

Sharing the Love

It was the same discussion Ray always brought up. “Carl you’re wasting our inheritance with another archeological dig to discover some dead tribe’s fate. You seem to forget that half of that money is mine. Who gives a damn about some cliff dwellers from a hundred fifty years ago much less what happened to them? “

“Father was interested in the fate of the Navajo clan headed by Anolee Chee and his shaman brother Hashkeh Naabah Chee. I am too. Their tribe represented ten percent of the Navajo nation and overnight they just disappeared. As long as father’s will states funds can be used to carry on my research that’s exactly what I intend to do.”

“I don’t suppose there’s any use in arguing with the great Doctor Carl Landrum any more, is there? After all, I’m only a lowly college professor specializing in native history not a published author on native archeology. I’ve just come from the site of the last great fight of the Indian Nations and you’d be surprised what I learned there.” Ray said.

“My mind’s made up, I’ll be at the dig by nightfall and my students will be there first thing in the morning.” Carl said as he continued packing.

Ray pulled a small deerskin wrapped object from his pocket. “I didn’t think I could talk you out of it so I brought you a gift to bring you luck on your quest.” Ray said handing the packet to Carl.

Carl opened the pouch revealing an intricately carved medallion hanging on a woven rawhide strip. One side bore Navajo picture writing partially obscured by a red filmy substance. The other

side was inscribed in Navajo and read... *the bearer will receive his wish*. Carl was dumbfounded but accepted the gift with a handshake.

“I disagree with you sometimes Carl... but I still want you to get what you deserve.” Ray said smiling; he hoisted his beer in a toast. Carl raised his beer from the nightstand and clinked them together.

Carl puzzled over the attitude change in his brother as he drove across the Navajo reservation. They’d struggled with each other competitively even as children. Their lives had led them down the path of history both personally and professionally. Unlike Carl, Ray had always sought to use history and its events to his own advantage and the meaning of events had been secondary. Carl felt the medallion as it caressed the skin inside his shirt. *Maybe his selfish brother’s ways really were changing.*

The late afternoon sweltering heat sent rivulets of sweat running down Carl’s back as he unloaded his gear at the foot of Black Mesa. The foreboding of this place flooded over him once more. The heat beat you down during the day and at night the cold chilled your bones. The isolation of the place, its whispering swirling winds, and shadows reached out menacingly playing on your nerves. A crow’s bleating caw laughed at him as he started his climb. Carl swore he could feel eyes watching him as he paused to survey the barren sand and creosote covered blood red slopes of the valley. No one but a lonely Mesquite tree witnessed his ascent. To reach the cliff city, located below the black cap rock of the mesa’s rim, Carl would need to climb quickly to reach the abandoned cliff city before nightfall.

The cliff dwellings stood empty and silent as he reached the cleft in the cliff face. The village appeared to await the return of their occupants at any time. Some rooms still bore the remnants of crude furniture. In others pottery lay where it had been placed as if setting a table for a meal that was never served. It was the most pristine site Carl had ever seen. The Navajo guide he'd found through research had led Carl here...but steadfastly refused to enter the city. He claimed it was cursed. He had vanished from their campsite that night like a ghost. Now Carl was back to search out the secrets this place held sealed in its depths. These dwellings marked the passage of a proud people who had lived and prospered in this forbidding landscape we called the southwest. It had been abandoned and the people who lived here had vanished...but why? That was what Carl was determined to find out.

Carl started a fire to warm his hands and help him shake the dread this place created with its strange sounds and shadows. Gazing up at the village Carl marveled at the size and organization of the dwellings with their ladders intricately woven into the buildings. Their windows silent and dark staring into the night sent a chill through Carl even as he stood next to the fire. An intense rotten egg smell of sulphur, crept in permeating the night air as the moon faded behind ominous billowing dark clouds.

Drawn to the edge of the mesa by the sound of thunder, Carl stared down the face of Black Mesa and watched entranced as a misty fog, with lightning flashes and thunder rose towards his encampment. Glowing red eyes appeared in the fog. Carl felt his heartbeat quicken. Instinctively he stepped back, tensing, bent and picked up his digging pick. In a defensive crouch he jumped back against the rock wall. Now he wished he'd also packed the rifle from his truck up here as well. The mist and thing hidden inside it drifted closer, its size diminished, and the lightning

faded into flashes of brilliant light with no sound. An eerie silence fell over the campsite. He watched as the fiery red eyes winked out. The shape sharpened as a voice erupted from the haze.

“Do not be alarmed I am but a visitor at this time.”

A native-American in loincloth, with red and white beaded moccasins, and piercing black eyes appeared. His upper body naked, bronzed and broad, his muscles clearly defined. His braids were held back by a headband that identified him as being Navajo.

Carl was a scientist, a trained observer, a realist, but he couldn't explain what he'd just seen and experienced. He gripped the pick tighter. He composed himself, shook off the fear, and stepped forward with trepidation. Carl glanced at the pick, dismissed the thought of using it on his visitor, he dropped it to the ground. He stepped forward and greeted his spectral visitor “I never expected to see anyone out here...have you come far?”

The brave seemed transfixed on the medallion now hanging on Carl's shirtfront.

Smiling he said. “I have traveled the trail of time and place. I've come to do the bidding of the one who sent the amulet of Hashkeh Nabaah Chee, the angry warrior. I'm to take the wearer's soul to the underworld.” His eyes flamed bright.

“You've come to do what?” Carl said.

The stranger walked over and crouched down on his haunches next to the fire. Carl wasn't quite sure what to make of his guest. The brave's fingers caressed the flames stroking them with a lover's touch. Carl's right fist clenched tight as his left hand gripped the amulet his brother had given him.

“I’m the skinwalker bound to the cursed amulet of Haskeh Nabaah Chee,” the brave continued. “It was created with his dying breath chanting to the dark spirits of the underworld. Chee sought vengeance for the death of his brother and The People.”

“B.bu...But that’s why I’m here...I want to unlock the secret of what happened to their clan.” Carl said.

“In the time long past many soldiers bearing the blue and red flag of the crossed swords rode into the valley on their journey north. They stopped for provisions but The People had none to spare. The soldiers took what they needed by force. The People resisted and were killed, no one was spared. Their bodies were burned like cordwood at the base of the cliff. Wounded badly, Chee, the shaman, chanted to the dark spirits for revenge. With his last breath he chanted the curse and slashed his throat. The amulet soaked in his blood sealed the curse that all who wear it would perish. One bluecoat wore it to a place called Little Big Horn. I collected the souls of all the bluecoats responsible for the attack and death of Chee. Since that time I have awaited my call. “

“But it says I’ll receive my wish.”

“Chee, the great shaman, knew that all in nature is based on balance. Just as the life of the coyote is tied to the abundance of rabbits, so it is with life. Great evil needs to be balanced by great good. His enemies are to be taken by a skin walker to dwell in the underworld forever. Yet balance is the duty of a shaman...so he gives you your last wish as well,” the brave said. “Make your choice wisely and know you cannot ask for your life to be spared.”

Rising, the brave’s features began to morph, to change into that of a huge coyote with flaming red eyes and fangs dripping blood. Erect on two legs with a massive chest and forepaws bearing

razor sharp claws, he cocked his head, his rank and fetid breath swept over Carl, his huge jaws opened. He leaned forward towering over the now humbled and kneeling Carl.

“Bring Ray with me!” Carl shouted as he stood to face his fate.
