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Off the Beaten Path

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The Visitor

Nancy L. Ross

Mary Elizabeth was sweeping the dirt floor of the Soddy, a task that always made her smile as she thought how ironic it was. Whenever she swept she was reminded of the oriental rugs on the gleaming hardwood floors where she grew up in Pennsylvania.

Behind her the door was standing open to let the hot air from the Bad Lands circulate through the two rooms. As she finished sweeping she turned and gasped as she saw outside the door. With her hand covering her open mouth, and the hairs standing up on the back of her neck, she took in the sight of an Indian. He was a large man wearing a wide brimmed leather hat with an eagle feather stuck in the band. He wore a vest with no shirt and a pair of light colored cotton pants with leather leggings over them. On his feet were handmade leather moccasins with colorful beadwork.

As her heartbeat started to calm down she said, "May I help you?" He made a motion of feeding himself. She said, "Are you hungry?" and motioned for him to come in and sit as she pulled out a chair from the table. She went to the iron stove where the stew for the night's supper was simmering, took one of her mother's china plates out of the cupboard and filled it to the edges. Then she sliced the bread she had baked that morning and put it on a plate. She brought both dishes to the table and put them in front of him. She poured a glass of tea and put it and a container of honey on the table.