

CHAPTER VI

TAHN-TÉ — THE RULER

SUMMERS of the Sun, and winters when the stars danced for the snow, had passed over the valley of Povi-whah. New people had been born into the world, and old people had died, but the oldest man in the council, Kā-ye-fah — the Ruler of Things from the Beginning, had lived many years after the time when he thought the shadow life must come to him. And to the Woman of the Twilight he had said that it was her son who kept him living — her son to whom he taught the ancient things of his own youth. In the keen enthusiasms he had found such a son as he had longed for. The lost daughter, Kā-ye-povi, he had never found — and never forgotten. To Tahn-té he had talked of her until she almost lived in their lives. The face of the god-maid on the south mesa had for Kā-ye-fah the outline of chin and backward sweep of hair strangely akin to the face of the lost child. He liked to think the god-maid belonged more to his clan of Towa Toan — the High Mesa clan — than to another.

“If she had not gone into the shadow land, her face would have looked that way,” he said.

“And we could gather bright flowers for her hair,” — said the boy — “they would be sweeter than the cold, far brightness of the stars where the god-maid waits,” and he pointed to where Antares gleamed from the heart of the Scorpion above the dusk profile, — “I think of Kā-ye-povi as the dream maid. She

will be my always young sweetheart — my only one.”

“That is good,” said Kā-ye-fah — “very good for the work of the unborn years.”

For the youth was to carry on the tribal prayers to the gods when Kā-ye-fah no longer walked on earth. And his teaching must be greater than all other teaching, for the Ruler was planning for the work of the days to come.

And in a day of the early spring the work was made ready, for to Sāa-hanh-que-ah he said: — “A week ago So-hoah-tza went under the waters of the river and never breathed again. To him was given the guard of the sacred place of the Sun Father. I have not yet made any other the guardian. You are the woman of the order of the Po-Ahtun — I give you the guard to keep. Call the governor — but call your son first. You shall be guard as So-hoah-tza was guard, but Tahn-té shall be guard as I have been! Lean lower, and let your ear listen and your heart keep sacred the word. I go to our Lost Others — but I leave you to guard.”

The governor came, and all were sad, but no one thought that the life was over. Kā-ye-fah talked and smiled as one who goes to a feast.

But Tahn-té, standing tall and still by the couch said: — “It will be over! This morning he wakened and said he would go with the sun to-day. He has no other thought, and he will go!”

And the women wept, and made ready the things of burial for the high priest of the highest order. If Tahn-té said he would go into the shadows at that time — the women knew that it would be so. Tahn-te, as they knew him, joyous in the dances of the seasons,— was never in their minds apart from Tahn-te the prophet whose dreams even as a boy, had

been beyond the dreams of the others who sought visions.

And as the sun touched the black line of the pines on the western mountain, the aged Ruler asked for his wand of office, and the governor gave it to him, and with his own hand he gave it to Tahn-té, that even when his own form was covered with the soil, his vote would be on record in the minds of those who listened — and that vote gave to his pupil in magic, the wand of power — The youngest qualified member of the Order of Spiritual things was thus acclaimed as the Po-Ahtun-ho, a Ruler of Things from the Beginning.

Twenty-four years he had lived — but the time of life with the white men had counted more than double. In magic of many kinds he was more wise than the men of years, and the heart of his mother was glad with the almost perfect gladness when Tahn-té stood in the place of the Ancient Wisdom and listened as the ear of the god listens to the recitation of many tribal prayers.

The Po-Ahtun-ho also listens at times to the individual appeals of the things of every day life — as a father listens to a child who seeks advice. To the more ancient Rulers the younger people were often afraid to go — various “uncles” of the village were appealed to instead. But the youth of Tahn-té made all things different — even the love of a man for a maid, was not so small a thing that the new Ruler made the suppliant feel how little it was.

And one of the first who came to him thus — who knelt and offered a prayer to him, the prayer of a love, was the little Apache tigress who had been first of his own village to greet him in Ua-lano — Yahn Tsyn-deh, who had grown so pretty that the men of

the other villages talked of her, and her mother had asked great gifts for her. But the mother had died with the winter, and Yahn refused to be subject to the Tain-tsain clan of her father, and there had been much trouble until she threatened to go back to her mother's tribe, and many thought it might come to that after all — for she was very strong of will.

But before Tahn-té the Po-Ahtun-ho she crouched, and sobs shook her, and her hair covered her face as a veil.

“ If it is of the clan, Yahn, it is to the governor you should speak: —” said Tahn-té — “ from him it may come to me if he thinks best. There are rules we must not break. Because I carried you, when little, on my shoulder, is no reason to walk past the door of the governor and bring his duties to me.”

He spoke kindly, for his heart was kind towards the little fighter of boyhood's days. Her alien blood was ever prompting her to reckless daring beyond the customs of Te-hua maidens. In a different way, he himself was an alien and it helped him to understand her. But this day he saw another Yahn — one he had not known could hide under the reckless exterior.

She tossed back her hair and faced him.

“ How should I speak with Phen-tza the governor — he is the uncle of Ka-yemo! It is he who has helped do this thing — he would make me a slave or have me whipped! How should I speak with him? Ka-yemo knows that the governor his uncle, will —

“ Ka-yemo! What has Ka-yemo done? What trouble does he make? ”

“ Oh — no trouble! ” her words were bitter words, — “ Only the governor his uncle, has talked with the family of Tsa-fah and the marriage is made with his

daughter Koh-pé of the beads, and you — know, Tahn-té — you know!”

Tahn-té did know, he regarded her in silence.

“Speak!”—she pleaded. “You are more than governor — you are the Highest! Magic is yours to make and to unmake. Unmake this thing! With your magic send him back to me — to me!”

“Magic is not for that:—it is for Those Above!”

Again she flung herself at his feet and wept. The sobs hurt him, yet he must not lift her. She begged for a charm — for a spell — for black magic to strike dead the wearer of the red bears and the blue beads, for all wild things a wild passion could suggest.

“If you could see into the other years you would be content to have it as it is,” he said gently — “the years ahead may —”

“I care nothing for the years ahead! I want the *now!* — I want —”

“Listen!” he said, and she fell silent with covered face. “That which you feel for Ka-yemo is not the love of marriage. A man takes a wife for love of a wife and a home and children in the home. A man does not chain himself to a tigress whose bite and whose blows he has felt. A man would wish to be master:—what man has been born who could be master in your home?”

“You do not know. You have lived a different sort of life! I could be more than another wife — than any other wife! I shall kill some one! — and she rose to her feet — “unless the magic comes I kill some one!”

“And then?”

“Then Phen-tza the governor will have me

strangled, and they will take me to my grave with ropes of raw hide and there will not any where be a sad heart for Yahn Tsyn-deh."

"You see how it is — he is precious to you — as he always has been. But your love is too great a love for happy days. Always it will bring you the ache in the heart. No thing of earth should be given the love like that: — it is a fire to burn a whole forest in the days of its summer, and in the winter snows there will be only ashes."

"Good! — then I, Yahn, will rather burn to the ashes in such summer days, and be dead under the snows in the winter of the year!"

"And after that?"

"After that will not the Po-Ahtun-ho be Ruler always? Will he not remember his friends who are precious in the Beyond as he remembers this one today?" she asked mockingly. "Kā-ye-fah told the council that you have lived a life no other man lives, and that no woman is precious to you: — when you find the woman who is yet to come, may a viper poison her blood — may a cat of the hills tear her flesh! May you love until madness comes — and may the woman find only death in your arms — and find it quickly!"

When the Woman of the Twilight came in from the field with yellow corn pollen for the sacred ceremonies, the lattice of reeds at the outer door was yet shaking as from touch of a ruthless hand, or a strong wind.

"Who was it that cried here? she asked. "Who has left you sad?"

"Perhaps a prophetess, my mother," answered Tahn-té, and sat thoughtful where Yahn had left

him. And after a long time he arose and sought the governor.

But it was fated that the governor and the new Ruler were not to talk of the love of a maid or the marriage of a man that day.

A runner had been sent to Povi-whah from Kat-yi-ti. He gave his message, and stayed to eat while other runners took the trail, and before the sun had moved the width of a hand across the sky, the villages of Kah-po and Tsa-mah and Oj-ke were starting other runners to Ui-la-ua and far Te-gat-ha and at Kah-po the head men gathered to talk in great council over the word brought from the south.

For the word was that the men of the iron and the beards and the white skins were again coming to the land of the People of the Sun. They came in peace, and searched for the lost padres. A man of the gown was with them for prayers, and a Te-hua man who had been caught by the Navahu long winters ago and traded to the land of green birds. The Te-hua man said the white people were good people, and he was guiding them to the villages by the big river, Pō-sōn-gé.