

CHAPTER II

THE DAY OF THE SIGN

MO-WA-THE,—the mother of Tahn-té, drew with her brush of yucca fibre the hair-like lines of black on the ceremonial bowl she was decorating. Tahn-té, slender, and nude, watched closely the deft manipulations of the crude tools; — the medicine bowls for the sacred rites were things of special interest to him — for never in the domestic arrangement of the homes of the terraces did he see them used. He thought the serrated edges better to look at than the smooth lines of the home dishes.

“Why can I not know what is that put into them?” he demanded.

“Only the Ancient Ruler and the medicine-men know the sacred thing for ‘Those Above.’”

He wriggled like a beautiful bronze snake to the door and lay there, his chin propped on his hands, staring out across the plain — six hundred feet below their door — only a narrow ledge — scarcely the length of the boy’s body: — divided the wall of their home from the edge of the rock mesa.

Mo-wa-thé glanced at him from time to time.

“What thoughts do you think that you lie still like a kiva snake with your eyes open?” she said at last.

“Yes, I think,” he acknowledged with the gravity of a ceremonial statement, “These days I am thinking thoughts — and on a day I will tell them.”

"When a boy has but few summers his thoughts are not yet his own," reminded Mo-wa-the.

"They are here — and here!" his slender brown hand touched his head, and heart,— "How does any other take them out — with a knife? Are they not me?"

"Boy! The old men shall take you to the kiva where all the youth of the clan must be taught how to grow straight and think straight."

"Will they teach me there whose son I am?" he demanded.

Her head bent lower over the sacred bowl, but she made no lines. He saw it, and crept closer.

"Am I an arrow to you?" he asked — "sometimes your face goes strange like that, and I feel like an arrow,— I would rather be a bird with only prayer feathers for you!"

She smiled wistfully and shook her head.

"You are a prayer; — one prayer all alone," she said at last. "I cannot tell you that prayer, I only live for it."

"Is it a white god prayer?" he asked softly.

She put down the bowl and stared at him as at a witch or a sorcerer; — one who made her afraid.

"I found at the shrine by the trail the head you made of the white god," he whispered. "No one knows who made it but me. I saw you. I am telling not any one. I am thinking all days of that god."

"That?" —

"Is it the great god Po-se-yemo, who went south?" he whispered. "Do you make the prayer likeness that he may come back?"

"Yes, that he may come back!"

"My mother; — you make him white!"

She nodded her head.

“I am whiter than the other boys; — than all the boys!”

She picked up the bowl again and tried to draw lines on it with her unsteady fingers.

“And you talk more than all the boys,” she observed.

“Did the moon give me to you?” he persisted. “Old Mowa says I am white because the moon brought me.”

“It is ill luck to talk with that woman — she has the witch charm.”

“When I am Ruler, the witches must live in the old dead cities if you do not like them.”

Mo-wa-thé smiled at that.

“Yes, when you are Ruler. How will you make that happen?”

“All these days I have been thinking the thoughts how. If the moon brought me to you, that means that my father was not like others; — not like mesa men.”

“No — not like mesa men!” she breathed softly.

Mo-wa-thé was very pretty and very slender. Tahn-té was always sure no other mother was so pretty, — and as she spoke now her dark eyes were beautified by some memory, — and the boy saw that he was momentarily forgotten in some dream of her own.

“No one but me shall gather the wood for the night fire to light Po-se-yemo back from the south lands,” he said as he rose to his feet and stood straight and decided before his mother. “The moon will help me, and your white god will help me, and when he sees the blaze and comes back, you will tell him it was his son who kept the fire!”

He took from his girdle the downy feather of an

eagle, stepped outside to the edge of the mesa and with a breath sent it beyond him into space. A current of air caught it and whirled it upwards in token that the prayer was accepted by Those Above.

And inside the doorway, Mo-wa-thé, watching, let fall the medicine bowl at this added evidence that an enchanted day had come to the life of her son. Not anything he wanted to see could be hidden from him this day! Powerless, she knelt with bent head over the fragments of the sacred vessel — powerless against the gods who veil things — and who unveil things!

It was the next morning that Mo-wa-thé stood at the door of Ho-tiwa the Ancient one; — the spiritual head of the village.

“Come within,” he said, and she passed his daughters who were grinding corn between the stones, and singing the grinding song of the sunrise hour. They smiled at her as she passed, but with the smile was a deference they did not show the ordinary neighbor of the mesas in Hopi land.

The old man motioned her to a seat, and in silence they were in the prayer which belongs to Those Above when human things need counsel.

Through the prayer thoughts echoed the last thrilling notes of the grinding songs at the triumph of the sun over the clouds of the dusk and the night.

Mo-wa-thé smiled at the meaning of it. It was well that the prayer had the music of gladness.

“Yes, I come early,” she said. “I come to see you. The time is here.”

“The time?”

“The time when I go. Always we have known it would be some day. The day is near. I take my son and go to his people.”

of silent speech with all the birds, and the four-foot brothers of the forests. Only a few have not lost it, and the Trues send all their Spirit People to work with that few. Your son may take back to your people the faith they knew in the ancient days."

So it was that the boy watched the drama of the Flute people from the mesa edge for the last time. The circle of praying priests at the sacred well; virgins in white garments facing the path of the cloud symbols that the rain might come; — weird notes of the flute as the chanters knelt facing the medicine bowl and the sacred corn; then the coming of the racers from the far fields with the great green stalks of corn on their shoulders, and the gold of the sunflowers in the twist of reeds circling their brows. He did not know what the new land of his mother's tribe would bring him, but he thought not any prayer could be more beautiful than this glad prayer to the gods. Of that prayer he talked to Mo-wa-thé.

Then eight suns from that day, he went from his mother's home to the kiva of the Snake Priests, and he heard other prayers, and different prayers, and when the sun was at the right height, for four days they left the kiva in silence, and went to the desert for the creeping brothers of the sands. To the four ways they went, with prayers, and with digging-sticks. He had wondered in the other days why the men never spoke as they left the kiva, and as they came back with their serpent messengers for the gods. After the first snake was caught, and held aloft for the blessing of the sun, he did not wonder.

He had shrunk, and thought it great magic when the brief public ceremony of the Snake Order was given before the awe-struck people: — It had been a

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matter of amaze when he saw the men he knew as gentle, kind men, holding the coiling snake of the rattles to their hearts and dance with the flat heads pressed against their painted cheeks.

But the eight days and nights in the kiva with these nude, fasting, praying men, had taught him much, and he learned that the most wonderful thing in the taming of the serpents was not the thing to which the people of the dance circle in the open were witness. He was only a boy, yet he comprehended enough to be awed by the strong magic of it.

And of that prayer of the serpents he talked not at all to Mo-wa-thé.

And the Ancient knew it, and said. "It is well! May he be a great man — and strong!"

From a sheath of painted serpent skin the Ruler drew a flute brown and smooth with age.

"Lé-lang-ûh, the God of the Flute sent me the vision of this when I was a youth in prayer," he said gently. "I found it as you see it long after I had become a man. On an ancient shrine uncovered by the Four Winds in a wilderness I found it. I have no son and I am old. I give it to you. Strange white gods are coming to the earth in these days, and in the south they have grown strong to master the people. I will be with the Lost Others when you are a man, but my words here you will not forget; — the magic of the sacred flute has been for ages the music of the growing things in the Desert. The God of the Flute is a god old as the planting of fields, and a strong god of the desert places. It may be that he is strong to lead you here once more to your brothers on some day or some night — and we will be glad that you come again. For this I give the flute of the vision to you. I have spoken. Lolomi!"