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Papago Legend of the Sahuaro

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While a student at the University of Arizona, Susie Ignacio Enos published this story in the first issue of the Arizona Quarterly (Spring 1945). She introduced it with the following statement:

This little story of the Sahuaro is long but I have tried to tell it in exactly the same way that one can tell it in the Indian language. There are songs that the coyotes and the rabbits sing. There are songs that the people sang when they tasted the fruit and after they again found the plant. There are songs that the mother sang. All these I do not know. So I have written them as part of the story. It is harder to translate the songs and one almost has to have a different language in these songs.

In comparing the style in which this story is told to the stories of Ted Rios and Frank Lopez printed in this section, readers will note that Susie Egnacio Enos has edited this story heavily. She offers us here a literary, rather than a word-for-word translation of the Papago story.

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Once there was a little Aw'awtam baby who lived with her mother and father, and her name was Sugu-ik Oof. She was called this by her mother because she was always happy.

Now it happened that when she was about a year old, her father, who was very fond of her, died. Before he closed his eyes in sweet sleep, he said to his woman, "Bring Sugu-ik Oof to me." When the mother had brought the child to him he said, "The Wise Man of the Aw'awtam has appeared to me as a young man, but here I lie and am about to leave you, so it is that since Sugu-ik Oof is a girl she will be different from woman. She will be great as her father should have been. She will live forever to the end of times. She will be known by races of people from far and near. She will be queen of the Taw haw naw Juwut (desert lands). Generations of Aw'awtam will be saved from starvation because of her and her family."

When the young father had spoken he closed his eyes in peaceful sleep.

Years came and years went and Sugu-ik Oof grew in beauty and in size. When she was ten years old she could not stand the loneliness of her life any longer, for her mother had to go into the village nearby to get food for them both, every day. The little girl was left all alone day after day.

So one day Sugu-ik Oof said, "I will go after my mother for I am very lonely at home by myself."

The little girl set out on her journey,

although she knew not where her mother could be. Off in the distance were the Gihau mountains.

"My mother pointed out the Gihau mountains to me so I shall go toward them; maybe that is where she is."

Sigu-ik Oof walked and walked for a long time before she saw any kind of life. In the distance a coyote approached her.

"My friend, Coyote, will you tell me where I can find my mother?"

The Coyote, with sly eyes, said: "Yes, Sugu-ik Oof, I will tell you where your mother is if you will give me one of those gourds you are carrying."

The little girl handed one of the gourds to the Coyote very anxiously.

"Over the Gihau mountains you will find a village and there you will also find your mother," the Coyote said and went on his way.

Sigu-ik Oof walked on and pretty soon she met a rabbit.

"Be very kind to me and tell me where I can find my mother," the little girl again asked of the animal.

So the rabbit looked at the gourds very fondly and said, "If you will give me one of those gourds you are carrying, I will tell you where your mother is."

"My mother gave these to me and I like them very much, but I will give you one gladly." So she did.

"Beyond the Gihau mountains you will find

your mother in the village," said the little rabbit and ran off on his way.

Again Sugu-ik Oof started walking. By now she was very tired and hungry. The mountains to which she was walking seemed so near and yet when she walked toward them they seemed to get farther away.

When the sun was turning toward the west, she met a little bird who spoke very kindly to her.

"Sugu-ik Oof, why are you this far away from your home? It is getting late and shadowy. Your mother will be unhappy if she doesn't find you at home."

"Little Gray Bird, I am looking for my mother. Can you tell me where she is? I will give you one of these gourds if you tell me," the little girl replied.

"I shall be very happy to tell you. I will even show you the way to the village, but I cannot take you clear to the village for there the little Aw'awtam boys shoot arrows at me and throw rocks," the little gray bird told Sugu-ik Oof.

"I am very happy because you have been very kind to me. Some day you will be rewarded for what you will do for me this day. Shall we go?"

The two traveled on and on, over rocks and down slopes they went; the little bird ever flying by Sugu-ik Oof showing her the way. When the shadows of evening began to fall they had climbed over the mountain.

The little gray bird said, "Now, I will leave you but from here you can see the village where

your mother is." And so the bird left Sugu-ik Oof.

Sugu-ik Oof walked down to the village where she saw a group of children playing.

She went up to them and asked, "Can you tell me where I can find my mother?"

The children didn't seem to hear her for they did not answer her. She waited for their answer and once more asked, but they still would not answer her.

Pretty soon Sugu-ik Oof began to chant a song. The children still did not pay any attention to her. She chanted on and on. When finally the children looked at her, they saw that she had sunk halfway into the ground. At this the children became frightened. They all started screaming for help. Some of them rushed to the place where they knew her mother worked and they quickly called her. In the meantime one of the little boys pulled her by her hair thinking he could save her, but it was no use, for he only pulled the hair off from the top of her head. They could not help her for she had sunk deep into the ground and was no more. Her mother came running but she was too late. No amount of tears could bring the little girl to the surface of the earth.

Sugu-ik Oof's mother used to visit the place where her daughter had sunk and she would place food and water there because she believed that her daughter's spirit still lingered there.

A whole year went by, and it was the same season the next year. When Sugu-ik Oof's

mother went to place the food and water at the spot, she noticed a queer plant had come up in the very place where her daughter had gone. So the woman began to water the plant, and to take care of it, till it grew into a tall and stately plant. No one had ever seen any plant like it. People came from far and near to see this peculiar plant that had grown where Sugu-ik Oof had sunk.

"What use can a plant like that be to us? It has too many stickers and we cannot eat it," many of them were saying.

Years went by and Sugu-ik Oof's mother had grown old and feeble but she was faithful to her plant and daughter for she still took care of it. One day after the coldest time of the year had just passed, when it had grown so high that it soared higher than the highest plant in the desert, the stately plant began to show signs of budding. The whole village was excited over this but Sugu-ik Oof's mother was even more excited.

The buds grew and grew and when the desert flowers just began to peep out of the ground, the queer plant bloomed forth into a beautiful white flower. After the flower had gone a fruit formed and this grew from a green to a red fruit.

One day when the flowers had gone to seed and the desert began to swell with the summer heat, the fruit of the stately plant burst showing forth a scarlet red. When it had fallen to the ground Sugu-ik Oof's mother ate some of it after she had seen the birds eat it when it was still on the plant. She tasted that the fruit was delicious and so she gave some to the other people and

they too liked it.

Every year after that the *hash'an*, as the people began to call it, bore the same flower and fruit. The birds liked it so well that as soon as the fruit began to show signs of ripening they would gather on the plant and eat of it. The Aw'awtams liked it too and so were angry at the birds who could reach it more easily, so the children began to shoot the birds with their bows and arrows and they threw rocks at the birds to chase them away.

One day at the time of the ripening of the fruit the children ran out to get at the fruit before the birds, but they found that the *hash'an* had disappeared. With great excitement they ran and told the other people, who ran out to see if what the children were telling them was true. They were sad for their delicious fruit had disappeared. They became alarmed, for they believed it to be the work of evil spirits. Thereupon a great council was called at which were present the wisest men of the villages far and near. Smart medicine men were there too to give their aid.

After many nights of council they decided that everybody that was able, man, beast and fowl, should go out and hunt for the plant.

The hunt started. The birds hunted in the air as far and as high as they could go; the animals that live mostly under the ground dug holes — deeper than they had ever dug before to hunt there; the men and animals alike hunted all over on the surface of the earth. The search lasted for days and days until one day they began to come back

one or more at a time and began to unfold strange adventures concerning their search. They had seen many strange and beautiful things but they had not seen their plant.

Finally all but one returned. The one who had not returned was a small gray bird who had only one eye. The Aw'awtam children had hit him in the eye when he was trying to eat some of the *hash'an* fruit.

Those who were gathered there began to make fun of the little bird. "Oh, he has only one eye and he probably got lost somewhere. Anyway he couldn't have found the plant with his one eye." On they talked in this way about the poor little gray bird.

Several days went by. One day the keen-eyed eagle said that he saw a tiny speck in the sky in the very far distance. Maybe it could be their friend the little Gray Bird. And so it was. It wasn't long when the little bird came all tired out and hungry for he came so fast to tell the news. He told that he had found the *hash'an* high on the west side of a high mountain.

A group of people got together and made their way into the mountains to see for themselves.

When they reached the place sure enough the *hash'an* was there where the little gray bird directed them. The *hash'an* was asked why it had tried to disappear and this is what it said:

"Years and years ago when I was a little girl in the form of an Aw'awtam, I was hunting for my mother and a tiny gray bird like the one who found me was kind to me and willingly helped

me to the village where my mother was. It was then that I promised that one day the little bird would be rewarded for his kindness. Now I am a *hash'an*, I can help the birds. They will be the first to eat of my fruit when it is ripe. When I stood near the village the Aw'awtam children used to shoot and throw rocks at the birds when they tried to eat of my fruit, but I didn't like that. If the birds couldn't eat of my fruit then no one else could."

So it was decided there between men, beast and fowl that all should eat of the fruit of the *hash'an*, the tallest and most stately plant on the desert of this country.



Sahuaro
Jim Darnton