

SEASONS OF HARVEST – Chapter 48

“First the Spaniards want our houses,” Gokache raged. “Then they beat and rape our women, and now they steal our clothing.”

As he spoke before the gathered elders of the river towns, the ancient longtooth pendant hung about his neck. It was an old and all but forgotten totem now, but it had come to Gokache through family inheritance. He was uncertain if much power was still in it and he seldom wore the curving, polished fang. Yet, with the possibility of conflict heavy in the air, he’d felt a need to take it from its deerskin pouch.

“The business of the woman is regrettable,” an elder said. “But in the end it is merely insult, causing little trouble for any of us here.”

“But Dry Cornhusk should have never given them Aalkafa,” someone else stood and criticized. “Tsitchi’ maz – you must answer for your actions.”

Dry Cornhusk stood to speak. “I am governor of Aalkafa,” he said nervously. “And the responsibility is mine. I remembered the words of Strikes-The-Camp, a man whom I consider wise. He told us to receive these strangers with friendship and respect – ”

“Wait, wait – I did not mean to give away our land,” old Strikes-The-Camp interrupted. “For as long as I can remember, we have defended what we had. We have not fought the Diné and others for so many generations just to let these bearded, white-skinned fools take away our homes. Dry Cornhusk has made a big mistake, I think.”

“What is done is done,” another elder said. “The question now is what we must do next.”

Gokache stood again. “Their great general, the tall, dark one called Coronado, summoned Governor *Been’thot’ka* – He-Makes-The-Fire, to his house. There the Spaniard demanded over three hundred winter coats with which to dress his soldiers, to be given over by all twelve Tse’wesh towns – as well as cotton cloth, and corn and turkeys.”

He-Makes-The-Fire stood. “What Gokache says is true,” the governor explained. “But I told the man I could only act for Moho – that each town was separate, governed differently from all the others.”

“Yet this Coronado sends his men to each of us with the same demand,” Gokache said with disgust and anger in his voice. “When they come to Kuaua, maybe we will kill them.”

Now an older man named *Too’estefa* – Antelope Runner, rose to speak. Antelope Runner was short and squat, even for a Tse’wesh man, but he carried a deep, strong voice which was twice

his size and in the darkened confines of the kiva his words boomed like thunder.

“I am the governor of Kuaua,” Antelope Runner said. “And it would be by my word, not Gokache’s, as to whether we would kill these men.”

“I meant no disrespect,” Gokache said. “But my blood is hot against these strangers. And my fear is strong. To let them take hold here will bring hard times for all of us. We are many more than they. Let us kill them now, and the others when they arrive.”

“A hard winter is ahead,” Antelope Runner argued. “All our wizards tell us so. I do not want to make it any harder by calling for war. Kuaua will give these Spaniards what they ask, and pray that they’ll be gone by spring.”

One by one, the other governors agreed to do the same. In the garrison of Alcanfor the news was welcomed, and in obedience to the command of Viceroy Mendoza, General Coronado decreed that nothing would be taken from the Tiguex pueblos without some recompense.

But shiny beads and little bells would not keep the people warm when winter came, or feed them as the autumn harvest was fast depleted by the demanding strangers in their midst.

Gokache had left the council in a rage. Even if the Spaniards left in spring, he was convinced, little would remain behind for the Tse’wesh to live on. These strangers were like the clouds of locusts that occasionally came through the river valley, devouring everything in their path. Every sense Gokache possessed told him that to do nothing but give in to them was foolish. Unknown to the governors of Tiguex, many others felt the same.

“But can we drive these Spaniards away?” A man from Paako asked. The flames of a dozen small fires danced across his face. This was a secret meeting, called by Gokache and some others – held in the desert at night, east of the river near the old cave in the mountains. Squatting by the fires were at least sixty young men from all twelve pueblos.

“We can,” Gokache insisted. “And many others will join us. Now is the time to do it, brothers. Before their larger force arrives and while we still have food left.”

“What of our elders and the governors?” Someone asked. “They have spoken against war with these people.”

“They are old, past the time of fighting,” Gokache argued. “When it is a time of peace their words are good words, but now they are wrong.”

“Would Gokache go against them, then?”

“Yes, to save ourselves.”

“What of the other Spaniards that march this way,” another man shouted. “Will not those that follow seek revenge?”

“Not with their leader gone,” Gokache predicted. “Cut the head from a snake and the rest of it is harmless.”

Now it was *Taash'tle* – Takes-No-Water, who spoke in the firelight, his breath steaming in the cold air. “Maybe Gokache reasons well, but this may be a snake whose head is hard to cut.”

“Why would Taash'tle think so?”

“Because, like Gokache, I have seen their great weapons – and the animals they ride upon.”

“They are only men, no different than ourselves.”

“True enough,” Taash'tle agreed. “I myself have bested one or two of them in wrestling. If they can be beaten in play, they can also be killed in war – just like any other man.”

“Then what does Taash'tle fear?”

“Their horses. If the Spaniards can be carried by such huge beasts able to trample over both obstacles and people, and then be borne away to safety faster than a Tse'wesh warrior can run – ” Taash'tle let the sentence die, and shrugged. “I fear their horses, brother.”

“Then let us deal with the horses first,” Gokache suggested. “Before we tend to the head of the snake.”

Neither Primitivo nor Emiliano had ever seen a man flogged. Even on the long voyage from Spain no soldier or sailor had misbehaved in so bad a manner as to invoke such punishment. Yet now, with the rest of the assembled garrison at Alcanfor, they stood stiffly in formation as a hapless, middle-aged Indian from Moho was dragged naked out the door of Coronado's headquarters.

“What's the wretch done?” Primitivo asked.

“Stolen a turkey,” someone whispered within the ranks.

“God's blood, if that's true, he stole it from us after we stole it from him.” Primitivo pointed out, shaking his head. “The poor bastard.”

“Silence!” Sergeant Vigil snarled from the corner of his mouth. “No talking in the ranks, you men are still soldiers in the Spanish army.”

With his wife and children, and with other members of his family silently watching, the Indian's wrists were bound tightly together then tied to the wheel of a heavy Spanish cart. His legs and feet were left unbound. Fray Alonzo limped forward to offer prayers, handing the frightened and confused turkey thief a carved wooden crucifix and urging him to clutch it tightly in his hands.

“Christ's mercy, it will help thee bear thy suffering,” whispered the devout Franciscan to a man who did not understand him.

Captain Cárdenas, attired in full formal dress, stepped forward and read the particulars of the man's crime, the judgement of his guilt, the sentence proscribed, and finally General Coronado's orders for its execution. Coronado himself never emerged from the doorway to see the order carried out.

The instrument of punishment would be the infamous *gato de nueve colas* – the cat-o-nine-tails. This one was weighted with a small, sharp barb of tin fastened to the tip of each leather strand. It was a device designed to cut and tear, to produce much pain and blood without leaving its victim with the deeper scars of a heavier, single-strand oxen whip.

Administered by a stocky soldier selected for his strength, the sentence was twenty strokes of the cat. The Indian only grunted for the first nine and then began to cry out, softly at first, then louder with each successive fall of the lash. The crucifix fell from the man's hands early on. It was dropped purposely for it served no cause the prisoner could comprehend.

By the fourteenth hissing stroke, the hoarse cries of punishment became like the screams of the damned to Primitivo. Bound securely to the cart's wheel by his wrists, the Indian's legs were well beyond his conscious control. The legs involuntarily tried to run – to scramble away from the pain – first this way and then that, until by the seventeenth fall of the lash, consciousness was gone, the legs were still, and the man could no longer feel anything.

When it was done, the Spaniards cut the prisoner from the wheel and let him sag limply to the ground. The man's children stood back frightened and confused, while his wife and some others wrapped him in a blanket and carried him down to the riverbank where the cold water might wash and numb his bloody back.

Later that day, Primitivo and Emiliano, with some other soldiers and a few Mexican Indians, had drawn the duty of mucking out the garrison's corrals. The stalls were located some distance from the pueblo, and it was hard and dirty work, but none of them minded for the labor kept them warm.

The air seemed thin and brittle, with little wind, and in the distance the white smoke of a dozen cookfires drifted above the pueblo rooftops for a hundred feet or more before the smoky columns broke apart and slowly disappeared into the dull gray winter sky.

"That one took the cat well," Emiliano offered, thinking about the flogging they'd witnessed only hours earlier. "I do not think that I could have stood so much had I been in his place."

"He'll steal no more turkeys," another soldier said.

“Oh yes he will,” argued Primitivo. “He’ll steal again if his family is hungry enough – any sensible man would.”

“The mountains are full of deer,” the soldier pointed out. “When his back has healed, let him hunt to feed his family.”

“No, you must first look to the white *mantilla* that covers those peaks,” Primitivo said, pointing toward the mountains. “The months of hunting are gone until next spring. There is six feet of snow in the high valleys up there.”

For as long as the people of the river could remember, the Tse’wesh had called their holy eastern mountain Oku Pin – the place where Wind Old Woman made her home. Now the Spanish, enthralled with the deep red beauty of sacred Oku Pin at sunset, began to call it *Los Montañas de Sandia* – the “watermelon mountains” – the Sandias.

“Then let the savages starve,” the soldier shrugged, tired of the discussion. “We have come to this place for gold and grant. What is their hunger to us?”

Just as this was said, one of the Mexican Indians working with them gave a cry of surprise and jumped up in the air. He ran a few feet, then staggered and crumpled to the ground, great gouts of blood rushing from his coughing mouth. Two arrows had whistled in from somewhere, one stuck in the muscular nape of the Indian’s neck, while the other pierced the man’s back, passed just below his ribcage and severed the large artery of his heart.

“We are attacked!” A soldier shouted. “God save us all.”

Amid much confusion and a high, eerie chorus of war cries, the corralled horses reared and squealed in fright. Before Primitivo could reckon what was happening, he was hit painfully but harmlessly in the boot by another arrow. Now, with Emiliano pointing in their direction, Primitivo saw twenty or thirty Tiguex Indians knocking down the pine barricades which held the Spanish mounts – waving blankets and driving the horses, panic-stricken, across the shallow river towards the pueblos of Arenal and nearby Moho.

The soldiers knew they had no chance to fight. They’d been surprised and caught unarmed, save for their pitchforks and shovels – poor weapons with which to defend corrals. Yet, it seemed the raiders were less intent on killing them than in driving off the horses. Without their mounts, both officers and the terrifying Spanish cavalry would be afoot and impotent in this vast, unfriendly land.

“This place is lost,” Primitivo shouted. “We must run back to Alcanfor and tell the general of this hostility.”

By the time word reached Coronado, the corrals had been knocked down and emptied. Cursing the insolence of the savages, Cárdenas, along with a detachment of his men, galloped out in fast

pursuit. The prints of feet and hooves led him across the river where he found many animals already dead from lance and arrow wounds. Some others were still alive, but terrified and scattered widely in the cottonwood bosque.

The captain rounded up all he could and started back across the river. Passing the pueblo of Arenal, now barricaded behind new walls, he heard a barrage of angry shouts and insults. From within the pueblo itself he could hear captured horses screaming and dashing wildly about. The Indians were driving them as they did buffalo, and shooting arrows at them until they stumbled and fell dying.

The Spanish nobleman within Cárdenas caused him to be both furious and saddened at the thought of fine mounts so cruelly wasted. With both pomp and indignance, he paraded his company in front of the pueblo offering the Indians forgiveness and peace if they'd stop their folly and free any animals still alive.

Gokache had planned the horse raid and was first among those who took part in it. He stood at the walls defiantly, calling out to the Tse'wesh fighters assembled in Arenal: "This one offers peace – the Spaniard says he will forgive us, even as he steals our houses, rapes our women, takes our clothing and our food. Yet, see how easily his horses die – no different than the bison or the elk. Now we shall butcher and eat these animals he sits upon – a fair trade for our turkeys and our corn."

Disgusted by the Indian's lack of respect for established Spanish authority and frustrated by his temporary inability to do anything about it, Cárdenas roughly wheeled his horse, and the entire small troop along with the salvaged mounts, forded back across the river to the troubled little garrison at Alcanfor.

"Damn them," General Vásquez de Coronado swore. "We are not yet of comfortable strength to make a fight. If Arellano and the army were arrived, it would be a different matter."

Once the garrison was over the initial surprise of Cárdenas' retreat from Arenal, the general hurriedly called his staff together for a council of war. All his captains and the five Franciscan chaplains sat with him while all factors were carefully weighed.

"When is Arellano due?" An officer asked.

"We do not know for certain," Coronado answered. "Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps a week from now."

"Your honor, we cannot let this insurrection go unpunished," Cárdenas insisted.

"Yes, of course. I agree with you, captain," Coronado growled. "The only treasure to be found in Tiguex is twelve adobe towns rich in souls to save. I have decided that our next objective must be the exploration of Quivira beyond the cattle plains. But for

now, the coming winter holds us here, and if this little uprising spreads throughout the province – ”

“It would seem we are out on a long limb,” offered Capt. Diego López, a somewhat short and portly officer, the second son of one of the wealthiest landowning families in the Spanish coastal town of Tarragona, in Aragon.

“It would seem so, Don Diego,” agreed the general. “Not only in our present circumstance but also in the future.” Coronado slammed his open hand down upon a table. “Damn their savage eyes, if we fail to maintain authority here and now, there will be much danger for us between the treasures of Quivira and the long road home to Tenochtitlán.”

“Then to do nothing is the greater folly,” Diego López said.

The general agreed and called for votes. Each captain in turn, as well as the gathered friars, decided to make one more offer of peace and if it was once again rejected, then to fight.

Captains Diego López and Mateo Fermin de Maldonado were each ordered to take a small detachment and approach the pueblos of Arenal and Moho. There, with enormous courage in the face of perhaps three hundred armed and angered Tse’wesh, they mustered as much official pomp and dignity as they could, and made long announcements offering peace and forgiveness to the Indians.

In reply, Gokache and the others in both towns stood upon the terraces and roofs of their homes, ladders drawn up against attack, jeering the Spanish officers and crying their defiance to the sky. To the soldier’s utter disgust, many of the Indians waved the tails of the many Spanish horses they’d killed.

After this show of contempt, whether his entire army arrived or not, Coronado resigned himself to war and issued his orders. Cárdenas, still scratching the scab of his earlier embarrassment, would command a large force to subdue and capture the mutinous pueblo of Arenal.

This would be done without delay. Later, attention could be turned to Moho and any other pueblo in Tiguex Province that dared promote rebellion.