

THE FLUTE OF THE GODS

CHAPTER I

THE WOMAN FROM THE SOUTH

A *LIKSAI!* In Tusayan the people were living! It was the year after the year when the great star with the belt of fire reached across the sky. (1528.)

The desert land of the Hopi people stretched yellow and brown and dead from mesa to mesa. The sage was the color of the dust, and the brazen sky was as a shield made hard and dry by the will of the angry gods. The Spirit People of the elements could not find their way past that shield, and could not bear blessings to Earth children.

The rain did not walk on the earth in those days, and the corn stood still, and old men of the mesa towns knew that the starving time was close. In the kivas fasted the Hopi priests, the youth planted prayer plumes by the shrines of the dying wells, and the woman danced dances at sunrise, and all sang the prayers to the gods: — and each day the store of corn was lower, and the seed in the ground could not grow.

In the one town of Wálpi there were those who regretted the seed wasted in the planting,—it were better to have given it to the children, and even yet they might find some of it if the sand was searched carefully.

“Peace!” said old Ho-tiwa, the Ancient of the village, and the chief of Things of the Spirit. “It is not yet so bad as when I was a boy. In that starving time, the robes of rabbit skins were eaten when the corn was gone. Yet you see we did live and have grown old! The good seed is in the ground, and when the rain comes —”

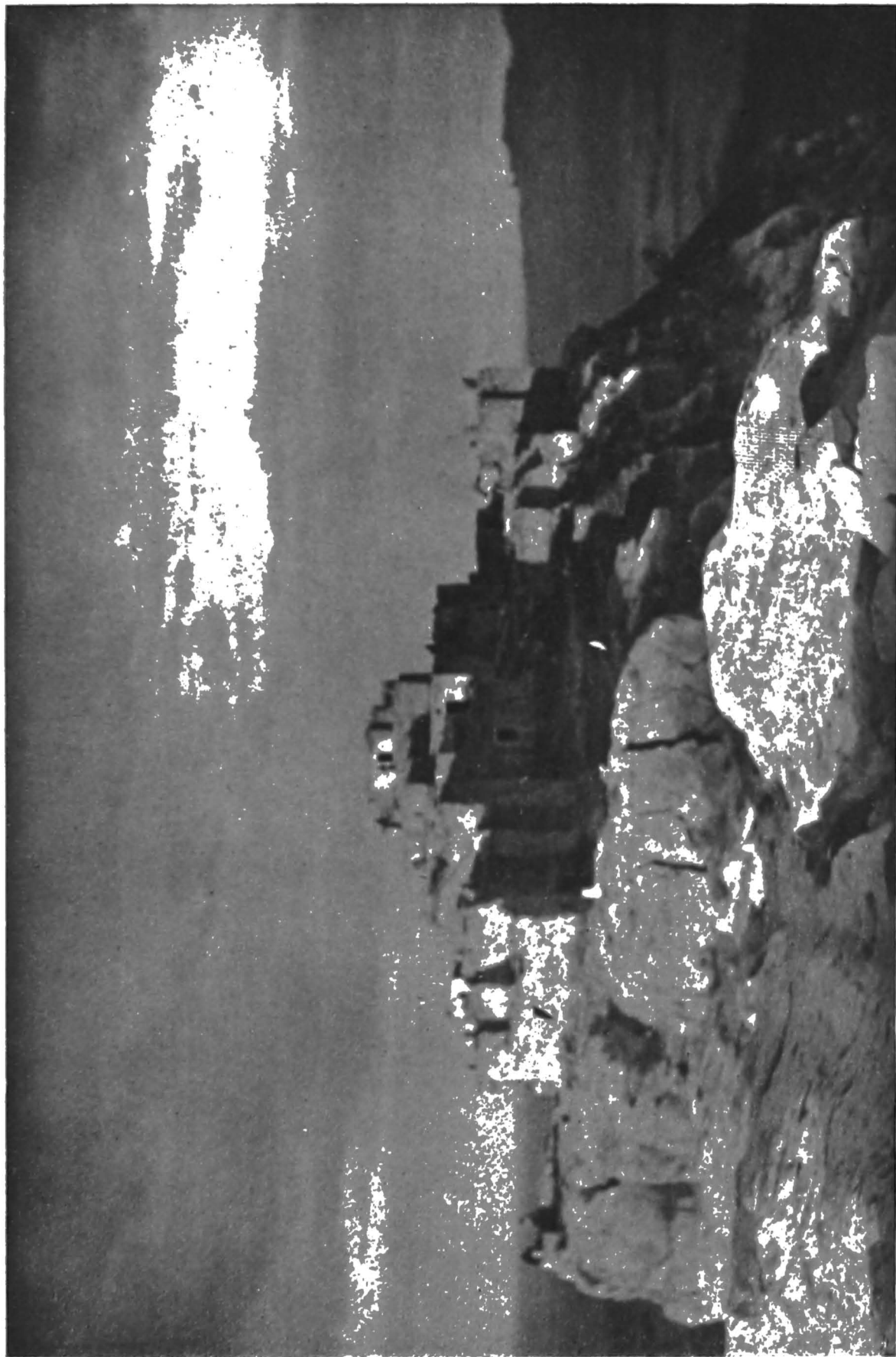
“When it comes!” sighed one skeptic — “We wait one year now, — how many more until we die?”

“If it is that you die — the rain or the no rain makes no change — you die!” reminded the old man. “The reader of the stars and of the moon says a change is to come. Tell the herald to call it from the housetops. This night the moon is at the big circle — it may bring with it the smile of the glad god again. Tell the people!”

And as the herald proclaimed at the sunset the hopeful words of the priests who prayed in the kivas, old Ho-tiwa walked away from the spirit of discontent, and down the trail to the ruins of Sik-yat-ki. All the wells but that one of the ancient city were useless, green, stagnant water now. And each day it was watched lest it also go back into the sands, and at the shrine beside it many prayers were planted.

So that was the place where he went for prayer when his heart was heavy with the woe of his people. And that was how he found that which was waiting there to be found.

It was a girl, and she looked dead as she lay by the stones of the old well. As he bent over to see if she lived, the round moon came like a second sun into the soft glow of the twilight, and as it touched the face of the girl, the old man felt the wind of the south pass over them. Always to the day he died



*T*HE ONE TOWN OF WÁLPI

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did he tell of how that south wind came as if from swift wings!

He called to some men who were going home from rabbit hunting in the dusk, and they came and looked at the girl and at each other, and drew away.

“We have our own women who may die soon,” they said: “Why take in a stranger? Whence comes she?”

No one had seen her come, but her trail was from the south. She wore the dress of a pueblo girl, but she was not of their people. Her hair was not cut, yet on her forehead she carried the mark of a soon-to-be maternity — the sacred sign of the piñon gum seen by Ho-tiwa when he went as a boy for the seed corn to the distant Te-hua people by the river of the east.

“I come here with prayer thoughts to the water,” said the old man noting their reluctance,—“and I find a work put by my feet. The reader of the skies tells that a change is to come with the moon. It is as the moon comes that I find her. The gods may not be glad with us if our hearts are not good at this time.”

“But the corn —”

“The corn I would eat can go to this girl for four days. I am old, but for so long I will fast,— and maybe then the gods will send the change.”

So the girl was carried to his house, and the women shrank away, and were afraid — for the clouds followed the wind swiftly from the south, and the face of the moon was covered, and at the turn of the night was heard the voice of a man child — new born of the strange girl found by the well in the moonlight. Ho-tiwa in the outer room of the dwelling heard the

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voice — and more than the child voice, for on the breath of the wind across the desert the good rain came walking in beauty to the fields, and the glad laughter of the people went up from the mesa, and there was much patter of bare feet on the wet stone floor of the heights — and glad calls of joy that the desert was to live again!

And within the room of the new birth the women stared in affright at the child and at each other, for it was most wonderfully fair — not like any child ever seen. This child had hair like the night, eyes like the blue of the sky, and face like the dawn.

One man among them was very old, and in his youth had known the Te-hua words. When the girl spoke he listened, and told the thing she said, and the women shrank from her when it was told.

“She must be a medicine-woman, for she knows these things,” she said, “and these things are sacred to her people. She says that the blade of a sacrifice must mark her child, for the boy will not be a child as other children.” And at the mention of the knife the people stared at each other.

“There is such a knife,” said Ho-tiwa. “It belongs to the Ancient Days, and only the gods, and two men know it. It shall be as she says. The god of the sky has brought the woman and has brought the child, and on the face of the child is set the light of the moon that the Hopi people will never again doubt that the gods can do these things.”

And there was a council at which all the old men talked through the night and the day. And while they talked, the rain poured in a flood from the gray sky, until men said this might be magic, for the woman might have brought witchcraft.

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But the old chief said no evil craft could have brought the good rain:—The wind and the rain had come from the south as the girl had come from the south, and the light on the face of the child was a symbol that it was sacred.

Then one man, who had been an Apache prisoner, and found his way back, told of a strange thing;—that forty days to the south where the birds of the green feathers were, a new people had come out of the Eastern sea, and were white. The great kings made sacrifices for them, and planted prayer plumes before them — for they were called the new gods of the water and the sunrise.

And the girl had come from the south!

Yet another reminded the council that the words of the girl were Te-hua words, and the Te-hua people lived East of Ci-bo-la and Ah-ko — the farthest east of the stone house building people.

“Since these are her only words, the child shall be named in the way of that people,” said Ho-tiwa. “The sacred fire was lit at the birth, and on the fourth morning my woman will give the name in the Te-hua way, and throw the fire to burn all evil from his path, and the sacred corn will guard his sleep. Some of you younger men never have heard of the great Te-hau god. Tell it to them, Atoki, then they will know why a Te-hua never sends away a poor stranger who comes to them.”

The man who knew Te-hua words, and had seen the wonderful Te-hua valley in his youth, sent smoke from his ceremonial pipe to the four ways the gods, and then to the upper and nether worlds, and spoke:

“*Aliksai!* I will tell of the Te-hua god as it was

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told to me by the old man of Kah-po in the time of starving when I went with the men for the sacred corn of the seed planting:

“The thing I tell is the true thing!

“It was time for a god to walk on the earth, and one was born of the piñon tree and a virgin who rested under the shadow of its arms. The girl was very poor, and her people were very poor; when the piñon nut fell in her bosom, and the winds told her a son was sent to her to rest beneath her heart, she was very sad, for there was no food.

“But wonderful things happened. The Spirits of the Mountain brought to her home new and strange food, and seeds to plant for harvest:—new seeds of the melon, and big seed of the corn:—before that time the seeds of the corn were little seeds. When the child was born, strange things happened, and the eagles fly high above till the sky was alive with wings. The boy was very poor, and so much a boy of dreams that he was the one to be laughed at for the visions. But great wise thoughts grew out of his mountain dreams, and he was so great a wizard that the old men chose him for Po-Ahtun-ho, which means Ruler of Things from the Beginning. And the dreamer who had been born of the maid and the piñon tree was the Ruler. He governed even the boiling water from the heart of the hills, and taught the people that the sickness was washed away by it. His wisdom was beyond earth wisdom, and his visions were true. The land of that people became a great land, and they had many blue stones and shells. Then it was that they became proud. One day the god came as a stranger to their village:—a poor stranger, and they were not kind to him! The proud hearts had grown to be hard hearts, and

only fine strangers would they talk with. He went away from that people then. He said hard words to them and went away. He went to the South to live in a great home in the sea. When he comes back they do not know, but some day he comes back,— or some night! He said he would come back to the land when the stars mark the time when they repent, and one night in seven the fire is lit on the hills by the villages, that the earth-born god, Po-se-yemo, may see it if he should come, and may see that his people are faithful and are waiting for him to come.

“ Because of the day when the god came, and they turned him away for that his robe was poor, and his feet were bare; — because of that day, no poor person is turned hungry from the door of that people. And the old men say this is because the god may come any day from the South, and may come again as a poor man.

“ And this was told to us by the Te-hua men when we went for seed corn in that starving time, and were not sent away empty. *Aliksai!* ”

The men drew long breaths of awe and approval when the story was ended. The old man who had found the girl knew that the girl had found friends.

But the mysterious coincidence of her coming as the rain came — and from the south — and the fair child!

Again the man who had been a prisoner with the Apaches was asked to tell of the coming of the white gods in the south where the Mexic people lived. He knew but little. No Apache had seen them, but Indian traders of feathers had said it was so.

The men smoked in silence and then one said: — “ Even if it be so, could the girl come alone so far through the country of the hostile people? ”

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“There is High Magic to help sometimes,” reminded the old chief. “When magic has been used only for sacred things it can do all things! We can ask if she has known a white god such as the trader told of to our enemies.”

And the two oldest men went to the house of Hotiwa’s wife, and stood by the couch of the girl, and they sprinkled sacred meal, and sat in prayer before they spoke.

And the girl said, “My name is Mo-wa-thé (Flash Of Light) and the name of my son is Tahn-té (Sunlight) We may stay while these seeds grow into grain, and into trees, and bear harvest. But not always may we be with you, for a God of the Sky may claim his son.”

And she took three seeds from the fold of the girdle she had worn. They were strange seeds of another land.

The old men looked at each other, and remembered that to the mother of the Te-hua god, strange seeds had been given, and they trembled, and the man of the Te-hau words spoke:

“You come from the south where strange things may happen. On the trail of that south, heard you or saw you — the white god?”

And she drew the child close, and looked in its face, and said, “Yes — a white god! — the God of the Great Star.”

And the old men sprinkled the sacred meal to the six points, and told the council, and no one was allowed to question Mo-wa-thé ever again.

The seeds were planted near the well of Sik-yat-ki, and grew there. One was the tree of the peach, another of the yellow pear, and the grain was a grain of the wheat. The pear tree and the wheat could

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not grow well in the sands of the desert, only enough to bring seed again, but the peach grew in the shadow of the mesa, and the people had great joy in it, and only the men of the council knew they came from the gods.

And so it was in the beginning.