

Why Coyote Sings

By Kelsey Fanning

Many years ago, in the time of the buffalo herds, there was a tribe that lived on a vast plain. The members of the tribe agreed that it was time for Coyote, a young and restless youth, to find a wife. Coyote ventured forth into the world to find the most beautiful and desirable bride. He journeyed for many days, but luck was not with him.

After much time was spent wandering alone afoot, Coyote came upon a large encampment. He approached and was welcomed with hospitality by the tribe's chief. Coyote explained the nature of his toilsome quest to the wise tribal elders, and all agreed that the chief's daughter, a beautiful and hard working girl called Moon, would make Coyote a fine wife.

The two were married, and, after much feasting and ceremonial rejoicing, they departed for the camp of Coyote's tribe. They reached the encampment of Coyote's tribe and were received with a hearty welcome. The days following were happy and pleasant.

Soon, however, the members of the tribe became annoyed with Coyote for he was a braggart and claimed his new bride was more beautiful than any other woman in the tribe. At first the grievance was slight, but with each passing day the others became more and more angry. Married men were insulted that Coyote would dishonor their wives; women were jealous of Moon's great beauty; and the unmarried men deemed Coyote unworthy of such a magnificent bride, thinking that they, instead should be wedded to her.

Soon the people became so enraged that they fell to quarreling fiercely amongst one another. To resolve the situation, the troubled tribal elders called a meeting to see what should be done. The men shouted, "Avenge our wives' honor and kill Coyote!" Jealous women

screamed, “We must be rid of Moon! She is the cause of all the bickering. Let us make her suffer. She is evil!” The enraged crowd continued to clamor and threatened violently to go to the tent of Coyote and Moon. The elders, not wanting to anger the wild mob any further, decided that Coyote and Moon must be done away with. However, they did not want bloodshed on their consciences. They decided to ask the help of Snake, a cunning and devious character who would surely come up with a clever means of disposing of the offensive couple.

Snake, always fond of a plot, agreed to help. He devised a plan to trick Coyote into getting rid of his beloved Moon. He surmised that with Moon gone Coyote would not wish to stay with the tribe. Snake concocted his plan and went to meet with Coyote. He strutted with confidence, and the tribe felt assured of his success.

Coyote watched Snake approach his tent. He knew that Snake had a reputation for being sneaky and resolved not to be fooled by his wily ways. When Snake arrived, Coyote beckoned for him to come inside the tent and to sit with him saying, “Welcome my friend. To what do I owe the pleasure of entertaining such a distinguished guest as yourself?”

“Come, come,” replied Snake, “it is I who am honored to be in the tent of such an upstanding member of the tribe. You are one of the wisest and most handsome men of this band, and a fierce hunter and warrior, I’d wager.”

“Let us not get carried away with flattery,” said Coyote, though it was obvious that he enjoyed the shower of praise Snake was giving him. “Please, tell me what you wish to speak about.”

“Yes,” answered Snake, “I’ve come to talk to you about your wife, Moon. She has great beauty, I’m told by all the villagers. In fact, I’ve heard that her beauty cannot be rivaled. There are whispers that not a soul in this camp can challenge it. You are lucky to be the husband of

such a gem.”

“You have been rightly told, sir, but I am confident that no person on this earth could surpass her beauty.”

“Are you quite certain?” inquired Snake.

“I surely am,” answered Coyote.

“Well,” mused Snake, “but no, perhaps it is a bad idea.”

“It would be my honor to hear what it is you have to say, Master Snake,” replied Coyote. “Surely any idea of your’s is worth at least hearing.”

“All right. I suppose there’s no harm in it,” Snake said, grinning inwardly. He knew his plan was working from the growing interest in Coyote’s voice. “It’s just that poor Moon deserves to be honored. The local people know of her, and perhaps a few others, but the most beautiful woman in the world deserves to be revered by all. Everyone should see her and admire her handsome physique and delicate features.”

Coyote, spellbound by the web of words that Snake was weaving, fell unwittingly into Snake’s well-placed trap. He nodded his head saying, “Please, kind friend, tell me what to do.”

“Well, tonight, when the sunlight fades, toss Moon into the air with all your might. All the world will see her and gaze at her wonder. Nobody in the world will be able to contradict that she is the most beautiful of all women,” instructed Snake.

Coyote agreed, and Snake left knowing he had successfully fooled the youth. The anxious tribe questioned and pleaded with Snake, wanting to know if Coyote had gone. Snake explained that the rest of his clever plan would be unfurled that night, but that he would not speak of his conversation with Coyote.

That night, when the sun had set and Moon had gone to sleep, Coyote crept into the tent.

He gently picked up his wife and carried her up a nearby hill. He reasoned that he'd have to throw her very high indeed, so that the entire world could see her and pay her the proper homage. He threw the sleeping maiden with all his might. She hung near the stars and Coyote, satisfied with his toss, returned to the camp to show the tribe his magnificent spouse.

When dawn began to break, Coyote proudly returned to the hilltop to retrieve his wife. He found, however, that he had thrown her so far that he was unable to reach her. He tried with all his might to snatch her from the air but to no avail. He even called to her so hard he wore out his voice, yet Moon continued to sleep. Soon the sun climbed so high in the sky that it veiled Moon's presence.

Coyote realized that it was futile to try to jump and reach her, and his voice was raspy and would not be able to get her attention. He began to wander aimlessly, going nowhere in particular and thought only of his stranded wife.

When the fiery sun went down and poor Moon was visible once more, Coyote climbed a taller hill and began to sing as loud as he could. He sang and sang until the sun started to rise and his voice once again became hoarse and useless. To this day, Coyote wanders climbing tall hills and singing his melancholy song, lamenting the loss of his beautiful wife.

The tribe's people were at first aghast at Moon's revered place in the sacred sky. They found Snake and began to curse him angrily for allowing it to happen. They demanded that she be taken down at once. Snake coyly replied, "I have done as you wished; you are rid of Coyote and Moon. And if you remember, Moon never once sinned against you. Why do you fault her? You have been needlessly jealous and Moon will remain in the night sky to eternally remind you not to envy others in the future."