

THE CHINDI – TREATMENT

The sliver of a moon hangs in the winter night sky of the desert American Southwest. Smoke pours from a small mud and stone dwelling (hogan). Inside the hogan, a woman performs the diagnostic ritual called “hand trembling.” She prays over her patient who sweats where he lies on the ground, his eyes closed tight in fear. Twisting near his family members in attendance, this sick man comes dangerously close to the fire glowing in the center of the hogan. This man is Tse of the Folded Arms People clan, and he is having yet another nightmare.

In this nightmare, someone lies face up in a river, blood pooling from an axe lodged in his skull, a look of terror etched into his face. Tse dreams of seeing this man’s blood spread over his own hands.

In the hogan, this murdered man’s ghost rises in the shape of fire. It reaches to strangle Tse who fights for his life. Just as the ghost overpowers him, a young girl’s screams wake Tse. He straddles Haseya, his ten year-old daughter who struggles to breathe. Tse’s hands are tight around her neck as he chokes her. Members of his family and the hand trembler are pulling Tse from her. He comes to, and as he realizes what he’s done, Tse frightfully takes Haseya into his arms, promises he will never hurt her again. Ooljee of the wealthy Salt clan, his eight-month pregnant wife, sits back in a mix of worry and relief. As the embers in the fire pit glow, Haseya quietly cries, hugging her father who is thin and ragged from sleep deprivation. She notices the burn marks around his neck.

Outside, not far from the hogan sit two strange-looking coyotes watching the hogan. One is large and mangy. A faint whistle breaks the cold silence of night. The coyotes turn and quickly disappear with unnatural speed into the darkness.

The following morning, the Salt clan members do their late fall chores of grinding dried corn into flour. Not far from the activity is Tse’s hogan. Inside, Tse sits near Ooljee with two medicine man and the hand trembler who gives the diagnosis. Tse has the “ghost sickness,” but no one in their community knows how to perform the only ceremony that will cure him: the Evil Way. Hotheaded and somewhat delirious, Tse states that if this illness continues, he could harm his beloved family and he himself die.

As the group continues to argue over alternatives, Haseya eavesdrops outside the hogan. In the daylight, she’s a strange looking child, with a shock of white hair woven through her black hair, and the root-like patterns of a scar over her neck and face. Haseya continues to press her face to the hogan when a bucket of corn cobs hits her on the head. Her teen cousin has thrown them and chides her for not helping with the fall chores. Haseya reluctantly turns to join when she runs

smack into Sicheii, an older man and one of her family's hired shepherds, who is moving sheep away from her family's hogan. He helps her up, smiles, then continues on his way. Haseya spots a turquoise bracelet in the dirt and picks it up. She starts to call to the shepherd about his lost jewelry, but he is already too far to hear.

No matter. Someone in the distance riding on horseback has caught her eye. She runs to him to the dismay of her cousins. Haseya happily greets Nastas, 18, of the Bitter Water clan. Nastas helps her to his horse, gives her some dried peaches from his bounty accrued from his trip to the trade store. With her mood lightened, Haseya shows him the turquoise bracelet. As she reveals to Nastas who it belongs to, he stubbornly tells her she must return it to the shepherd. "If that man were to die and you had his belonging, his ghost would never be able to travel north. He would be stuck here until you destroyed it." Haseya thinks deeply on this.

On a hillside, Sicheii herds sheep. He watches the Salt clan below, focusing on Tse's hogan as the hand trembler and medicine men depart on horseback. As the group passes, Sicheii overhears them discussing Tse's stubbornness when it comes to the Evil Way ceremony. Assured the other shepherds are nearby to control the flock, Sicheii walks towards the hogan.

There, he tells Ooljee and Tse that he has overheard Tse's diagnosis, and is aware of a healer who can perform the Evil Way ceremony. Eager, Tse presses for details. Sicheii reveals the healer lives three days from the Salt wintering village, at a place called "Where Sheep Fall In," but the healer is blind and old, so he cannot make the trip himself. Tse says he will begin the trek to the old healer tomorrow but Ooljee refuses. She is not happy to have him traveling in his sickened condition. Nastas and Haseya appear, and eager to ease the tension, Nastas volunteers to accompany Tse on this trek. As Haseya listens to her mother and father, she seems worried.

Nearby, two of Ooljee's nephews, Klah and Gaagi, 19 and 20 respectively, laugh and joke while hanging butchered goat meat. Ooljee's older sister, Chooli, chides them for being carefree, wonders aloud when they will ever become men. Overhearing the commotion, Ooljee gets an idea. She approaches her sister, pursued by Tse. He knows what Ooljee has in mind and whispers her nephews are idiots who can't saddle a horse properly much less make a three-day trek, but Ooljee continues to the group with determination.

Haseya turns back to her hogan. Sicheii is there. He assures her that her father will be well again. Shy, Haseya hides her smile from him at this hopeful news, then remembers she still has his turquoise bracelet. She passes it back to him and he thanks her. He puts it on his wrist where there are many other bracelets, and turns to leave.

At Nastas' hogan later that evening, Nastas prepares for his trip. His mother, Manaba, assists him. As Nastas packs his bow, Manaba spots it. She takes it, her eyes going soft with remorse. She comments how she remembers when Nastas' father made this for him when Nastas was just a boy, and she passes it back to her son. Nastas touches her shoulder, attempting to comfort his mother. Manaba changes the mood, asks her son to take good care of Tse, as they would have nothing without his help.

Late at night, Haseya rests against her father. She is wide awake while Ooljee sleeps near them. Tse is barely awake as he holds his daughter who plays with her dolls. She speaks of the time when Tse will return from the healer, better and healthy, and soon her baby brother will be born. Their lives will be happy again. As she draws animal-like tracks in the dirt of the hogan floor, Tse grins and asks her if she remembers the trekking lessons he has taught her. As Haseya recounts how to tell the animal by his tracks, Tse emits a snore. He has nodded off to sleep. Haseya snuggles tightly against him, watching the fire in the pit before her.

The burn of the fire continues. As we pull back from the orange glow, we are in the center of an oil lantern glowing in a pitch black night. Pulling back further, we see someone in the dim light digging through dirt, tossing aside rocks and sticks to unearth a wool blanket. This man opens it to reveal several pieces of silver jewelry. He puts them in a leather horse satchel and then unearths the dead body beneath this find. He pulls this body out and puts it on his horse.

Moments later in a dark cave, this obscure man piles this dead body on a small stack of other recently deceased. The cave is dimly lit with fire and oil lanterns, revealing headless corpses. Many are children and babies. Through them, we see the forms of two skinwalkers, partially covered in the pelts of animals, moving around a fire as they take the skulls of babies and crush them into fine powder. They wear large amounts of silver and turquoise jewelry. Their faces are painted. One skinwalker dumps this powder into an animal pouch.

The next morning at dawn, in a completely opposite ritual, Ooljee faces the east and completes her morning prayers to the Holy People, sprinkling corn pollen as part of the ritual.

As the sun is just starting to turn the horizon blue, Ooljee and Nastas help the weak Tse on to his horse. The two nephews wait on their own horses nearby, tired. After Nastas mounts his horse, the men turn to start their journey.

Haseya wakes from inside her hogan. Realizing she is alone, she tosses aside the wool blanket and bursts forth from the hogan. She runs after her father. Tse lovingly reminds her she is needed at home and he will be back soon, better and healthy. She passes him one of her dolls, to "help him," then reluctantly lets him go. Watching in worry, she focuses intensely on the horses

leading the group, when the four horses begin to resist the guidance of their riders. They turn around to walk back towards the hogan. Ooljee frowns and firmly tells her daughter to stop, to let the men go. Judging by her frustration, this is not the first time Haseya has done something like this. Haseya looks away, and the horses resume their journey.

To comfort herself, Haseya hugs her mother, pressing her ear into her mother's pregnant belly. As the sun continues to make the sky brighter, she listens and then looks up to her mother in worry. "My brother says he's scared of the tree," she says. Frustrated, Ooljee mentions how much she dislikes how Haseya's stories scare her.

In a montage, we see details of a three-day journey. Tse, the nephews, and Nastas travel through dry lands, passing shepherds of other clans who guide sheep through winter pasture. Seeing this trip as an adventure, Gaagi and Klah make fools of themselves by purposely scattering a sheep herd, falling off their horses into sheep dung, and teasing a more reticent Nastas. They try to shoot a jackrabbit, but miss. The nephews also taunt each other with tales of skinwalkers coming out at night to kill. As annoyed as Tse is by them, he struggles with his sleep and his health, waking Nastas with his nightmares while the two nephews sleep soundly.

Away from his hogan for the first time in a long time, Tse has a different kind of nightmare, one involving the horrifying details of Haseya's birth. In it, he is herding sheep. Ooljee is on the other side of their large flock, also herding inside a canyon. The two look younger, healthier, and Ooljee is very pregnant with Haseya. A strange wind stirs and thunder rolls through. A storm moves in quickly, and as lightning streaks across the sky, Tse calls for Ooljee to come in. Ooljee tries to move the sheep out of the canyon when the sky goes dark. Tse calls again, panicking now, as a bolt of lightning breaks from the sky into the canyon. He calls for his wife but there is no reply. He runs to the edge of the canyon to spot her face down, charred in black, her legs streaked in blood. He calls to her, but there is no reply. He slides down the cliff to attend to Ooljee, pulling at her body. She convulses, alive, but dazed, as she clutches her stomach in pain. The lightning strike has forced Ooljee to give premature birth. The baby is dead. Devastated, Tse cradles the baby girl as the rain splashes against her skin, revealing the fine root-like veins on her neck and face from the lightning strike, and a strange patch of small white baby hair. As another bolt of lightning lights the sky, the baby begins to move. Tse watches his child, dumbstruck, as the rain around him stops. The baby cries. She is alive.

Back at Tse's camp in the surrounding darkness, something blows a fine grey powder into Tse's face. He freezes, then slowly wakes with a start. The two figures of coyote-human hybrids dash silently around the camp outskirts.

As Tse sits up, the powder scatters over his face. The three other men are asleep. The horses are acting skittish and as Tse looks about, he spots a mangy old grey coyote watching him. Alarmed, he quietly stands. The coyote remains still before turning and walking away into the darkness. Dazed, Tse gets on his horse and follows it. The doll Haseya had given him as protection falls to the ground. The horse steps on it.

Struggling with his sickness, Tse treks in the darkness. He passes rock formations, the same formations repeating over and over again. Tse is lost when he finds a small glowing light of a hogan in the distance. Smoke pours from the smoke hole.

Nastas wakes at the camp, notices Tse is gone. He wakes the nephews who would rather sleep through this cold, but as they notice Tse's disappearance, they clean up camp. Nastas uses his tracking skills to follow Tse.

Tse continues alone in the darkness, but passes a frozen pond that holds the figures of dead sheep, suspended in the ice. This is "Where Sheep Fall In." He turns around, looking for signs of others, when suddenly he faces an inviting hogan. Firelight glows from the entrance and smoke hole.

Meanwhile, Nastas continues to lead the nephews over desolate dry desert lands. They spot the hogan in the distance and Tse's horse cobbled nearby. This hogan, however, seems old and decrepit, not how Tse experienced it. The young men continue, wary.

Tse enters the hogan. A fire burns in the middle. Bidzii, a blind old man, sits in the shadows, his body covered with his long white hair. As is Navajo custom, Tse begins his introduction of his clan affiliation and his diagnosis with the ghost sickness. Bidzii agrees to perform the Evil Way ceremony for him and he begins making a sand painting.

Moments later, Tse sits sweating, writhing on this sand painting, as Bidzii chants a healing song, shaking feathers around the hogan.

Outside, Nastas and the nephews approach the decrepit hogan. The nephews' horses refuse to go any further, so they stay with them, frightened, as Nastas moves forward alone. He enters the dirty hogan but what he sees is not at all like what Tse is experiencing. It seems he is at the edge of a large dark space. At the center are the figures of Tse and a skinwalker, a revolting coyote-man hybrid, near the fire, desecrating the Evil Way ceremony by urinating and defecating on a sandpainting. Nastas calls Tse's name but there is no response. Nastas tries to run to him but rattlesnakes are wrapped around his ankles, holding him to the ground. Nastas calls Tse's name but no sound comes from his mouth.

The skinwalker paints blood on the backs of his hands. Approaching Tse from behind, the skinwalker places his hands over Tse's head. He now can "see" into Tse's world.

As Nastas soundlessly calls once more, everything goes black.

In a flashback, a river trickles. Tse chops firewood with an axe. He is healthier. In the brush nearby, a five year-old Haseya sits near a river, playing, delighted as she guides the fish, making them respond to her wishes to "dance" before her. A man passes, watching her from behind the scrub oak.

The man approaches little Haseya and talks to her. He chides: "Your family has many sheep. They are never sick. How is this possible? Is your father a skinwalker? Or are you the skinwalker?" Tse emerges from the brush. It's clear these two know each other. They lock eyes. Tse has heard this man and he is angry. He tells Haseya to run back home, and quickly.

Tse approaches this man who now proclaims he will tell everyone about what he saw, Tse's daughter making fish obey her commands, that they will now know why Tse is so wealthy, by hiding a skinwalker in his family. Anger escalates. They fight. A rock goes flying from the creek bed and hits the man squarely on the head. Another rock goes flying from the ground, knocking the man in the shoulder. As yet another rock flies to hit the man, Tse turns to spot Haseya hiding in the brush, an angry look on her young face. She is the source of these rocks. Tse angrily tells her to run home. Haseya obeys.

The man swaggers, blood dripping down his face, accusing them both of being witches, when he runs at Tse. In self defense, Tse grabs his axe, hitting the man in the forehead head where the axe lodges. The man falls backwards into the river.

A little boy calls through the trees. Panicking, Tse dislodges the axe, blood spilling over his hands, and he leaves. The body lays in the river, blood trickling into the water. A little boy around the age of 11 returns, dropping his firewood. He shakes the body of the fallen man and calls out "Father!" The man says his dying words: "Nastas..."

Back in the hogan, Nastas wakes from where he has passed out on the floor of the hogan entrance. He watches while the skinwalker releases Tse. Tse is fighting a fire ghost that tries to strangle him.

Bidzii demands Tse say the name of the man he has killed. Tse struggles then heaves and spits out the name: Hok'ee. Nastas's father's name. Finally, the fire ghost fighting Tse withers away into an ember that Bidzii crushes with his foot.

Nastas stares at this scene before him, stunned, then turns and runs from the hogan into daylight.

The two nephews are having a pissing contest when Nastas appears, running into them, terrified. They make fun of him when Nastas states he has only been gone for a few minutes. They tell him he's been gone for three days. Nastas is speechless.

In the hogan, the ceremony is over. Tse falls to the sand painting. Bidzii leans over and removes a swatch of Tse's hair. He buries it. Tse opens his eyes. The hogan looks normal. Bidzii does not look like a skinwalker, but an old man.

Tse is already looking better. Bidzii asks about payment. They agree that payment will be five of Tse's fattest sheep delivered in no more than five days, butchered immediately.

Outside the hogan, the nephews look at Nastas incredulously, laughing, not believing his story. Tse appears behind them, along with Bidzii who looks nothing more than a kindly blind old healer. Nastas doubts even more what he just experienced. Tse notices their horses seem hungry and have no water. Angry at the laziness of his nephews, he sends Gaagi and Klah out to do the dirty work of slaughtering the five sheep, and bringing them back to Bidzii within five days.

Still unsure over what he saw in the hogan, Nastas volunteers to help the nephews as a way to avoid being near Tse, but Tse insists he make the journey home with him.

On the trek back, Tse, who is in vastly better spirits and health, comments on Nastas' turn of mood. Nastas is in turmoil about what he saw and his loyalties to Tse's family. Sensing something amiss, Tse's mood grows serious and he tells Nastas to not let his imagination get away with him, that he will give Nastas' mother five sheep, just for her son's trouble, knowing that she is poor. As Tse retires for the night, Nastas' look turns sour. There is a disturbing fire in his eyes.

The next day, the two nephews look over a distant valley at a flock of sheep in winter pasture. Gaagi comments it will take a day or more to catch up with them, and they don't know if the sheep even belong to their clan. Discouraged, Klah turns in frustration when something of interest catches his eye. Very close by, there is a herd of grazing antelope.

The two young men go about killing and butchering five of them, then quickly deposit them outside the decrepit old hogan. As night comes, Bidzii as the skinwalker appears outside the hogan, sniffs for the carcasses and drags them back inside. He eagerly eats the raw antelope meat, crunching bones, only to discover these are not the sheep he requested. He stands, disgusted, and infuriated by this deception. A wind dims the fire. The fire revives, but the hogan is empty. The skinwalker is dashing away at incredible speed.

Gaagi and Klah, meanwhile, set up an overnight camp when a brief wind blows through as quickly as it appeared. They continue preparing their campfire when something stirs in the brush. It's a jackrabbit. They shoot it with a rifle and it dies. As the nephews grab it, they see an upright antelope, staring at them with lifeless eyes. The animal turns and runs behind an outcrop of rocks. Gaagi follows it while Klah waits, wary. The night is deadly silent. Gaagi does not reply to Klah calling his name. Klah looks for his brother behind the rock outcrop, but nothing is there. He turns back to their camp only to see his brother's body, gutted and butchered like an antelope, roasting on a spit over the fire. Klah panics and gets out of there on his horse as fast as possible, but something passes him quickly, disappearing ahead.

In the morning at the Salt wintering grounds, Ooljee suffers from late term morning sickness. Haseya leaves the hogan to gather water from a pond for her mother. On her journey, she accidentally drops the clay vessel, breaking it. She panics, worried what her mother will think when Sicheii overhears her from where he guides a flock. He calms her and tells her he will let her borrow one of his vessels and she follows him to his makeshift camp. Sicheii tries to make small friendly conversation, but Haseya is still a little shy.

With the borrowed clay vessel, Haseya returns to the pond when something coyote-like runs at her for an attack. Haseya hides in a small animal burrow. The creature, which looks like a mix of man and coyote, tries to go after her, but is too large. Haseya takes a rock and hits it, forcing it to pull out in fear. As it does, it gets its pelt stuck. It rips from its body.

Terrified, Haseya peers through to burrow see an old blind man, bloodied. It's Bidzii, who reaches inside the hole, desperate to find his fallen pelt. Ooljee calls for Haseya in the distance, and as the bright morning sun beams, Bidzii turns and disappears.

Haseya waits, then takes the pelt and slowly exits the burrow. The pelt is a collage of several types of animals, primarily coyote. It quivers and begins to curl around her arm, sliding on to her to fit her. It's painful as it makes barbed-like connections to her skin. Haseya rips it off with great pain when Ooljee beckons again in the distance for Haseya to return. Haseya hides the pelt in the water vessel and heads back to her hogan.

Tse and Nastas have returned when Haseya catches up with Ooljee. Haseya is eager to tell someone about what just happened, but Ooljee and Tse are too happy with his return and his new-found health. Chooli inquires about Gaagi and Klah, learning from Tse they are a day or so behind, helping with payment to the healer. Haseya approaches Nastas to tell him what she saw, but he is in a dark mood and ignores her as he returns in the direction of his own hogan.

That evening, Haseya can't sleep. Her parents having sex keeps her up. She gets up to leave and stops at a brush hogan at a collection of similar-looking clay storage vessels. She finds the one Sicheii loaned her, takes out the quivering pelt, looks over it with curiosity, almost putting it on. With it climbing over her arm, her seeing and her hearing become sharper. But as it is painful, she decides to place it in one of her mother's vessels. She ties a piece of cloth around it to tell it apart from the others.

Taking Sicheii's now-empty vessel, she returns to his camp where he is settling in for the night. He takes the vessel back, asking her if she is not scared to be out at night with ghosts and witches roaming. Haseya shrugs it off, and now is more talkative and opens up to him. She talks about herself, her strange abilities to make things move sometimes, her mother's anger at her for not being like a normal kid. Sicheii listens with interest, encouraging her to be as the deities want her to be. When Haseya reveals her strange attack earlier that day, the blind old man she saw, and the curious pelt she found and hid, Sicheii takes a special interest, but when he proclaims they should talk about this attack to her parents so he may get permission to destroy this evil pelt, she balks and leaves, proclaiming her mother will be angry to know what she did.

The next day. In Tse's community, a wedding is now happening inside a hogan. Haseya is bored, wondering more about Nastas' distance to her. Tse seems very happy near Ooljee as they watch the rituals, but he begins to have a hallucination brought on by Bidzii's earlier sorcery taking his lock of hair. Tse hears a strange buzz and looks about the crowd. They appear to be saying terrible things about him, how much better he thinks he is than everyone else. He sees them wearing skinned wolf skulls. Before him, he watches Haseya draw a spiral in the dirt of the hogan floor, a spiral that becomes a snake. Ooljee passes Tse the corn mush basket to eat from, but as Tse carries the corn mush to his mouth, a snake leaves his hand, entering his mouth. He fights and pulls at it but it keeps entering his body. Ooljee brings Tse back to the present by touching his shoulder. Tse tries to act normal but he is clearly disturbed.

During this wedding, Nastas sits on the edge of the group, brooding. He whispers to his mother that there is something he must tell her when a commotion outside catches his attention. He exits along with others.

Outside, Klah slowly approaches the group on his weary horse. They are both ragged from a long hard ride. His worried mother, Chooli, approaches Klah, wanting to know where his brother is.

Klah tries to dismount his horse but collapses. Tse approaches, worried. After some forceful coaxing, the nephew reveals something killed his brother. Cries of shock break through the crowd, and with Tse's forceful coaxing, Klah reveals he did not follow through Tse's request to bring sheep to the blind old man. Tse is both irate and frightened by this news, but promises Chooli he will find out what happened, and is sure Gaagi must be alive. He finds his horse and takes off into the night. Panicked, Ooljee asks for someone to follow Tse. Nastas steps forward and volunteers to go.

Late that night, Ooljee and some other women relatives assist with making the weak Klah comfortable and preparing herbs and restorative foods for him. Chooli is in a dark mood, fights with Ooljee, revealing buried tension, expressing that she never should have agreed to let her sons assist Tse. She comments on Ooljee always having more luck while she herself has had to deal with more hardship. Haseya sits near Klah, whispering him questions on what he saw. He's too weak to answer. Haseya takes her arrowhead necklace off and puts it around his neck, stating it will protect him. The older women move her aside to feed Klah, and Haseya accidentally knocks over Klah's soup. Ooljee sends Haseya to return to their hogan and be out of the way.

Outside her hogan, Haseya walks back to the hogan, crying, frustrated. She stops at the sound of clay vessels being broken at her hogan. She runs towards it, hiding as she approaches. Something moving in the darkness catches her attention. A naked and blind Bidzii moves amongst the shadows. He is breaking the clay pots, one after the other, searching for his pelt. He breaks the one with the cloth tied around it, revealing the pelt. Haseya jumps forward and she and Bidzii fight over it. It rips in two, with Haseya getting half. Bidzii puts the remaining portion of the pelt on, and it slides over his naked body like it was meant to be there. He transforms into a half man-half coyote and smelling the air, and now able to see, he turns and searches for Haseya. Clutching her portion of the pelt, she hides behind hanging sheep rugs. Bidzii searches, then turns and leaves.

Haseya runs into her hogan. There, she buries the portion of the coyote pelt beneath a her mother's pile of wool rugs.

While Tse rides his horse nearly to death, Nastas tracks him behind at a more cautious pace on his own horse. He never reveals his presence when coming upon Tse, stopping to angrily watch him water his horse and rest. At one point, Nastas strings his bow and arrow and almost shoots him, but his horse gets in the way.

Tse finally approaches Bidzii's hogan, which now seems decrepit. His horse is exhausted and refuses to walk any further. Tse dismounts and enters the hogan. It is pitch black but a fire begins on its own, lighting the space. In the middle of the hogan are the antelope parts, rotting. As Tse balks, he bumps into human corpses. Horrified, he turns only to find himself surrounded by other corpses. The hogan walls burst into flame. Tse looks for the exit but it is solid wall. The exit has disappeared.

Outside, Nastas approaches the hogan. He notices Tse's horse lying on the ground, foaming, panting. He touches its broken leg. Tse screaming inside the old hogan nearby distracts him. Nastas enters to find Tse on the ground near the small fire in the hogan pit. There are no corpses, the walls are not aflame. Tse is having another hallucination from Bidzii's sorcery with Tse's hair swatch. Nastas shakes Tse free of his hallucination, asks what has happened, but Tse tries to get control of himself and play it off for fear of acknowledging what Nastas already knows: Tse was healed by a skinwalker.

In Tse's hogan, Ooljee and Haseya lie awake near the fire, both unable to sleep. Haseya touches her mother's belly, asks if being born hurts the baby. Ooljee supposes it might a little. Haseya asks if dying then hurts people the same way, and Ooljee is less willing to answer. Haseya questions why either of these things have to hurt. She asks her mother if maybe a witch got Gaagi.

That night, near the light of an oil lamp, someone hangs a killed coyote and skins it. We cannot see this person's identity as he takes this new skin and sews it to Bidzii's coyote pelt. It becomes part of this quivering mass of animal skins. This same person passes the fixed pelt to Bidzii, in his blind old man form.

Later, someone blows grey powder into the smoke hole of Chooli's hogan where Klah sleeps. Klah freezes, then wakes as the powder scatters from his face. Someone walking on the hogan startles him. He panics, tries to wake Chooli who sleeps fitfully, when something begins knocking. Klah looks in amazement to see his brother there, smiling, standing on the hogan and peering into the smoke hole in the middle of the ceiling. Gaagi lowers his hand to Klah who reaches for it. An inhuman force pulls him up through the smoke hole. He gets stuck there and tries to wrestle himself free. Chooli wakes, notices her son's legs dangling in the smoke hole and pulls on him. Klah screams in pain. With her son's blood dripping over her, Chooli desperately tries to get her son out. She finally manages to pull her son's legs down. As the rest of him is missing, she screams. Blood and entrails drips down the smoke hole and walls.

At the Salt wintering grounds the next day, Ooljee and her family go about the funeral rites for Klah while awaiting the return of Nastas and Tse. At the end of the rites as the burial site clears

and night comes, a man wearing many turquoise bracelets appears and digs up Klah's remains and precious belongings, locating the arrowhead necklace that Haseya had given him amongst the valuables. He puts the remains and valuables on his horse and leaves.

At the end of the four-day mourning period, the Salt clan complete the mourning by washing themselves and saying prayers. Some of the older kids near Haseya give her trouble, whisper that her father visited a witch to get better. Angry, Haseya evokes a nest of bald faced hornets to sting them. As they flee, Ooljee notices the commotion and the look of joyful spite on her daughter's face. Ooljee reprimands her but Haseya proclaims she was defending her father from their accusations. Their tension escalates, and Haseya forces a hornet to sting Ooljee. Ooljee is shocked at her daughter's defiance when Nastas and Tse return. Her husband's worn appearance alarms her. The mourners of Klah spot him, dark looks passing their faces, as Tse learns from Ooljee that Klah recently died. He, Ooljee, and Haseya return to their hogan.

There, Tse asks where Sicheii is as Ooljee questions about the details of his trip, concerned about her husband's frantic state. Haseya reveals where Sicheii's camp is located and Tse grabs his rifle.

Before he can leave, however, men call from outside the hogan to speak to Tse. Tse seems worried and Ooljee steps out to face several of her brothers and cousins. They want to talk to Tse about his visit but are stern and aggressive. Ooljee knows full well they intend no good, and she defends Tse, reminds everyone of his community reputation, his giving of time and resources. This works and the group backs off. As Ooljee returns to her hogan, she spots the men speaking with her sister in the shadows.

Later that night, Nastas lies awake in his hogan. His mother sleeps soundly. Something moving outside alerts him. He takes his bow and arrow and sees a pair of feet outside the hogan entrance. He leaves to find Ooljee and the two talk. Ooljee begs to know what happened on the journey he made with Tse, but Nastas only hints at what he saw in the hogan, knowing that it's better to keep most of the details to himself. Nastas glances to her with softness and takes her hands. Ooljee delicately pulls them back and leaves.

Meanwhile, Tse moves in the darkness to Sicheii's camp where Haseya said it was. It's been cleared out, however, and only some food scraps and burned firewood remains. As he turns to look about, he faces a coyote, skinned, rotting, hanging from a tree. Tse becomes woozy, the buzz sounding in his ears again, and as the forest seems to fill with whispers, he blacks out.

Sicheii appears with his horse outside a cave. He whistles before he enters. Inside, he drops Klah's remains on top of the dead bodies of others. He adds Klah's belongings, including the

arrowhead necklace Haseya gave him, to a pile of other valuables of the dead. He finds a necklace he likes, and puts it on. Blind old Bidzii lingers in the shadows, sorting through the bodies, feeling the sizes of their skulls. Sicheii tells him that there is an elderly man at the base of the hill who puts his sheep into coral the same time each night, and he does it alone. He comments that this man has a lot of jewelry and tools.

That night, Yiska, one of the elders, finishes putting his sheep into a corral. The figures of two coyote-men move in the nearby darkness. Yiska spots what appears to be a person standing in his corral with his sheep. He enters. There, he finds a sheep standing on its hindlegs, staring with lifeless eyes. Terrified, Yiska backs away, but runs smack into Bidzii as a skinwalker.

When Tse comes about, it's the morning. Sun breaks over the forest ground. Tse looks about, unable to remember anything about the night before. Tse finds his horse and leaves.

A commotion on his return to his hogan draws his attention. Several community members, including Ooljee and Nastas, linger outside Yiska's corral. They seem distraught and Tse approaches them. Ooljee comes to him, having been worried about him, and Tse enters the corral. The sheep part, only to reveal Yiska dead, his throat slit. Horrified, he leaves the corral and tells Ooljee to return to the hogan immediately, and not let Haseya leave. Ooljee leaves. Tse moves to his horse, but many clan members are giving him a reprimanding look. He pushes through them and assures everyone he'll find the perpetrator. He turns his horse around to leave the crowd.

In the forest, Ooljee stops as she hears commotion. She hides, spots one of her brothers on horseback. He guides the medicine people of their community by gunpoint. The hand trembler proclaims her innocence from witchery. Not far behind him is Chooli, brandishing a rifle. Panicked, Ooljee turns to return to Yiska's corral where she sees another of her cousins approaching Nastas to follow him.

Tse moves back towards Sicheii's old camp to look for his shepherd. He calls out for his shepherd once in a clearing, when Chooli and several of her brothers appear. They bring forth the hand trembler and two other healers, all tied with rope and all accused of being witches and causing the recent death. Chooli questions Tse's recent journey, and he starts to try to explain but suddenly is unable to remember the name of Sicheii or his trip details. Bidzii's sorcery is at work again. There is a rustling in the brush when a cousin appears with Nastas. They ask him to give his side of the story. Nervously, Nastas notices Ooljee looking at him through the brush, worried. To protect Ooljee, Nastas ends up lying, saying they visited an old healer, not a witch. This surprises Chooli's posse who were expecting a revelation of something different, but as Nastas

ends the details of his journey with Tse, he watches Ooljee nod at him in gratitude from the brush, unnoticed by the others.

The group turns to the others accused, asks them to reveal which one is the witch, but all proclaim innocence. Finally, the eldest medicine man in the group angrily states they should all think through what they are doing, that their people have already gone through this craziness before. As arguments with him intensify, Chooli shoots him, proclaiming it's to protect other people's sons the way hers never were. The group goes quiet as the healer dies. Nastas stares in disbelief at what he has just witnessed. Shaken, he departs from the group, unnoticed, running from them as fast as he can.

At her hogan, Ooljee tries to focus on doing her prayers to the Holy People but she is very stressed and cries quietly to herself. Haseya notices and warms up to her, tries to comfort her, when Chooli passes on her horse. Aggressive, she tells Ooljee the witch is dead, that she killed it, and she rides off. Ooljee angrily watches her leave, but Haseya quietly reveals to her mother that she is sure that the witch, in fact, is still alive. Ooljee asks Haseya to sing to her to comfort her and her baby brother.

The burial rites end for Yiska. As night settles over the now quiet grave of the murdered old man, Sicheii appears to dig up the body and the valuables of jewelry, tools, and buffalo pelts.

That night with her mother finally asleep, Haseya slips out of her bedding. She carefully digs out the coyote pelt that quivers to life at her touch. Clutching it, she peeks outside where her father keeps guard outside the hogan. As her father paces, she ducks outside, unnoticed and runs into the surrounding nearby brush. There she puts on the small portion of the pelt. It grows to cover her, painfully clinging to her skin with barbs. She tolerates it and tries to run in it. It is awkward at first, but it makes her hearing sharp and her sight even sharper.

She runs to Yiska's corral where she locates the large paw prints and smell of the skinwalkers. She follows them through the forest, quickly, finally ending at the entrance of a cave. With her sensitive hearing, she can hear someone inside. She cautiously enters, lingering in the shadows, until she comes upon the numerous riches of many dead Navajo: their jewelry, saddles, pelts, rugs, tools, rifles, and other belongings of worth. She continues further, shaking in fear at the horrifying sight of corpses, some in piles. She has to suppress a scream when a shadow moves, catching her attention. Haseya hides as Bidzii approaches to make corpse powder by crushing a baby's skull into dust. Bidzii is in his form as a blind old man. He tests the powder on a rabbit, blowing the grey powder into its face. He touches the animal to feel it briefly falter, then begin to act strangely nervous, ill and confused. Pleased, Bidzii dumps the powder into a small animal skin pouch when a whistle sounds from outside the cave. Sicheii appears, putting the dead Yiska

on the other corpses near Haseya, and loads his valuables on the nearby pile. Bidzii sorts through them, feeling them to gather details.

To distract them, Haseya mentally lifts a rock and forces it to fly against the cave wall and land in a side tunnel. Sicheii runs to see what they believe is an intruder as Bidzii listens. Haseya takes this distraction and skirting around Bidzii who can almost sense her, she steals the pouch of corpse powder and the rabbit, then leaves as Sicheii returns to the cave.

Outside, Haseya runs with greater skill and speed in her pelt. She stops to free the rabbit, but it is dried up, dead. Sad, she look over her steal, the strange grey powder, when she senses someone close by. She puts the powder away on her belt and hides, and sees Nastas passing quickly on horseback. Curious, she follows him

Chooli eats in a cousin's hogan with several of her witch-hunting posse. A shaken Nastas suddenly appears and breathlessly tells them he needs to speak the truth. Haseya lingers near the hogan, eavesdropping with her heightened hearing, to hear Nastas reveal the truth of his experience watching Tse get healed by a skinwalker and deny it, and Tse being the murderer of Nastas' father. Knowing Tse is their man, the posse stand to grab their weapons. They prepare to hunt down Tse. "Give me a chance first to call out the girl and her mother," Nastas tells the group. "Then we get Tse." Angered, Haseya quickly runs in the direction of her family's hogan.

Outside his hogan, Tse has fallen asleep on his watch. Haseya approaches, but before she comes to her father, she takes off her coyote pelt with some pain and difficulty. She hides it beneath her clothing as she approaches her father to alert him of the coming group.

Nastas, Chooli, and the witch-hunting posse quietly approach Tse's dark hogan. Nastas dismounts his horse and calls for Haseya. No one comes. He calls again. The group is impatient but Nastas indicates they should wait. He calls again, but the men defy him, jump off and enter the hogan to his protests. It is empty.

Tse, Ooljee, and Haseya are on the run. There appears to be a storm brewing in the direction they are going. Ooljee is worried and perturbed by Tse not explaining their destination. Tse is irritated with her as he tries to cover their tracks. Haseya tries to get them to stop fighting. As they move towards higher ground, the storm grows with snow and wind. The pass gets more difficult to tackle and their horse hesitates. They encounter a large landslide of rock blocking their path, and Tse must take a longer route. As they turn around, Haseya can spot the forms of two coyotes moving in the distance.

Nastas stops at some tracks. He seems confused and some of the group give him a hard time, asking how Nastas would ever know how to track the man who taught him how to track. He ignores them when one of the group is able to pick up Tse's tracks. The group follows them.

Tse is now lost. He is on top of an overlook where he cannot see anything. The snow and clouds have covered the sky. Upset, he begins to sway, dizzy, Bidzii's sorcery working through him again. He is disoriented, feels something moving inside of him. He grabs at his throat. The snake appears outside of his mouth. He grabs at it. Ooljee and Haseya witness him struggling, but can't see the snake. Just as Tse feels smothered, the snake disappears. He looks to his family and tries to dismiss what he just experienced. He informs Ooljee and Haseya that they must set up camp. Ooljee throws out suspicions that they are lost. Tse's fuse is short. He denies her accusations and snaps at her for being so combative. It's a dark side that frightens both Ooljee and Haseya.

The storm has also stopped Nastas and his group. He and the others erect blankets to protect against wind. Later, they try to keep warm near a fire. Nastas speaks quietly with Chooli, says he needs her assurance that he can move first to protect Ooljee and Haseya. He shows her the bow his father made him, says he wants the first shot at Tse. Chooli understands and nods.

Hours later. It's a bitterly cold night. The moon overhead filters through the brush, lighting the frozen breath of the sleeping group from beneath their sheepskins and wool blankets. Bidzii as a skinwalker appears and moves among the sleeping group. One of the men, Astii, awakens, stares at him in surprise. Bidzii is unaware of him. Astii searches for his rifle, but before he can locate it, Bidzii attacks Astii. He drags him into the forest. Astii screams, waking everyone. As the others gain their bearings and gather their weapons, Bidzii moves about the surrounding forest, from the trees, the rocks, with unnatural dexterity. The group fires their rifles into the darkness, terrified. Others run to their horses. One man is hit by gunshot of his fellow posse members. In the chaos, Chooli and one member of her group flee, while Nastas gets away on his horse, panicked. The screaming of men and now of Chooli fill the night air.

At Tse's camp some distance up the mountain, these faint screams filter through the winter air. Tse sits awake, on watch over his family, clutching his rifle. His eyes are red, a line of frozen spit hangs on his cracked bleeding lips. He looks dazed. The buzzing whispers of a strange voice are much more clear, deafening to him, until a shadow moves in the trees. It catches Tse's attention. He stands, clutching his rifle. Waits. The figure of a coyote moves. Tse follows it.

The coyote leads Tse into a clearing with a fire then disappears. Sicheii's voice comes to Tse, invites him to sit. Sicheii speaks without appearing, explaining that Tse never paid the healer. He states that if Tse wants the mayhem to end, he should give them his son when he is born. Just as Tse seems to be letting this manipulation sink in, he lifts his rifle and shoots in into the trees. A

coyote yelp fills the air. Tse gets up and follows the sound where he finds Sicheii, shot, dragging his body across the bloodied snow. Sicheii offers him the plentiful jewelry around his neck if Tse will let him live, but Tse takes one more shot and kills him.

Meanwhile, in the nearby forest, Nastas continues on his horse, breathless but the night around him is quiet. As he cautiously moves forward, he hears the sound of something moving in the brush. He waits, pulls out his arrow and bow, when a small group of the horses from the witch-hunting posse appear, all without their riders except for one. One horse holds the lower torso of Chooli. As Nastas grabs the reins of one of the loose horses, he turns away in disgust.

At dawn, Ooljee wakes with a start. She is going into labor and looks about. Tse is nowhere to be found. She wakes Haseya who witnesses her mother clutching her stomach, and knows what is happening. Excitement and worry fill Haseya, and she says she must go get Tse. Ooljee tries to convince her not to, to get her to leave the camp with her, but Haseya refuses to abandon her father in such a way, and takes off to find him. Ooljee is powerless to stop her. She finds a knife in the supplies, and she hobbles away from the camp, desperate to get away from her husband.

In the forest, she runs into Nastas who has been tracking them, and she tells him where Haseya has gone, worried about what Tse might do. Nastas gives her one of the horses he has captured, helps her mount it, and tells her to wait for him at Wide Rock Path. She leaves and Nastas continues after Haseya.

Haseya runs through the forest, calling for her father when she finds him sitting back at the clearing, staring at the embers in a fire, clutching his rifle. He is not his normal self and she cautiously tells him that Ooljee is going to have her baby brother. Tse is unresponsive. She calls to him again when he lifts his gun and fires it at something behind her. She ducks, frightened, when Tse demands that Nastas, the traitor, appear.

Nastas slowly appears, his bow and quiver strung on his horse saddle, and states he is there to make amends, to beg for Tse's forgiveness. Haseya grows impatient with these two men and reminds them that Ooljee is about to have her baby brother when Ooljee's cry of fear rings through the forest. Haseya panics and runs for her mother.

Startled, Tse points his gun at Nastas and tells him to ride ahead of him. Nastas asks him "Would you kill me? Like you killed my father?" Tse glares at him, then pushes Nastas ahead with the rifle.

Haseya runs, with her father and Nastas close behind, both now on their own horses. Hiding, Haseya reaches into her coat and pulls out the coyote pelt. She throws it over herself and

becomes part coyote. With amazing speed, she out runs Tse and Nastas. The two men are speechless to see the transformation of this little girl. They resume following Ooljee's cries as they sound one last time.

Haseya runs through the forest until something on the ground catches her eye. Her mother's horse stands nearby, without its rider. She finds her mother's moccasin when she comes upon a gruesome scene. Her mother lies near death against the trunk of a grandiose tree. Her body cavity has been cut open. Haseya approaches her and Ooljee tells her she stabbed the thing that took the baby. Haseya notices skinwalker tracks and the start of a blood trail.

As Ooljee dies, Nastas appears on his horse behind Ooljee and Haseya. He breaks down crying at the sight of the carnage, while Tse appears. Spotting his daughter in a coyote pelt, her hands bloodied, he becomes livid and runs at her, thinking she is the skinwalker. With her coyote pelt still on, Haseya runs from him, following the trail of blood and paw prints. Tse fires his gun at her. Using this distraction, Nastas launches an arrow at Tse. It lands in his upper thigh. Nastas takes off after Haseya. Tse tries to fire a shot at him but is out of ammunition. He loads up but Nastas and Haseya are gone.

Haseya follows Bidzii's prints and blood trail to the cave and enters. There, she can hear her newly born brother crying, but his wailing seems to come from any one of the numerous cave paths she faces. Desperate to find him, she chooses one path and moves into the darkness, skirting the corpses that line the walls.

Nastas approaches and enters the cave, calling for Haseya. Ultimately worried for his safety, Haseya ignores her anger at him and backtracks. She reveals herself. The two reconcile. After Haseya expresses worry about her father, Nastas agrees to stay outside to look for Tse and prevent him from going into the cave where it would be too dangerous for him.

Nastas keeps a lookout for Tse who appears. Wanting to slow him, he attempts to fire his last arrow into Tse's foot, but Tse dodges the arrow and enters the cave. There, he fires at Nastas, hitting him and causing the boy to lose his footing. He falls and becomes unconscious. Tse sees Nastas' blood, believes he killed the boy and turns to continue pursuing Haseya into the cave.

Haseya continues alone, passing the same tunnel details from her first trip, but when she enters the heart of the cave, she hears her brother crying from another side tunnel. She follows his crying into this tunnel, where she falls through a layer of ice and becomes stuck in a cave pool saturated with blood. Above her are corpses hung to dry, their heads removed. Terrified, Haseya wades through the cold bloody water, using a hanging corpse to pull herself free.

Outside the cave, Nastas comes to. He's bleeding but only been grazed. He locates the arrow and pulls it from the earth. It is intact and he continues into the cave in pursuit of Tse.

Haseya now faces a rock pile partially blocking the continuation of the tunnel. Her brother and Bidzii are not there. Frustrated, Haseya looks around when Bidzii speaks from the surrounding darkness. He makes an offer. Now that his cohort, Sicheii is dead, he needs help. Someone to act as his eyes. He acknowledges the little girl is brave. He will teach her witchery and she will work for him. She will never be ill, never need for anything, never feel hunger or cold. Additionally, he will let her brother, father, and Nastas survive.

Haseya is about to say yes when Tse appears behind her, gun pointed at her. He stares, fighting between the sorcery and his natural fatherly instincts. Haseya begs her father to see it's she and removes her coyote pelt. She reminds him of the promise he made not so long ago, that he would never harm her again. Tse falters. A moment of clarity appears, and he seems to recognize Haseya through his madness. A drop of blood drips from the ceiling, landing on Tse's hand. Without moving, Tse glances up and shoots his rifle into the darkness above them. Bidzii falls from the ceiling where he has been hiding like a spider. He is wounded but fights Tse, inflicting a mortal blow. Back in her own pelt, Haseya attacks Bidzii, ripping his pelt from him and disabling him considerably.

Haseya tries to attend to her dying father who tells her she should go find her brother. She runs over the rock obstructions, taking Bidzii's pelt with her. As Tse struggles to reach for his rifle to shoot Bidzii, the skinwalker takes it. He's injured, but points the gun at Tse, ready to fire. He stops, and opens the weapon, feels there is only one shot left. He states he will save it for Tse's daughter and leaves.

Haseya continues onward. She can hear the closeby calls of her baby brother, and runs further down the tunnel to find him. Bidzii tracks her, using his keen sense of smell.

Nastas overhears the commotion and runs in the direction of the chaos, stopping to find Tse dying. Tse tries to speak but cannot. Nastas only looks coolly at Tse, then follows Bidzii's generous blood trail as Tse points to it.

At the end of the tunnel, Haseya passes more grave-robbed valuables and tools. She tosses Bidzii's pelt into the fire, destroying it. She finds her brother and takes him into her arms as Bidzii appears, blind but smelling her presence. He carries Tse's rifle. Haseya tries to back away quietly as Bidzii moves to her. The baby makes a noise, alerting the blind Bidzii to Haseya's presence. Just as Bidzii is about to shoot at her, Nastas appears in the distance. It's a long shot, but he lets his last arrow fly, and hits the skinwalker in the shoulder, setting him off.

Bidzii grabs Haseya's leg as she runs past, pulling her to the ground where she falls. Haseya attempts to use her telekinesis to hurl rocks and tools at him, but he swats them away like flies.

Haseya reaches for the small pouch hanging from her waist and opens the corpse powder. Holding her breath, she tosses it at Bidzii. The skinwalker freezes from his own creation, twitching, confused, long enough for Haseya to run to the loot pile of the dead, and grab a rifle.

Nastas runs to grab the baby from the skinwalker's reach.

Haseya tries to fire the gun. It jams and Bidzii begins to move normally again, when finally, Haseya pulls the trigger, shooting Bidzii in the head. The skinwalker shivers and collapses, returning to his normal state of an elderly man as he dies.

Haseya and Nastas return to where Tse now lies dead. Nastas shields Haseya's eyes from the sight of her father as they make their way from the cave.

Outside the cave, the sun is high in the cloudless sky. A ragged Nastas appears, followed by Haseya who caresses her baby brother who is alive. She puts him aside. He is comfortably wrapped in many warm wool blankets taken from the cave.

Nastas builds a fire. When it is ablaze, he and Haseya dump all of the robbed belongings of the dead into it. Haseya puts her arrowhead necklace she gifted to Klah in the fire. As these items burn, the ghosts of the numerous dead appear, relieved as they turn and continue to journey to the north. Klah and Yiska appear amongst them.

As the fire continues to burn behind them, Nastas, Haseya, and the newborn leave the cave on the two horses that remain. The two move down the mountain, and Haseya looks with sad affection at her baby brother who sleeps. In the distance on the plains below, their community's hogans lie in wait of their return.

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