

CHAPTER IX

YAHN, THE APACHE

“**B**ROTHERS:— you of the life
— Of also the fire divine!
You of the mountains
Of also the Mother Mist!
Out of the mist is a voice.
It is not the voice afraid!
Out of the shadows,
Out of the forests,
Out of the deserts
It is born!
In a good hour it is born.
The wind of the Sun sends it breath!
Brothers:— the Dawn drives the Darkness
And in the mountain strong
No one sings fear!
Out from far worlds it comes,
With the strong Dawn it comes
Brothers:— be mountain strong
Sing not of fear!”

The rising sun tipped the terraces with gold and rose, and the nude brown men, and the men children, faced the east with hands lifted to greet the coming of the Great Power. This was as it had been since the time of most ancient days.

But the song chanted from the terrace by the Woman of the Twilight was a new song, and the men made their prayers, and wondered at the singer singing thus on the roof of her dwelling.

The dew of the hills was on her clothing and on her hair. She had dreamed a dream and walked in the night until the words of the dream had come to her lips, and when they came she sang them aloud and the people listened, and the men went from their prayers and thought about it.

Many were conscious of secret thoughts of dread at the coming of the strangers. The priestess had spoken of the thing no one had given voice to.

From the day when her son had been honored as Po-Ahtun-ho, the strife of existence seemed ended for Sāā-hanh-que-ah. The thing she had lived to see was now accomplished. Her days were now the gray days of rest and of mystery. She made many prayers alone in the hills, and forgot to eat.

She was not old, yet to Tahn-té she said, "It is over:— The time is come when you stand alone to be strong. Your work is now the work of the strong man, and I go to make prayers in the hills."

When she stayed over long, he sought her out lest ill should come to her, and more than once he had walked into the village with his mother in his arms as other people carried the little children. It was the Woman of the Twilight, and no one laughed. At any other woman they would have laughed to see her carried in the arms of a man.

And so, when she stood on her terrace and spoke of the voice of the Dawn and the Mountain Mists, all listened. The men talked of it in the kivas of each clan, and the women talked all together, and were glad. They did not know quite what their fear had been, but it was no longer with them since the woman of the God Thoughts said the voices sang no fear.

Only Yahn Tsyn-deh on the terrace opposite, strung

together claws of birds for a necklace, and scoffed warily.

“Only if you are mountain strong need you have no fear,” she said. “The promise that her son is maybe the Voice and the Dawn is a good promise — but the wise woman of the hill caves is double wise! Her song has double thoughts. Be you all mountain strong, as gods are strong, and no fear will come! But if the mountain strength waits not at your door — what then happens?”

No one knew, and the women looked at each other in question. The peace of the wise woman's words was killed by the bitter laugh of Apache Yahn.

When the bitter mood touched the girl, the Te-hua people remembered that her mother was of that wild Apache people — enemy to all. At times she could be a maid like other maids — with charm and laughter — a very bewitching Yahn who made herself a beauty barbaric with strings of gay berries of the rose, or flat girdles of feathers dyed like the rainbow. Her bare arms had bracelets of little shells. Into the weaving of her garments she had put threads of crimson in strange patterns — they were often the symbols of the Apache gods or spirit people, and when she chose she made the other women feel fear with them. Her own mother who told her of them, would not have worn them thus — but Yahn was more Apache than her mother.

One woman shelling corn for the meal, suggested that if the Te-hua people had not mountain strength it might mean war as the people to the South had endured that other time — when the men at Tiguex were burned to ashes by the strangers.

“Oh, wise Säh-pah!” and Yahn laughed at the

late thought,—“Has the thing at last come to the mind of one of you?”

“I thought of it also,” said one of the other women sulkily.

“Ai:—you all thought—but none of you dared say words while the new Ruler and the wise governor kept silent to the people!” she taunted them. “Of all the women I only can speak in the speech of the strangers.”

“Think you we will see them?” asked one girl doubtfully—“will we not all be sent to the hills the days when they come?”

“In other villages they did so in that long ago day—some men never let their women be seen of the white men who wore the iron.”

“I will not be sent to the hills,” decided Yahn. “From Ke-yemo and from Tahn-té I know their words. I will talk for the strangers. I will learn many things!”

“When was it you learn so much?” asked Säh-pah jealously.

“A little—little at a time all these years!” declared Yahn in triumph. “Tahn-té wanted not to forget it—so he said to me the words—now they are mine.”

The women regarded her with a wonder that was almost awe,—there might be something infernal and unlucky in talking two ways.

“If it be war, think you Ka-yemo will be the war chief as he has been made?” queried Säh-pah. “He will be made second if there is fighting,—think you not so?”

Yahn apparently did not think, but she did listen.

“We know how it was with his father Awh-we—” said one. “In that day of trial he failed that once

in the battle with the Yutah. The old men let him pull weeds in the corn when the next war came."

The strong fingers of Yahn broke the bird's claw, and she tossed it from the terrace edge, and selected another.

"But the new young wife Koh-pe may make the son of his father brave for all that," and Säh-pah who was not young and not winsome, watched Yahn, and felt content when she saw the Apache eyes grow narrow and the teeth set. "A wife with many robes and many strings of shells and blue stones, makes a man strong to fight for them. Ka-yemo will be a strong man now."

"He is of my clan — Ka-yemo!" said Yahn panting with pent up fury, "he can fight,— all of our blood can fight! — if the war is here we can show you of the Panyoo clan how the Tain-tsain clan can fight with the new enemy!"

They all knew that Yahn Tsyn-deh could indeed fight, she wore eagle feathers and had a right to wear them since a season of the hunt on the Navahu border when a young warrior had stolen her for his lodge, and with his own club set with flint blades, had she let his spirit go on the shadow trail, and to her own village had she brought the scalp and the club, also his robe and beads of blue and of green stone — and she made the other women remember it at times.

"Ho! — and will it be you who bears a spear and a shield and a club on that day?" asked Säh-pah the skeptic.

"I fight that day — or any day, as strong as the fight any man of yours can ever make!" This retort of Yahn was met with half frightened giggles by the other women. Säh-pah had been unlucky in the matter of men. Yet, her list of favorites had not

been limited, and the sarcasm of Yahn was understood.

“It is good there is some one brave to meet the strangers!” and the smile of Säh-pah was not nice. “Maybe you go to ask for a man — maybe it is why you learn their words — maybe the Tain-tsain clan will ask for a white man for you!”

“When *I* ask — I will not be made a laugh, and sent home with a gift,”—and the other women squealed with shrill laughter and had great joy over the quarrel. The eyes of Säh-pah blazed. She tried to speak but her fury gave voice only in throaty growls, and an older woman than all of them stepped between them in protest.

“To your own houses — all you who would fight!” she decided — “go fight your own men if they send you away with gifts, but by my door I do not want panthers who scream!”

Säh-pah sulkily obeyed, and Yahn laughed and continued her work.

“It is not good to laugh when the bad fortune comes to any one,” said the old woman, but Yahn refused to be subdued.

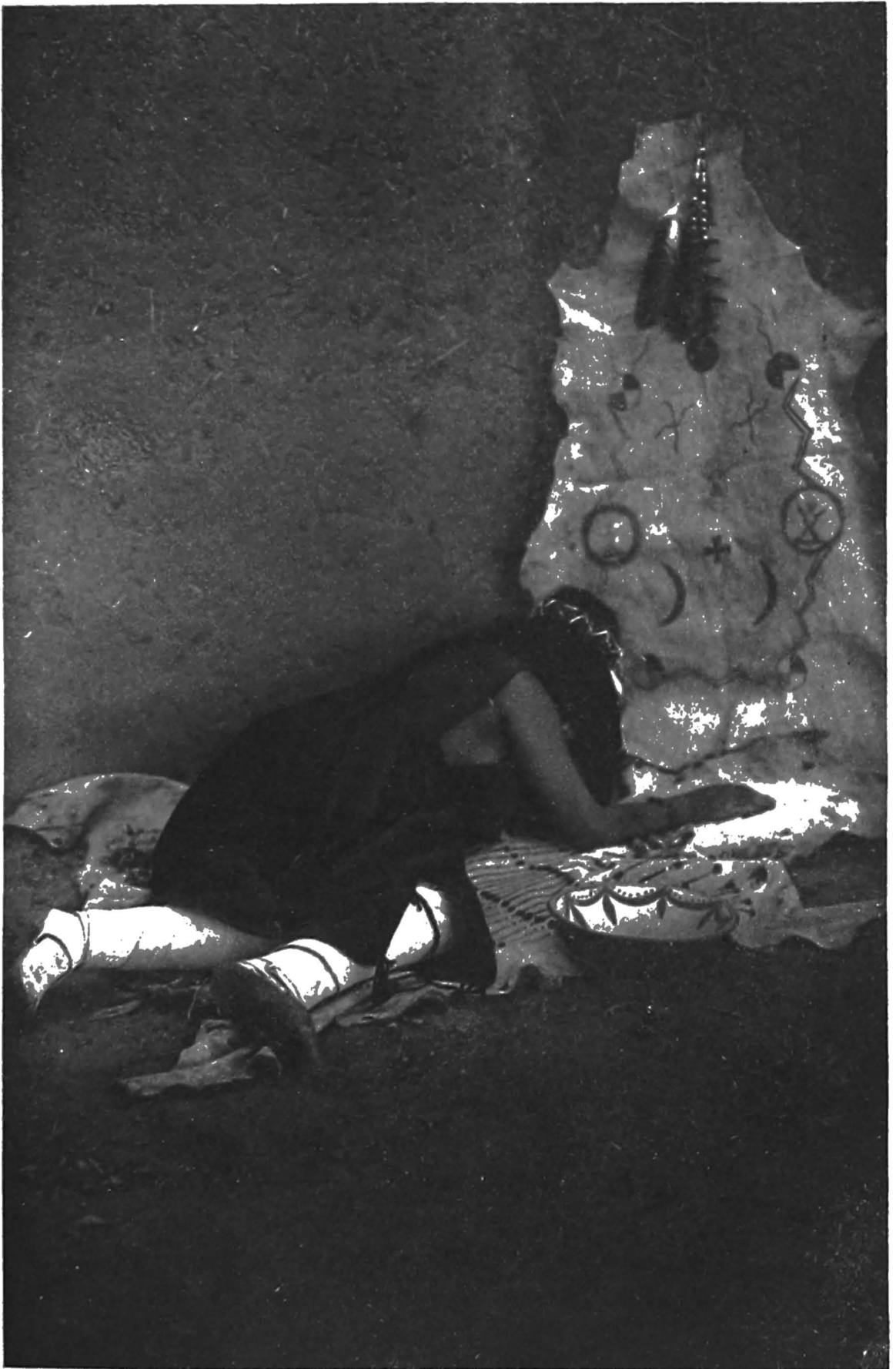
“It is true, mother —” she insisted — (all elderly women are mothers or aunts to village folk) — it is true. When the dance of the corn was here and the women made choice of their favorites — it is well known that Säh-pah did follow Phen-tza a long ways. He laughed at her.” Yahn herself laughed as she told it,—“he laughed and he asked why she comes so far alone — and he gives her his blanket and goes away! That is how he takes her for favorite that day! — he only laughs and let go his blanket to Säh-pah!”

The old woman put up her hand that her laugh

be not heard. The humor of primitive people is not a delicate thing, and that the blandishments of Säh-pah had been of no use — as was witness the blanket! — had made many laugh around the night fires. Yet the old “mother” thought it not good that quarrels should grow out of it.

“Is your heart so bright with happiness that you understand nothing of the shame another woman may know, Yahn Tsyn-deh?” — she asked seriously. “Säh-pah is of the free woman — and we are not of her clan to make judgement.”

“Speak no words to me of a bright heart!” said Yahn, and arose, and went away. Across the roofs she went to the stairway of her dwelling, where she had lived alone since the death of her mother. It was a good room she entered, very white on the walls, and the floor white also, with the works of her own fingers on the smoothness of it. In a niche of the thick wall stood a bronze god, and a medicine bowl with serrated edges, and a serpent winged and crowned painted in fine lines to encircle it. On the wall was a deerskin of intricate ornamentation, good and soft in the dressing, it was painted in many symbols of the Apache gods and the prayer thoughts. From her mother Yahn had learned them and had painted them in ceremonial colors. The great goddess of the white shell things — and white flowers — and white clouds — was there, and the sun god was also there, and the curve of the moon with the germ of life in its heart. The morning star was there — and also the symbol of the messengers from the gods. Circling all these sacred things was the blue zig-zag of the sky lightening by which Those Above send their decrees to earth children who know



*T*HE PRAYER OF YAHN TSYN-DEH

the signs, and at each corner the symbols of the Spirit People were on guard.

Sah-pah had said once that they might be devil things, and not god things, and Yahn had watched her chance, and emptied a jar of dirty water on her head for that, and no more women said things of the walls of Yahn Tsyn-deh's house. But whether she deemed them holy or not holy, she hung the necklace of birds' claws under the symbol of the Goddess Stenht-lihan, and then prostrated herself and lay in silence.

After a long time she spoke.

"All this that the Apache blood be not lost in the flood of a shame! All this that no Te-hua woman ever again sees that my heart has been sick — all this that a double curse of —"

But in the midst of her words of whispered prayer speech failed her — and tears choked her until she sobbed for breath. With all her will she wished to curse some one whom all her woman's heart forbade her harm!