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WOLF MOON

A ROMANCE OF THE GREAT
SOUTHWEST

BY JOSEPH J. QUINN

CHAPTER I.

A SPECTRE IN THE GLOOM
The rain imps danced upon the yellow tent. Nava rose from her sagging cot as the first drops splashed and drummed upon the canvas. At last the drought was broken. The great swirling dust devils would fly no more. The camp could now move on from the shimmering prairie caps, cracked and blistered by untemper desert heat, on past the shrivelled skulls of corroded rocks penciled to pastel shades by the everlasting beat of fiery suns, and beyond the brown mesa, tranquil under the rain of a million star-thrown shadows, sweeps into view. The gypsy advanced to the opening, cupped her copper hands and shouted:

"Bluebonnet."
The call floated clear upon the evening air. It lifted high over the sand hills burnt dry through countless gaunt summers, up, up, across gaunt ridges and melted into the ingenuous out there where the beetling crags keep watch, as they have watched through ages of sunlit peace. Through the red and pearl and gray of fluted canyons, where night had early trailed her dusky garments, the cry penetrated, and further to the crotches of the hills until lost in diminuendo whisper in the gulf of space beyond the brown mesa, tranquil under the rain of a million star-thrown shadows, sweeps into view. The gypsy advanced to the opening, cupped her copper hands and shouted:

"Bluebonnet!"
The cry rose sharper. A little woodland nymph hidden in a nearby grove started and gave answer. The call was as a sword-winged dart that cut her soul, crushed it with its import. She had heard it a thousand times before from those same lips and each time it had meant a bitter command to rise from the reverie into which she inevitably had fallen. She rebelled against it inwardly but what had rebellion meant but a resurgence of gusts of bitter passion? Tonight the feeling of repulsion toward the very word "gypsy" seemed nourished by the thought of what would transpire between the going down of the sun and its rising on the morrow.

Bluebonnet was seized with a desire to tear herself away forever from the summons of this tyrant. It was as if she passed into a world of peace and happiness wherever she stole from the routine of the camp, as though she were driven through a roaring torrent one moment and then, in the next, drifting into the hush and calm of a broad expanse of river. Here in the glow of life came to rest. In the sunshine she could trace her fingers along the arabesques that shadows wove upon her dress. Then it always brought dreams, indistinct dreams of other days that she couldn't quite bring forth from the world of phantasy into a realization of what they possibly could be.

Her dream world shattered by the cry that came rushing over the shoulders of the ridge above. Bluebonnet arose, dipped her bucket into the cool water bubbling forth from leaves and dancing sand and started to mount the slope. Up near the crest light from the leaden sky was gradually receding. Bluebonnet gazed far into the distance, over and beyond the high caps that merged with the plains, gazed until she stumbled, and sprawled among the leaves. Some where out there in the hills Pemella, the gypsy chief, was coming toward her. And she, a frail, young thing, child-like, with a world of pleasure missed and a world of sorrow gained, would be his bride.

Pemella! The very word sent the thought of a viper rising to her weary brain. She beheld a vision of a copperhead with monstrous jaws, its black fangs darting in and out of an iron-edged mouth. She buried her face in the wet leaves, a thousand moods taking possession of her at once. Shame, fear, anger, disgust mounted in one full sweep to her mind and loosed tears from her eyes. She would not, she could not marry Pemella. His dark, lowering eyes, with the faint glimmer of glowing beads, some shop deep into her soul whenever he spoke to her or laid his large rough hands like coils upon her. Bluebonnet pushed her wet face further into the leaves and wished that she could lie there until dawn, until a thousand dawns had come. Her wounded feelings, bruised in countless places, had narrowed her vision until she felt as if she were forever walking in a cavern, groping, now driven, now led brusquely, her footing uncertain, her face bleeding, her hands filled with thorns. Life to her was only toil and torture and each night a wait for the coming dawn.

"Bluebonnet!"
The woodland nymph startled by the nearness of the cry looked up into the face of Nava. The muscles under the wrinkled skin of the gypsy queen were ironed, an ugly contortion worked in her bulging neck. There was an intense show of indignation in her blood-shot eyes. Her lower jaw was caught up by its muscles until it closed like a steel safe. She crouched for a moment, brandished a large club over her head and with violent oath rushed forward. Bluebonnet crushed her face into the sand and dirt but the sharp, bruising

blow she was expecting never fell. "Don't Nava, Nava!" she screamed, her plea narrowing the eyes of the queen into knife-like slits. Her throat was dry, her body quivered in agony. But there came no hiss, no guttural harangue, furious and raging, from the queen. A moment of silence passed. Bluebonnet lifted her face and gazed up into Nava's eyes. Into those wicked orbs had come a new light. Dark shadows seemed to leave. Their coal-black depths were filled with liquid meriment while a wan smile played across her face as sunlight in a dark canyon. But to Bluebonnet it was sickly. It reminded her of adobe walls under a high noon sun. It was ghastly because uncommon, weird because new.

Nava shook her jet earrings as she pointed back to the tents and commanded:
"Come to camp."
The huge, lumbering form of the gypsy ambled to the crest and disappeared over the ridge. Bluebonnet followed sheepishly, her head throbbing with wonderment at the inexplicable action of the camp queen. What did it foretell? Would it mean that her life of torture, of harassed, haunted existence was set down her bucket and stirred the Pemella pot? Was she to be taken from the rack and her body freed from the pain of years? Never had she known Nava to drop a threat once goaded into fury. She felt that back of her action was a purpose she could not divine. Each step toward camp only increased her amazement.

Arriving near the fire Bluebonnet set down her bucket and stirred the glowing ashes. She piled high and dry cottonwood until the flames leaped to the lowermost boughs of the overhanging trees. Great raindrops hissed upon the black pot. Nava had disappeared into the darkness of her tent.
Everywhere there was hustle and excitement for the camp was in consternation over the return of Pemella. He had gone to Arizona a month before to attend a moon meeting of the gypsies near the border. Well-known in the Southwest and Mexico his reputation had extended as far as Sinaloa. In some Spanish-speaking communities it was said he was a diviner or seer. Pemella had declared he would return to camp on the full moon of October. Tonight the moon would rise, round and golden, and Pemella kept his word. It was his law.

Anemia that had blued the veins in the under parts of her arms poured into Bluebonnet's spirit a desire to crawl away from camp to the high hills and sleep. Continual slavery in camp condemned her weakened body to nights of torture. She was never thus from the Dakotas to New Mexico. Now the camp was moving slowly southward for the winter but the furnace winds of Oklahoma imprisoned them until rain beat down the dust and sand and made traveling possible. For weeks the sun had shone from brassy skies, the wind driven from the Southwest unceasingly; everywhere were moving sheets of biting sand that stung the face and gnawed the ears. Now the brown puffball. Out on the plains the desert sun heated the ugly bodies of the tarantulas until they slipped under rocks to protect themselves from the rays; here in the cottonwood grove it had shriveled the leaves on the trees until at each flare of wind they crackled like high-pitched voices of ghosts.

The burden of the world lay heavy on Bluebonnet. There was no exuberance in her nature; adversity had driven it from those barren shores. There was no smile upon her face for the tyranny of Nava had abraded it. She cried rather than laugh for a hundred tragedies arose each day to draw tears from her. She was unhappy yet she had never known happiness. And all because Nava had early taken a dislike to her. Nava through her jealous eyes had seen the beauty that was to be in the child. She would have crushed it with her huge, horny hands had it not been for Pemella who was saving her for himself. He, too, saw in her face a comeliness that could not be equalled in all the camps from Butte to Chihuahua. Her blue eyes, though ringed with circles of brown, had caught the color from desert skies; her tender mouth, twitching always when under command, was sweet though sensitive. Although the suns of the Southwest had poured color into her cheeks the trying, exhausting life in camp and the brutality of Nava had withdrawn it. Her appealing beauty had arrested Pemella's attention even when she was a child but when childhood had given way to the bloom of womanhood he had felt himself drawn toward her with a love that surprised him. Obsessed by the grace of her face and form, the tenderness of her expression, the appealing look in her eyes he consciously experienced infatuation that strengthened and grew fibrous with each passing day. It sought out some weakness in her and that weakness was that she needed protection. From then on he became her protector. The cold-blooded ways of Nava met with rebuffs and warnings that halted the gypsy queen and transformed her into a monster, reminding Bluebonnet of nothing less than a giant horned toad. Pemella cursed her shyness yet blamed it all on Nava. The latter covered glumly until Pemella had disappeared only to

turn on her victim with increased fury.
Thus Pemella worshipped at the tiny shrine he had built to her in his heart. He had become the gypsy chief when twenty-five years old upon the death of Guadalajara. Yet he was fitted for his post. The finely cut Grecian features, the deep set eyes, dark and penetrating under black brows, showed an unrelenting character. Gypsy-like he held to his purpose if that was gain. In his veins coursed the blood of a thousand nomades. Close-up he was Hungarian and spoke its gypsy dialect. Far removed the nomadic races of India gave him his wandering desires and aversion to a fixed home.

In the long silences of the night on their trips west to the Gulf of California Bluebonnet often started into wakefulness. Somewhere near camp a tinkle of a bell would tell of the lead horse grazing. At times a night bird screamed weirdly by. At others she could hear naught but the snoring of the gypsies. She had thought of escape often, had tried it once only to sink back to her cot as she perceived figures in the gloom. She felt that she was watched both night and day.

In cursory analysis she often sought out the factor in this repugnance to gypsy life. She could not fathom the reason. In her heart raked rebellion which contrasted with the satisfaction of the other children. She firmly believed that she was not a gypsy. She had blue eyes; the others had black or brown. Her skin was whiter, her ways gentler. She felt that she must be different from the gypsies who snatched the warm bones from the impoverished table and gnawed upon them for hours at a time. They could slumber in the hot sun, in rumbling wagons with only a saddle for a pillow. She worked from the moment that dawn came stealing over the hills until night grouped its shadows around the camp. As she grew older dark shadows crept into her eyes and the circles under them grew more pronounced. The routine was beginning to tear her apart from within, crush her slowly, perceptibly; it was dragging her down until her anemic form appeared as a spectre fitting through the brakes and deadwood of the grove.

Two looming phantoms stalked through her life—the tyrant Nava and her marriage to Pemella. Bluebonnet realized what the return of Pemella meant. On that dark gray day in September, when he left for Arizona, he had clasped her to him, crushed her lips to his and warned, "When I come back, be ready." His kisses burnt her mouth like pressed hot steel and his words went deep until it seemed they seared her soul. She staggering back into her tent, reeled blindly and fell. A wild, fierce passion to hurt, to tear, to fling back upon him with intense fury tightened her will but she was powerless, subdued exteriorly. The threat that she had heard drummed into her ears was about to be fulfilled. Now she understood why Pemella had guarded her so insanely, threatened death to the other men were they even to touch her. An evil design on the part of the slothful gypsy drone would have converted him into a furious, raging beast. His love for her was sensitive yet strong, born as it was under the parching suns of Summer and the ice of Winter. To him Bluebonnet was a flower that he guarded while near and dreamed of from afar.

The thought of living with Pemella sent the blood edging against the base of Bluebonnet's brain. It would be impossible; she would rather crush her very life into nothingness, to die suddenly than live and be his bride. For she was a woman now with all the complexity of a woman's heart. She could not understand the counter currents of love for life and loathing for it, were she the gypsy's bride. She knew that behind his smile to her was a scowling, brutal nature. She had seen him rise as a volcano in action and storm through camp, wild-eyed, cursing, breaking that which met his grasp. Men and women quailed in fear at his approach. During his spells even Nava avoided him for she averred that the god of fire came down and excited his being. Then at the sight of Bluebonnet he would calm, his writhing muscles would quiet. She seemed to charm him yet she felt the time would come when she, too, would be caught up, shattered and cast aside.

For some unknown reason he wished her to speak with him in a language unknown to Nava who, fired to revenge, set the dark and evil forces within her designing ways to torture the object of Pemella's love. Their conversings in English were taken as plots to destroy her queenly reign. The books and magazines that Pemella brought for her to read were torn in a thousand pieces. From those that Bluebonnet saved she gleaned her information of the doings of the world that moved far away from the drab little gypsy camp.

TO BE CONTINUED

You must accustom yourself to seek God with the simplicity of a child, with a tender familiarity and a confidence in so loving a Father.—Fenelon.
It is every day in the power of a petty nature to inflict innumerable annoyances. It is every day in the power of a noble character to confer services.

AN HUNDRED FOLD

Naomi West, country-born but London-bound, knew where to find the footsteps of spring when she had a free hour at her disposal. But for a parish worker in a London slum such hours are few and golden.

It was her weekly half-day off, and she sat on a bench in Greenwich park, just where she could see the full loveliness of a pink almond tree standing on a carpet of crocuses against a background of tree-shaded water, over which the February sunshine glanced and gleamed. But, though Naomi loved this bit of the gardens best of all, she was not taking her usual delight in it today.

There was something on her mind. She had told a lie. At least, to her uncompromising, either black-or-white conscience, it was a lie. She had told Mrs. Brown, the vicar's wife, that she had an engagement this evening, and so could not come in to supper, whereas she had no engagement other than what she might make for herself. But she did not want to hurt kind Mrs. Brown's feelings, and the main part of her excuse was true—she could not go there to supper tonight.

Perhaps it was the crocuses which paved the path of memory with their colorful mosaic—they used to grow just like that in the old vicarage garden at home—but suddenly Naomi West was swept back to a world of twenty years ago. There was happiness and homely comfort in those old days. Poverty is almost picturesque in the country, and does not bite so keenly as in the town, and there was much love to sweeten life.
Naomi was housekeeper and companion and heart's desire to her book-worm father—her mother had died when she was a tiny child—and a life which would have seemed dull to many was full and happy to her. She had her housewifely duties, her garden, her Sunday school and choir and cottage-visiting, all the many small activities of the country.

Then came that dreadful day when Jimmy Blake, naughty and best-beloved of village urchins, had his terrible accident in the harvest field, hiding in the corn when the boys were ordered out, so that the reaper caught his leg. Naomi had to take him to the neighboring hospital herself and even go with him to the operating theatre, for she alone could calm Jimmy's terror; and that was how she first met Dr. Sinclair, the new house-surgeon.
It was some months before old Mr. West realized that it was not only the flora and fauna of the marshland which brought Dr. Sinclair so constantly to the village; and the realization brought great comfort to the anxious old heart, for the next to nothing to nothing for Naomi when he died. With would-be tactfulness, he tried to convey this to her, but the young man's cause needed no parental pleading; it had an advocate in the girl's own heart.

Many of these bitter-sweet memories swept over Naomi now—the widening of her horizon in this contact with a vigorous young mind, the rapturous call of love, the knowledge that her father's fears for her would be set at rest. She remembered the gentle, clumsy hints of the dear old man on that February day—just such a day as this—when John Sinclair came to say good-bye before taking up a London practice. They had walked to Far Marsh End, but Naomi had come back alone. Even now she did not know how she had parried her father's questionings, quibblings more by look than by word. And then the merciful brain-fever had intervened.

Naomi West got up. She was rather stiff from sitting so long upon that hard bench. February is scarcely the month for outdoor meditations and Naomi was not free from rheumatic pains. A Deptford firm had the healthiest places in the world, nor are the lodgings of a parish-worker the last word in comfort. Any little ailments to which one is subject are likely to increase in such an environment.

She would walk across the Heath and down into Blackheath Village to tea; that would be a nice change. And she must think what she should say if Mrs. Brown asked questions. She was so kind and friendly, and she knew that Miss West seldom had anywhere special to go on her free afternoons. She felt it to be dreadfully unfortunate that Miss West should be engaged on this particular evening when Sir John Sinclair, the celebrated bacteriologist, an old college friend of her husband's, had so kindly consented to give the opening lecture in the new parish hall and come to supper with them afterwards.

"But I cannot meet him," Naomi said half aloud, as she passed through the park gates and braced herself to face the wind on the heath. "I cannot, I dare not. God knows that I did right. He knows that it was the only thing to do. John did not care for the real things; they were not real to him."
And then fierce, well-nigh overpowering temptation swept down on her like a flood.

"Take a bus back to Deptford," it urged. "Tell Mrs. Brown that you find you can come to supper after all. Give yourself a chance; give him a chance. He is not one to forget; you know he has never married. He loves you still. Think

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