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## The Grinding Stones

By ELIZABETH WILLIS DEHUFF

"**T**HAT man, he in this house! I pass him at the corner!" The deep, angry voice, speaking an Indian dialect, broke the noon tranquility of the almost deserted Pueblo of Santo Tomas; deserted because most of the other inhabitants were out in the summer fields, camping near their small patches of growing crops in one-roomed adobe huts, or beneath *ramadas* of cottonwood boughs. In silence, the irregular frontage of the long lines of continuous mud houses stood sphinx-like, marking the birth of the building urge of mankind. Like the eroded cliffs across the sluggish *rio*, they seemed huge loaves of oven-baked bread, browning deeper in the bright semi-tropical sun, with here and there the mud plaster, bits of flaking crust, fallen away, disclosing the ends of age-old adobe bricks.

"You think every man comes here when you see him in the plaza! There many houses in this plaza!" The woman shrugged her shoulders and drew her short form up stiffly. Slender and defiant, she stood looking at her husband for a single moment; then her green skirts swished against the white boot-tops of her moccasins, as she swiftly turned her back upon him.

"If you stay in the fields every day and do your work, you not see so much!" She knelt and bent over a great batch of wet clay upon a cloth on the floor and continued mixing it.

"Yes, stay in the fields so I not see what mischief you do. I do my work! Who else have as much corn as I do? Who else have no weeds? And while I work that man he come in here! Other houses, yes! But there no other women in these houses at this time except old grannies and you! I went to the trading post to get sugar. Here it is!" He dashed the small solidly packed bag upon the

clay floor at her feet. It burst, spilling its sliding grains in a large circle. "You know I go there!"

During their four years of married life, Pah-ah-pi and Tam-pohve had had frequent quarrels from jealousy; each at times accusing the other of infidelity, though they had no grounds for the accusations, except a vague feeling of incompatibility, which caused a restlessness neither could define. This was Pah-ah-pi's occasion. His strong face, typically Indian, with its high cheek bones, long prominent nose and sharp black eyes, was now tense with anger; and his lithe muscles, each one under separate and easy control—free, yet compact—were now rigid. He had found this man of ill repute almost in front of their own door. The flush of aroused temper animated his fine face.

A vision of Tam-pohve in illicit embrace had blinded him. His fingers tingled to get at her throat. His woman, he saw her! His to embrace! He saw himself teaching her this. He saw her devilish Chinese eyes closing their slanting slits as he choked her. He felt his arm beating her until she knew she was his woman.

These mental visions of her gave way to the actual sight, but he could scarcely see her, for the whole room looked red. Standing out against this intense redness, he saw her shrug and heard her refusal to either affirm or deny his charge. This enraged him more. His whole form quivered. His eyes reflected the red of his scarlet cotton shirt, his teeth set and his muscles jerked with wrath.

"That man he in here with you! There no other women!"

"How you know he with one woman?"

Tam-pohve was freshly plastering the walls of their room. That was why she had not yet moved into their temporary shelter out in the fields. She now picked up a handful of wet clay and slapped it with vigor upon the wall.

"I know that man! I know you!" Pah-ah-pi almost.

yelled the words at her, as he grabbed up his bent shinny stick from the fireplace corner.

Tam-pohve, still rubbing the mud plaster with angry force, saw his move. When he stalked toward her, she rushed unexpectedly and seized the stock. Pah-ah-pi jerked his arm up to wrench it from her grasp, but Tam-pohve successfully clung to it. They closed, each strong body straining against the other, a swiftly moving conglomeration of reds, blues and greens, they bent and struggled violently for possession of the stick. She was quick and agile from fury, but Pah-ah-pi's greater strength finally threw her to her knees and lifted the freed stick above her head to strike.

"I teach you to take other men into my house, you *mooli-pee-ko*, free to all men!"

But in the tussle he had backed Tam-pohve farther and farther into the room, until she had finally been forced down beside the grinding stones. Now as he was in the act of striking, she grabbed the smaller stone and hurled it against his uplifted arm. With a groan, like a curse, accompanied by the clatter of the stick upon the clay floor, he grabbed the injured arm with his free hand.

Quick to use her advantage, Tam-pohve jumped up and held the stone menacingly above his head.

"Now you get out from here!" she screamed. "Get out, get out, get out!"

Step by step she forced him backwards out of the open door, forced him vanquished but furious. He did not see their two small children, mere babies, whose single red garments were half drenched and mud besmeared from playing in seepage from the horse trough. They had come toddling to the door, frightened and attracted by their parents' angry voices. So, as he backed out, Pah-ah-pi knocked the younger of the two down and there followed such penetrating screams from both of them, that neither his accusations and threats nor Tam-pohve's angry retorts

could be heard above the shrieks. He was too enraged to grab for the child. A sheet of intense red hung before his vision. Those children were hers. Let her care for them! That man! He could see him—red and grinning. Fires burned within; made him blind! He turned quickly and walked away. Tam-pohve as a *mooli-pee-ko* walked before him. He did not see her snatch in the children from public gaze, nor hear her slam the door and lock it.

His anger, now growing sullen, and the intense pain in his bruised arm, made him walk rapidly, scornfully ignoring glances of old women peeping through the windows at the sound of his footfalls. The cerise yarn tassels upon his coil of black hair shook and his necklaces jangled. As he passed the several groups, who had curiously rushed from work to watch the row, under cover of house corners or doorways, he whispered explosively "*Sang-ah-mah*, sons of dogs, it is not their affair!" He set his face so they could not read behind it and walked purposefully on, holding his injured arm. "*Su-gah-clah-tu-nah* that grinding stone!" Grinding stones! He and Tam-pohve were like two big grinding stones, each sloped the same way not to suit each other, trying to work together, scratching and rubbing without touching in the right places; instead of a small stone fitting against a big one. She should be the little stone. Her man, he should be one big, strong stone. The small one should fit the big stone. Hah, Tam-pohve could not fit anything with her bossiness! Her man-love!

Soon he could see his brother's purple striped shirt, where he lay sprawling on his back with both hands beneath his neck, sound asleep under the shade of a tree. The water from the irrigation ditch, which was supposed to be watering his corn, had broken the embankment of a carelessly made trench and was flowing over the bordering patch of weeds.

One lazy dog, accused Pah-ah-pi. In his present mood he had a keen desire to thrash the fellow, to beat the wholly

lazy life out of him. Every winter he came with his empty belly crying for corn. "No more corn I give if he and his whole family starve. He no better than Tam-pohve! Such a brother, such a wife!" A sudden vision made Pah-ah-pi startle and quicken his pace. Why had he not seen that before?

O-coo-wah, his brother, had been in love with Tam-pohve when she had married himself. Maybe it was right that she marry with O-coo-wah! She would have made him work. Then he would have had no time to sleep in the growing season. If she had to keep O-coo-wah busy, she would have no time for other men. O-coo-wah's wife was Tam-pohve's sister, but a very different person, indeed. One could get along peacefully with Poh-lah-mee-me. She had no will of her own. She would do what she was told! Funny she was named butterfly. She was more like a fat, lazy bumble bee. She was pretty, fat. She was prettier than Tam-pohve, more fat and more quiet. She would do what her husband said, if she had a good husband! She needed a boss and O-coo-wah needed one, too, so that he would have corn.

The corn leaves, in a cluster of stalks at his elbow, rubbed rustlingly together as he passed; men's voices in an ancient growing song came fitfully with gusty breezes, accompanied by the rhythmic scraping of hoes upon dry earth; a thirsty horse neighed and a woman far behind him laughed teasingly. When he reached his brother, Pah-ah-pi's mood had changed because of that sudden thought which had come to him. Instead of kicking O-coo-wah viciously as he had intended, he placed his moccasined foot upon his abdomen and gently shook him. O-coo-wah awakened with a guilty start. Pah-ah-pi was about to scold him. Then he suddenly compressed his lips. He must keep O-coo-wah in a good humor. O-coo-wah looked up with shame in his glance. When no burst of accusation came

from Pah-ah-pi, he sensed something unusual, but hid the question in his eyes.

Pah-ah-pi picked up the hoe and with a few deft strokes with his left arm, closed the break in the side of the water course and sent the stream once more into the corn patch. His brother sat up and yawned in relief.

Pah-ah-pi settled down beside him and leaned against the tree. He must be cautious in telling O-coo-wah of his plan! He sat for some minutes with a far-away look in his eyes, appearing not to see the frequent, sly glances from O-coo-wah, whose suspicions were now thoroughly aroused. Finally he began by a few casual suggestions about the corn crop and then:

"You need somebody to make you work, O-coo-wah, or you starve some day!"

There was no answer, so he continued, idly pulling apart the petals of an Indian paint brush, as if there were nothing important to discuss: "You should have Tam-pohve for a wife. She know many things. She do much work. Poh-lah-mee-me, she is one fat prairie dog, just like you!" Again he paused, glancing sideways at his brother, but O-coo-wah was looking away, curious to know the real cause of this visit.

"Before we marry, you like Tam-pohve better than anyone else."

"Humph!" agreed O-coo-wah, looking down as he rubbed the edges of the soles of his moccasins against each other.

"Yes, and it was right that you have her. I not know then. She keep her house plastered and clean and she cook good food. I think she good wife for me; that is not true. The Great Spirit make her for you. Your walls look like they tumble down all the time. Poh-lah-mee-me need somebody to make her plaster them. She no wife for you!"

"I never think of it," confessed O-coo-wah.

Pah-ah-pi paused long enough to get up and chop a short trench, awkwardly with his left arm as before, for the

other still ached from the blow of the grinding stone, to send the irrigation water down a new furrow; then he returned to his seat.

"I see now what the Great Spirit, He want. He want you to have Tam-pohve to marry with you."

"She *your* wife," O-coo-wah looked at him, studying his brother's face.

Pah-ah-pi sensed à tinge of eagerness in the reply.

"Yes, but she made right for you. She not like one prairie dog that get fat and sleep. She like one ant what work and push another ant to make him work. You come live with Tam-pohve, I live with Poh-lah-mee-me. I be one eagle to make Poh-lah-mee-me run. Then I make her do things in her house. Anyway, you need Tam-pohve. She likes you."

Pah-ah-pi looked up at floating white clouds, pretending generosity but indifference to the outcome. A tiny spot of sunlight, sifting through the leaves, made the orange scarf about his head glisten.

O-coo-wah did not answer at once. Then he asked, "What about those children? You have two and I have two. Who take them?"

Pah-ah-pi repressed a smile. The curtain of red anger which had hung before him was now shining blue. "Children they belong to their mothers. When mothers they are sisters, all the children they have two mothers. The children can stay where they like. Poh-lah-mee-me, she has all of them half of the time now."

The reply seemed to bring content to O-coo-wah. After a long pause, during which a small house finch in the plum bushes nearby burst its little red throat in a chatter of song, he asked,

"Tam-pohve, she like to change?"

"Tam-pohve, she always like you. I quick and make her marry with me. Poh-lah-mee-me, she like me. We get mixed up; I take the wrong girl. I not know then. I know now."



Without further questioning O-coo-wah meditated for a long while, as the irrigation water gurgled around a stone, a stone which should not have been there between the corn rows. Then, with pleasure lighting up his face, he nodded his head. "You right, Pah-ah-pi!"

A sly expression swept across the features of Pah-ah-pi, quickly here and as quickly hidden. "Tam-pohve, she smart. Poh-lah-mee-me, she lazy like you, O-coo-wah. Tam-pohve she better to marry with. You give me something else with Poh-lah-mee-me to make them equal."

O-coo-wah hesitated a long time, then asked:

"What you want?"

Pah-ah-pi considered a moment, then, "What you give me?" he asked.

"You tell me what you want."

Again Pah-ah-pi hesitated. "You give me that bay mare and her colt, with her harness and you gun? Tam-pohve, she is a fine woman, she the prettiest woman in the Pueblo; she work all the time. I just give her to you because she likes you and because I see one vision that tell me the Great Spirit make her for you."

"Yes, Tam-pohve she is one fine woman, but you want everything I have to trade for her. I give you Poh-lah-mee-me and that colt!"

Pah-ah-pi glanced shrewdly at his brother; then shook his head. "Give me the colt . . . the harness . . . and the gun and I trade."

O-coo-wah shook his head. Pah-ah-pi waited. The irrigation water covered the weeds. Finally O-coo-wah answered: "That too much. I have no more harness for my wagon." The corner of Pah-ah-pi's mouth twitched. He was going to get what he wanted.

"Then I take the colt and the shot gun and nothing less!"

After a long pause, O-coo-wah shook his head in consent. Pah-ah-pi smiled, pushed himself up with his left

arm and the two men in silent understanding of their next move toward sealing the bargain, arose and together closed the vent, sending the irrigation water back into the ditch. Then they separated, each going to his own home.

Tam-pohve ignored Pah-ah-pi when he came in; but she showed scornful curiosity as he gathered up his belongings, his saddle, harness and other things, and dragged them, together with his wooden chest, out of doors. He was conscious of her peeping, too, as he took the things next door to her sister's house. She would think he was just staying there for the time being because he was angry! He smiled as he had a quick vision of O-coo-wah's entrance there.

O-coo-wah, slow as always, had only half finished gathering together his personal possessions. He pointed to the shot gun left hanging upon the wall, and continued in silence. Poh-lah-mee-me, looking baffled and tearful, stood swinging her baby's cradle, apparently only a bundle of figured orange calico cloth. She looked appealingly from one to the other of the two men, as if to ask what she had done to lose her husband and what it all meant.

He has not told her anything, thought Pah-ah-pi. He leaves that for me to do; always leaving things that he does not like to do for somebody else. Pah-ah-pi looked affectionately at the troubled woman. She is not lazy inside; she spends too much time spoiling her children and being good to other people. O-coo-wah is one fool. He does not know what he is losing.

Pah-ah-pi said nothing until O-coo-wah finally, avoiding to look at Poh-lah-mee-me as he did so, dragged his things from the room and closed the door.

"Poh-lah-mee-me" began Pah-ah-pi, somewhat haltingly, "I do not love Tam-pohve any more. She and I quarrel all the time. I come to live with you. I let O-coo-wah live with her. She make him work. You like me. You let me live with you?"

She gave the cradle a sudden jerk and looked at him in wide-eyed amazement. For a few moments there was silence, save for the swishing rub of the cradle ropes around the *viga* overhead, and the intermittent jingle of the mother's bracelets as she gave it its swinging pushes. Finally she asked very softly, "O-coo-wah, he like to go?"

"O-coo-wah he need Tam-pohve to make him work. I need to live with you. O-coo-wah go to Tam-pohve. He like Tam-pohve and he need a boss. You are too good to him. He grow worse and worse all the time! He like Tam-pohve and I like you! You like to marry with me Poh-lah-mee-me?"

Poh-lah-mee-me's bronze face flushed rosily; she looked thoughtfully down at her bare, brown feet. The silver squash-blossom beads and the silver horse shoe, the Navajo medicine knife emblem, upon her breast rose and fell rapidly, but she did not answer.

"You like me, Poh-lah-mee-me?"

She glanced up slyly in embarrassment. "If O-coo-wah—if he happy—and if you like me."

"Then I live here!" He walked over and placed his hand upon her. She glanced responsively into his face for a fleeting moment.

Immediately Pah-ah-pi began arranging his belongings about the room and in the secret store room, where private property and the stone gods were kept, as if he had always lived there and had only been away for a short visit. Poh-la-mee-me left the baby swinging and set to work to grind fresh corn meal for supper.

The soft tread of his moccasins, the rasping rhythm of the grinding stones, the jingle of bracelets and the soft rub of the cradle ropes spoke peace and comfort to Pah-ah-pi. What a wild life he had been living in comparison to this? When Tam-pohve had not been quarrelling, she had been bustling about in confusion. At last he would have quiet moments to think and a wife to do his bidding!

The door suddenly creaked open and O-coo-wah slipped in. His whole bearing showed agitation, which he tried to conceal but could not.

"What is it?" demanded Pah-ah-pi.

"Tam-pohve! She not let me take in my things. She say she know enough of men to show her what dogs they are."

Pah-ah-pi scowled, then laughed aloud. He could not help admiring Tam-pohve's audacious spirit when directed toward some one else; nor could he help being amused over O-coo-wah's predicament and his utter dejection. Poh-lah-mee-me had stopped grinding and sat on her heels looking sorrowfully at her erstwhile husband. Then as they talked, she looked wonderingly from one to the other of the two men.

"Wants nothing more to do with men, ha, ha!" laughed Pa-ah-pi. "Tam-pohve could not live a day without a man!" Then he bent double, shaking his body and swinging his turquoise ear bobs in convulsed amusement. His merriment baffled O-coo-wah, but finally it changed his sheepish look to one of more confidence.

"Tam-pohve, she like to talk. Let her talk! She wants much doing all the time. You go back. Put away your things. Make yourself at home and pay no attention to her. She will come around all right!" So saying, Pah-ah-pi placed his hand upon O-coo-wah's shoulder, led him—now a stranger in his own house—to the door, pushed him gently outside and then following he pushed him into the other house, unseen by Tam-pohve as he did so.

Then slipping along the wall, Pah-ah-pi chuckled and peeped in through the window. Tam-pohve had grabbed up the shinny stick and her voice was shrill and angry.

"You come back in here when I tell you to get out!" She paused for breath. As she did so, she heard a laugh outside.

Swiftly Tam-pohve's glance turned toward the window and as quickly back again. Her mood changed with the same rapidity. Dropping the stick, she threw back her head with a coquettish laugh; rushed to the surprised O-coo-wah and encircled him with her arms.

Pah-ah-pi winced. He had not thought of that side of the bargain. He shrugged his shoulders and envisioned the plump, comfortable Poh-lah-mee-me. There was no more Tam-pohve to him! He turned away and went back into his new home.

It was a year later, on the day of the *Koshare*, the fun-making ceremony, that Pah-ah-pi walked ahead of his family into the plaza. His watermelon-colored cotton shirt was echoed in the two little garments behind him, all dazzling in the sunlight. Poh-lah-mee-me followed a few steps behind, crackled and crunched in stiff silks; her legs three times their normal size in a wealth of buckskin wrappings. In the cerise shawl upon her back a tiny baby slept through the jouncings of her pace; while the two other children, trotting to keep up, clung to her blue-bordered rose skirt.

The shadows along the adobe house-fronts had grown short, for it was near the noon hour. Only with difficulty could one crouch within their protection. Pah-ah-pi found a space and settled his family in its narrow strip of shade, one of the many clusters of festal color schemes.

Just as he himself had stooped, resting upon his moccasined heels, and had drawn out a handful of piñon nuts from a blanket fold to munch and to share with his family, a similar Indian group came unhurriedly and arranged themselves against the mud walls just beyond.

Tam-pohve was leading, her quick steps accompanied by the slithering of silks against buckskin, with O-coo-wah awkwardly carrying the tiny sleeping babe. Its little sleek, black head lolled to one side and its arm dangled loosely. It was she who told her family where to sit, and she who carried the cloth bag of pine nuts. Blue, green, purple,

and pink formed the color medley, more subdued than Poh-lah-mee-me's.

The grown-ups nodded and muttered greetings to one another, as the children began playing aimlessly, running and pushing each other without intent.

Suddenly down the steps and into the plaza, the black and white striped fun-makers came running. Corn husks rustled dryly over their ears, nodding above whitened clown faces that grinned grotesquely, as they made directly for Poh-lah-mee-me, the loose ends of black loin cloths flapping against protruding rumps. In panic the children tried to hide behind her fat arms.

One of the *koshare* chucked the baby under the chin. "One new little corn-stalk, I see! Fine! Fine!"

"Oho, but how is this?" The second *koshare* frisked over in front of O-coo-wah. "Two tahs, two yeahs, six little stalks!"

"This one, yours; this one, yours; no, his; no, hers; no, his and hers; no . . . no . . . how is it?" Both scratched their heads covered with white paste, in feigned perplexity. The crowd laughed uproariously. Color mounted in the cheeks of Pah-ah-pi, below the horizontal streak of red paint marked there for the fiesta. He folded his arms and tried to look ahead nonchalantly; but his evident discomfort and effort to conceal it only amused the spectators the more.

Poh-lah-mee-me hid her face completely in her shawl; O-coo-wah, with a bashful grin, looked down at his moccasins; but Tam-pohve only stretched herself in pretended composure, as she reached over to settle the baby more comfortably in the striped shawl upon her husband's back. As the *koshare* trotted away to further horseplay, there was a smile of satisfaction upon her pert lips, reflected in her black slanting eyes.

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