

Skin and Bones

The crisp dawn air seemingly running away from the sun, illuminated the men's breath. The jingle of keys echoed throughout the valley as if it had no competition to be heard. Will opened the old rusted and dented Chevy door to let Rocky their Blue Heeler in the cab before following himself.

"Are you nervous?" Will asked his nephew Kai as he turned over the ignition and the truck reluctantly decided to start after much contemplation.

"How could I not be? Ever since we got to Chinle last night I have felt a sense of uneasiness. I don't know why, but I have had butterflies in my stomach since before bed."

"Trust your intuition, in our case we are drawn to this burden for the betterment of others. I'm not too sure what details my sister and your father have told you, but we have responsibility to bear and now that you are 18, you must carry the torch. You, me, our family and our ancestors are the shepherds over a flock, we must watch over and protect our herd from an ancient spirit. This spirit is hardly ever detected by the layman, but we have an innate ability to sense is wretched presence."

Kai nodded in acknowledgement. Although he had been overloaded with information, it felt destined for him to fit this role. They continued to drive not encountering another soul unless you count the endless array of shrubs, cacti and sandstone features.

"Do you see that up there?" Kai announced as he leaned up and pointed 100 yards ahead to a faint white object. Will drove over and parked the truck, dust continuing to plume underneath. The two saw a young lamb whose distress calls were falling on deaf ears.

"Poor little creature" Kai said as they approached it.

"It has a bad limp and is lost. It won't make it another day out here on its own. We will put him in the bed and when we are in town hopefully someone will know who he belongs to." Will said to Kai as he leaned over the lamb. Will looked into the lamb's murky black eyes and placed his palm on its face. Suddenly, Will felt sharp chills throughout his body, all of his muscles locked, and he began profusely sweating. Will's mind was flooded with malevolent spirit's presence, pure evil, endless hatred, despicable memories and abhorrent desires.

Will screamed out with full effort "Get the fuck back" and began sprinting towards the truck. The lamb appeared to have let a light snicker slip from its demeanor. It began to change, first standing upright. Then the wool began to transform into a plethora of different animal skins and furs being worn. Its distinctly lamb features became lost as it morphed into an indiscernible beast. Kai stood watching in a limbo between disbelief and terror; his boots felt glued to the arid soil beneath him. Before he could properly react, the Skinwalker slashed at his torso propelling him back 20 feet to a grinding halt. Simultaneously, Will arrived at the truck and pulled out a weathered but reliable Ithaca Model 37 pump action shotgun from behind his seat. In a fierce and rapid motion, Will cocked his gun, brought it up tight to his shoulder and fired at the Skinwalker.

The creature appeared to scream in anguish before shapeshifting into a coyote and slipping into the brush.

“Go get ‘em Rocky!” Will commanded his dog as he let him jump from the truck. Will’s attention suddenly shifted back to his nephew lying on the ground. Upon reaching him, Will stripped off his shirt and used the fabric to wrap a bloody gash on Kai’s chest.

“You’re gonna be ok, listen to me. Get inside the truck, lock the door and wait for me to return. I won’t be long; I need to take you to the hospital.”

“I understand” said Kai “Do what you must” Will glanced over to where Rocky ran, grabbed a pocket full of shells and began jogging.

“Rocky, Rocky, come here boy, where are you?” Will shouted while frantically searching. His racing thoughts were cut short by a chilling bark and whimper. Will ran in the direction of the noise. After running for about a minute, Will found Rocky next to a liter or so of blood beginning to soak into the thirsty land.

“Come on boy, we need to leave now, it got us this time,” Will told his dog reassuringly as he headed back to Kai.

“Did you find it?” inquired Kai as his uncle opened the door for himself and Rocky.

“No, Rocky must have and he got a little roughed up, but he seems fine.” Will began driving with a sense of urgency, his shirt wrapped around Kai’s chest had become completely blood soaked impossible to distinguish the red from black. Will was saturated with guilt, that he hadn’t done enough to keep Kai safe. He pondered on the lethality of Kai’s wounds, and wondered how their family might take the devastating news. Needing a split second of relief, Will reached his hand back to pet Rocky’s snout. Upon making contact with Rocky, Will froze in panic as he felt the sheer terror flood his veins as he could sense the diabolical spirit.