

CHAPTER XIX

THE APACHE DEATH TRAP

WHEN the runners carried the word to the river that the vision of Tahn-té had been a true vision, the padre and Don Diego stared at each other incredulous. It was a thing not to be believed by a Christian. Yet the runners said that many Navahu scalps and two dead Te-hua men witnessed the truth of it, and the men of iron had proven indeed brothers in the time of battle. The governor made thanks to Don Ruy, who was wounded, and his Excellency had sent the secretary back to camp with Ysobel since there was not anything new to record. The Te-hua men would dance the scalp dance when they came to the village, and two clans mourned for men left dead on the mesa meadows.

The padre regretted that he had not gone with the troop. Since they had won honor and thanks, it was the good time to work for the one favor of the gold in return.

And Don Diego regretted the Te-hua men who had died without absolution.

The secretary stated that the clans of the dead men were clamoring for the Navahu captive taken by Gonzalvo, and there was much talk about it. Also that the Navahu said it was one maid they came searching for — a Navahu maid who wore bluebird wings — they had not thought to harm Te-hua

women! Of course the Te-hua men thought that was a lie, for the Navahu always wanted more women.

But the old men of the village to whom it was told looked at each other with meaning.

It was a strange thing that the men of Te-gat-ha to the north, and the men of Navahu from the west, took the trail to search for that one maid of mystery. The ground over which she passed had reached far, and the evil wrought by her had been great. The wise men of Te-gat-ha knew that the tornado followed her trail, and the Navahu men who searched for her, had found death and defeat. Prayers must be made against the evil of her if her feet should cross the land of the Te-hua people.

And all through the long beautiful twilight the tombé sounded from the terraces, and the mourners for the dead on the high mesas knew that prayers were being made against new evil — and that the medicine men would in an early day demand penance and sacrifice of many if the cloud of dread was not lifted from their hearts.

Four days of purification must be observed by the warriors ere entering again their home village after a battle to the death. And Yahn could not by any means approach Ka-yemo during that time, which did not prevent her speech with other men. To Juan Gonzalvo she talked, and Gonzalvo chafed under the restrictions of Don Ruy. Steadily in his mind had grown that thought of the parentage of Tahn-té. He was unwilling to think that the native mind could have the keenness and the logic of this barbarian whose eyes were the the color of the darkest blue violets, and whose diabolic power made even the Castilians awe-struck, and sent them to prayers more swiftly than did the sermons of the padre. If he

only dared hint it to the padre — if by some god-given power he, the insolent Cacique, could be delivered into their hands — if as the son of Teo the Greek, he could come within the law of the Inquisition for his devilish heresies — the all too lenient Inquisition demanded white blood in its victims — what a triumph it would be for the Faith to add the sorcerer to the list! For such a triumph would Gonzalvo have been willing to tread with bared feet all the sands of the trail to Mexico.

With such pious intent did he question much of Yahn, who knew little — and was indeed afraid when the medicine god woman was asked of. She had seen that which had come to the outcast of Na-im-be who would have told tribal things, and she had no wish to grow dumb, or blind, or a trembling wreck in the time of one sun across the sky.

But she did go with him to the place of the well in the sand at Shufinne at the time when the Twilight Woman went for water. He waited there and drew for her the water, and watched closely her face as he spoke a Castilian word of greeting. If he had hope that she had ever before heard such words his hopes were fruitless. She was so indifferent to his presence that not even once did she lift her eyes from the water jar or look in his face, and the fragile figure turned from him and walked away as if Castilian warriors were seen daily on the path to that well.

Yahn knew that all the other women wished greatly to be let go down to the village that they might see and be spoken to by the great strangers, and she hid in the brush to watch the medicine god woman and even won courage to ask of her who had filled the water jar so quickly.

“Was it not then the stranger who is your lover, Yahn Tsyn-deh?” asked the other, not as one who cares, but as one who states a fact — “the man whom you give love to in these new days.”

“Who says I give love?” demanded Yahn. “Sah-pah the liar, or Koh-pé, who knows not anything!”

“You walk together alone as lovers walk. The other women do not think they lie.”

“They are fools — the other women!” stated Yahn — “also they are liars. They are glad if a man of the beard looks the way they are, — they would make a trail to follow if the men of iron whistled them, — they would be proud to make their own men ashamed — they!”

For the first time the older woman looked in the face of the girl with intentness, as though suddenly aroused to interest in the human drama about her, and the actors in it.

“Then you would not follow, Yahn Tsyn-deh?” she asked. “The others say you laugh at the men of the tribe and give love to the strangers — they say you pass Ka-yemo on the trail and your eyes never see him any more because of the men of iron who give you gifts!”

“A jealous woman says that!” stormed Yahn Tsyn-deh, — “a woman who maybe lies to him when he will listen! You see this:” — and she picked up a black water worn pebble with a vein of white through the heart of it — “Sometime when the Earth Mother was beginning with the work, these two were maybe not together like this. They were apart — maybe it was before the ice went from around our world and the mountains sent fire to split the rocks. Look you now — you are wise, but maybe you do

not know how this is, for you go into shadow lands, and men and women, and the stones over which your feet walk, are all the same to you — also the love of a man and a woman are not anything to your thoughts!”

The other looked at her, and beyond her, and said nothing. The words of Yahn were words of angry insistence on the thought she had never yet been able to express — and to say it to even the god medicine woman who sheltered a witch, was to speak it aloud, and have it forgotten!

“ You are wise in medicine craft but do you know how this grew? ” — she demanded — “ I know — I feel that *I know!* — the mountain fire or the sky fire broke it that the white stone of fire could be shot like an arrow into the heart of it. To keep some count it was made like that by the Most Mysterious; — and in the hand of the Mystery it was held — and the hand was closed over it while the mountains came down to the rivers, and the rivers made trails through rock walls. When the hand was opened and the sun looked on it, it was grown into one; — can you with all high medicine put them apart? — can you break the black and leave the white not broke? Can you make two colors of the powder you would grind from it between grinding stones? — Yet the two colors are there! Like the two colors are Ka-yemo and Yahn Tsyn-deh. One they were made by some magic of the Great Mystery, and no woman and no man, and no lies of women, can break them apart! When you hear them lie another time, you can look at this stone, and know that I said it! ”

She had worked herself into such a passion that the long smothered rage against the women who spoke her name lightly in the village spent itself on the one

woman of all who lived most apart from such speech. But aloud had Yahn Tsyn-deh said once for all that her life was as the life of Ka-yemo, and that no earth creature could make that different, and for the saying of it aloud she was a happier woman.

And Gonzalvo who listened to her defiance, fancied that the silent woman of mystery had given her chiding, and that Yahn was doing wordy battle for the new Castilian friends.

All the more could he think so when Yahn joined him with her great eyes shining like stars, and braided in her hair some flowers he had plucked for her — and walked back to the camp with him openly before all men!

And she said to him; — “I like only men who fight, — men who are not afraid. Tell your priest who does not like me that now is the time to speak again to the council of the sun symbol and of brothers. The old men have seen that your fighting was good, and that it saved them their women. This will be the time to speak.”

“But their proud Cacique —”

“It is a good time to speak —” she insisted — “else will Tahn-té grow so tall with prophecies that his shadow will cover the land, and the men in the land, — tell your priest that the shadow has grown too tall now for one man. Other men have fought well and taken scalps — yet only one name is heard in your camp — the name of Tahn-té who sees visions in the hills!”

He wondered at her mocking tone of the visions in the hills, for no other Indian mocked at the visions of the sorcerer.

Don Ruy was well agreed to get back to the fair camp by the river, and so pleased with them were

their new comrades in arms, that he was amused to see more than one dame of the village trudging homewards across the mesa:— they forgot to doubt the new allies who had helped send the Navahu running to the hills. When he reached Povi-whah he rallied Chico that he kept close to the camp and found so many remembered records to put safely down the “Relaciones,” when there were more than a few pairs of strange dark eyes peeping from the terraces.

But Chico had quite lost the swagger of the adventurous youth since he tumbled down the arroyo bank almost on top of the flayed savage. The fainting fit need not have caused him so much of shyness, since his Excellency had also apparently indulged in the same weakness;— for Chico on awaking had carried two hats full of water and drenched his highness completely ere he had opened his eyes and again looked on the world. However, without doubt that fainting fit of Master Chico’s had taken away a fine lot of self confidence, for ink-horn and paper gave all the excitement he craved. His audacity was gone, and so meek and lowly was his spirit, that Don Diego had much pleasure in the thought that the vocation of the lad was plainly the church, and that sight of the dead, unconfessed barbarians, had awakened his conscience as to human duties for the Faith.

This interesting fact he made mention of to Don Ruy, who bade him god speed in making missionaries out of unexpected material,— and got more amusement out of the idea than one would expect, and Don Diego hinted that it was unseemly to jest at serious matters of the saving of souls when his own had stood so good a chance at escape through the hole in his neck.

“It may be that I found a soul through that same

wound," said Don Ruy, "at least I gained enough to make amends for the scar to be left by the wicked lance."

"It is true that the knowledge gained of their savage surgery is a thing of import for the "Relaciones," agreed Don Diego,— "but only the infidel Cacique made practice of it, and his acts are scarcely the kind to bring a blessing on any work — I have been put to it to decide how little space to give his name in these pages. It is not a seemly thing that the most wicked should be the most exalted in the chronicles of our travels."

"Whether exalted or not he must be again considered in this quest of the gold," stated Padre Vicente, "Gonzalvo brings me word that more than one of the tribe would have joy in his downfall, and that it is the good time to talk with the head men openly on this question. Our men have helped fight their battles: — thus matters have changed for us. Many of the women are allowed to come home — they perceive we are as brothers and are not afraid."

"They also perceive that we have a Navahu war captive whom they desire exceedingly for use on the altar of the Mesa of the Hearts,"— observed Don Ruy. They are much disturbed for lack of a sacrifice these days. They say the Ancient Star will send earth troubles until such sacrifice is made, some of the clans must donate a member unless the gods send a substitute — their preference is for a young and comely youth or maiden. They plainly hinted to Gonzalvo that the Navahu has been given into our hands by the gods for that purpose."

Don Diego was emphatic in his horror, but the padre explained that from the heathen point of view it was not so cruel as might be thought. When the

savages went to war they prepared themselves for such fate if captured. More:— the death was not torture. The ceremonies were religious according to the pagan idea — chants and prayers and garlands of flowers and sacred pine were a part of the ritual. The blade of sacrifice must be sharp, and the heart removed from the victim quickly and held to the sun or the star behind which the angry god waited. When it was a sacrifice of much high import, it was made on the Mesa of the Hearts, and in remembrance a heart shaped stone was always left near the shrine by one of the secondary priests:— for that reason one could find many heart shaped stones, large and small on that mesa. When a medicine man found one, even in a far hunting ground, he brought it home for that purpose.

“ And the body of the victim? ” asked Don Ruy — “ I have been on that mesa and seen no bones — what becomes of it? ”

“ If it is trouble of floods or storm or drouth, the victim is thrown to the god of the river below. On the mesa to the west is an ancient circle of stones with the entrance to the east. The ordinary sacrifice is made there for good crops, and the body is divided until each clan may have at least a portion which he consumes with many prayers.”

Don Diego confessed that such ritual sat ill upon even a healthy stomach, for his own part the open air seemed good and desirable, and he was of a mind to return whence they had come, rather than risk longer unauthorized visits among such smiling soft voiced savages. Since his eminence had learned thus much of their horrors, who was to know how many might be left untold? — or how soon the tribes might have

a mind to circle the camp and offer every mother's son of the Christians on some such devilish altar?

Even while he spoke a curious shock ran through the men, and they stared at each other in amaze and question. Plainly the floor had lifted under their feet as though some demon of the Underworld had heaved himself upward in turning over in his sleep.

Screams and loud cries were heard from the terraces, men came tumbling up the ladders from the kivas, and Master Chico let fall a slender treasured volume of Señor Ariosto's romances and ran, white faced and breathless to Don Ruy, who caught and held him while the world swayed about them.

In truth he did not even release him so quickly as might be after the tremor had passed, but no man had time or humor to note the care with which he held the secretary, or that it was the lad himself who drew, flushing red, from the embrace of very strong arms.

"I — I feared you might not know — I came to tell you —" was the lame explanation to which Don Ruy listened, and smiled while he listened.

"I wonder what 'Doña Bradamante' would have done in all her bravery of white armor if such an earth wave had shaken her tilting court?" he asked, but the secretary did not know, and with face still flushed, and eyes on the ground, went to seek Yahn Tsyn-dch to hear if this was a usual thing that walls lifted in wavy lines — and that chimneys toppled from Te-hua dwellings.

The old people said it was long since the earth had shaken itself, and they watched closely the Mesa of the Hearts, and the mesa of the god-maid face, and a mountain over towards Te-gat-ha. If the

anger of the earth was great against earth people, then smoke would come from certain earth breathing places,— and the sentinels kept watch — and the old men watched also.

And around the village went a murmur of dire import — for it was plain that the Great Mystery was sending many signs to the Te-hua people; — the altars had been too long empty!

A strange foreboding filled the air, and the Castilians gathered in little groups and talked. To send the Navahu captive to his death at the hands of the tribe was not to their fancy, but if a member of a Te-hua clan must be offered up, who could tell what vengeance that clan might not take on the strangers?

Padre Vicente looked over all, and listened to much, and then talked to the governor: — was it not the time to take strong brothers that they share both the evil and the good together?

“The gods are certainly not well pleased with us, we make offerings and we make prayers — and the only good they let come to us has been our brothers of the iron and thunder and the fire sticks,” said Phen-tzah. “Yes, I think it is the time to take brothers of a strong god.”

This was the word of the governor and it was the strongest word yet given for union. But the governor made it plain that he did not belong to the order holding secret of the sun symbol. The Po-Athun were the people who must decide these spirit things. He thought the hearts of the old men of that order were kind and soft for the strangers, but — the head of that order was Tahn-té, the Po-Athun-ho!

This gave pause for thought, every man who chose to go contrary to the will of Tahn-té, found himself well nigh helpless in the Indian land, his infernal

gods were so strong that the Castilians were none too eager to flout them, only Yahn Tsyn-deh seeing the crisis of things, crept to Juan Gonzalvo and whispered,

“ You hate the Po-Athun-ho — and you say love words to me. You think you want me? ”

Juan Gonzalvo was a blunt soldier who had never before been kept at the distance of Tantalus by an Indian girl who took his gifts. On her brown neck a silver necklace of his shone richly, and in her braided hair corals of the sea gleamed red. While others had fled to the altars for prayers,—and sprinkled sacred pollen to the Go-hé-yahs — the mediators between earth and spirit world — Yahn had bathed in the river and made herself beautiful with Castilian gifts and barbaric trinketry.

To the man who measured her with eager eyes, she looked beautiful as the Te-hua goddess of whom she had told him — Ta-ah-quea who brings the Spring.

He told her so while he devoured her with his glances.

“ Good! ” she said. “ You give me love, and you hate the Po-Athun-ho. You can have us both if your heart is brave this night. ”

His arms would have clasped her for that promise, but she eluded him and laughed.

“ Your Don Kuy tells you the Po-Athun-ho must have no harm, ” she whispered, “ but is there not among your men, one, maybe even three soldiers who are master of the bow,— and can destroy in silence? ”

Gonzalvo was himself a master Bowman — and had some pride in knowing it, also he could if need be, pick men of his company who had skill, and could be trusted.

“Could you send these men as if to hunt or to fish,—could you have them find the way past the Te-hua sentinels to the place where they camped in the pines?” and she made a gesture towards Puyé. “Could you secretly find your way there in the dark before the Mother Moon looks full on the face of the earth?”

“I can do this — and I can do more than this.”

“Can you win for your people the good heart of the council that they show you the sun symbol?” she asked. “Only Tahn-té closes the door to you, and they fear Tahn-té. Tell me why your hate of him is strong.”

“His father was the Devil. Through the devil soul he learns magic things.”

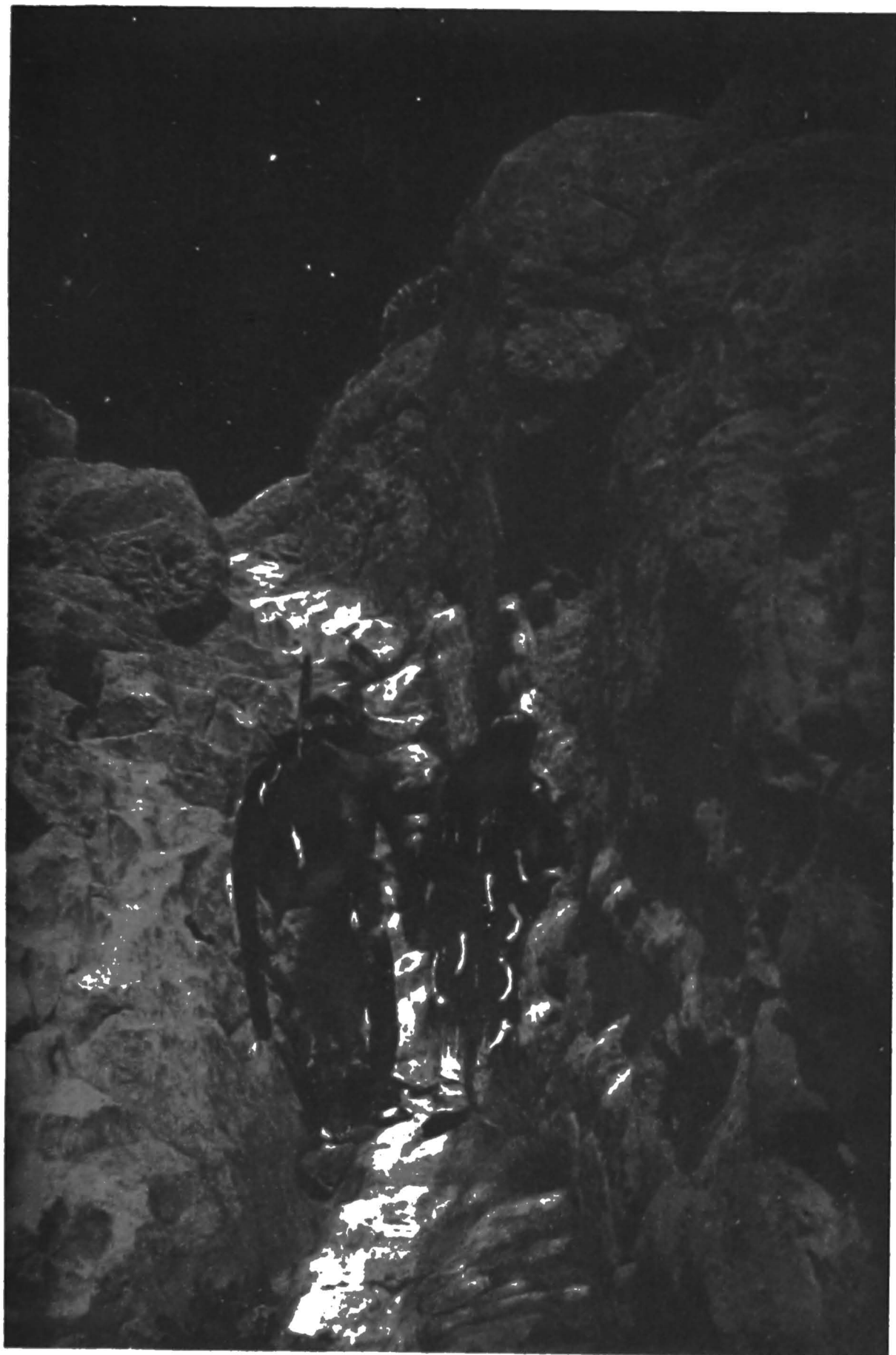
“Good! You hear the wise men tell of a maid of evil who brought the tornado and the battle — and now brings this shake of the world?”

“The witch maid,” and Gonzalvo crossed himself — “Yes — the men speak of her in whispers — and the Indians say a sacrifice must be made.”

“It must be made,” said Yahn Tsyn-deh, and her white teeth shut tight in decision. “Maybe it happens that you can make it, and win the council — how then?”

“I — make the sacrifice — I?”

“Not where the altar is,” soothed Yahn as he recoiled from the thought. “But listen you! — maybe I dream — but listen! — maybe the witch maid is a human thing with the heart of magic like Tahn-té,— maybe I can find them together for you in the sacred place of the stars in Puyé. Maybe the spirit of Tahn-té has been traded into her keeping, and with the double strength of evil she will destroy the earth in this place. The stars say so; — a great evil is



SHE LED HIM UP THE ANCIENT STAIRWAY

coming! The medicine men see it in the sacred vessels of water and in the clear stone of the ancient prophets — they say so! You are a brave heart — you can save these people and win the gold secret from the council. If you want Yahn Tsyn-deh for love you will do this thing!”

Gonzalvo stared at her incredulous, she was crediting him with a power that would place him high in the Castilian camp — if he could win! And more — she was to give him her own intense, glowing, restless self!

“I also hate Tahn-té,— that is why!” she said frankly, “and I love only men who are brave above all other men. Your fire sticks of thunder must not be heard on the heights of Puyé, but when Tahn-té and the witch meet there in the night, your arrows must send them together to the Afterworld — not one alone — but *together!* When the men of Te-hua find the dead witch (for the men of Te-gat-ha and the Navahu can witness that it is the one!) and when they find the lion robe of Tahn-té on her body, — and other gifts of Tahn-té — and find them dead the one beside the other, then the man who has made this happen will be a great man! Even the men of Te-gat-ha will come with gifts, and the men of Te-hua will give you honor, and will open the trail for you to the sun symbol. There will be no Tahn-té to put evil magic on them for doing so! When he is found dead with the witch maid they will see clearly that his magic was evil magic, and they will have breath that is deep and free again. Also I — Yahn Tsyn-deh — will walk beside you where you choose.”

Low and rapid was her speech there in the shadow of the adobe wall — and so fair was the dream she

made clear for him, that he felt himself grow dazed with the glory of it — yet he was a strong man!

If it was true that Tahn-té and the witch nested together in the ruins of Puyé, he knew well that the day of the young Ruler was ended in Povi-whah, or in any Te-hua council where it was known. But the strange mental or spiritual power of Tahn-té made it a thing of danger to let him live after accusal had been made. The way of Yahn seemed the best of all ways. If he was found dead beside the maid accursed, the evidence would be clear against him — and the True Faith would have the credit for such extermination!

He knew this was not a thing to speak of to Don Ruy — and though the padre was enemy to every thought of Tahn-té — he feared even the padre — that strange man who knew so much that was hidden in Indian life, would so clearly see that Yahn Tsyn-deh was as much the motive as gain of the gold, or glory for Mother Church.

No,— it was a thing to think out alone.

Yahn pressed his hand furtively and smiled on him as he left her, and then entered her own dwelling and sprinkled prayer meal to the spirits who carry messages to the gods.

Then she sent a child for Ka-yemo and gave the child some dried peaches that he be content to stay with his fellows in the sunshine and eat them.

Ka-yemo entered her dwelling for the first time in many moons and clasped her close, and then seated himself in the farthest corner from the Apache god pictures while Yahn Tsyn-deh talked.

Her voice was low, and often she went to the opening to see that no one listened, and Ka-yemo was

wonder-struck at the greatness of the thing she whispered.

“ You have won scalps in this battle — you have led the men in the scalp dance, and the people know you are strong. If Tahn-té went out of the world now, at this time, you would be strongest. This is the time he must go! ”

“ But if the vengeance of the Castilians came heavy? ”

“ It will not come heavy. Don Ruy has forbidden Gonzalvo even to speak words against Tahn-té to the padre. So it is that he would be angry if Gonzalvo sent arrows into the Po-Ahtun-ho. *You* must not do it, for his magic power might come heavy on your head. If you fear to destroy the Castilian capitan you are foolish in your thought — for it need never be known. Look! — here are arrows of the Navahu, from the place of battle I gathered many, these are the arrows for the work. Let Gonzalvo risk the magic of Tahn-té, and the magic of the witch maid, and destroy them, then you must alone, trail the Castilian, that he comes not back alive to tell how it was done! The Navahu arrows will take the blame from your head — it will be plain that some Navahu men stayed to take pay for their dead! So it will be, and you, Ka-yemo, will stand high, and your clan will be proud that no man stands more high. And I — Yahn — will be with you each step of the life trail — and each step we dare look down on all others and be proud. The songs you sing can be proud songs! ”

The blood of Ka-yemo jumped in his veins at that picture of victory as drawn by Yahn Tsyn-deh. Now, since she had asked him to destroy Juan Gonzalvo

was he at last content in the thought that her love had not wandered from him, Ka-yemo! Even in the days of silence and anger had he held her spirit; — and to do that with a woman is proof that a man is strong! It made him feel there in the dwelling of Yahn the Apache, that he could do battle in the open for her with the Castilian capitan if need be and have no fear; — how much more then would he dare do the work to be done in secret on the heights!

Thus did Yahn Tysn-deh spin her web that Tahn-té and the maid of the forest be caught in its meshes, and it seemed good to her that the men of iron be killed when chance offered; — especially must the Castilian capitan not be let live to tell the clan of Tahn-té aught of how the plan was made; — and above all had she spoken truth to the Woman of the Twilight by the path to the well: — her life was as the life of Ka-yemo; — if the Castilian escaped and dared claim the price she offered —!

At that thought Yahn felt for the knife in her girdle, and had joy that the edge of it was keen as the steel of the Castilians, and her smile was a threat as she almost felt her hand thrust and twist it in the flesh of the man of iron who had dared think himself the equal of Ka-yemo!

Some savage creatures of the wilderness there are who choose their mates, and stand, to live or to die, against all foes who would break the bond. The tigress will watch her mate do battle for her and then follow his conqueror, — but Yahn Tysn-deh had not even so much as that meekness of the tiger in her; — her own share of the battle would she fight that the mate she chose should remain unconquered. Proud she was of his beauty and of his grace in the scalp dance, — but more proud would she be when no

serene young Po-Athun-ho looked at her lover as if from a high place of thought. It was, strangely enough, the *unspoken* in Tahn-té against which she rebelled in bitterness. No word that was not gentle had he ever spoken to her — and to Ka-yemo no word that lacked dignity. It was as if the man in his thoughts was enthroned on the clouds: — and at last she had found the way for that cloud to be dragged low in the dust!