

# Eye Killers

A Novel

by

A. A. Carr

University of  
Oklahoma Press  
Norman

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Carr, A. A. (Aaron Albert), 1963—  
*Eye killers* / by A. A. Carr.

p. cm. — (American Indian literature and critical studies series ; v. 13)  
ISBN 0-8061-2707-4 (acid-free paper, cloth)

ISBN 0-8061-2854-2 (acid-free paper, paperback)

I. Indians of North America—Fiction. I. Title. II. Series.

PS3553.A7626E95 1995

813'.54—dc20

94-36175

CIP

*Eye Killers* is Volume 13 in the AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURE AND CRITICAL STUDIES SERIES.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources, Inc. ©

Copyright © 1995 by A. A. Carr. Published by the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Publishing Division of the University. All rights reserved. Manufactured in the U.S.A.

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

---

For Dawn.

---

For Kyle Craig, Patricia Louise, and Cheryl Anne.

---

For my Laguna Pueblo grandmother  
who carried me when I was a baby,  
wrapped in her shawl, as she visited friends.

---

For my Navajo grandmother  
who chases away the dark.

---

For Lena Carr, my mother, who teaches strength.

---

---

---

# Prologue

---

---

**E**ye Killer awakened beneath a shroud of soil. Sand and dead wood pressed upon his body. He worked the muscles of his arms and flexed each cord in his hands, relishing the pull of reknitted tendons. Taut as bowstrings, he thought. And at the tip of each finger, arrowheads of iron.

His consciousness soared upward, beyond ancient iron and countless stone ceilings to the night sky above. He sensed the moon in passing clouds, a reflecting disc grating his nerves. He moved a hand, thrusting his arm upward until he felt empty air. Then he concentrated on the restraining weight of soil. Dirt and pebbles rattled on wooden floorboards.

A spear of moonlight hung in the darkness; fine dust swirled in the silvery beam, as substantial as a bar of steel. He reached for it, rising from the earth. Dizziness threatened, and he swung his legs over jagged planks to stand cautiously.

The stinging moon settled in his eye. He followed the light to a window cut into rock. He touched sharp edges, cleaned away fragments and chips. His white fingers shimmered in the moonlight.

The moon, a pale eye, glared above a barren land. Blocky, buttressed towers rose above an ocean of sand and shattered rock. He remembered fragments of crossing the still, dead sea: a turning bowl of alien constellations; shifting sand hills; twin star-imprinted masked heads emerging from red boulders and white sands, sleepless eyeholes watching and hunting.

A freezing wind numbed his eye.

He remembered a lithe, dark-eyed girl; how he had howled her name when the sun's fire descended.

He remembered his name.

Crossing to a black doorway, he ascended stone steps. Smooth, carefully worked floors changed to deep sand. Cold air blew across his naked skin, and it felt like warm breath. He followed rough walls until he came to the outskirts of a glowing village. Corrupt magic worked in his body. A familiar

pain seared in his joints as his skeleton rearranged itself, as his skin accommodated his changing form. He dropped to all fours feeling thunder grow in his hind tendons. When he burst from his sanctuary's hidden entrance, stars glared and moonlight flamed along his spine. Below him stretched a demure, sinuous desert.

Eye Killer sniffed the wind currents. Prey. Somewhere, some shy animal grazed under the trees. And there was another smell. Rich and keening. Gazing to the south, he saw a line of delicate beads, a necklace of tiny fires pulled on string by the disc of glowering Father Moon.

Stench of petroleum waste. And the timorous scent of blood.

---

---

# One

---

---

Michael Roanhorse felt the October winds eating at his body, removing whole chunks from his legs, mind, and heart, carrying them in clouds to the domain of old man Moon-bearer. Stars flew in a black water sky, whirling shapes that reminded Michael of the ancient Navajo stories told only after the first snowfall. The living stories his granddaughter, Melissa, should be learning and keeping secure in her heart.

From a tin cup, the lean old man sipped a bitter Mormon tea cut with sprinkles of juniper leaves. He ignored Mount Taylor, which held up one corner of the starry horizon twenty miles away. A wind blown from the dead volcano rattled the locust tree next to him, and the loose fence surrounding his dead wife's garden sighed. He had been meaning to tighten the fence wires for the last twenty-six years—Margaret had quietly scolded him about the undone task all that time. How could he have explained (without Margaret thinking him just lazy) that the sagging fence was a breathing part of their home, like their neighbor animals—the badgers, bullsnakes, coyotes—that to fix the chicken-wire fence would be like ripping out the locust tree from the ground? Michael studied the moon.

"You know about me, too, the way Margaret used to. I'm just a dreaming old man."

Blue-edged mountain brome whispered around his feet. When the wind changed direction, he could hear the groans and shuffling of the sheep in the corral. The old collie beside him huffed at a passing insect.

"Help me to remember my grandmother's stories, old man," he said to the moon. "Come down and sit with me and Lee."

He began to recite a part of a chant that came to him:

From my walk may the pollen of yellow evening light teach me;  
From my chest may the pollen of dawn teach me;

From the soles of my feet may the pollen of little whirlwind teach me;

From my head with sky, moon, rainbow, yellowbird pollen, may I be taught;

With earth's little whirlwind teaching the tip of my tongue. . . .

He couldn't remember the rest of the song, couldn't remember who had first spoken those words. And to whom.

He tasted the Mormon tea. Forty miles to the east, an orange cloud hovered above Albuquerque, and running in parallel strands straight into the city's heart were the twin lanes of I-40, another veteran of the desert. On grandfather freeway's back rode moonlit cars like bugs with lighted eyes. Michael felt droplets of moisture settle onto his face, misting the back of his hand. Snow was coming. His stomach felt warm, and for a little while he forgot the pain of his arthritis.

His brain wheeled and creaked like the windmill a half mile below the sheepcamp, pumping up clear gushes of memory. A powerful afternoon rain drummed across sandy plains, spangled on yucca and bright sunflowers, streamed into the wash in reddish brown streaks. Rivulets of water seeped under his collar. Had it been Sarah or Melissa who had stood with him, bundled in a bulky coat, dancing about gingerly to avoid the tiny streamlets under her boots?

"But I want to see the antelope, Grandpa," the child had said; not Sarah, then. Melissa. "I want to see them dance in the rain."

"Shh, *shí'yazhi*, my little one. You must learn to stand still, learn to be quiet, or they'll all get scared and run away."

"I won't scare them!" the girl had pleaded into the rain. "Please make them come."

The rain had softened. Sunlight shifted through golden clouds, stirring up a warm breeze. Michael took off his hat and swatted it against his jeans.

"Maybe they're sitting along the mesa tops, watching us and laughing because we're standing in the rain. What do you think?"

"If they are, I'm going to kick their butts!"

"Why don't we trick them, then. You and I. See, there's your mother shouting at us to come inside. Let us turn into antelope and run as fast as we can. Then the antelope will stop

laughing at us when they see how fast we can run. Faster than they can, I bet."

"Faster than hummingbirds!"

Needlelike pain shot through Michael's fingers, threw him out of memory. His rheumatoid arthritis had not yet tortured him when he had become an antelope with his granddaughters and raced in the rain.

Where was Melissa now? And where was Sarah tonight? Alone somewhere like her father, maybe, trying to remember the same stories and songs?

Michael had given Sarah some of the old knowledge his grandmother, Nanibaa', had left him, hoping she would pass it on to Melissa. Only a tiny portion of those powerful Navajo songs and stories was left here on earth, if he could believe what Nanibaa' had told him before she died. And those few elders who held the remaining wisdom and stories and knowledge in their hearts were dying like butterflies in a freak spring frost.

Bitter knowledge. But the songs had been good. And useless old man that he was, he couldn't remember one song to save his life. Coyote came in many forms and old age was one of them; a creature nibbling greedily at Michael's memories, storing them away as winter fat, stealing them for his own children, or saving them for the next world above this one—the sixth world.

Michael took a last sip from his tin cup. First Warrior. First To Hurl Anger. Hunter of Memories. Good Navajo names for Coyote. If that's the way of it, Grandfather Coyote, then take my soul and heart—maybe make something beautiful out of them. For your children.

Wind answered with a terrific gust that blew sand into Michael's eyes, stung his exposed skin.

## Nine

Time slowed beneath Hanna's bare feet, and she watched as moonlight advanced across a withered floor toward the standing mirror. Her reflection was so like a pale mist, Hanna was afraid the moon's killing rays would imprison her in the mirror's depths, holding her until the sun rose and its eyes charred her skin off blackening bones, leaving gauzy fragments swimming in air like dustmotes. A white blur filled the mirror, dominated by black eye sockets.

My eyes will anchor me to this world, Hanna thought, smiling at a distant memory of herself: Tall with red-gold hair, and green eyes.

"Corrupted," Falke said as he touched shifting moon beams. His undecipherable thoughts drifted like smoke in the decaying schoolroom; a shattered room not so different from those Hanna had known a century ago. A temporary dwelling.

Hanna shrugged. "It dries my skin. I don't like it."

A hand wove itself in her hair. She fell into the rhythm of its movement, then swooned against Falke's chest. Hanna had not heard his approach, even though her senses were almost as acute as they had once been. And she had forgotten that Falke could move as a spirit.

Fear mixed with the hunger in her belly—what else have I forgotten?

"The moon is innocent," Falke said. "It is the treacherous sun who uses her body against you."

"Whichever. I hate them both." Hanna pulled herself from Falke's grip, studied his faint image in the mirror. His shape filled the deep room behind her. Or was it a deception?

"I'm leaving you, Falke. You and your fucking wife."

Falke remained still, as if turned to rock. "I, also, might leave. East, perhaps, where the cities are vast. I have heard they are so, though I cannot believe the words."

"Who told you this?" Hanna felt a whispery touch on her skin. Gently, his fingertips explored her stomach, her nipples; his hands were like rising silk, or silken webs.

"No magic," Hanna said, emerging from his spell. She moved to a patch of moonlight on the floor, where she knelt among glass shards. Falke wrapped his long coat around himself and sat against a blasted wall. City lights fluttered outside a gaping window.

"I don't understand this town in the desert," Hanna said. "A long time ago, you made these promises to me: strength, escape. And I'm still here! Wounded and hurting like some stupid animal. I don't understand why you chose a desert out of all the cities of the world."

"The search . . . a war against fate." Falke stared impassively at her. "I will tell you once, Hanna. It is a bitter song that should be remembered, kept hidden, not to be sung twice. A night, two centuries past, while wandering among sand dunes, Kuenstler gave a great shout; he had found our sanctuary. A womb inside the largest of the surrounding blood fortresses, and set within the patient caves—silent ruins. Ancient dwellings unoccupied for thousands, perhaps millions of years, master! Kuenstler shouted across the red sand. 'Surely, we have crossed the Rhine and come to Nibelungland!'"

"How the vassal could spin, Hanna! Break the ruins, I commanded him. Build over them a new haven, and populate it with corpses. Their drying skulls will speak of savage death; will give protection from the inquisitive Nibelungs."

"One night, a century ago, I hunted a native girl with loose, dusty hair who was drawing water from a spring. Her brown body, underneath heavy cotton garments, delicate. Her blood, raging. For one instant, I was distracted by the kill."

Falke stopped. Hanna shifted among the glass fragments and remembered glowing red arrows that had beckoned her out of the desert.

Falke continued. "As I fed upon the girl, twin moonlit masks, pale as bone and grimly chanting, rose from the sand dunes. Howling flames shot from their mouths. They opened up the sky, Hanna, brought down the sun."

"What?" She opened her eyes and saw scraps of paper flying, stripped by a sudden wind. "Lunatic!" Hanna stood and crushed fragments of glass in her hands. "Fool! Don't try to frighten me!"

Falke smiled. "Be wary of them, Hanna—the cheerless masks. For they watch endlessly, even under the moon."

Hanna became a pillar of rage. "Is this all you've got to tell me? Lies!"

Falke relaxed against the wall. "You must remember Hanna, that when last I traveled, I was under great strain to find a secure home. A place where my uniqueness would be unknown. I was tired of being hunted. I'm not accustomed to it."

"Who hunted you?"

Falke didn't answer.

"So you bled savage desert women and ended up in a rock tomb—with one frightened child." Hanna laughed. "Your wife." "You understand nothing."

His stillness lacked surety. Was he afraid? She needed to touch him, enter his mind, to be sure. Hanna unveiled her wings and became a mist on a current of wind. She rose off the glass-littered floor and drifted to Falke.

"Have you met with Elizabeth?" Hanna asked. "Have you planned your escape with her?"

Falke sat just under her fingers. The moonlight had crept onto his shoulder. His hair became a steel river.

I could kill him! thought Hanna. If I'm quick enough.

"Leave if you will," Falke murmured. "I will remain for a time in this city and study its modern way first. Know the ways of your enemy. His lifestyle and habits. His language. You will be better prepared to destroy him."

His gaze illuminated her, pierced her thoughts. Hanna stilled her movements and tried to empty her mind. She suddenly remembered being a human child in lace-up boots and a dirty nightgown, running circles about a blood-soaked, screaming dog her father's hounds had ripped apart and dragged into a rain puddle. Later, picking through the dog's organs swelling in muddy water, Hanna had found a broken tooth. The image disappeared.

Falke closed his eyes. Hanna carefully guided a finger to his face. Slivers of moonlight burst into her eyes and she blinked. Her hand was caught and held. Instead of fighting back, Hanna knelt on bare wood and kissed Falke's knuckles.

"You made me a vampire, Falke," she said. "Made me strong. I've protected Elizabeth. I will protect you."

Hanna nuzzled into his icy throat. Falke's pulse hammered under her lips. His hand, still holding hers, was a stone wedged between her breasts.

"I am connected to you," she whispered. "Your mistress. Be truthful if you can. Will my strength return?"

"You are not a frightened child, Hanna. That's why I chose you." Falke released her hand. "I made you. When I sleep, you sleep. Your strength will return. Do not fear."

"I don't understand fear."

"Perhaps separation is good, for a future moment." Falke's words nudged her away. "Elizabeth is valuable to us now." Hanna looked into his blue eyes. They were filling with intense light, staring at something far away. She kissed his chin. "Know the ways of your enemy," she said softly. "I don't trust Elizabeth. She's been running without a bridle for too long."

"Elizabeth cannot harm us. She chooses to remain human. Vulnerable."

"I remember. She is weaker than us, and I like her that way. Don't change her, Falke!"

"Elizabeth believes that she is my wife. As I say, so will she do."

"And I?" Hanna lowered her mouth to Falke's throat, above the largest pounding artery. Her tongue licked her eyeteeth's razor-edged points; tasted her own blood. Her jaw muscle twitched open. "Do you think I'll do what you say?"

"If you would want to live more than a few hungry nights, Hanna, you will do exactly as I tell you to. Without pulling."

Before Hanna could rip into Falke's throat, swift hands brought her head level with his face. She saw no rage in his expression. His gaze was steady.

"You are slow and stupid yet," Falke said. "Do not draw me out until you are stronger."

"Let me go!" Enraged, Hanna struggled against his implacable hands.

"Do you hear, mistress?"

Hanna jerked her head convulsively in assent. The ferocious pressure against her skull eased. Trembling, Hanna unleashed the braid that held her hair, allowing waves of glossy hair to cover Falke's eyes.

"I'll consider it," Hanna said. "But I want something in return."

"You want more than your life?" Falke moved his hands to the back of his head. "What is it that you want?"

Hanna smoothed tendrils of red hair away from his watchful eyes. His lips were cold as iron. She kissed them and licked the tip of his nose. "It can't be allowed, your having a frail wife."

Falke remained silent beneath her—a waiting pool of water. Hanna smiled and slipped a hand under his sweater, massaged the hard muscles of his stomach and chest, flicked his stiff nipples with a fingernail.

"Elizabeth won't always be valuable to you," she said. "Promise me that."

"You do not understand memory, Hanna." Falke rested his palm over her heart. "It gives when it can. We must wait for Elizabeth, and we must see what she has learned."

The tide of moonlight flared on Falke's cheek. The sudden pain of its reflected light cleared Hanna's mind. Her hunger was forgotten.

"I understand love, Falke."

Grasping his head between her palms, Hanna lifted him to her throat. Falke twisted her hair in his fingers. Hanna laughed and squirmed against his rough clothes, pulled his frozen hands to her breasts. A bolt of pain shivered throughout her body as Falke's canines slashed across her nipples. Blood misted like black water in the moonlight, dotting the walls. Flames raged in her chest, rising, as Falke licked the deep gash across her breasts and drank.

Hanna's vision cleared, and she looked toward the mirror at the far end of the empty classroom. Inside, glass knives swirled in a growing, tinkling tornado.

"Elizabeth isn't like us, Falke. For that, I'll kill her." Make her into a true vampire, Hanna promised herself. To keep.

To cherish.

"Hanna?"

Elizabeth gathered her skirt around her thighs and sat on her coat, which she had spread out between the glistening rails of the track. Silver-blond hair settled comfortably in curls around her numb shoulders, luminous under a staring moon that punctured the western night sky. Razors of moonlight cut into her eyes, even with the protection of her mirrored sunglasses. She shaded her eyes and tried to pick out the Pleiades. The hairs on her arm flattened under the blazing light. Her skin tightened as the moisture evaporated off her body.

The moon washes everything away, Elizabeth thought sadly. And its heat was becoming hateful. She could see none of the friendly constellations; only a stinging cloud of needles descended onto her head. Even her light cotton dress, made with her own hands, crinkled woefully, its colors fading under the falling sky. Soon, she would have to leave the train yard and find shelter before the sun itself rose above the Sandia Mountains. She sighed.

"Sun, sun, go away. I can't see you anyway."

Elizabeth pulled her fist from sand, clenched it tight. If I squeezed hard enough, could I make glass? The grains cut into her flesh, marking out tiny graves in her palm. When she threw the grains into the air, new stars fluttered around her, tinkling onto the railroad tracks, ringing like glass bells. The sparkling lights of the city might sound the same if she could hear them; they, too, were disturbed and trembled nervously.

Elizabeth waited. The railroad yard wavered with rippling shadows. Suddenly, a tall woman with hair the color of autumn leaves emerged from under a concrete overpass. Bare, white legs, scissored in the moonlight. Her short leather dress gleamed like black iron. Elizabeth remembered lifting Hanna to her breast and holding her slashed wrist patiently above a slack mouth, allowing a trickle of rose-dark blood to fall



Elizabeth pushed down terrifying images. "Falke's body was almost destroyed. I couldn't wake you, Hanna. I tried and tried. I thought you were ill."

"For a hundred and ten years?" Hanna giggled. "And with what, sister, typhoid?"

"Don't joke! I still don't know what happened."

Hanna stepped back until she was in shadow, a dark slender form against the orange, polluted glow above the city. "Let me touch you," Hanna whispered. "As a test of my strength. Will you let me?"

Elizabeth tensed her muscles.

"Be honest, Elizabeth, about what you feel."

Silence stretched around her. Then an icy fog entered Elizabeth's mind, creeping inside her thoughts, paralyzing them with frozen breath. Her soul became centered on the sinuous alien stream. Mesmerized. The fog hardened and began battering against her mind's protective walls. Her brain split open, her memories escaped out of their cracking shell, beating like moth's wings. Voices of the dead shouted, raged, wept. Vibrant colors rippled like silk under a taut wind. Across a dome of blue-silver sky, a black hole opened, a widening greedy mouth.

"Get out!"

Hanna's mind poured into Elizabeth without hesitation. Electrified fingers scurried down her spine, into her arms and hands. Stunned, Elizabeth could not fight back. Her weakening legs threatened to collapse. She was held upright only by the invading presence within her.

"Stop!" Elizabeth screamed.

As quickly as it had captured her, the fog departed. A frozen finger caressed her heart. Powerful hands gripped her shoulders. Elizabeth looked up to see eager eyes in gaping sockets. "I'd never hurt you, Elizabeth," Hanna whispered. "I remember how you . . . suckled me. Kept me from death."

Elizabeth struggled against clenching hands.

"Shh. Calm, or you'll hurt yourself." Hanna's white face hovered closer, cruel lips grinning. She smelled of bitter, rotting leaves. "Elizabeth, I'll let you go only when you stop struggling against me."

Elizabeth took deep breaths, felt the cold air soothing her lungs and muscles. Even the moonlight helped—its needle

points on her skin a reminder that her body was her own. She had lived without any real threat for so long, she had not recognized it until too late. Hanna had caught her off guard. Elizabeth relaxed and silently thanked Hanna for the grim lesson.

"Let me go." Elizabeth imagined fresh walls of defense rising inside her mind. Bits of Hanna's invading fog twitched hungrily inside her, but Elizabeth killed them easily.

"I've learned a lot since we were last together, Hanna." Elizabeth watched the vampire warily. "Don't come into me again."

Hanna drew back to the edge of the hotel roof and smiled, revealing savage eyeteeth. Her hair blew out in a fan around her head.

"Perhaps you might share some of your wisdom with us."

"Us?" Elizabeth asked shakily. "Do you mean Falke and you?"

The moonlit air around Hanna darkened. A swirling cloud of black motes erupted from her skin, like flies boiling in a carcass. Elizabeth choked on a rank, spoiled stench as Hanna's form elongated and curled into the night sky.

"Tell me!" Elizabeth shouted. She forced herself into movement. Too late. Her hand clenched at empty air.

Hanna had vanished.

---

## Eleven

---

Michael opened his eyes, startled from a dream. He didn't move. He wasn't sure what had awakened him, and he didn't want to frighten it if there was something dangerous close by. Glow-in-the-dark numbers on his wind-up clock said 5:10. At first, everything was dark. Then, slowly, he could discern the round outlines of the clock and the wooden table by his bed.

He looked up and saw a window-square of purple dawn. A star twinkled in the featureless sky.

He had been dreaming of a tumble-down bar beside ancient Highway 66, the broken asphalt track a mile south of his sheepcamp. Long ago, this bar had served strong drink: mescal, tequila, and smelly, cheap rye. It had been a watering hole for burnt shepherders, wandering ranch hands, lost city women and men, despairing old folks. A two-room adobe shack surrounded by lonely desert, the bar had been built many winters before the construction of I-40.

After receiving news of his younger brother's fall in Korea, and later, during the wake over Benjamin's wrecked body, Michael had found the bar a suitable mourning place. A church to pray and think in, more silent and more intimately human than the wide desert flats or the valleys of juniper and piñon below Madrecita, the Keresan village where his wife's family lived. On the hard-packed dirt floor, he had drunk alone and danced with other sad shadows through dusty nights and windy days, finally reaching a frozen place where his brother's pinched face vanished into the rough adobe wall.

One morning his wife and her brother had come for him, lifted him silently into their creaking pickup with the bundle of hawk feathers and sage brush hanging from its rearview mirror, and carted him to Margaret's blue house under stands of drooping apricot trees.

His Keresan in-laws endured his mourning time for their daughter's sake. Margaret found friends to care for the sheep, to help with the chores. All of her family, in the Indian way, left him alone to find his lost heart. Soon, the changing seasons healed him, and Benjamin's face became clear only in colorless pictures.

Michael lay the quilts aside. In his dream, Nanibaa' had asked him to be thankful for the Walk in Beauty that Benjamin had provided with his death. She had been sitting in her hogan, in the middle of its circular dirt floor, spinning tufts of dirty wool into four trembling strands of white, yellow, blue, and black yarn, urging him in her scolding voice to remember happiness and love, as the lines of yarn floated out the doorway.

Strange dreams he had been having lately.

He recalled how, thirty years ago, a Navajo boy named Square Hat had painted the image of a Navajo rug outside the bar's entrance. Michael saw the stark, zigzagged lines and blocky pyramids in brilliant reds, deep greens, and shiny blacks glowing off that painting in the desert waste. The boy had died of a burst appendix soon after. The bar had become known as the Navajo Rug. Now, sixteen years later, the shack was a pile of rock and broken adobe next to old 66. Only one section of wall was left standing, and it kept Square Hat's faded painting.

He heard snuffling at the other side of the room. A badger attacking his grandchild's cereal boxes? Maybe a bobcat sniffing at his water pail? They were the two creatures most able to unlatch his screen door. Michael rose onto one elbow. The room breathed cold air on him, and it was thick with shadows. Something moved stealthily in the far corner and whined softly.

"*Ya'at'eeh,*" Michael said, giving greeting in Navajo.

A shadow moved over the floor. A doglike shape. "Lee?"

The animal padded to the center of the room and lifted its head. Its eyes were yellow circles.

Not Lee. A smaller creature.

*Ma'ii.* A coyote.

Nanibaa' once told Michael that if a coyote were to cross his path, he was to pray at once. Coyotes were bad; a warning of coming danger. Not as bad as a nearby lightning strike, but bad enough.

Michael didn't feel like praying. He had always admired the coyotes' tenacity and intelligence. They were beautiful creatures. And he had taught his daughter and granddaughter to see them in the same way. Michael whistled softly as if Lee were standing in the middle of his home and not this wild creature. The coyote wagged its tail. Its large, furry ears perked up, listening. Then it turned and trotted to the blank wall by the stove and vanished like smoke on a wintry day.

Michael lay in the silence. Outside, Lee barked and scratched at the screen door.

"*Shimá sání,* my grandmother," he said to the empty room. "I'm glad you didn't see that."