



FOR love thy life, nor hate; but what thou iwest, live well; how long or short permit to heaven.—Milton

The Heart of the Desert

By Honore Willsie

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CHAPTER I.

The Valley of the Pecos.

RHODA hobbled through the sand to the nearest rock. On this she sank with a groan, clasped her slender foot with both hands and looked about her helplessly.

She felt very small, very much alone. The infinite wastes of yellow desert danced in heat waves against the bronze-blue sky. The girl saw no sign of living thing save a buzzard that swept lazily across the zenith. She turned dizzily from contemplating the vast emptiness about her to a close scrutiny of her injured foot. She drew off her thin satin house slipper painfully and dropped it unheeded into a bunch of yucca that crowded against the rock. Her silk stocking followed. Then she sat in helpless misery, eying her blue-veined foot.

In spite of her evident invalidism, one could but wonder why she made so little effort to help herself. She sat drooping on the rock, gazing from her foot to the far lavender line of the mesas. A tiny, impotent atom of life, she sat as if the eternal why which the desert hurls at one overwhelmed her, deprived her of hope, almost of sensation. There was something of nobility in the steadiness with which she gazed at the melting distances, something of pathos in her evident resignation to her own helplessness and weakness.

The girl was quite unconscious of the fact that a young man was tramping up the desert behind her. He, however, had spied the white gown long before Rhoda had sunk to the rock and had laid his course directly for her. He was a tall fellow, standing well over six feet and, standing under the heavy sand with an easy stride that covered distance with astonishing rapidity. As he drew near enough to perceive Rhoda's yellow head bent above her injured foot, he quickened his pace, swung round the yucca thicket and pulled off his soft felt hat.

"Good-morning!" he said. "What's the matter?"

Rhoda started, hastily covered her foot, and looked up at the tall khaki-clad figure. She never had seen the young man before, but the desert is not formal.

"A thing like a little crayfish bit my foot," she answered; "and you don't know how it hurts!"

"Ah, but I do!" exclaimed the young man. "A scorpion sting! Let me see it!"

Rhoda flushed.

"Oh, never mind that!" she said. "But if you will go to the Newman ranch-house for me and ask them to send the buckboard I'll be very grateful. I—I feel dizzy, you know."

"Ge whis!" exclaimed the young man. "There's no time for me to run about the desert if you have a scorpion sting in your foot!"

"Is a scorpion sting dangerous?" asked Rhoda. Then she added, languidly, "Not that I mind if it is." The young man gave her a curious glance. Then he pulled a small case from his pocket, knelt in the sand and



National Service Girls Doing Work Far Removed from School Studies. The girls who went out from our various educational centers the past summer in connection with National Service, did all kinds of work on the farms. The illustration herewith shows one of them scuffling and two using the hoe.

lifted Rhoda's foot in one slender, strong, brown hand. The instep already was badly swollen.

"Hold tight a minute!" said the young man.

And before Rhoda could protest he had punctured the red center of the swelling with a little scalpel, had held the cut open and had filled it with a white powder that bit. Then he pulled a clean handkerchief from his pocket and tore it in two. With one half he bound the ankle above the cut tightly. With the other he bandaged the cut itself.

"Are you a doctor?" asked Rhoda faintly.

"Far from it," replied the young man with a chuckle, tightening the upper bandage until Rhoda's foot was numb. "But I always carry this little outfit with me; rattlers and scorpions are so thick over on the ditch. Somebody's apt to be hurt anytime. I'm Charley Cartwell, Jack Newman's engineer."

"Oh!" said Rhoda understandingly. "I'm so dizzy I can't see you very well. This is very good of you. Perhaps now you'd go on and get the buckboard. Tell them it's for Rhoda,

Rhoda Tuttle. I just went out for a walk and then—"

Her voice trailed into nothingness and she could only steady her awaying body with both hands against the rock.

"Hu!!" grunted young Cartwell. "I go on to the house and leave you here in the boiling sun!"

"Would you mind hurrying?" asked Rhoda.

"Not at all," returned Cartwell. He plucked the stocking and slipper from the yucca and dropped them into his pocket. Then he stopped and lifted Rhoda across his broad chest. This roused her.

"Why, you can't do this!" she cried, struggling to free herself.

Cartwell merely tightened his hold and swung out at a pace that was half run, half walk.

"Close your eyes so the sun won't hurt them," he said peremptorily.

Dizzily and confusedly, Rhoda dropped her head back on the broad shoulder and closed her eyes, with a feeling of security that later on was to recall the confidence of this moment with uplifted and horror. Nor did she dream how many weary days and hours she was one day to pass with this same brazen sky over her, this same broad shoulder under her head.

Cartwell looked down at the delicate face lying against his breast, at the soft, yellow hair massed against his sleeve. Into his black eyes came a look that was passionately tender,

didn't I warn her! Put her on the couch here in the hall, Kut-le. John, tell Li Chung to bring the hot-water bottles. Here, Rhoda dear, drink this!"

For half an hour the three, with Li Chung hovering in the background, worked over the girl. Then as they saw her stupor change to a natural sleep, Katherine gave a sigh that was almost a sob.

"She's all right!" she said. "O Kut-le, if you hadn't come at that moment!"

Cartwell shook his head.

"It might have gone hard with her, she's so delicate. Gee, I'm glad I ran out of tobacco this morning and thought a two-mile tramp across the desert for it worth while!"

The three were on the porch now. The young man in flannels, who had said little but had obeyed orders explicitly eyed Cartwell curiously.

"You're Newman's engineer, aren't you?" he asked. "My name's DeWitt. You've put us all under great obligations, this morning."

Cartwell took the extended hand.

"Well, you know," he said carefully, "a scorpion sting may or may not be serious. People have died of it. Mrs. Jack here makes no more of them than of a mosquito bite, while Jack goes about like a drunken sailor with one for a day, then forgets it. Miss Tuttle will be all right when she wakes up. I'm off till dinner time, Mrs. Jack. Jack will think I've reverted!"

DeWitt stood for a moment watching the tall, lithe figure move through the peach-trees. He was torn by a strange feeling, half of aversion, half of charm for the dark young stranger. Then: "Hold on, Cartwell," he cried. "I'll drive you back in the buckboard."

Katherine Newman, looking after the two, raised her eyebrows, shook her head, then smiled and went back to Rhoda.

It was mid-afternoon when Rhoda woke. Katherine was sitting near by with her sewing.

"Well!" said Rhoda wonderingly. "I'm all right, after all!"

Katherine jumped up and took Rhoda's thin little hand joyfully.

"Indo you are!" she cried. "Thanks to Kut-le!"

"Thanks to whom?" asked Rhoda. "It was a tall young man. He said his name was Charley Cartwell. 'Yup!' answered Katherine. 'Charley Cartwell.' His other name is Kut-le. He'll be in to dinner with Jack, to-night. Isn't he good-looking, though?"

(Continued on page 24.)

THE FIRST INSTALMENT

THE first instalment of "The Heart of the Desert" in this issue and we feel sure that many of our readers have been looking forward with interest to its appearance. Just a few days ago we received a letter from a new subscriber requesting us to start their subscription with the first instalment of "The Heart of the Desert." This is but an indication that many others have also been watching for it. In a recent issue we allowed our readers to take a "sneaky peek" at the plot running through this mysterious tale of the desert, so we will not divulge any more secrets, but will allow each reader to seek for himself. We trust that "The Heart of the Desert" will be enjoyed by every reader of Farm and Dairy.