaping upon her slipped feet and mounting her silken legs, and formed a pedestal of jewels and fine gold.

Something touched her now, something she could not explain. Realizing she was the central actor of a tremendous drama, she lifted her face toward heaven and smiled, a quaint, charming little smile, her eyes bright and her cheeks all aflame. And still the hoarded treasure rained at her feet, and Milton upon the wall became uneasy, for he knew this could not last. He knew, too, he had seen something the Hopi would never let be known beyond the walls of their pueblo. She was safe enough at present, but when she failed to vanish and take their offering with her would they allow her to leave as flesh and blood? Would they? He knew that they would not. He knew when she did not vanish into heaven with their gifts they would begin to be troubled, and to doubt, and like all men to destroy that which they had worshiped. As for himself—but he did not think of himself. She was down there, she who was so lovely, coiled about with snakes and half buried in gold. And then his eyes took in the significance of that treasure. No more long pilgrimages across the hostile desert; she would no longer have to feel the crawl of snakes across her silky shoulders. She could leave the snakes to the heathen priest. They could live! They? That brought back the

hint she had dropped him. At least it had seemed a hint to him, a barrier she had raised that he might govern his heart. "Snakes saved the life of one I love." That sentence! It had stung him before she was in this danger, and danger had roused something long peaceful years never arouse.

THE old priest had now prostrated himself upon the roof again and she was extricating herself from the heap of treasure, gently uncoiling the big snake from her white throat and placing him, a tawny coil, upon the yellow gold and the blue turquoise and the white silver. Then with a lithe grace she went quickly up the ladder and took refuge behind Milton upon the higher roof. She was afraid of those bare, white-toothed snake priests. She did not trust the power she had exerted over these heathen men.

"Oh!" she cried and sank limply behind Milton. "Wasn't it terrible?"

"It was very beautiful—and unreal," he said as he gazed at the tumbled treasure with its goddess gone.

"Yes, unreal," she assented.

"That stuff down there! That!" He pointed below. "It must be worth almost anything. I had no idea they had gold! So much gold!"

Then he thought of her and forgot the treasure.

"You'd better go now. Hurry. If they find you're flesh and blood they'll kill you."

She made an odd little gesture of compliance which caught at Milton's heart, but she said, "Come on, let's go together. I believe I need an escort."

There was something in his eyes she did not understand.

"I can't go just yet," he said, knowing full well the Hopi would never let him go while their treasure was left rejected upon the roof. Then,

as she looked at him puzzled, he added, "I haven't finished my trading."

"You practical man," she laughed, "to finish trading when a goddess demands your service. Very well, is it good-bye then?"

"Yes, good-bye," he said hastily, afraid she might wait too long.

"Good-bye," and then as she started over the wall she blew him a kiss and said softly, "I shall remember you, always."

She waved him a farewell as she descended the ladder and left him her smile as a last picture, just over the parapet of the roof.

He struggled with an impulse to follow her, and conquered. There was no way but for him to remain. They would not let him go to tell the clans to the east and the west and the south of their treasure and its shame. He must stay; for if he left with her, their runners would hunt him down and find her also, and find she was no goddess after all, and he would fight but that could not save her. There was only one way to save her and that was by surrendering himself. So he sat thinking, waiting for the storm to break below and the painted priest to leap upon him and kill him. He thought of her alone out there on the thirsty desert, slowly taking her way across the miles back to the circus for which she had risked the little known Hopi lands. He wondered if she would think of him as she said she would, always!

And then, he saw her face again, there above the parapet. At first he thought it the heat that had wrought that face there, her face, which he had never expected to see again. She smiled and then drew a puzzled frown between her eyes.

"I forgot," she whispered. "Where is the well? I have no water."

"You haven't water?" he exclaimed alarmed.

"Only about a gallon," she answered. "Is it that bad? You look positively scared."

He sat thinking hard.

"The trader told me there was plenty of water at the pueblo," she said, defending her lack of foresight.

"There is. But not for you."

"Not for me?"

"They must not know you need water. Goddesses do not come with water kegs for the return trip. I can't get it for you, either. They might think I was trying to get away."

He bit his lip hastily, but it was out, he had told her. She understood instantly why he had not gone. Her act had made him prisoner. She came back quickly upon the roof, fear in her own eyes now. She caught hold of his arm, whispering tensely: "What is it? What are you hiding? They will kill you! They'll kill you because of what you saw down there! I know it! You can't fool me, man. Tell me the truth! I'll not go until you tell me the truth!"

He only shook his head and said, "I'm only afraid for you. They must not find you. You must go."

"Then you come, too," she insisted. "What am I saying? We can't go, either of us. We should die of thirst."

"Look!" he pointed toward the southeast. "See that gully in the red sand, just beyond the soapweed clump?"

She shaded her eyes from the glare of the sun.

"Yes."

"Up that gulch two miles you will find my burros loaded with water and food. Take them and go quickly. I will follow with your burros and meet you at Tres Piedras within a week. This is your only chance. Hurry! They won't look for you. If I am here they will suspect nothing."

"But you?" she questioned look-

ing at him closely, her eyes telling what her lips would not say.

"Me?" he said as though he had just thought of himself. "Oh, I know these *hombres*—I trade with them."

"But you said they would not let you go!"

"I'll fool them."

"How?"

"I have a plan," he lied.

"Why did you hide your burros?" she asked with new suspicion.

"I didn't hide them. There's a little shinary brush up that gulch. I left the burros there to save feed."

He drew her back quickly from where she was standing near the wall. "Keep low!" he whispered a caution to her.

The grizzled old priest had ventured to raise his head from the blistering mud bricks, and hesitated with his head poised in air as though listening for a flutter of angel's wings, and then he guardedly risked a glance toward the heaped treasure and then a full gaze of astonishment. She had vanished as she had come, but his old face gathered wrinkles of worry into its seams. He began a chant of wailing, waking the seemingly dead acolytes, swaying his old head toward the mass of treasure as he chanted. Milton understood what it meant. They were wailing because their treasure had been refused. Hardly knowing he was thinking aloud he said, more to himself than the girl, "If we only had some way to get rid of that stuff! If we only had some way!"

"I've gotten you into trouble," breathed the girl as she crouched beside him. "I never dreamed of such a climax. You get away. It was my fault. See if you can't escape. If they come up here I can startle them for a while."

"Escape? Say!" He laughed with a bold fearlessness. "Do I look that kind?"

She was repentant now. "Please

go!" She begged. "It was my fault. Go! Leave me to undo it."

"If we only had some way of getting rid of that stuff, we could go together. If we only had some means of lugging it off, all of that blasted stuff, carry it off in such a way as to make them think it was sucked up into heaven or taken by their angels. You could go and I would follow you. They would want me to go then so that I might tell the unbelievers to the south and east of what I had seen, but if we can't get rid of that stuff they will never let us go. They would kill you if I went with you, for they would hunt me down. You will have to go on alone, and let me have my chance when you are gone."

"Listen! Listen!" she exclaimed, her words drowned by the clamor below. "They're going crazy. Listen!"

THE mysterious appearance and disappearance of the girl, her strange power over the snakes, had set the dancers on fire. The crisis for which they had waited for centuries was upon them. The great day long looked for had come. Prophecy was fulfilled, legend was verified. Their music grew fevered and wild, their dance waxed violent and fierce. Throbbing, pulsing sobbed their drums; pleading, beseeching wailed their chant; calling, calling back the angel who had given them a visitation; praying with their dance for her return; praying with their most furious and fervid dance for her to return and accept their gifts, their long-accumulated treasure against this time; and then they prostrated themselves, hoping when they arose to find their treasure gone.

"I must go back," she whispered.

"What?" he exclaimed, not trying to hide his fear for her.

"I must go back. I have a plan." That was all she would say.

"You must not." He was firm, but he asked, "What is your plan?"

She did not tell him. He might not consent. If she failed and they killed her, he would be free. She would not have his blood upon her hands. She had a plan, a bold, foolish plan. It might make away with the gold and jewels—those dear, terrible jewels, and that gold. Yet, there was many hundredweight of it. Gold is so very heavy. She could not carry it away; that would be impossible, but she had a plan, a plan that had come to her as she spoke of angels.

Every head there below was close against the ground, and again she descended the ladder. Milton protested, but she went ahead and he dared not call out or try to detain her, but he stood where she had left him like an image of stone, watching her as she picked up the stupefied serpent where it lay hot and blinded by the sun, still coiled upon the heap of treasure. She put the snake carefully to one side and stooping down lifted necklace after necklace and bracelet after bracelet; cheap silver ones from the Navajo tribes to the east, and costly fabulous ones from rich caravans which had journeyed from the west coast; heavy gold ones from the defeated Conquistadores who had become lost upon this Painted Desert; strings of matched pearls and heavy turquoise and beads of pure gold. She covered her arms and ankles and slipped them about her neck until there remained not one bracelet or necklace left. Then she stretched down her arms and lifted the big snake and placed him upon her shoulders.

Milton still stood perplexed and petrified. He thought her purpose was to take the necklaces and bracelets and leave the heavy gold and the heaps of rare jewels. He knew that would not do. They would find her upon the painted sands weighted with her ornaments, and they would

never let him go as long as the gold and jewels were left, for the vision had refused their greatest gifts, their own gold and blood rubies picked from their sacred mountains, and she had taken the handiwork of the hated Navajo and the spoils of the more hated Spaniard. No, they would not let him go. But that mattered little. He would have thrown himself in the midst of those vile, poisonous snakes if it would free her.

Still she stood waiting. Why did she not go quickly to the ladder on the other side of the wall which led to the ground below? Why did she not hurry to get across the great burning sand and reach the gulch he had shown her? He was of half a mind to call to her, to urge her to run, though he knew that would not do. They would hear him and kill her before she could get away. Tensely he leaned over and wondered what she had in mind.

And then he heard the long rise of a queer sound, rising in a thin weird key, throbbing like the beat of drums, quivering like a cry; louder it grew, rising and rising, sobbing and wailing in the same thin key. The prostrate worshipers heard it and their rigid muscles grew stiffer until they seemed like petrified images of stone. The snakes of the big Kiva heard it, too, and poked puzzled heads from its door as the staccato plaint kept on.

Milton looked at the girl in astonishment. In her mouth was some kind of a reed pipe and she gazed steadily ahead of her toward the door of the snake Kiva with the same dazed look he had seen upon her face as she had watched the snakes from over the wall. Milton began to feel somewhat hypnotized himself as the queer sound went on.

FROM out the Kiva door one mammoth snake drew its seemingly interminable coil, and after it came

another, and they glided toward the girl upon the pile of precious stones and metal; another and another, dozens of them, hundreds of them, and still they came from the Kiva, more and more of them, and on they glided with that sinuous, sidewise sweep, crawling over the prostrate men, on and on to the foot of her golden throne.

Milton stared in wonder, fear, horror! What could she do? What *could* she do, against that oncoming reptilian army? But even as he despaired, he saw her do a peculiar thing. She passed her hand before her very much as a hypnotist would do, and the big prairie snake ahead stopped with a puzzled stupor, raised its head from the earth in a rigid metallic-seeming arch, and then opened its yellow mouth and hissed, darting its tongue in and out with lightninglike rapidity. She reached down and lifted it with one hand, and with the other lifted a nugget of gold the size of a marble; then, grasping the sides of its mouth, she forced the nugget into the snake's throat and with her fingers outside its neck gently massaged the bulge until the snake had swallowed it. And this she did again and again in the hushed silence which fell upon that lone pueblo in the vacancy of desert and clear sky, a silence that was broken only by the creepy rasp of snake bellies over the hard baked roof. The white-bellied rattlers she charmed but laid in a stupefied heap to one side, grasping the harmless prairie snakes to make the cache for her gold.

When one snake's sides were distorted with gold and rubies and pearls and sapphires and turquoise, she laid it in a heap and picked another of the larger prairie snakes and repeated her methods. She did not hurry, for she was handling death. Rattlers were coiled or crawling all about her, and yet the pile diminished very slowly. If those

priests looked up! If they found her feeding their treasure to the snakes! What would they do? Would they rise and kill her? Milton had no idea and he fretted as time dragged on.

The old priest began to grow uneasy, too, with grim silence about him. He stirred, he poised his head in air again, he was about to rise. The girl saw him. She dropped the big snake in a twisting heap at her feet. Milton clenched his teeth. She ought not to have done that. She ought to have placed the snake about her. That is what had startled them before. Milton gripped the ladder as the grizzled head of the priest slowly turned toward the treasure heap. She must do something at once. And she did. She placed the reed pipe in her mouth and blew a note, long, wild, high. The old man dropped as though hit by a bolt from heaven.

"*Akkii! Akkii!*" he groaned and flattened his face to the roof.

She lifted her snake again and went unhurriedly on, yet with the swiftness of precision. Her eyes fell upon a pigeon-blood ruby. It was larger than any Milton had ever seen, and he knew that she coveted it, for she reached down and placed it to one side and kept on with her labor until there was left but a handful of yellow dust, which she swept up carefully and placed in one of those tough, round, waterproof baskets the Hopi weaves from the strong fiber of the yucca leaf, and into the basket she dropped the great ruby and picked up the basket and took the snake from her shoulders and went swiftly down the ladder to the ground, beckoning Milton to follow her where she had gone on the trail to the gulch. From his perch above, Milton saw her vanish behind a large drift of maroon sand, and then he went below.

The big snakes were heaped upon one another, sluggish with their

weight of precious stones and much heavier gold.

"My brothers," Milton said.

The prostrate men arose, looking quickly toward the heap of snakes and where had lain the heap of treasure. There was a shout, a scream of triumph, a babble of dancing joy, an ecstasy of religious exultation. It was some time before they would listen to him, circling in their frenzied dance, flinging handfuls of sacred meal toward the heap of snakes, dancing, dancing, round and round, but finally he made them hear him and commanded their attention. Then he began in slow, solemn speech.

"My brothers," he spoke in the Hopi tongue, and they settled upon their tucked-under legs as in a daze, or dream, or weary exhaustion. "I have seen. And now I go to tell the Navajo and the Laguna and the Acoma that there is a true people with a true worship. And that I have seen with my own eyes that she has come and accepted of your gifts, and such as she has not taken with her she has left in the belly of the

snakes, her angels, so that when they carry your messages for rain and long life she may know that they come from your pueblo and not from another. And when your name is heard among the Eagle clan to the east, or the Water clan to the south, or the Bear clan to the north, they shall have my witness. And now, my brothers, I go, and may peace be unto you."

And when Milton overtook her below the sand dune and had smiled at her triumphantly and tenderly he said: "And now the snakes have saved the life of one you love, and the life of one who loves you; but what can the one do who loves you, without your love?"

And she laughed a little happy laugh and said to him, "The one I love, sir, is you."

And he looked at her bewildered and said:

"But you told me they had saved one you love even before they had saved me?"

And she laughed more happily and said, "The other one, you goose, was myself."
