

SKIN CHANGER

By

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Chapter 19: Cherokee

Charlie looked over at the snub-nosed .357 service revolver, which now lay impotent in the middle of a mesquite bush. Telcotti had him steadily retreating back to the riverbank. Charlie's hand and forearm felt as though it had touched a high voltage power line. His muscles twitched erratically, as the feeling slowly returned with a burning sensation.

As his heels touched the edge of the bog, Charlie decided it was time to turn the tables on the leering girl who was stalking him down. Instead of rolling sideways where she would have a solid shot at him, he did the only thing he could do. He ducked his shoulders and lunged forward with a bull rush. Catching Telcotti full in the belly. Charlie dug in and picked a surprised Telcotti up off of her feet, driving her backwards a number of yards.

Charlie was surprised at the girl's weight. There was no way she should have weighed more than one hundred and ten pounds, but when he picked her up she felt closer to two hundred pounds. Her body was hard as a rock, like iron.

Condensed, Charlie thought, condensed in order to fit within this girl's skin.

At last, with a final heave, Charlie dumped Telcotti onto her back, and stepped back onto the balls of his feet, his hands up, ready to strike a blow at any opportunity.

"I know the legend of Zacacoatal," Charlie told her. "I know you."

Telcotti's azure eyes narrowed within the pretty young woman's skin. Those cold eyes didn't fit this girl. She smiled up at Charlie and bounced to her feet, as she did, Charlie launched a flying kick at her head. Telcotti ducked the kick, but couldn't duck the backhand right Charlie sent her way. Again, Charlie's hand felt as though it had struck a brick wall. The effect on Telcotti was minimal.

Slowly, deliberately, Telcotti straightened till she stood the full height of the skin she wore. Her arms were at her sides. She was smiling, her ice blue eyes dripping malice.

"Is that the best you've got Shonoshito?" The girl said, only it was Telcotti's voice that

came out, and not the musical voice. This was a hate filled sound, like boulders crushing together.

Charlie was confused, Shonoshito had been the name of a great Comanche war chief in the 1800's, but he tried not to let his confusion show. Instead he smiled as he circled her on the balls of his feet, not foolish enough to be lured in by her mocking words. She circled with him, her moves catlike and graceful.

"I will enjoy reaving your soul from its moorings Shonoshito," the girl leered at him. "Again."

"Are you so far from your blood Cherokee that you don't know your own heritage," Telcotti laughed, seeing the hint confusion on Charlie's face. "I see your great grandfathers in you boy. You will have no better success than they had."

An opening appeared, just a small chink in her guard, but Charlie seized it like a lifeline. He lashed out with a quick left hand that struck her below the eye, leaving a tear in the skin high on her cheekbone. Her smile widened and her guard closed up. They circled each other, the occasional probing fist reaching out and finding its mark. Charlie couldn't believe the strength of the girl's blows. Even her jabs felt like knock out blows from a heavy weight champion. After just a few moments, Charlie's face resembled twenty pounds of ground chuck.

This strategy was hopeless; Telcotti was too quick, and far too strong to be out boxed. Charlie was fading. Just when Charlie had decided to use a desperation leg sweep, Telcotti over committed with a straight right hand, exposing her rock hard mid-section to a well placed knee from Charlie.

Charlie heard the air whoosh out of Telcotti's lungs, he had scored, and he knew it. He came over the top with a roundhouse right hand, catching the off balance Telcotti behind the ear. The girl sprawled out in the snow and sand flat on her stomach. Charlie launched his booted foot at the back of her neck, but she rolled the instant his boot struck. What would have been a death blow skidded off of her neck leaving a bloody welt in its wake. As she rolled, Charlie kicked again, catching her square in the middle. Another whoosh of air escaped her, but she made it to her hands and knees. Charlie aimed another kick at her exposed temple, but again she rolled with it and he caught her only a glancing blow.

She was on her feet in a flash, blood pouring from the gash on her neck where his boot

had torn the flesh. She tried a Russian leg sweep that he easily jumped over, but when he came around for a counter punch she was ready. As he threw, she caught his arm and twisted on her hips. Instead of one hundred and ten pounds throwing her weight into his shoulder, it was two hundred. She brought him over her hip, where he landed flat on his back with a thud in the sand. A smile of triumph filled her darkening face. Her fist rose high over her head, as she prepared to launch it at his exposed throat.

In desperation, Charlie brought the toe of his boot up and connected with her forehead as she prepared to launch the blow that would have ended his life. The kick landed true, catching her above her right eye and opening a three-inch gash there. Instead of letting go of his arm, she hung on, even though she was staggered by the kick to her head. With all his strength, Charlie pulled her over him, and sent her skidding across the snow and sand on her face.

Charlie was up in a flash, as was Telcotti. Again they circled each other, Telcotti now bloodied as Charlie was. The only difference, Charlie was breathing hard after just that short volley, Telcotti was not.

A look of stark disbelief filled Telcotti's face. How was this whelp doing this? How was he evading her? In all her predatory years upon the Earth, Telcotti had never known a human to fight this bravely. There had been one tenacious Vietnamese soldier at Qi Di Lin, but even he hadn't posed the dilemma that Charlie did. How Telcotti had reveled in lowering that scrappy Vietnamese soldier on that pungee stick. How she would revel when she finally tore the Cherokee's heart from his body.

Telcotti circled, it was time for her to use her superior strength. She lunged forward, hoping to bull her way through Charlie's guard. Charlie landed three or four crisp punches to Telcotti's head and neck, but too no effect. Then, just when Telcotti thought she had him, Charlie rolled under her grasp and caught her with a punishing kick to the mid-section. Telcotti howled in frustration as she went to her knees in the snow and sand. She spit, she cursed, and she screamed at the Heavens. What was wrong with her? This Cherokee should have been annihilated long before now.

Perhaps it was the ascension, perhaps it was the fact that she could now feel the pain her body felt, whatever it was, it was unpleasant. It was weakness when she was possibly the strongest she had ever been in her existence. There were the limitations to the flesh, limitations

she was still not accustomed too.

Charlie ducked under Telcotti's wild grasp and paid her with a short quick kick in the gut. Telcotti's grunt made Charlie smile with satisfaction. Charlie could sense Telcotti's growing impatience. He needed to play on that if he was going to have any chance whatsoever against this creature. He had to goad Telcotti in, be more patient than her. It was the only chance he had, and that was practically a snowballs chance in hell.

"You punch like a girl. You know that?" Charlie said mockingly as they resumed circling each other.

Telcotti just frowned and stalked her prey in silence.

Again and again, Charlie found openings in Telcotti's defense. Again and again, he scored with quick rights and lefts, always being careful not to over commit to the punch. Telcotti snorted each time a blow slipped through her guard, her nose gushing blood at this point. This once beautiful girl was no longer a pretty sight. Still, she moved like a cat. Telcotti was the champion, and Charlie was just the contender. It wasn't over till one or the other fell.

"Looks like you won't get to use this skin long Curandero. I've 'bout got most of it flayed off of you now," Charlie said as he ducked a poorly aimed punch and brought up a quick left uppercut counter.

The uppercut connected, causing Telcotti's teeth to click together hard, and sending her backwards a step. Charlie seized the opportunity and stepped in with a barrage of carefully aimed blows. Another step, then another, Telcotti was forced backwards. Growls of frustration in her throat as she was driven back. Again, Charlie pressed the assault; Telcotti blocked some, but caught more. The skin around her azure eyes was a mess of hamburger by the time Charlie finished with another barrage.

Charlie however, was winded, he couldn't keep this pace up forever, and though his blows seemed to have some effect, it was nothing like he needed them to have. Telcotti was open, but he wasn't sure he had enough to put her away.

For her part, Telcotti was in trouble, her head was spinning; this was like nothing she had ever encountered in all her days. The Cherokee was a whirling dervish. Plainly, there was something or someone else at work here. Charlie was being aided. Telcotti thought about using her power, but it took a moment to focus through a human body, and it drained her body's

energy quickly, energy that would be precious to her in the coming hours. This body, great as it was, had its limits. Her powers were not an option; she would have to beat Charlie the old fashioned way – that is if she could.

“I thought you would be better than this,” Charlie said, smiling at Telcotti though bloodied teeth.

Both of them were wobbling now. Charlie was breathing hard and sweat poured from him despite the freezing temperature.

“Your death will ring in a new age Cherokee,” Telcotti growled. “I will eat your heart from your body while your captive soul watches.”

Charlie launched a flicking right hand that slipped through Telcotti’s guard. Instead of it being a fist, it was an extended thumb that caught Telcotti full in her left eye. Telcotti reeled back, grasping her wounded eye. Charlie followed with a flurry of punches and kicks. His breath was coming in raw gasps, but hope gleamed in his eyes. At last he felt he had Telcotti on the ropes.

He spun to launch a roundhouse kick that should have ended it all, when the snow and sand gave way beneath his plant foot.

Pain tore its way up his leg, as in mid spin his planted foot slipped deep into a prairie dog hole. He heard the bones of his ankle and knee pop under the strain, ligaments snapping like overworked guitar strings. Charlie cried out as his ankle shattered. His wobbly kick stopping well short of Telcotti’s head.

Charlie fell to the ground in a heap, clawing at the loose sand and snow, trying to extract his ruined leg from the hole.

Telcotti grinned triumphantly through her bloody lips as she let her hands drop casually to her sides.

“I’m going to enjoy this Cherokee,” she said, as he deliberately bore down on Charlie.

Charlie made every effort to crawl away, but he knew it was no use. Finally, He rolled over to meet his death, face-to-face and eye-to-eye with the beast that was about to slay him. The last thing Charlie saw was Telcotti’s ice blue eyes as her fingers sunk into his throat, there was brief hot pain, and a tugging sensation. Blood flew in all directions, as Telcotti jerked her hand back, yanking Charlie’s trachea and esophagus out.

For a moment, Charlie thought he could see his father, grandfather, and a stern faced Indian in old-fashioned warriors garb, on the horizon. He attempted to focus on his vision; it seemed important that he do so, then all went black. The warrior had looked very much like himself.

An Excerpt from Book II

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A novel by

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