

CHAPTER XVII

THINGS REVEALED ON THE HEIGHTS

ALL the Castilians but Padre Vicente and Don Diego went with the warriors to the western heights. For reasons of his own, the padre preferred the pueblo when freed of the influence of Tahn-té, and Don Diego preferred to bear him company,— a secretary could well look after the records of warfare, if it came to warfare, though for his own part he believed not any of the heathen prophecy of the coming of warriors, and wondered much that his eminence, the padre, showed patience with their pagan mummeries. He assured the padre that it would be a wrong against Holy Church to grant the sacraments to the pagan Cacique until that doom of the outcast had been revoked; — To take the power of high God for the managing of pueblo matters was not a thing to grant absolution for! And Padre Vicente, to quiet his anxiety on that score, agreed that when the pagan Cacique came for absolution, he should be reminded of his iniquity.

And while they settled this weighty matter, the young Ruler who had prophesied, moved contrary to custom, with the leaders across the high mesa, and was followed by the Castilian horsemen, in their shining coats of mail, and on a mule led by Gonzalvo rode Yahn, unafraid, and with proud looks.

And ever her eyes rested on Ka-yemo who held his place of chief, and chanted a war song, and was so handsome a barbarian that Don Ruy made mention

of it, and told the secretary that he was worth an entire page of the "Relaciones," even though not a thing of war came in their trail.

The great white cliff of a thousand homes of the past, filled the Castilian mind with wonder. Generations had lived and died since the ghost city of the other days had throbbled with life, still the stucco of the walls was yet ivory white, and creamy yellow, and it looked from the pine woods like a far reaching castle of dreams.

It was nearing the sunset, and a windless heat brooded over the heights where usually the pines made whisperings, clouds of flame color hung above the dark summits of the mountain, and the reflected light turned the ghostly dwellings to a place of blood-tinged mystery. More than one of the adventurers crossed themselves. Don Ruy said it looked, in the lurid glow, like a place of enchantment.

"But there are beautiful enchantments," said Chico — "and this may be one of them! Think you we might find walls pictured by Merlin the magian if we but climb the steep? Magic that is beautiful should not be hedged around by a mere ocean or two!"

"This is the place of the ghost woman," stated Yahn, — "and Shufinne, where the women are afraid, is beyond."

Within sight was Shufinne, and there the Castilians had expected to camp. But among the older Indians there had been talk — and who can gauge the heathen mind?

"Two camps will we make," they decided. "Here is most water for the animals and here our white brothers can wait; at Shufinne will the Te-hua guard be awake all the night, and give warning if

the enemy comes,— other guards will watch the trail of the cañon. Thus we cover much ground,— no one can pass to the villages of the river;— and quickly can all camps help the one where the enemy comes.”

“ Not so bad is the generalship in spreading their net,” said Don Ruy.

“ Nor in excluding the stranger from the hiding place of their pretty maids,” added Chico with amusement. “ Ysobel — ride you close to me. This is the place where they herd their women, and guard them,— and you are not so ill favored in many ways as some I have seen.”

Ysobel whimpered that it was not to follow war she had left Mexico and her own people, and like Don Diego she could see no good reason to search for trouble in the hills.

“ Then why not stay behind safe walls with the padre? ” asked Don Ruy, and Ysobel went dumb and looked at Chico — and the lad shrugged and smiled.

“ Has she not married a man? ” he queried, “ and does not the boy Cupid make women do things most wondrous strange in every land? José would fare as well without her watchful eye, but no power could make her think it,— so come she would on a lop-eared mule despite all my fine logic! ”

“ You — yourself — would come! ” retorted Ysobel, “ so what — ”

But Chico prodded the mule so that it went frisky and sent its heels in the air, and but for Don Ruy the beast might have left the woman on the ground.

“ What imp possesses you to do mischief to the dame? ” he demanded — “ and why laugh that she follows her husband? When you have more years

you may perhaps learn what devotion may mean!"

"Never do I intend to strive for more knowledge of it than I possess at this moment!" declared Chico—"see to what straits it has led that poor girl, who, but for this matter of a man, would have been good and safe working in a convent garden. Small profit this marriage business is!"

"A selfish Jack-a-napes might you be called," remarked Don Ruy, "and much I wonder that the woman bears patiently your quips. Give us ten more years, and we'll see you mated and well paid for them!"

"Ten years!"—and the lad whistled,—“let me wait ten of my years and I can wait the rest of them!"

"Name of the devil!" laughed Don Ruy—"if you grow impatient for a mate, we'll charge you citadel and capture one for you!"

"Oh, my patience can keep step with your own will, Excellency," retorted the lad. "I've no fancy for halting the expedition, or of making a winning through another man's arms."

"Your conceit of yourself is quite up to your inches," observed his patron. "When you've had a few floutings you'll be glad to send signals for help."

"One flouting would be enough to my fancy—I'd straightway borrow myself a monk's robe."

"We all think that with the first love affair—or even the second—" volunteered Don Ruy—"but after that, philosophy grows apace, and we are willing to eat, drink—and remain mortal."

Ysobel giggled most unseemly, and Chico stared disapproval at her.

"Why laugh since you know not anything of such philosophy, Dame Ysobel?" he asked. "It is not given many to gather experience, and philosophies

such as come easily to the call of his Excellency."

The woman hung her head at the reproof, and his Excellency lifted brows and smiled.

"You have betimes a fine lordling's air with you," he observed. "Why chide a woman for a smile when women are none too plentiful?"

But they had reached the place of the camp, and the secretary swung from the saddle in silence. Don Ruy watching him, decided that the Castilian grandfather must have been of rank, and the Indian grandmother at least a princess. Even in a servant who was a friend would the lad brook nothing of the familiar.

Tahn-té stood apart from the Spanish troop while camp was being made, and a well dug deeper in a ravine where once the water had rippled clear above the sand. The choice of camp had not been his. The old men and the warriors had held up hands, and the men of iron were not to see the women at Shufinne,— so it had been voted.

The lurid glow of the sky was overcast and haste was needed ere the night and perhaps the storm, came. Since it was voted that Puyé be the shelter, Tahn-té exacted that only the north dwellings be used — the more sacred places were not to be peered into by strange eyes!

A Te-hua guard was stationed at the ancient dwelling of the Po-Ahtun. Near there alien feet must not pass. Where the ruins of ancient walls reached from edge to edge of the mesa's summit, there Te-hua guards would watch through the night, and signal fires on Shufinne mesa would carry the word quickly if help was needed.

A Navahu captive from Kah-po came with men of Kah-po, and was left at Puyé. Juan Gonzalvo

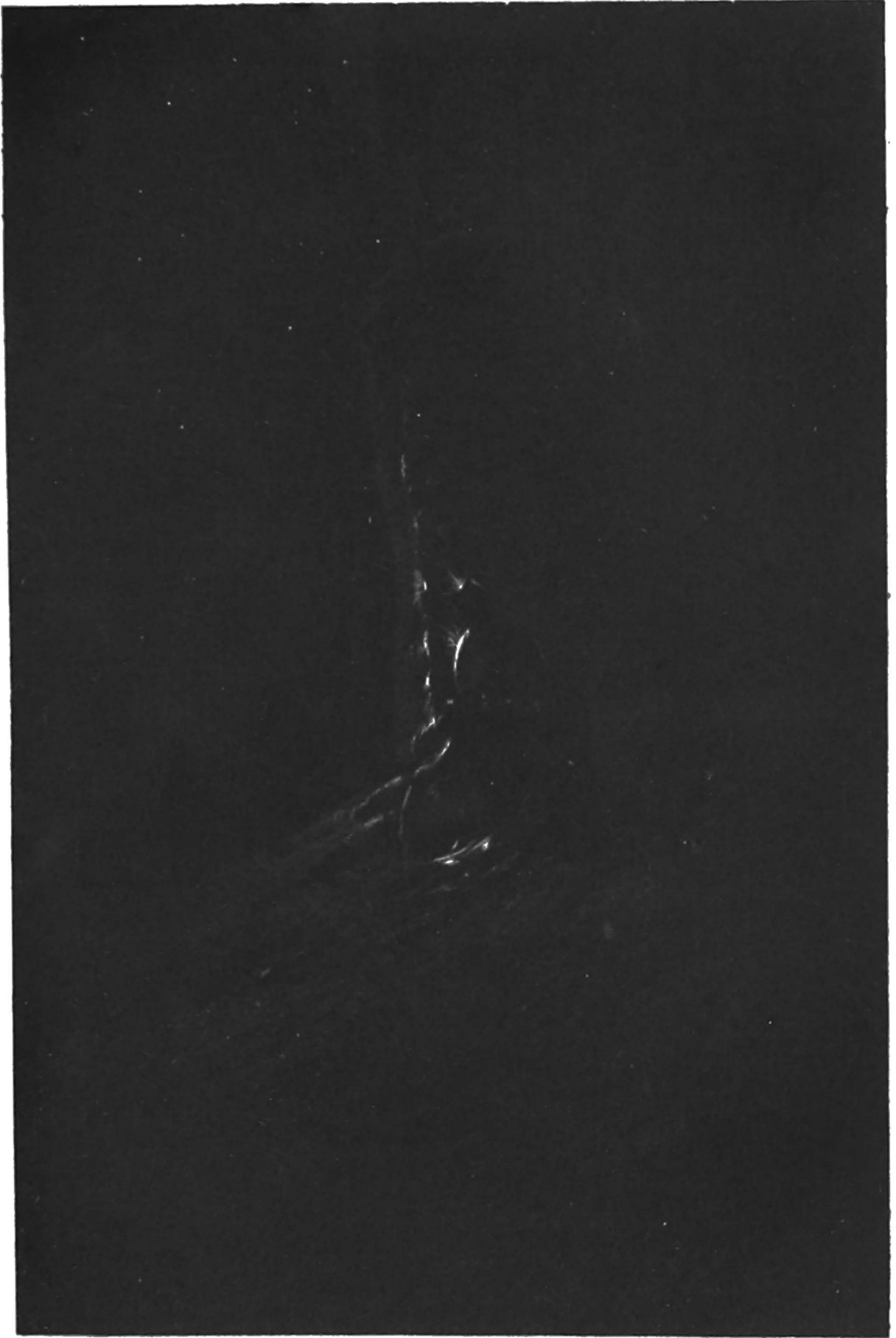
stationed his own guards, having no fancy for sleep with only painted savages between his troop and danger. Ka-yemo for no stated reason lingered near, and watched the Castilians, and watched Yahn Tsyn-deh;—so sullen and strong had grown his jealousy that here in the hills—apart from the padre, he dared think what could be made happen to the little cluster of white men if the Kah-po men would join Povi-whah for battle,—and if—

Under the eyes of Padre Vicente no such thought would have dared come to him,—but he had brief wild desires to win by some stroke, a power such as Tahn-té held without question. Let the Castilian whisper “sorcerer” ever so loudly, yet the old men of Te-hua would give no heed without proofs—and who could make proofs against Tahn-té?

The words of the governor had cut deep—and Yahn who was of the Tain-tsain clan, would rage if the clan gained not credit by the war chief,—and Gonzalvo the man of iron,—would then take her to himself—and— He walked apart in rage. From the ancient dwelling of the Po-Ahtun he could hear the chanting of a war song. Tahn-té was invoking the spirits of battle—Tahn-té it was who had seen the vision of warriors and started scouts to the hills;—on every side was he reminded that Tahn-té the priest—was looked upon as Tahn-té the warrior heart!

The Castilians would go back to their own land with that word to their people, and to their king;—and he, Ka-yemo,—would have no mention unless it should be of the weeds pulled in the corn!

His heart was so sick and so angry that he could almost hear the laughter if he returned without honors:—but one man should not laugh!—He did



*I*N CASTILIAN WAR DRESS HE STOOD

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not know how it would happen that he could have the Capitan Gonzalvo killed — but that man should not laugh with Yahn Tsyn-deh!

In his sick rage he had brooded and walked far. Along the summit of the mesa among the ruins had he walked to the east. The weird dead city of the Ancient Days was made more weird by the strange brooding heat of the dusk. No cool air of the twilight followed the setting sun this night. Sounds carried far. No fires were lit in the camp below — yet movements of the animals told him where the Castilians tethered their wonderful comrades of the trail.

At any other time he would not have walked alone on the heights where mystery touched each broken wall, and wrapped the mesa as in a strange medicine blanket. But in his impotent rage he felt spirit forces of destruction working against him, and the dread of them dulled his senses as to the place where he wandered.

And then his heart jumped with a new fear as the form of a woman arose from a crevice in the stone wall — did the ghost of the ruin wait for him there?

The figure halted uncertainly and then ran toward him with outreaching hand.

It was Yahn Tsyn-deh, and she was half laughing and half sobbing, and the barrier of anger was brushed aside as if it had never been.

“Ka-yemo! — Ka-yemo!” she whispered — “You dare be highest now; — and Tahn-té will be under your feet, Ka-yemo!”

She clasped her arms about him as she stumbled, breathless, at his feet, and his hands clutched her in fierceness.

“Is this a trick?” — he asked. “Have I trapped

you with a lover, and you run to me with a new game?"

"Oh — fool, you!" she breathed — "There was but one lover, and he went blind, and walked away from me at a daybreak!"

She would have said more, but he caught her up and held her too close for speech, and she felt in triumph the trembling of his body.

"The man Gonzalvo," — he muttered — "I was walking to find the way I could kill him alone because you wear his gifts."

"Fool!" she whispered again. "Shall I then go to a woman at Shufinne and kill her because her gifts are with you? I let her live to see that the gifts she brings are little beside my own! I bring you victory over Tahn-té the sorcerer of Povi-whah! I bring you the trail to his witch maid of the hills. With her he comes to make prayers in the night time! For this he guards the dwellings of the star where she is hidden. Tahn-té the sorcerer shall be under your feet! Ka-yemo — I bring this to you!"

And while they clung to each other, scarce daring to think that union and triumph was again their own, Tahn-té the Ruler of magic sat within the ancient dwelling where the symbols of the Po-Ahtun are marked on the walls even in this day.

In a shadowed corner a tiny fire glimmered, and by its light he studied the clear crystal of the sacred fire-stone. With prayer he studied it long, and the things speaking in the milky depths held him close, and the breath stopped in his body many times while he looked, and the prayers said through the Flute of the Gods were prayers to the Trues to which he sent all his spirit.

Then from his medicine pouch he took the seeds

of the sacred by-otle into which the dreams of the gods have ever grown as the blossom grows.

Darklings were these, gathered when the moon was at rest, and no wandering stars swam high in the night sky. The dreams in these shut out day knowledge, and the knowledge of earth life. For medicine dreams they shut out all of a man but that which is Spirit, and the body becomes as a dead body knowing not anything but dreams — feeling neither heat nor cold.

Of all medicine left on earth by the gods who once walked here, not any medicine is so strong to lift the soul to the Giver of Life even while the feet walk here over trails of thorns, or the whipping thongs cut bare to the bone the dancing flesh of penitents.

When Tahn-té had listened to Padre Luis, and had read of the grievous pain of that one Roman crucifixion of the founder of the church of Padre Luis, the boy had not been impressed as the good priest had hoped. Even then he had heard of the medicine drugs of different tribes, and the Medicine Spirit granted to some, and as a man he knew that the man to whom the gods give medicine gifts can make for himself joy out of that which looks like pain. He knew well that the earth born who drew to themselves God-power, do not die, and the man on the Roman cross could not die if his medicine Power of the Spirit was strong. He knew that he had only gone away as all the god-men and god-women have gone away at times from earth places.

He knew that strong magic of the spirit could always do this for a man if his heart was pure and steady, but not to another could he give the spirit power, or the heart of knowledge.

He counted over the seeds of the By-otle and knew

that there were enough to make even a strong man dream of joy while under torture.

After that he dared look more closely into the shifting lights of the sacred fire stone, and the Castilians in the camp below, and the guards on the level above, and the plotting woman, and her regained slave and master heard the call of the Flute, and intonings of sacred songs from the century old dwelling of the Po-Ahtun.

*“ The battle is here!
 The battle of gods is here!
 The flowers of shields have bloom,
 The death flowers grow!
 Among that bloom shall homes be made,
 Among the bloom shall we build fair homes.
 Brothers: — drink deep of warrior wine,
 For our enemies we build homes!
 Eat: — eat while there is bread.
 Drink — drink while there is water.
 A day comes when the air darkens,
 When a cloud shall darken the air,
 When a mountain shall be lifted up,
 When eyes shall be closed in death,
 Eat — eat while there is bread,
 Drink — drink of warrior wine! ” **

* Book of Chilan Balam.