

THE TEST OF FIRE: A ZUNI ORDEAL.*

IN the curious old "pueblo," the walled city of the Zuni Indians, a brother and sister were talking by themselves, apart from their youthful playmates; and their conversation was very serious, as was evident from the tone of voice in which the sister said—

"I wish you would not be a warrior, Inhadi."

"Why do you make such a wish as that, Kiawa, my little sister?"

"Ah, because you must suffer, and I may not be with you, brother; and my heart will break to think of you in pain all the long night!"

Kiawa's eyes were full of tears, her soft voice trembled piteously, and she clung to her brother's hand, sitting on a flat stone at his feet, as he leaned against the gray wall of the old pueblo terrace. Below them, white with snow, the plain of Zuni stretched away to the western mountains, where the low, winter sun was sinking out of sight.

Inhadi smiled and clasped the trembling fingers of his little sister with a reassuring touch, as he replied—

"You need not fear for me, Kiawa; I am not afraid. My heart is not so weak as to faint before the hour of trial comes; and when it comes I shall not have to bear my trial without help. The spirits of all my brave forefathers—my guardian spirits—will be with me and uphold me; they will not let me shrink and shame my warrior blood."

Kiawa sighed, but said nothing. Inhadi added—

"They say the Yumas and Mojaves will make war upon us in the spring, you know, and I must win the right to go forth among the Zuni braves and help to save our corn lands and defend our homes. Not be a warrior! Why, if all the Zuni girls could keep back their brothers from the trial of the brave, how long would there be any men to fight our battles and drive away our foes?"

"But you are so young, Inhadi, and they say the trial is cruel," faltered little Kiawa.

Inhadi smiled again.

"I am past sixteen, my sister; and how much longer would you have me wait? My father was not so old as I am when he took his degree; and since he is gone away to the land of our lost others, who never more return, his son must take his place and be worthy of his line. I must be a warrior, Kiawa; and you may be sure that I shall bear my ordeal bravely."

The youthful Zuni stood up straight and proud, folding his red and blue serape around him as he spoke, with all the dignity becoming to a "warrior bold," such as he meant to be. And, indeed, it required no small degree of resolution to face the thought of what awaited him.

Among the Indian tribes of the pueblos, of whom the Zunis are perhaps the most important, it is invariably the custom, when a youth desires admission to the warrior's rank, to put him through an ordeal of great severity, the manner of which is varied in the different pueblos, in order to test his courage and his powers of endurance. The young candidate who is not willing to qualify himself by submitting to this test can not hope to hear his name included in the list of fighting men—the nation's roll of honor.

Inhadi, whose father had been a valliant warrior and a man of influence among the people, had applied for his military degree, as it may be aptly termed, in the customary form; and this night he was to undergo his trial and prove his fitness for the rank he claimed.

The sun was setting, and it would soon be dark; the towers of the pueblo cast long shadows across the plains and the sunny terrace was growing cold.

"Come, Kiawa," said Inhadi to his sister. "I must be making ready for the ordeal; it is time."

Kiawa rose, still clinging to his hand, and together they went along the terrace to a narrow doorway, by which they came into a little, stone-paved court; and climbing up a ladder, they stood upon a higher terrace with a parapet along its outer edge, like the ramparts of a mediæval castle. Hand in hand they entered at the low door of a Zuni house—their uncle's house, which had been home to them and their widowed mother since the day when their father had departed, as the Zunis say, "to the land of our others."

The room into which Inhadi entered, leading his little sister, was paved with blocks of stone; the ceiling was of wattled willow poles, upheld by great, smoke-blackened rafters, and the walls were plastered with clay and neatly white-washed. There were two small, high windows, with plates of transparent selenite instead of glass; and the smoky chimney had an arched fire-place, where a fire of "pinone" wood was burning brightly; while two great, bowl-shaped lamps, filled with grease, added, in equal measure, to the brightness and the smoke.

Inhadi's uncle was a wealthy man among the pueblo people, as was evident from the abundance of gay blankets hanging on the walls and spread over the stone bench at one side of the room, the sheepskin rugs upon the floor, the handsome water jars and other decorated pottery, and the fine clothing worn by all his family. The little Kiawa was dressed in a loose-fitting frock of the finest Moqui cotton, with a border of gay stripes, a head mantle of bright-hued fabric, and long strings of shell beads twined around her neck and arms. Her flexible shoes of soft buckskin were completely covered with bead embroidery. Her brother wore, under his fringed and striped serape, a seamless coat of dark-blue cloth, gathered at the waist with a

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