

AUBURN

© 2020 By Sue Erickson

Chapter 22 - Soccer

Julia and her three buddy Acolytes intercepted me late one afternoon as I left Sunrise Service. I knew each of their English names of Julia, Ruth, Linda, and Terri.

I asked. "Don't you have Navajo names?"

Terri said. "Most parents give their babies both Navajo and Anglo names now. Many speak English to their children at home. The schools became so English language there is an effort to keep the children bilingual. We want to keep our cultural heritage."

I must have tilted my head as if I doubted that about the languages being spoken.

Julia said. "We have to break out of our poverty. We have to overcome prejudice. It's the parents wanting to do the right thing for their children to succeed. For their children to have a better life. Same as all over the world."

I didn't know what to say to that.

"There are strong feelings about you even after that meeting at the Agency. There are people who want you to succeed creating jobs and there are people who hope you drop dead. We think it is time to do something about that. Come along and we will introduce you to people more our age. We have an idea. C'mon."

Ginger interrupted putting her front paws on my chest as she licked my chin. I squatted down for her where she licked me from ear to ear. Somehow she knew they were taking me away. I promised to return.

When the Acolytes were through with the Ginger slurps they towed me by the hand to the road. They called to Ginger too.

I had become hot, tired, and sweaty, but had no resistance to these four women.

They borrowed a dusty battered station wagon at Joe's. Julia drove. They put me

in the front passenger seat. Ruth, Linda, and Terri sat in the back seat. Ginger rode in my lap with her head out the window. Her paws pounded on my legs in her excitement. Her toe nails found my bare leg skin and scratched me. The car's air conditioning didn't work. I rode along with the window open adding dust to the more sweat I made to the sweat already making me damp.

At the town with the Agency Council building, Julia found a shady spot under a tree and parked there. I held Ginger with an arm around her neck to keep her from jumping out through the window. That strong a jump could raise an awful welt on my legs. When I opened the door she bolted to new doggie friends who sniffed each other at both ends.

The Acolytes introduced me as their friend to a dozen or so of their other friends.

A Soccer game had started across the street among the men about our ages. Two of the sweaty dusty players in sports shorts and grimy sweat soaked t-shirts came to us. "We've had an injury on the field and are short one player. You play soccer?"

I became mortified. I hated sports. "I can run up and down the field if you tell me what you want me to do?"

They gave me a quizzical stare. The Acolytes smiled and one of them smacked me on my padded butt. "Go. Oh, take off your sandals." Some of the players were in bare feet.

I was terrible. The first few times the ball came my way I couldn't even hit it with the side of my foot. I could run up and down that field and I did get the hang of keeping the ball from going out of bounds.

A slam from the side sent me flying and sprawled on the ground. My skirt came up and I think a few of the players saw my diaper bulge. I had been hit so hard I became dizzy.

Somebody must have signaled something as a whistle blew. I didn't understand the talking.

One of the players, maybe on the other team, came to me and held his hand down. "Sorry, my friend. How are you?"

My left arm hurt which turned out to be skin abrasions.

An Acolyte handed me a canteen as another washed my arm. I doubt those other players let their girlfriends do that, but they saw the Sorceress as a real threat. Behave or no participation in the next Peyote ritual.

One of the Acolytes smacked me on my padded butt again. "Go, Nati, go. Play!"

We were running up and down that field. The next time somebody went hell-bent for leather with me in the way I had prepared. We collided, but neither of us went down. I got smiles from my team.

Another time when a ball came my way I got my feet tangled up with each other and that ball. I did keep the ball inside the field, but I went flying to the dirt face down. I'm pretty sure other players and spectators saw my diaper bulge that time.

I had become a wheezing sweaty wreck by the end of that game. My sweat soaked diaper acted oddly.

Their girls were bringing pitchers of dilute pink lemonade out to where the players had gathered at one end of the field. It tasted delicious.

An older teen in the red shorts of the team I had played with limped out to all of us. He made my eyes water when he slapped my back, and hung his arm around the sweat soaked shoulders of my dress. At least it was that old denim dress. He was the injured player. His action made an international sign of my acceptance by them.

One of those lemonade bearing woman with an empty pitcher stood close to me.

The four Acolytes stood close to me too, but not too close. They made room for anybody who wanted to welcome me.

What could I do? "You all eat after one of these?" I tilted my head at a pizza joint nearby. "Buy you all pizza?"

That had mixed reactions from the players, their girlfriends, the Acolytes, and even the Sorceress had arrived.

I asked. "Did I go too far?"

Terri said. "Nah. C'mon."

The Sorceress disappeared from sight. Ginger loved pepperoni and sausage pizza. She learned to lick the meat off of the crust. I folded the crust trying to have her eat the whole thing. Sometimes she did. Sometimes she chewed extracting the meat and dropped the chewed crust on the ground. The Acolytes were talking with the girls and exchanging facial expressions.

I had my doubts about what I saw, but I think they were claiming me as their boyfriend. They were being careful with their relationships with the other women.

The heat had dried my dress out just a little. The guys had taken off their sweat soaked t-shirts going around bare chested as they cooled off. I couldn't do that without revealing my secret.

The crowd thinned. One of the Acolytes went inside and returned with an invoice. Eyes went big as I counted out twenty dollar bills from my wallet after an Acolyte handed me my shoulder bag.

The men were jittery as they came past me with thanks, a few hand shakes, and lots of slaps on my arms and shoulders. They knew perfectly well I had been a terrible player, but I had been a good sport to them. They saw me in a new way.

A new game started. But it wasn't soccer. The Acolytes said parts of sentences interrupting each other as they explained it to me. "That's the newer form of traditional Indian stickball. Lacrosse was invented from it. Just watch."

Somebody gave me a glass of iced lemonade. As I drank it I became aware it had a little something stiffer in it. Vodka maybe. I added water. Another time plain lemonade. I kept diluting it. Julia, Ruth, Linda, and Terri noticed and asked. I told them. Ruth leaned into me and told me somebody gave me that because I am an Anglo. Alcohol was illegal by Tribal law for them when they could have the peyote I couldn't legally have.

"Interesting."