

Yanaha Tl'izilani

Yanaha Tl'izilani was born into the Tl'izilani clan in the Diné (Navajo) tribe. The Navajo call themselves Diné which means “first people”. Tl'izilani means many goats in Diné, and this was immediately evident when one took even the slightest look at her clan. All the men were goat herders. Yanaha's clan lived by a long winding river, a river that allowed her father's goats to drink. Her father was from the Honágháahnii (the one who walks around) clan, one of the original four clans. Though Yanaha's father was a goat herder, (the clan demanded it of him) he was originally a warrior, and Yanaha loved when he would gather her siblings and her into their hogan to tell them tales of great warrior gods. Her favorite character was Nagaynezgani, a hero who defeated many monsters and evil spirits.

Once her father was done telling the story about how Nagaynezgani vanquished many evils except four, Yanaha would always ask,

“Which four?” To which her father would reply,

“Cold, hunger, old-age, and death.” Before chasing her and her siblings around the hogan. Then, her mother would get up from her loom and reprimand her father for scaring her and her siblings. Her father would say sheepishly,

“But we were just having fun.” Yanaha loved her father. She loved the way his brown eyes crinkled when he talked, she loved the way he laughed, a hearty deep chuckle, and most of all, she loved when he told her she was brave.

“That's what your name means, brave.” He would say before walking off to tend to his goats.

Yanaha's tribe had originally gotten goats from the Spanish, as with horses and the tl'aakal (velvet skirts) that Yanaha and the other women of her tribe wore. Every once in a while a haggard Spanish man would come with his donkey loaded up with things to trade. Yanaha's mother would trade the rugs, beads, and baskets she had made for cotton and velvet fabric, and

if she could, pots and pans. The Spanish traders never stayed long, and didn't talk to anybody unless if to trade. That was the only experience Yanaha had with white men. However, trading didn't happen with just Spaniards. Every month Yanaha's father would round up some of his finest goats to trade with another Diné clan. He would usually bring Yanaha and some of her older siblings along with him. Yanaha knew that she would eventually have a husband from a different clan, and if war ever broke out amongst the Diné tribe and another tribe the clans would unite to fight off the enemy. But those events seemed far in the future, and the majority of Yanaha's interaction were within her clan. She had never even interacted with another tribe. All in all, Yanaha's life was happy and calm. That is, until the sickness came.

The chief had heard about it a few clans over, but it was soon too late. The sickness spread to her clan, and Yanaha's father became ill. A medicine man was called in to heal Yanaha's father. He gave her father medicine and said some prayers, but the sickness kept getting worse until Yanaha's father became bed-bound. Yanaha's mother shooed the kids out of the hogan, but Yanaha stayed close to the opening and listened in on their conversation.

"I'm sorry, I tried everything." The medicine man said, "But Chohanoai (the sun god) has claimed him."

"Isn't there anything you can do?" Yanaha's mom pleaded.

"Only defeating death itself could save him now. If I were you I would gather your children around to say goodbye." So Yanaha's mom, with tears in her eyes, told her children to say bye-bye to daddy. Once it was Yanaha's turn she walked slowly up to her father. He was very pale and skinny, Yanaha could tell that death would soon come for him.

"I love you dad." Yanaha whispered to him, her eyes filling with tears. Just then, his eyes opened.

"Yanaha." he said in a weak voice.

"Yes father?"

“There was a prophecy about you. One of the elders had a vision of a girl who would go on to do great things, who would defeat many monsters.”

“Like Nagaynezgani?” Yanaha asked.

“Exactly like him.” Her father said. “I will be gone soon, but before I go I want to finish telling you the prophecy.”

“Please father, don’t go.” Yanaha pleaded.

“My time is soon, but not yet.” Her father said with a small smile. “You must defeat the monsters. In order to get more information you must meet Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá (Spider Woman). Travel East for a day and a night. She will tell you all you need to know. But whatever you do, don’t fight the 4 great evils.” Yanaha immediately remembered that the 4 great evils were the evil gods that even the great Nagaynezgani couldn’t defeat. But then it occurred to her, if she defeated them, mainly death, then she could save her father.

“Why can’t I fight them father?” Yanaha asked, but he was asleep. That night, the medicine man came in to do some final rituals and Yanaha’s father died.

Yanaha wasted no time. Once the funeral was completed she packed a bag full of dried meat and maize, saddled her horse, and went on her way. Unfortunately, her mother stopped her.

“Yanaha, where do you think you’re going?” Her mother asked, her hands on her hips. Yanaha was about to respond, when the chief stepped up.

“Yanaha has been chosen by the spirits to defeat many great evils. She needs to go to Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá first.” Yanaha’s mother started to tear up a little.

“I love you Yanaha, be brave.”

“I love you too mother. I will.” Yanaha fought the urge to hug her mother, and instead rode off on her horse.

Yanaha traveled through the harsh desert all day until it got dark, then she stopped by a large cactus to sit down and have a bite to eat. Once she was done eating she continued on through the night.

When the sun finally came up Yanaha spotted a great mountain in the distance, it was Sisnaajini. Sisnaajini marked the edge of Diné territory. Everything beyond it belonged to different tribes. Yanaha had never traveled this far before. Usually she went west instead of east. She saw a settlement come into view, and she decided to stop there to ask them for help navigating the mountain passes.

Some warriors came up to Yanaha.

“What’s your name and business?” They asked.

“My name is Yanaha Tl’izilani. A prophecy sent by the gods has decided that I shall defeat many evils. But first, I need to speak to Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá. Which tribe have I found myself among?” The soldiers bowed.

“Yanaha Tl’izilani who has been sent by the gods, you are in the Dzi ł t’aadi clan.” A warrior with bright red feathers said. After he said that, an old woman emerged from a highly decorated hogan.

“Elder,” Yanaha said and began to bow, but the old woman cut her off.

“If anything I should be the one bowing to you.” She said with a chuckle. “Here, come come, I have something for you.” So Yanaha followed the old woman into her hogan. The old woman pulled a shiny feather out of an animal skin pack.

“This feather will point to the direction that Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá is in. That way you will find her easily.”

“Thank you.” Yanaha said as the old woman handed her the feather.

“Now you mustn’t waste any time.” The old woman said. Yanaha knew what she meant. She said goodbye and rode her horse up to Sisnaajini.

The mountain seemed to sparkle white, and Yanaha knew why her people referred to it as the white shell mountain.

“Stay strong old boy.” She said to her horse as she grasped the feather. Immediately when she rode through the mountain her feather started to shake. She came to two tunnels, and her feather practically flew out of her hand. It quite obviously wanted her to take the right tunnel.

After a few hours of this the sun started to come down and Yanaha grew sleepy. Her feather stopped quivering, so she decided to tie her horse to a stump and sleep. She slept for a while until she felt a tingling on her nose. It was her feather. It was trying to wake her up. Yanaha reluctantly woke up to see an old woman peering over her.

“Ahhhhhhh!” Yanaha exclaimed as she jumped back.

“Yanaha TI'izilani?” The old woman asked.

“Yes.” Yanaha said as she looked at the old woman. The old woman wore much turquoise jewelry on her neck, ears, and wrists. Her skin was a dark tan, like mud, and her eyes had no pupils. All four eyes...

“Are you Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá?” Yanaha asked.

“You caught me.” Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá said as she put her hands up in the air.

“Now come with me if you want advice for your quest.” Yanaha watched Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá walk up to a cave opening that had a blanket laid over it. Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá held the blanket up as she walked under it and into the cave.

Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá's cave had very little possessions. There were some bowls and rugs, a few baskets, and turquoise jewelry. That was it. Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá sat on one of the rugs and motioned for Yanaha to sit down too.

“So you are the one who will defeat many monsters?” Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá asked, her brow furling ever so slightly.

“Yes. That is the path the spirits chose for me.” Yanaha said as she fiddled with her hands. Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá closed her eyes and breathed deeply.

“You must follow Chohanoai (the sun god). He will lead you. When he goes down, follow the moon. There are three kinds of monsters you will encounter, a rock monster, bird monsters, and an enormous giant. You will have to fight each one every day. On the fourth day you will arrive at Thoyetli. There you will encounter the 4 great evils.” Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá paused and looked into Yanaha’s eyes.

“It is very important that you do not kill the four great evils and instead make your sacrifice and return home.” Yanaha was conflicted. But she knew she had to say yes.

“I promise.”

“Good. Now take this.” Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá pulled a bow and arrows out of an especially big basket.

“These were Nagaynezgani’s. The arrows can pierce any creature for they are made out of lightning. But use them wisely.”

“I will. Thank you grandmother spider.” Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá gave Yanaha food and water.

“Now what are you waiting for?” Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá said. “You must be on your way. You have many monsters to vanquish.” With that Yanaha left Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá’s tent, untied her horse, and rode down the mountain into the sandy desert.

Yanaha rode through the night but by morning she was tired. She decided to tie up her horse and rest on a nice large boulder. No sooner had she fallen asleep than the ground started to move underneath her. She looked down. The rock was alive! And it was trying to hurl her off of its back. Yanaha’s arrows were still on the ground. She rolled off of the rock monster and grabbed her bow and arrows. The rock monster was huge now, towering and impenetrable. Quickly rocks were being sucked from all over the desert floor to it. There the rocks came together and the monster grew. *How do I defeat something that seems impenetrable?* Yanaha thought. The rock monster interrupted her thoughts as it hurled a large chunk of itself at her. Yanaha lunged out of the way and the rock just barely missed her. She knocked one of her arrows into her bow as she stared at the hunk of rocks. Then she saw it. Its weakness. There

were slits between the rocks, bits of space that if punctured, Yanaha thought, could potentially hurt the rock monster. She took aim and fired her arrow at one of the slots of space by its elbow. She missed and the arrow glanced off of one of its rocks instead. This made the monster furious. It threw even more rocks at Yanaha. Yanaha ducked and maneuvered masterfully so she didn't get hit. She wasn't ready to give up just yet. Yanaha knocked another arrow, took aim, and fired at an opening near the creature's belly. This time the arrow went in. A flash of lightning shone and the monster lit up. The monster started shooting rocks out rapidly. Yanaha lunged behind a cactus for cover. When she peaked out from behind the cactus she was met with a barrage of rocks. The monster may have been big and powerful but it wasn't moving. Yanaha knocked an arrow, prayed to the gods, and release it. It hit the monster again. This time in a slot in its neck. The monster began to shake and Yanaha ducked for cover as it burst into pebbles. Yanaha stood up and scooped some up. The pebbles felt smooth and warm, but scorched black with lightning. Yanaha couldn't believe that the little stones were ever a horrible monster. They felt charges with positive energy. *I did that.* Yanaha thought. *I rid the world of a monster.* It felt good to be fulfilling her destiny. But also tiring. Yanaha collapsed on the spot and slept.

That night she dreamt of a turquoise palace. In it she saw her father. He was dressed in feathers and precious stones.

"You will do great things Yanaha." He told her.

Yanaha woke up at night. The moon shone bright.

"Come on, let's go." She whispered to her horse as she mounted it. While she rode she ate beans and dried meat wrapped in a corn tortilla. As the sun rose she noticed an Anasazi gathering. (Dinés called the Pueblo People Anasazi which means Enemy Ancestors) The building's mud arches stood empty.

Where are all the Anasazi? Yanaha thought. Just as she went to investigate a swarm of bird monsters flew out of the abandoned Anasazi dwelling. The bird monsters had turkey feathers and beaks, but they stood upright like humans. They were as big as humans too.

“Who comes here?” An especially large one squacked.

“It’s me, Yanaha Tl’izilani, the one who was sent by the spirits. Where are all of the Anasazi?”

“We drove them out.” The large one said. “It’s not like you Diné wouldn’t have done the same.”

“What do you mean?”

“You Diné drive Anasazi out of their homes all the time. Why should we be the ones persecuted for it?”

“Even your word for them, Anasazi, is offensive.” Another bird monster said. Yanaha thought long and hard about this. She turned her head away from the bird monsters to think. Then, she saw, behind a bush a tuft of black hair poking out.

“Just one second.” She told the confused bird monsters as she went to investigate.

There, crouched behind the bush was a little boy.

“Are you one of the Anasazi?” Yanaha asked him.

“Yes, I am of the Pueblo tribe. I am not Anasazi.” He replied. “The bird monsters drove my people out of our home. I heard you say that you were brought here by the spirits. May you please kill these horrible monsters?”

“Yes.” Yanaha said, her eyes staring straight into the boy’s. “I will.”

Yanaha emerged out of the bush and faced the bird monsters.

“So, have you mulled it over and decided to abandon your mission?” The bird monster asked, an air of malice creeping into his screechy voice.

“No.” Yanaha said. “You creatures strike fear into the Pueblo People’s hearts. You stole their home and their land. I cannot atone for the mistakes of my people but I can try to move

forward by helping this clan. Prepare to die bird monsters!" The bird monsters looked at each other, then the leader said,

"How can a girl defeat *us*? Creatures who have plagued humanity since the beginning?"

"Like this." Yanaha said as she shot an arrow straight into the leader's forehead. Chaos ensued. The bird monsters swooped at Yanaha but she was able to stave them off. She shot lightning arrow after lightning arrow at the bird monsters. Each time the arrow met its target. The birds were able to get their talons on Yanaha scraping her arms and neck but each time they were driven back. The screeching was deafening. The bird people fell one by one until there were no more. Yanaha fell to her knees, bloody and exhausted. One by one the Pueblo People came out from behind the bushes where they were hiding. The chief, a tall man in a feather headdress came up to greet Yanaha with the little boy holding his hand.

"Thank you so much for saving our people from these horrid beasts. Is there any way we can repay you?" His eyes were caring and deep brown, and soft creases appeared around his eyes.

"No, I really need to be heading on my way. But thank you for asking." Yanaha said as she mounted her horse.

"Please stay with us, just for one night." The little boy begged Yanaha, his lip quivering. Yanaha's eyes softened.

"Alright, I'll stay just for one night. But by morning I need to be off." Yanaha said as she dismounted.

"Yay!" The boy exclaimed as he ran off towards the adobe buildings, dragging Yanaha behind.

That night Yanaha ate a feast with the tribe, all the while the little boy was bouncing around, happy to have a real life hero with him. For the first time in a while Yanaha slept under a roof.

In the morning Yanaha waved goodbye to her new Pueblo friends, mounted her horse, and rode off. She stopped for a lunch break. Then, she heard screams. They were coming from past a thick plant growth. Yanaha rode up on her horse to investigate. There was an idyllic little Diné village by the river of her people (San Juan River). Or at least, it would be idyllic if it wasn't being attacked by an enormous giant. People were screaming in horror as hogan after hogan was destroyed by the monster. Yanaha knew that this would be the hardest monster yet to defeat.

"Hello giant. My name is Yanaha Tl'izilani. I was sent by the gods to defeat you." The monster turned around and stared at Yanaha. Its ugly misshapen head and its small beady eyes made Yanaha remember the myths her dad used to tell her. It let out an ear splitting laugh.

"You, defeat me?" It wheezed.

"I've already slayed a rock monster and bird monsters."

"So you killed a rock and some turkeys. What makes you think that you will ever be able to defeat me?" It asked, cocking its enormous head.

"I know because the spirits are on my side."

'Bring it on little girl." The giant said as it wielded its huge club.

Yanaha knocked her arrow and took aim at the monster. She fired. With one swipe of its club the giant deflected the arrow. It fell to the ground. The giant laughed. But then it looked down at its club. It was scorched black like lightning had struck it. This made the giant very angry. It thundered towards Yanaha swinging its dark wooden club. Yanaha had no other choice, she got off of her horse and ran. She hid in a hogan but could hear the giant's footsteps and voice.

"Come out, come out wherever you are, little girl." Yanaha's blood went cold. The giant began to lift up hogan after hogan looking for Yanaha. Yanaha knew she couldn't hide forever. She left the hogan and faced the giant.

“Oh, what have we...” The giant didn’t get to finish its sentence. Yanaha had shot it in the leg. The giant ripped out the arrow and let out a scream. Where the arrow had penetrated the giant’s skin was blackened. The giant swung its club and Yanaha just managed to lunge out of the way in time. The club was there, on the ground. Making a split-second decision Yanaha ran towards the giant. She ran all the way up the club, and began to climb its arms. Then she grabbed hold of its hairs with her arrow gripped tightly in her hand. The giant was wearing a crude animal skin loincloth. Yanaha had by now made it to the giant’s neck. The giant tried to slap Yanaha off of it, but its hands were big and slow and Yanaha was able to easily dodge its blows. It wasn’t long before Yanaha got to the top of the giants head. It was bald and warty. Yanaha began to crawl down the giant's face. A huge hand slapped at Yanaha. She was barely able to avoid it. But she was where she wanted to be. With a yell she thrust her arrow into the giant's right eye. The giant went berserk. Blood poured out of its eye and it shook around, trying desperately to get Yanaha off of it. Yanaha grabbed another arrow out of the quiver strapped tightly onto her back and thrust it into the giant's left eye. Again, the giant screamed out in pain. Both of its eyes were now bleeding and blackened. Scorched from the lightning arrows. Yanaha climbed back up onto the giant’s head and prayed to Nagaynezgani to grant the arrow power to deliver one final fatal blow. With enormous strength, strength Yanaha didn’t know she had, she brought the arrow down into the giant’s head. A huge bolt of lightning struck the giant’s head and it collapsed. Yanaha jumped off just in time to avoid being crushed.

An elder ran up to Yanaha and grabbed her into a hug.

“Oh thank you great chosen one of the gods. You have saved us all from that evil giant. If you hadn’t stopped the giant our village would have been destroyed and our children eaten.”

“You should be thanking the spirits for sending me on this quest.”

“Would you please accept these gifts?” The elder brought Yanaha food, water, shells, feathers, and Spanish cigarettes. Yanaha stared at the cigarettes and then remembered her father telling her how he had made a sacrifice of cigarettes after his battle. Then she

remembered Na'ashjé í Asdzáá's words about having to go to Thoyetli and make a sacrifice. *These Spanish cigarettes will make a fine sacrifice.* Yanaha thought as she turned them over in her palm. Thoyetli was not far from the village. She would be able to get there by midnight if she hurried. Yanaha thanked the village elders and set off for Thoyetli.

At nightfall Yanaha began to feel very sleepy. *I can always make the sacrifice tomorrow.* Yanaha thought. She dismounted her horse and set up camp. In a few minutes she was peacefully sleeping. After a few hours she was awoken by the sound of voices. They were coming from behind a bush. Yanaha crept towards the bush and peeked her head over it.

"I'm so co...co...coooold." A lady with a blanket said as she shivered.

"You're sitting right next to the fire." An unhealthily skinny man said. "At least you're not starving to death."

"Oh be quiet you two." An old as dirt woman croaked. "Neither of you don't have to deal with all the diseases that come with age." Suddenly, a regal man appeared. He wore a red velvet shirt and white pants. His tsiiyéél (Diné hairstyle) was topped with thorns, twigs, and dead leaves. He looked like a king. He was tall and slim, but not unhealthily so and his reddish skin was spotless. When he entered the circle the others bowed to him.

"Are you all back at it again?" He asked. His voice was as smooth as the smoothest river rock. Even though she could only see his back Yanaha could imagine his face. He would have a long slim nose, dark eyebrows, and thin lips. But his eyes... Yanaha couldn't imagine what they would look like.

"No Death." The skinny man said. Yanaha was struck. It was him, the demon she needed to slay to get her father back. She couldn't believe he was so regal, so handsome.

"Very good Hunger." Death said, and his voice dripped like sap. There was yelling as the freezing woman stole the old lady's blanket.

"Cold, Old-age. Stop it you two." Death said. He buried his head in his hands. "It's like dealing with children." They all went quiet.

“Very good.” Said Death. “We have a lot of work to do tomorrow.” Yanaha’s hands clenched into fists. She wouldn’t let them take any other father away. She started to stand up, but then felt a hand gently push her down. She looked up. There was a gorgeous woman dressed all in turquoise standing above her. It was Estsánatlehi, goddess of the west, fertility and crops, mother of the great hero Nagaynezgani, and wife of the sun god Chohanoai.

“Yanaha, you must not kill Death even if it is to bring back your father.” Her voice was soft and warm like Yanaha’s father’s smile.

“I need to bring him back.” Yanaha said through tears. Estsánatlehi reached out to Yanaha and cupped her hand on Yanaha’s cheek.

“Yanaha, you are so brave. But you need to trust me. Sleep, then head out at sunrise to Thoyetli.”

“I can’t, I can’t.” Yanaha’s voice was shaking now as tears fell down her cheek. Estsánatlehi looked Yanaha straight in the eyes and said,

“Yes, you can. Make a sacrifice when you get to Thoyetli. Put the cigarettes down and the feather Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá gave you. The feather will turn into a spirit that will lead you home. Oh and Yanaha, your father loves you.” And with that Estsánatlehi vanished. Yanaha knew she shouldn’t disobey the orders of a goddess, especially this goddess, but it was for her father. She hoisted herself up and walked into the campfire circle.

“I am Yanaha Tl’izilani. I have defeated many great evils, and now I will defeat you four. The final evils.”

“Yanaha Tl’izilani. I have heard much about you.” Death said smoothly as he turned around. His eyes were unlike anything Yanaha had ever seen. In them she saw the souls of many people, swirling around in a misty oblivion. Yanaha didn’t tear her eyes from his as she said,

“You killed my father, now you shall die.” She knocked her arrow onto her bow and pointed it at him. Very calmly Death said,

"I wouldn't do that if I were you."

"Oh yeah? Why?"

Just then Cold spoke up.

"Ever heard the tale of Sakaz-estsan and Nagaynezgani?" Yanaha wracked her mind until a memory floated up from the murky depths. She was sitting on her father's lap and he was telling her and her siblings about how after Nagaynezgani had killed all of the monsters he set his sights on the four great evils.

"Four is a very special number." Her father told her and her siblings. "It has magical properties. So of course there would be four major evils Nagaynezgani would have to defeat."

"Did he do it, did he kill them?" Yanaha asked, bobbing on his knee.

"Well, he got to Sakaz-estsan, The Cold Lady. She told him that if he killed her humans would be hot forever."

"Did he kill her anyway?"

"No, he couldn't." Her father grew very grave as he said, "Yanaha. The price for never being cold is worse than cold itself. Do not get rid of one bad thing if the consequences are worse than it."

Yanaha brought her attention back to Cold.

"Yes, I have. My father told it to me and my siblings." Cold smiled a freezing smile.

"Then I suppose you know how it ends." Yanaha was furious. She whipped her bow back over to Death and held the arrow quivering, inches from his face.

"Tell me."

"Tell you what?" Death asked, sounding slightly bored. Yanaha's hands shook.

"Tell me what would happen if I shot you."

"The whole human race would never be able to die. More and more people would keep being born, and over-population would be unbearable. Oh, and the suffering. The suffering would be unimaginable. So many people unable to die, forever in pain." His face was hard to

read, but Yanaha could tell he was being sincere. She remembered her father, Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá, Estsánatlehi, and all those who had told her not to kill the great evils. She lowered her bow.

“Do you like what you do?” Yanaha asked, this time to all of them.

“Do you like to invoke human misery?” Death turned to face her, dead branches and leaves swaying in his hair but never falling out.

“It will be so much worse when the white people come.” Yanaha was confused. The only white people she knew were the Spanish traders.

“The Spaniards? But they're already here.” Death shook his head and gave a small chuckle as if to say, “*Naive girl.*”

“No, the Americans.” Yanaha was done with the great evils. She ran as fast as she could to her horse, mounted it and rode off.

Yanaha rode through the night until she got to a large cliff overlooking the sacred river (San Juan river in Utah). Yanaha knew immediately that this place was Thoyetli. It had a positive energy, a heavenly vibe. Plus it had tons of offerings. By now Yanaha was wiped out, and remembering Estsánatlehi's words she decided to sleep.

When Yanaha woke up she walked over to the cliff. She waded through Cigarettes, tobacco, turquoise, shells, feathers, and other small items until finally she found a tiny square of space that didn't have offerings. She took the Spanish cigarettes and the feather Na'ashjé íí Asdzáá had given her out of her pack. Gingerly, she placed the cigarettes on the dirt. Then, the feather. She prayed and then said out loud, with tear filled eyes,

“I wish you were here dad.” At just that moment the feather began to glow and it morphed into a wispy shape, a ghost, a spirit. Her father.

“Dad!” Yanaha yelled as she lunged forward to embrace her father, but her arms passed through him.

“I’m not alive Yanaha, I’m like a vision. The gods allowed me to help guide you back home, but in a spirit form.” Yanaha began to sniffle and her father’s ghost eyes softened.

“I love you Yanaha. I’m so proud of you.”

“Thank you dad.” Yanaha said, fighting the urge to hug her father.

“Let’s eat breakfast.”

Yanaha and her father sat down by her horse and ate berries and travel biscuits. She laughed as the food passed through her father’s stomach. He gave her funny faces and rubbed his belly. Once they were done eating Yanaha’s father told her that since her quest was complete they could take as much time as they wanted coming back home.

“And that means sleeping too.” He said, pointing at the bags under Yanaha’s eyes. Yanaha giggled.

“Ok dad.”

Yanaha and her father set out. Yanaha was happier than she had been for a long time traveling with her father. But she knew it couldn’t last. That’s why she took her time going back home.

Yanaha was praised by the people that she saved from the monsters on her way home. Her father stayed behind as they lavished her with food and treasures.

“Look at that.” Yanaha’s father said, examining the fine jewelry that they gave her.

“I think that’s Spanish silver.”

“I told them not to give me anything but they insisted...” Yanaha explained.

“You’re a hero now Yanaha. People will want to give you things.” Her father looked at her lovingly. He was especially impressed when the Pueblo People came out to greet Yanaha and give her gifts. Once she was riding with her father again he asked her,

“Why are the Anasazi giving you gifts? I thought they were our enemies.”

“The Anasazi prefer to be called Pueblo People.” Yanaha said as she looked hard into her dad’s eyes.

“We have done bad things to them. Driven them out of their homes and made them suffer. The least I could do for them was to rid their home of the bird monsters.”

“You are so wise Yanaha.” Her father said as his eyes crinkled. “Many women never encounter another tribe unless they are kidnapped. But you...” His eyes became as soft as fresh clay.

“You have already seen so much.” Yanaha smiled and hugged her father even though her arms passed through his wispy body.

Yanaha and her father continued on until they could see Sisnaajini, Na’ashjé íí Asdzáá’s mountain. As they stopped and ate Yanaha’s father asked her about her mother and siblings.

“They all miss you very much.” Yanaha said.

“I miss them too.” Her father said, looking down at the ground.

“Is your mother ok? I want nothing more than to see her again.” Yanaha could feel the pain in his voice as he said this.

“Yes, mother is doing well. She’s sad but I think she will be ok.”

“She’s so strong. Just like you.” Yanaha’s father rested his hand just above Yanaha’s shoulder.

They decided to go around Sisnaajini as it would be easier than navigating it without a magic feather.

They arrived at the Dzi ł t’aadi clan. The warriors escorted Yanaha to the elder as her father stayed behind. The elder gave Yanaha gifts like the other people she had saved had, saying that Yanaha had done great things and had rid the world forever of many terrible monsters.

Eventually, Yanaha and her father saw a lilting stream and a cluster of hogans complete with pens for sheep. A huge smile spread across her face as she said,

“I’m home.”

The chief and village elders were the first to welcome Yanaha home, and then her family. Yanaha's siblings wanted to know all about how she had fended off the swarms of bird monsters or stabbed the giant in the eyes. They even liked the story of how Yanaha had made the rock monster crumble. And then her mother. Her mother's greying hair was bound up tightly in her tsiiyéél. She looked so much older even though Yanaha had only been gone for a little over a week. She grasped Yanaha tightly in a hug.

"I was worried sick Yanaha." She said. "But I'm so proud." Her deep brown eyes shone. And then Yanaha's family saw her father. Her mother let out a stifled cry as she ran to him. Yanaha's siblings followed.

"Darling, I'm a spirit." Her father said, his face pained.

"I don't care." Yanaha's mother said as she wrapped her arms around his glimmering figure. Her siblings wrapped around his legs and the older ones hugged his chest, their arms going through his wispy body.

"I love you all so much." Yanaha's father said. "But I have to go." Yanaha's mother looked into her father's eyes pleadingly.

"Please don't go daddy." One of her siblings said.

"My mission is complete. The spirits sent me here to guide Yanaha home and I have done that. Now I must join all of our ancestors in the spirit world. I love all of you. Goodbye." And just like that Yanaha's father vanished. There were tears and sniffing, but in the end everyone knew that was the way it had to be.

Yanaha's family lavished her with praise and took great pleasure in seeing all of the riches she brought back. Yanaha promised to her sibling closest in age to the Pueblo boy that she would take him there to meet him. When all of her siblings had gone to bed Yanaha's mother came up to her.

"Yanaha, did you defeat Death?"

“No mother. I realized that all things have to come to an end. If I had killed Death another more horrible demon would take his place. I couldn’t let that happen.” Yanaha’s mother nodded.

“Besides, I just wiped out three different kinds of monsters. I think Death gets a break.” Yanaha’s mother smiled.

“I love you Yanaha.” She said as she kissed Yanaha’s head.

“I love you too mom.”

That night Yanaha had visions of gods, monsters, demons, and her father. But even when faced with monsters and demons she knew she had the strength to defeat them.