

ROSS, S. W.

WITCH WOMAN

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Hattie Turner,  
Field Worker.  
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Interview with S. W. Ross.  
Park Hill, Oklahoma

"WITCH WOMAN"

There was some years ago in the Tahlequah District an old woman who was greatly dreaded by superstitious persons. It was said that she was a great conjurer, able to put "spells" upon persons or animals, and also able to change herself into an animal or fowl whenever so inclined. In appearance the old woman was not dangerous looking. She was stout and shaped somewhat like a big bag of wheat bran. She had a round fullmoon face and her hair was white. She wore large brass-rimmed spectacles and rode to and fro in the land on a sorrel pony. The old woman liked to find out what others were talking about and finally had a most painful experience.

There was a big house several miles from the old woman's cabin down in the hills and she greatly desired to ascertain what was going on in this home. So on a gloomy and cold day in the winter time the old woman changed herself into a

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good-sized domestic cat and set out for the home. Finally she arrived, watched until someone opened the door, stole silently in and sat down among the household cats in a warm corner. With half-closed eyes the old woman watched the people in the house and she kept her ears open, listening to all that was being said. Just one thing troubled the old woman, she had neglected to get a supply of coffee when last over at Tahlequah and at breakfast had not had her usual three big cups of black coffee. She felt a slight headache, a forerunner of the severe headache she knew would afflict her unless she could soon procure coffee. On her way home, she had told herself, she would stop at a neighbor's and borrow a small quantity of grain coffee and soon find relief. But she felt she must remain in the big house until she found out a secret, so she lingered. All went well until one of the young children trod upon the old woman's foot. Forgetting herself she sprang up and clawed the child so badly it squalled in pain and fear. The owner of the big house sprang up and tried to shoo the strange cat out at the door, but the old woman wouldn't go.

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growled at the man, bit him on the leg of his boot. The man lost his temper, grasped the strange cat by its tail and flung it hard into the yard upon the snow-covered ground. But instead of leaving, the cat returned to the house and scratched at the door, yowling in hateful manner. The man then took a shovelful of hot ashes and embers and threw them out upon the cat, which was badly burned and singed. The cat then limped away into the bushes.

Two days later some people on their way to Tahlequah stopped in at the old woman's cabin to ask if she wanted to send to the stores for anything, and then it was the old woman was found in bed, severely burned upon her arms, hands and feet. She had slipped, the old woman told, and fallen into the fire and would have to lie in bed some days.

The old woman's tale was pronounced false. It was said that she was the cat that was burned by the hot ashes and embers. Two hunters passing near her cabin on the day she was singed in cat form, saw a badly scorched cat limping to the door of the old woman's house. The door opened of it-

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self and the cat went within. No doubt, the people said,  
the burned cat and the old woman were one and the same.