

Coyote Tells a Tale

Lunch Counter Stories XVI



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Coyote

He was handsome, incredibly so, which may be why nobody ever questioned his name, Coyote. Tall, elegant, he moved through the city with an assurance that deflected any trouble. In fact, tough young men had been known to look down at their shoes quickly, if they caught his eye.

He was old, seventeen worlds old in fact, he had sung them into existence and out again. It had taken him seventeen worlds to find Amber.

Oh he had been involved, he had mates before, but Amber was the one he had been looking for, even if he didn't know it. She was his soul mate, she was the one who brought him out of himself, she was the one who tugged his ear, she was Coyote.

They had been a year in the bush, running free as Coyote or as Wolf or whatever other animal they wished. It was their world, they had sung, and it had appeared. Yet there was nothing they wanted from this world, other than each other.

They wandered.

They went north to find the snow, and then back south to find the spring. They needed nothing but the next meal, and the warmth of a pack at night. Which pack? Any pack, they were welcome everywhere because the animals remembered, they knew that Coyote was one of them, and Amber in Human form

was one of them. The animals remembered, deep in their core, that once animals and men were the same. There was a time when wolves with Human bodies walked upright, when men with bear bodies walked on all fours. There was a time. And sometimes, there were beings who walked the forest or the city who could still be both four legged and two.

Deep in the bush, Coyote and Amber didn't bother much with one form or the other, they switched as it suited them, or they sometimes kept aspects of both shapes, perhaps a coyote head to join the howls, or five fingers on a wolf's body to pick up wood for a fire.

Amber was going further and further from her original shape, and Coyote kept careful watch. He made sure to talk to her with his voice, rather than in her head. He made sure they changed to Human shape to make love, to walk for a while on two legs.

He told her stories.

Amber loved Coyote's stories, she knew his own story, she had been Coyote for years, while he was just a mutt. He had gifted her that, when she had insisted he fix the world. He had gifted her the insight as well, to see the result of her actions. She had learned the sadness of a trickster with good intentions, and she forgave him these gifts.

Amber loved Coyote's voice, the deep timbre of it in the darkness around a campfire as he told his stories of the long

ago times. She didn't know them, and she listened with attention. She smiled as she listened because Coyote was beside her in the dark and she was with him. She intended never to go back to the city, but she knew that he would take her back there some day. Coyote thought of the future, Amber thought only of this moment, here beside this man, listening to his voice. She was content.

Coyote started to speak.

How the Black Bear Came to Be

This is how the Black Bear came to be.

These days, large families are not so common, but once there was a time when a family of ten brothers was not unusual. There happened to be one not so very far from here, deep in the bush. They were a restless bunch, these young men, the youngest was headstrong and rash, but the older brothers kept him from hurting himself or others. Mostly they did.

There came a time when the oldest brother dreamed. He dreamed of a giant bear with a golden chain around its neck. He thought that maybe the chain was wealth, or maybe knowledge, but he knew that it was worth having.

He talked with his brothers and they agreed to come with him on a quest for this chain. His youngest brother especially

shouted with joy, “I will show you my strength and my bravery, I will show you all just what a man I am.” When they heard this his brothers told him to have some restraint and to keep his voice down.

The brothers set out on a long journey, they walked through the mid-winter snow for many days, always heading deeper into the forest. At night they camped, during the day they walked and hunted as they could. Once they came to a vast lake and they stopped to fish. The fish almost jumped out of the water into their hands. They ate well that day.

Eventually, they came to a clearing, and in the middle was a huge hill, and on top of that hill, looking like a part of it, all covered in snow, was a giant bear. His snores were like the thunder of a spring storm. Just as they stopped at the edge of the wood, the bear raised his head a little and shook the snow from his ears. The brothers could see the golden chain glinting in the afternoon sun.

“You see, my brothers, my dream was true, there is the bear and there is the golden chain. Stay here and I will go to get that chain while the bear is still asleep for the winter.”

The youngest brother spoke up, “I am the fastest, I will go to get the chain.”

He had spoken loudly enough to make the bear restless and the middle brothers quickly jumped on the youngest, knocking him down, and clapped hands over his mouth. “Quiet you, or you

will wake the bear.”

The brothers sat on the youngest and the oldest brother watched carefully until the bear settled down once more to his deep sleep. With a look back to make sure nobody would shout out, he crept across the clearing, up the hill, and right up to the bear’s head.

Carefully, carefully, he tried to lift the chain, but it was too heavy for him. He looked upward to the sky and prayed to his people to make the chain lighter. He bent down again and the chain was indeed lighter. Seeing this he smiled, his ancestors approved, but as he started to remove the chain from the bear’s neck, he realized he had to slip it over the bear’s head.

Looking around, he could see nothing to help him, but he was a clever man. He reached back and tickled the bear’s nose. The bear twitched. He tickled again and the bear twitched. Once more he tickled and this time the bear raised its head and sneezed. As it did so, the man skilfully slipped the chain over the head and off. The brother froze then, holding all the links tight to his chest so they would not clink, and waited until the bear settled down once more.

Walking quietly in his own footsteps, he returned across the clearing to his brothers. “Let us go quietly back to our home, I have the prize.”

This the brothers did, and had travelled half a day, when they heard a tremendous roar. The bear had awakened and had

found the chain gone. It leapt from the mound and landed in the clearing with enough force to shake the earth, and began to follow the tracks in the snow. Trees bent and snapped as he pushed through the bush toward the brothers.

The brothers looked at each other in panic, but the oldest stopped their chatter by saying, “I have had another dream, a spirit being, a Manitou lives in a cabin not far from here and he will save us.”

With that they ran on. Soon they saw a cabin and ran to the front door. A tall man came to the door and asked why they were running. “We have stolen a golden chain from the giant bear and he is chasing us.”

The man frowned, but said, “I am a Manitou and have never turned a traveller from my door. You were unwise to steal from the bear but you are guests and I must protect you. Go inside and eat, I will meet this bear.”

With that, the spirit called his two dogs, massive angry beasts that were half wolf. He controlled them with his arms and as the bear approached the cabin, he waved the dogs toward it. The dogs attacked and inside the cabin the brothers could hear the fight. They had hope, but soon they heard the cry of first one dog, then the other as the bear killed them. Shortly after that they heard the old man cry out as well.

The oldest said, “Out the back door, quickly, we must flee.”

Out they ran, and gained a little time as the bear snuffled around the cabin but it was soon after them once more. “I have had another dream of a spirit being near here who will save us,” said the oldest, and the brothers ran.

In another cabin was an old man who greeted them. “You are welcome here, but why are you running?”

“We have stolen a golden chain from the giant bear and he is chasing us.”

“This is a bad thing, but you are my guests and I will go face this bear. Please find food inside for you as is proper for visitors.”

With that, the old man took two war clubs from the wall where they were hanging. The brothers looked and the old man’s arms were the size of their legs. The man walked out and waited for the bear.

As the brothers ate and listened, they heard a mighty roar and an answering war-cry from the old man as he attacked the bear with his clubs.

Once, twice, five times the clubs came down on the bear but eventually they heard the cry of the old man as the bear caught him with his massive claws.

“Run brothers, out the back door, we must flee once more.”

On they ran, and the bear began to catch up to them. “I have had a dream about a lake, the same lake we caught the fish in, come brothers, follow me.”

The elder brother ran straight to a large canoe by the lake, they jumped in and paddled to the middle of the lake.

The bear found the edge of the lake where the canoe had been. He tried to enter the water but the rocks were slippery and he almost fell in. Backing out again, he looked to both sides and across the lake but saw nothing to help. The bear bent his head and began to drink. More and more water flowed into the bear, and the canoe drifted toward the bear. “Well brother, said the oldest to the youngest, now is your chance to show us how strong you are.” The youngest was next to the bear as the canoe touched it’s teeth.

“Watch me brothers,” said the youngest as he brought his club down on the bear’s head once, twice, three times with mighty swings, and on the third strike the bear dropped its head, stunned. The water of the lake flowed out of its mouth and pushed the canoe to the opposite shore where the brothers jumped out and began to run once more.

“I have had one last dream,” said the oldest, and the brothers followed as he ran to a third cabin. At the door was a maiden who greeted them.

“Why are you running?” She asked, after bidding them into her cabin.

“A giant bear chases us because we stole it’s golden chain.”

“Ah, this is not good, but I have welcomed you in to my home, so I must face this bear. My brother was a great warrior with many magic items, come with me and we will face this bear.”

With that she gathered some items from the cabin, arrows, animal fur, feathers and a belt with a satchel. She went out of the cabin just as the bear was approaching, she walked toward it and spread her arms as if offering herself. As the bear roared and walked toward her, she dropped her brother’s items one by one and suddenly the bear dropped to the ground unconscious.

“Quick, take your knives and cut the bear up into small pieces.”

The brothers did so, and as they cut each small piece from the giant bear, a small black bear appeared and ran into the bush.

This is the story of how the black bear came to be.

Coyote stopped talking and nodded to a bear who had been listening from the side of the clearing. The bear nodded back and wandered off on his own business.

Amber looked at Coyote, “What happened to the brothers?”

“That is not the story, I told you how the black bear came to be.”

“But the golden chain, the maiden, the old Manitou, what was their meaning?”

“It is just a story, love. Stories do not always have a meaning or a moral. Why don’t you finish it and tell the ending to me.”

Amber frowned, she looked again at Coyote, so innocently looking back at her. “This is to make me think, isn’t it Coy?”

Coyote smiled his beautiful smile and turned to put another stick on the fire.

The Salmon Spirits

“You’re staring at me.”

“You were staring at me first, Mutt.”

“I was watching the sun come up on a frosty morning, warm and clear, burning off the mist. I was watching a clear brook, leaping and splashing over a gentle rapids, I was...”

“Full of it. I swear you invented poetry as seduction, Coy, but you don’t have to seduce me, I’m right here with you under this

blanket. I'm just a poor violin student who happens to be in love with a wonderful man."

"Anything but a poor student, Amber, you studied in Paris and they asked you to teach. You are far from 'just' anything."

Amber reached for Coyote, "Like I said, I'm here with you."

An hour later the sun was fully up and Amber stretched, making her joints pop. Coyote had fallen asleep again and was just on the verge of snoring. Amber kissed him on the ear and whispered, "Don't you dare, the last time you snored the world disappeared."

Coyote rumbled deep in his throat, "Liar, that was your singing in the stream as you had a bath."

Amber laughed and sat up to see if the fire was still going. She blinked, there were provisions stacked haphazardly around the fire, bacon, a chicken, a basket of eggs, a fry pan for goodness' sake. "What is this?"

Coyote looked and smiled, "The little brothers must have raided a farm near here, I will make sure the farmer doesn't notice and reward him with a good week."

"You sent them so that I could remember that I'm a Human."

"You are Human, love, more Human than anyone I've ever met, but you might get lost in Coyote. Many Humans have, you

know.”

“You would save me.”

“I would sing the world away and back again to save you.”

“No. Be serious, Coy, you must never do that, even if I’m lost.”

Coyote just looked mildly at Amber. She felt that perhaps he would in fact, do such a reckless thing. She reached up to tug his ear and smiled, “Then I had better remind this Human girl how to cook. It’s too bad the brothers didn’t steal some flour and another pan, I could make bread.”

Coyote had his hands behind his back and brought one around, with a ten pound sack of whole wheat flour. In the other hand he had a large pan with tall sides.

Amber clapped her hands, “Wonderful, but I like white flour for my bread.”

Coyote smiled, once again put a hand behind his back, and Amber had her white flour.

“I’m just going to wash in the stream, I promise not to sing. I will get some water to cook with. Can you poke up the fire, please love?”

Coyote nodded and watched as Amber walked into the trees, her naked back shining in the sun, her hips swaying. She knew

he was looking. As she passed behind a tree, a slender wolf emerged from the other side and padded on toward the water. Coyote never stopped looking.

When Amber changed as she walked back to the camp to get a pail, she had her trekking clothes on. Coyote had fetched water and had coffee brewing as Amber started to make the bread. “You’re not using the white flour?”

“You like the whole wheat.”

And that was that. Coyote would have eaten white bread, and he would, when it was time for him to cook. As Amber put the dough in the pan over the coals, and started on the bacon and eggs, she said, “Coy the stream here, it’s not like the rivers we saw out west.”

“They come from the mountains, and get big fast. The newcomers relied on them for salmon.”

“The newcomers, you mean the Europeans?”

“No, the ones who came down the coast or through the passage between the ice sheets, the ones who came from North Asia.”

“Newcomers?”

“Sure, we animals were here first, for a very long time. The ones who killed all the big animals, the Mastodon, the Sloth, right down to the camels and horses. All they had left on the

coast were the salmon, so I protected them.”

“I thought the first nations were good stewards of the land? You’re saying they were as bad as the Europeans?”

“Or as good, the thing is, both the Asians and the Europeans are just Humans. They think in terms of a single lifespan, you and I can think in terms of thousands of generations.”

“So being good stewards?”

“The lifestyle of the first Humans here was such that they killed the big ones, and would have killed off the smaller ones, like the salmon, but there weren’t enough people. In Europe the Humans found a way to overpopulate and the animals were gone. Then they came here.”

“Why didn’t you stop them?”

“I’m not a God, Amber, I don’t run their lives for them. Humans are just another animal to me, and animals come and go. One day, in this world, the Humans may die out. You and I will be sad to see them go, but it won’t be because we killed them off so that some other animal could thrive.”

“Wait, they didn’t kill all the megafauna, the Bison are still here, despite the European’s attempts to kill them off.”

“The first Humans farmed the Bison, Amber, like the first Humans in Australia farmed the Kangaroo.”

Amber looked confused.

“The Europeans never saw it until recently, all those grasslands, the edge lands where the prey animals thrive, they were created by burning the forest. The Humans learned how to do that.”

“But the west coast?”

“They had the rivers and the Ocean, more food than they could use, so they did what Humans do, they used the excess to fight over, to rule with, to become civilized.”

“You’re telling me all Humans...”

“Are only Human, Amber, only Human. Although some become more, like you.”

“Well thank you. So how come the first Humans didn’t kill off the Salmon too, if they over-exploited everything else?”

“For a long time, there were too many Salmon, but eventually there were enough Humans, so the Salmon took steps. The elders would watch, and when a suitable Human came into the river, they would drown him. That Human would become a Manitou, a spirit, who would protect the river. He would possess someone and that person would argue for leaving the river to recover when it got weak, or he would wipe the river valley clean of Humans, even while he mourned for his

descendants as they were swept away.”

“The Salmon could do that?”

“They could ask one who could.”

“You?”

“Yes, and before you point it out, I did say I don’t interfere, but that’s not the same as granting a request. I’m the original Trickster, remember.”

“I’m not sure I could ever forget, having been Coyote.”

“I’m sorry...”

“Stop, we’ve been over this too often. I thank you for making me Coyote. Let’s not talk about it again while these eggs and bacon smell so good, and the bread has risen so nicely.”

Coyote produced a wicked-looking knife and sliced up the hot bread so that the steam rose up into the trees to curl around the branches. Chickadees lined the branches, making Coyote laugh as he tore up and threw a few pieces for them to fight over.

“That’s not good for them, Coy.”

“A little won’t hurt, and they do love to bicker with one another.”

“These Salmon spirits, are they still there, Coy?”

“They are, but they are weak, Humans have learned to ignore the spirits, and without belief, they are diminished. They try their best, there are some protections for the rivers, logging is kept back away from the banks, and the mills don’t just pour their poisons into them any more, but they are slowly dying anyway.”

“How could Humans have ever dumped their wastes into rivers?”

“The rivers were once endless, as were the forests, but eventually you come to the end of endless, all you need is enough people and enough greed.”

“Coy how can you stand it?”

“Because I’ve learned that fixing it always makes it worse. Humans have to come to the understanding that this is their home, I won’t make another for them.”

“Unless there is something that will destroy this world, and then you make a new one.”

“Don’t ever let the Humans know that, Amber, a single lifetime, remember. If they think I will save them, they will destroy as much as they can to win their ridiculous competitions to see who can die with the most stuff. Leave them with their vague sense of guilt toward the future

generations, it's the only thing that slows them down.”

“Sometimes I’m ashamed.”

“Don’t be, Humans can connect with each other, they are small and weak compared to the cave bears and the Sabretooth, but they cooperated. Humans can do that, and their potential for kindness is amazing, if they can remember that. I should also say that Humans weren’t totally to blame, the climate changed and made it hard for the great ones to survive. Perhaps it would be easier for you to think of the Humans as simply pushing hard on those that were on the way out.”

“If anyone is kind, Coyote, I’d say it was you, now come have breakfast.”

When Summer Came Into the World

Amber and Coyote were travelling through the melting snow, spring was coming, they could smell it in the air. “I love this time of year, Coy, where the winter gives way to the warmth of the summer months. I love winter too, but I would not like it if it were year round.”

Coyote sat down on the root of a great beech tree and took Amber onto his lap because the ground was wet. He took a look around and said, “Once, there was only winter. There was

no warm season at all.”

“That doesn’t seem right, how would all these trees grow?”

“My love, what makes you think that I didn’t just create them all.”

“Did you?”

“Well, yes, I guess I did.”

“Why didn’t you create the seasons too?”

“I told you, I am not a God, to do everything for the beings that live on this world. They did much themselves. Summer came in the time of the Animals.”

“Put your arms around me, Coy, and tell me the story, I feel that you have one and I do love to hear you tell them.”

Coyote put his arms around Amber to keep her warm and began to speak.

How Summer Came to Be

Long before the Humans arrived in this land, there was a Fisher and his family. The Fisher was a good hunter and provided well for his family. He had a son who wanted to be a great hunter

like his father, but try as he might, he never shot a bird with his bow and arrow.

He would go out every day and hunt until it got dark, he would come back home with his hands frozen, his nose frozen, he was chilled down to his very bones. The cold hurt and he would cry as he walked home empty handed.

One day as he walked through the woods near to his home a Red Squirrel barked at him from a tree.

“I love the Red Squirrels, Coy, they are so sassy, always cursing us as we go by.”

This squirrel was tired of seeing the boy cry as he walked home and so he called for him to listen carefully. “When you go home to your mother, cry for a long time and when she asks what is wrong, say nothing. Refuse to eat so that when your father gets home, your mother will tell him that something is wrong. When your father asks, cry and then say that the Winter hurts you, and ask your father to go find Summer so that you can learn to hunt in the warm days.”

With that the Red Squirrel vanished around the other side of the tree, and the boy went home to do as he was told. He cried and refused to eat or answer his mother’s questions. When his father came home he told him that he wished for his father to go and find Summer.

“This is a difficult thing, my son, Summer is far away and up in

the sky. I may very well die while trying to get it for you, but you are my son and I love you, I will try to do this thing.”

With that, the Fisher slept one last night in his home with his wife, and then in the morning he set out on his journey. He gathered his friends to help him, Otter, Wolverine, and Beaver. The four walked for a very long time until they came to a mountain. On the path upward they saw footsteps and blood, as if some hunter had killed his dinner and carried it upward. The Fisher said, “Let us follow these tracks, perhaps the hunter will give us some food to eat.”

With that they climbed to the top of the mountain where they saw a hut that looked very strange. “We must not laugh at whatever we find here my friends,” said Fisher as they knocked at the door.

A strange being indeed answered the knock, he was man-shaped, with a huge head, massive teeth and no arms at all. “Come in, have some food,” he said to the friends and they entered the hut.

As they were seated at the table, they noticed a wooden pot on the fire, with meat cooking inside of it. The being bent over and grasped the handle with his teeth to lift it off the fire and, seeing this, Otter laughed.

The being, who was a Manitou, became angry at this impolite behaviour and threw himself on top of Otter, for this is how he killed his prey. Otter, being quick, wriggled out from under the

spirit and fled out the door of the hut.

Fisher apologized for his friend's rudeness and the Manitou fed them while Fisher told him about his search for Summer. The spirit told him that they would have to travel to another mountain, one even higher than this one, and there they would have to break a hole in the sky. When they did that, they would find Summer.

The friends thanked the spirit and finished their dinner. When they left the hut, they found Otter waiting for them. "I hope you had a good meal" he said.

"You would have eaten too if you weren't rude," said Fisher as they started to walk down the mountain. After a long time they reached the bottom and began walking to the next mountain. They walked across a swamp and Otter eyed the frogs and the fish hungrily but they didn't stop to hunt.

They reached the next mountain and climbed for a long time until they reached the top, which was close to the sky. Fisher looked up and said "Who will try to break through the sky?"

Otter, wanting to make up for his rudeness, said he would do it. He jumped as high as he could, but did not reach the sky. When he landed he slipped in the snow and slid all the way back down the mountain. "I will not try that again," he said, and started to walk home.

Beaver offered to try next, but he had the same problem as

Otter, and he slid all the way back down the mountain. He too followed Otter home.

Fisher turned to Wolverine and said, “You are strong and brave, I know you won’t give up after only one try.” Wolverine nodded and jumped high. He hit the sky but didn’t break through. Twice more he jumped and on the third try he broke a hole in the sky and climbed through. Fisher followed him and they found a land of warmth, green trees and soft breezes.

In the distance they saw several lodges which seemed deserted, for the spirits of this place were out walking among the trees. The friends went into the lodges and found many cages of birds. Thinking of his son, Fisher let the birds out, and they flew down through the hole in the sky, taking the warm breezes with them.

In the land below the sky, the days began to warm up. Spring and Summer were escaping from the Manitou in the sky. These beings noticed this and were very angry, they shouted and began to close the hole.

Wolverine dove through the hole and escaped, but Fisher was too far away, he ran into the woods and climbed a tall tree. The spirits chased him there and fired arrows from their bows at him. Fisher was only vulnerable at the tip of his tail so he laughed at them, which made them even more angry.

Finally, after a long time and many arrows, one hit Fisher’s tail. He fell from the tree and as he lay dying on the ground he said,

“I am dying, but I have kept my promise to my son out of love for him, I am content.”

With that he died and ever since, in this land below the sky, there have been eight months of Spring and Summer warmth. Fisher, after he died, stayed in the sky, he is what you call the Big Dipper constellation, or Ursa Major.

“That was a sad story, Coyote. What happened to the Son? Did he become a good hunter and provide for his mother?”

Coyote shrugged, “that is the story of how Summer came to this land, I don’t know what happened to the son. Why not tell me the rest of the story.”

“Well, there are still Fishers here, so I think the father’s sacrifice was for a good cause, I think the son had a long life as a good hunter and provided for his mother and for a wife and children of his own.”

“That sounds like a good ending to the story, my love. You are a gentle and caring woman to give it such an ending.”

The Bonze

The old man greeted Coyote by name as he and Amber walked up to the cabin.

“Do you know him?” asked Amber.

The man heard, “I know both of you, you are Coyote.”

“And how do you know that?”

“Oh it’s obvious, like it’s written on your forehead.”

Amber looked at Coyote who was laughing, “Do not be fooled by this old faker, he pretends to be a great Shaman but he’s simply a fellow who has been here for a few worlds. And it’s not your forehead, you’ve left a streak of coyote fur down the back of your neck.”

“It was chilly this morning. So he is a spirit being?”

“Ah, that I don’t know, I only know that he has lived a long time, like the other ancients. He has always looked old and he has never done any magic that I know of. Can you do magic old man?”

“I don’t know, I’ve never tried, I simply live here by myself and I greet anyone who comes along. It may be that I have learned something over my years and I try to help when I can.”

“He helps everyone, again he is acting the fool. He is a great, and wise man who pretends to be someone else.”

Amber was intrigued, “Are you a Shaman?”

The old man smiled, “I would not presume to take that title, you might call me a bonze, a monk, who is a student of the Buddha.”

“But surely Buddhism is not quite 3000 years old.”

“In the cycle of the last world, you are correct. But the lessons of the Buddha are timeless, or perhaps I should say, ‘of all time.’ As such, they have existed always, if not actually, then potentially.”

“I’m confused.”

“The first step to wisdom. Will you come in and have tea with me?”

Coyote and Amber followed the old man inside where he took his time preparing tea and setting out food. Amber found his movements slightly hypnotic and she found herself calming down even more than she had been.

When they were all settled, the old man turned to Amber with a smile, “You have been here in the emptiness of the woods for a while now?”

“Yes, but it’s not empty to us, we meet the wolves and the coyote, the bears and the wolverines.”

“But few people.”

“Yes, few people. This has been good for me, I find people a bit stressful.”

“Ah, how do you mean?”

“Well I was recently speaking with Coyote about the way Humans are selfish and greedy, how they have destroyed the environment.”

“Surely not, this world is not even a year old.”

“The former world, to think what they did to it makes me angry, and fearful they will do it again to this one.”

“You are angry often?”

“There are so many problems, yes.”

“I understand that Coyote gave his powers to you so that you could fix those problems.”

Amber dropped her eyes to her tea and said nothing.

“And what form did you take after you gave up your powers, Coyote?”

Coyote turned into a shaggy mutt and the old man laughed and clapped his hands. “Who’s a good boy then, who’s a very good boy!”

Coyote turned into a man once more with a laugh. Amber was a bit shocked, this old man was, she felt, being a bit rude.

“You think me disrespectful, Amber? Did you treat Coyote any differently?”

“That’s not the point. He can sing the world away and back again.”

“He can, he is certainly a God.”

“He... he tells me he is not.”

“Because he can’t fix things? Because he doesn’t know the fall of the smallest sparrow?”

“I suppose so.”

“Did you see what he is when he made you Coyote?”

“He made me Coyote, but he also gave me the ability to foresee what might happen if I changed things.”

“A wise God then, were you able to fix things?”

“No, but I understood his frustration and reluctance to fix the world.”

“Yet you are still angry at Humans, who mostly do not have that power of prediction, for creating the problems anyway, although even with all that power you could not prevent it.”

“I guess I am.”

“Tell me, child, do you sit quietly sometimes, I feel that you do.”

“I have tried meditating, yes, but it doesn’t help much. Being out here in the bush helps a lot more.”

“Indeed, here where there are no Humans to anger you.”

“I suppose so.”

“Will you close your eyes and sit a while with me?”

Amber looked over at Coyote, who nodded and went to sit in front of the fire with his tea. Amber looked at the Bonze and said, “You are trying to teach me something.”

“Absolutely not, I have nothing to teach, I am simply a foolish old man, but I feel like sitting quietly for a few moments, and would like you to join me.”

Amber settled herself in her chair and dropped her eyes but didn’t close them. She folded her hands together, left over right and made a circle with her thumbs in her lap.

“Ah, you have been taught, I will follow your example.”

All was quiet for a time in the cabin, except the crackling of the fire. When Coyote sipped his tea, he made no sound at all, and it seemed like his cup refilled itself.

Eventually, the old man unfolded his hands and lifted his eyes. He poured more tea for Amber and himself while she roused herself.

“You were very still, you have some skill at this.”

Amber thought for a moment, “It is the same as when I play my violin, I have no reason to think, I simply feel the music.”

“And when you sit?”

“I feel my breathing, although sometimes, as we have discussed, my anger rises, I try not to pay attention, but we were talking just now about how Humans hurt the environment and it is hard to let that anger go.”

“But there are no Humans here, except me of course, did I make you angry?”

“No of course not.”

“Then?”

“I see what you are asking, yes, my anger rose out of my own thoughts. The anger was in me.”

“But you dismissed it, is it so fragile a thing, did not the anger struggle against you?”

“No of course not, it was my thought, I didn’t have to chase it around, I let it go.”

“You are far down the road to wisdom, Amber, far further than the God over there drinking his tea and warming his toes to the fire.”

“You were his teacher.”

“Not at all, we have known each other for a while, a long time actually, and we have tea together every now and then.”

“He says he is not a God, yet you call him a God.”

“He sings worlds in and out of existence, is that not a God? He populates the world with creatures, is that not a God?”

Coyote snorted. Amber glanced at him and said nothing for a moment, but then she smiled, “He can call himself a God or not, it makes no difference, he is what he is, despite what you call him. He can decide.”

The old man smiled gently, “Yes, and you decide if this anger comes from within you or from other Humans. You decide how

you view Coyote, me, and the world. It is within your power to decide what your world looks like to you.”

“But when others are destroying that world?”

“You can act if you choose to do so, of course, but the actions of others are not your actions. How can they make you angry when you can decide what their actions mean to you? Only if you decide that their actions make you angry, can you be angry.”

“Coyote has been telling me stories to keep me human, he worries that I will go too far as Coyote and forget.”

“Yes, he may be right to fear that you will forget, he has forgotten a lot. It is true that coyote and wolf and fox do not get angry with Humans or any other creature, they may fight for food or survival, but they are not bothered with the emotions of Humans are they?”

“I suppose I am not either, when I am a wolf.”

“But if you are a Human, can you not have the viewpoint of a wolf?”

Amber ignored the question and turned to Coyote, “Is this my lesson for today?”

“Lesson?”

“Oh to hell with you both, I thank you for your kind words, Bonze, is there something I can do for you in return? I see that your wood pile needs to be split, shall I split some for you?”

“You are a most kind and gracious Wolf, I would very much appreciate that.”

Amber nodded and turned to Coyote, “You can stay and chat with your friend, I need to go split wood and think on this not lesson.”

Coyote laughed again and bowed to Amber, who grinned and bowed back.

The Bonze Tells a Story

Having been invited to stay the night, Amber and Coyote settled down at the old man’s table and made ready to eat. Amber offered to help but the old man told her to rest, she had split most of his wood pile and stacked it neatly under the eaves of his cabin.

As the meal was served and the three of them were enjoying it, the old man asked Amber about Coyote’s stories.

“He is generous with his stories, and allows me to listen to them, which I gladly do because his voice is so dear to me and,

as I'm sure you know, he doesn't speak much otherwise.” The Bonze laughed, “It is true, he is a stingy talker indeed. Well, let me see if I can think of a story for you while you eat. I won't have the wonderful voice of Coyote, but perhaps the story will amuse you anyway.”

“I would like that I think, does your story carry a lesson for me?”

“Absolutely not, it is simply something that I saw one day out in the woods.” And with that the old man told his story.

The Sleep Fairies

Many years ago I was hunting with my dogs in the woods near here. I no longer have the dogs and have learned to find my food without hunting, but I was young then.

As I walked through the woods, I noticed my dogs were not with me, so I called and whistled, but they did not come. I went back along the path, looking for them and eventually I found them under a bush, sound asleep.

I began to feel sleepy myself, when I noticed a drone, a buzz like a Cicada and I looked to see such an insect on the branch of a tree. He looked down on me and said, “I have put your dogs to sleep and you will soon sleep too. You have come too close to my home.”

I replied that I would like to sleep in my cabin, rather than on the ground in the bush. The insect looked at me and said, “You have been kind to the insects of the forest, I will let you go. Take a leaf of that bush over there and chew it, it will keep you awake long enough to get home.”

I took the leaf and chewed it and felt quite a lot less tired. As I chewed, the insect stopped droning and my dogs began to stir. As I looked at them, I saw winged beings rise from their heads, where they had been clubbing the dogs to make them sleep.

“Those are my sleep fairies, I am the leader of this band. Wake your dogs and go on home.”

I could see the fairies and they followed me back to my cabin. It happened that I had many friends back at the cabin, waiting for me to bring home some food. As I got into the yard here, the fairies flew to my friends and began clubbing them on the head. They soon fell down in sleep, as did I. The fairies faded out of my sight so the effect of the leaf must have worn off.

Several days later, I decided to go and find this bush with the protective leaf, I didn’t want to be sent to sleep in the woods without warning. Leaving my dogs in the cabin so they would not fall asleep again, I went to the place I thought the bush was, but didn’t see it. I wandered for hours around the area, looking for the bush and eventually I was so tired I lay down to rest against a tree.

In the tree, the fairy king looked down at me. He was hanging

upside down from his branch and he laughed. “You are looking for my bush.”

I said I was, and he replied, “It is just there, a few feet from where you sit. Take a leaf but do not eat it yet. Save it for the evening when the sun goes down, there is something I would like you to see. At dusk I will call the insects to go to sleep in their homes, I would like you to see what happens then.”

I took a leaf and asked what I was to see. “The king of the Red Squirrels wants my nice branch for his own, he has told me to go away but I refused. I like my branch, so there will be a war. I would like you to watch so that you can say the war was fair. The rule is that if the Red Squirrel can touch me, I have to leave.”

I agreed to do that, and the Cicada told me to go sit behind an oak where I would be hidden but have a good view of the battle. As I watched, the insects began to arrive at the tree. The flies, the bees, the wasps and the hornets came and made a large circle around Cicada’s tree. The flies were furthest out, and the hornets, with their sharp swords were on the branch by their king. I say sharp swords because that is how I saw them, but I have no doubt what I was seeing was their stingers.

Soon, through the bush, I saw the red squirrels coming, behind them were the grey squirrels and after that, the chipmunks. It was an impressive sight, to see these beings march. Still, when they came to the outer circle of flies, I saw the insects covering the heads of the squirrels, they buzzed their wings and struck

with small clubs and the marching column of the squirrels broke apart.

The red squirrels formed into a wedge and drove on through the flies and then the bees and wasps until they made it to the base of the tree. “Up, up the tree!” ordered the Squirrel king and the Red Squirrels scrambled up the trunk where the Hornets met them strongly. As the Hornets struck over and over with their swords, the squirrels were thrown off the branch, some of them fell to the ground dead.

Next the Grey Squirrels, with their long fur began to attack. They moved through the flies, and were half way up the tree when the bees, in great swarms, descended on them. Now bees can drive off a bear with his thick fur, and they crawled through the Squirrel’s fur to strike them with their swords. The Grey Squirrels fell from the tree.

While this was going on, the Chipmunks had been moving quietly through the grass. When they saw them, the wasps attacked but the Chipmunks were well camouflaged. As the Squirrels fell, the Chipmunks scampered up the tree and onto the branch in a flash. They avoided the hornets and one of them almost touched the Cicada King, but as he was about to do so, the mosquitoes swarmed down, covering the heads of the Chipmunks so that they could not see.

This was all very exciting, but about then I noticed that the sun was going down. There were many dead on the ground around the tree, insects and Squirrels, and I was sad to see that. Still,

the fight raged on and I chewed the leaf as I had been asked to do.

The King of the Fairies droned his signal and the insects flew to their homes as they had to do as the sun set. Just then I saw the Sleep Fairies, who came in large numbers from the bush. I could see them clearly as they began to club the Squirrels on their heads, putting them to sleep. All those who had made it up the tree, fell to the ground.

The Squirrels had been defeated and as the effects of the leaf wore off, I saw the King of the fairies sitting in a circle of his followers, like the winner of a great battle.

Amber clapped her hands, “That was an exciting story, well told, it is a shame that so many died over the branch of a tree.”

“But wars are usually about territory are they not? Hunting grounds, or places to dig for gold, or to grow food. And all of it is eventually futile given a thousand years.”

“Indeed. You know, I have always wondered why, on a hot summer day, I become sleepy when I hear the drone of the Cicada. Thank you for telling me. One thing though, you say you don’t hunt any more, why is that?”

“Seeing the death of so many Squirrels and Insects, I lost my own taste for killing. And now, with the sun well down in the

sky, shall I call my friends the Sleep Fairies to help you go to your rest for the night?"

Coyote smiled, "Thank you my friend, but we have little trouble falling asleep, especially after we have made love, and in your generous guest bed, we will rest soundly until morning."

The Bonze smiled and bid the two a good night.

The Wolf by the Stream

After a night as humans in a nice bed, in a warm cabin, Amber decided that there were certain advantages to being human, after all. Still, her coyote nose thought it was a bit stuffy indoors, without a breeze blowing during the night. If it was a bit less whiffy for not having a pile of coyote or wolves around her.

She got up very early and wandered out to a stream that wasn't far away, changed to a coyote and went in to bathe. As she was enjoying the water, she noticed a large wolf on the bank, watching her. "Little brother, what are you doing? I've never seen a coyote bathing like a human before."

Amber felt this wolf was a bit rude, "I am human, so you still have not seen a coyote bathing."

“Ah, I understand, are you here visiting the old man?”

“Yes, my mate and I slept here last night.”

“Your mate?”

“Yes, Coyote is my mate, and he is in the house now, asleep.”

“Somehow I doubt that, he would have felt me arrive to watch you.”

“You know him?”

“We have met.”

“Where I live, Megan and Stan also live, do you know them?”

“Megan is my sister, yes.”

“I see, so you are a spirit being then.”

“I am who I am, I suppose I am a spirit being because I have lived a very long time, but I am just myself.”

“You are not very talkative, are you?”

“Ah, you humans, you do chatter. It seems to remind you that you are alive, I remember that now, ever since the first humans.”

“You remember the first humans?”

“Indeed, my pack and I taught them how to get along with each other, before that they were bickering constantly and in danger of starving.”

The wolf offered no more, and Amber realized she would have to pull the story from him one question at a time. She got out of the stream and shook herself dry, then sat on the bank.

“Tell me, what happened after you taught humans to get along?”

“They didn’t. They continued to bicker, so my sister Megan made herself into a spirit being called Nanabozo. Some of my brothers made themselves less fierce looking and became dogs to help the humans.”

“Why would you help them at all? I have become a bit ashamed of humans, who breed like rabbits and destroy the environment.”

“They follow their own nature, they are creatures of this world, like we are. They are deserving of help.”

“I wonder.”

“Oh my sister, you have been wounded by your thoughts of right and wrong, you have allowed your disappointment and

your imagination to paint a picture of humans that is unkind.”

“That is what the old man was trying to say to me last evening, are you trying to teach me a lesson too?”

“There is no lesson to teach. Humans are what they are, neither good nor bad, just another animal on this world. As are you and I, no matter what we are, we are part of this world.”

“I helped sing this world into existence.”

“This I can see, and so you have a feeling of ownership, as is common with humans. Even the first humans fought each other for territory, but remember, we wolves also fight for territory, it is a function of the amount of resources available. When there is plenty and no animal wants, there can be peace and harmony. When resources get scarce, there is war.”

“War?”

“Or fighting, or conflict, it’s all the same.”

“Will you tell me of the first Humans?”

“Has Coyote not told you that story?”

“No, although I haven’t asked him about it.”

“I have a few minutes, I will tell you about the flood and Nanabozo, how is that? This was many generations ago, before

the Europeans were floating around on their boats, before the people here had discovered their canoes. It happened that the humans were poor students, we wolves had tried but they became too angry for the world. Coyote decided he would try again, and brought floods down upon the land.

“Nanabozo watched the waters rise, and saw the Humans perish, one after another. She knew that Coyote was trying once more to fix a mistake and she shook her head sadly. Even then Megan was, how did she put this, ‘cleaning up after Coyote’s mess’. Those two have a very long history.

“Nanabozo ran up a mountain as the waters rose, and then climbed a tree. She asked the tree to stretch just as far as it could upward as she climbed into the top branches. On and on the water rose, and finally, when it was just below her nose, it stopped. The world was covered in water now.

“There were many animals swimming on the water and they saw the tree, so they swam to where Megan was. Megan looked at them and said ‘this is too much, we must have the land back, who will help, who will swim down and get some mud from the bottom of this water for me?’

“Beaver said he would try, and he dove deep, but he could not reach the bottom and he drowned. Wolverine tried next and he also drowned. Then Rabbit and Mink and Mouse tried, but they all drowned. Finally, Muskrat said he would try. The other animals were concerned, he was not strong, but he had a strong mind, and he said he would try.

“Down he dove, little Muskrat, and he was many hours underwater, Nanabozo thought that he had been caught underwater by dead branches, or perhaps a fish. Eventually, Muskrat floated to the surface, he was drowned too, and Megan gathered him to her chest, saying he was a brave animal to have tried so hard.

“As she mourned, Duck noticed that Muskrat had something in his hand. Nanabozo looked and there was some mud. ‘We will use this mud to make more land so you can all live above the water again, but where will we put it?’

“Turtle swam up and said, ‘put it on my back, I will carry the land so that others can live once more.’

“Nanabozo put the mud on Turtle’s back and waved her hand so that it would grow and grow and grow as the four winds blew. Turtle held it above the waters and it became the land you stand on now. Underneath, Turtle still floats, although he no longer lives.”

Amber was solemn, “What of the Humans?”

“Ah, Nanabozo was in human form, she became pregnant and as the land grew large under the four winds, she gave birth to the Humans that inhabit the world now.”

“Megan was the mother of all Humans?”

“Certainly, this is why she has little patience with Humans, she is like a mother with naughty children she must clean up after constantly.”

Amber shook her head, she had never heard this about her friend, Megan. She thought that when she got back home they would have a serious talk.

The wolf got up from where he was sitting and said, “Talking about all those animals has made me hungry, I think I will go and catch one for my breakfast.” With that, he winked at Amber and wandered off into the bush.

Amber went back to the cabin where Coyote and the old man were having tea. Coyote looked at Amber and said, “I see you have met Megan’s brother.”

“Coy, did you kill all the Humans in a flood?”

Coyote thought for a moment, “I have forgotten so much, I really don’t know, perhaps I did. You will have to ask Megan, she never forgets anything.”

Amber thought back to when she was Coyote and thought to herself, ‘there are things I’d like to forget too.’ She said no more about it but instead wandered over to the stove and began making breakfast for the two lazy men who had only managed to make tea so far.

Baba Yaga's Bakery

Amber and Coyote were back to wandering in the bush after saying good bye to the old man and his nice warm cabin.

“Would you like to stop for a coffee and a treat?”

“What are you talking about Mutt?” Amber had her head down, she was thinking about what the Bonze had said, and what the Wolf had told her about Coyote drowning the world.

“Over there. That place with the Baba Yaga's Bakery sign.”

“Where... Oh. Oh dear, we don't want to go there, Coy, do you know who Baba Yaga is? She's an old woman who eats children.”

“Well good thing we aren't children, come on let's see what she's doing here in the bush, she should be in Europe.”

“I'm not sure this is a good idea, Coy, I'm really not.”

“Well if nothing else, it will be fun.”

“Fun, a witch cooking and eating us, fun?”

“Well, if you don't want to...”

“No, no, by all means, let’s go see. We ought to make sure this isn’t the real Baba in our woods, kidnapping kids.”

Coyote smiled and rubbed his hands together, as if he was anticipating an adventure.

As they went through the front door, a tinkly little bell rang. It looked like a proper English Tea Room, complete with capital letters. As they sat down at a table with an embroidered cloth, a woman came out of the back. She was best described with the words ‘little’ and ‘old’, but not any of the words like crone, witch, ugly or horrible.

“Coyote my dear, how are you? What brings you to my little shop?”

“Hello Baba, we were wandering in the bush and I felt you were nearby. How’s business?”

“I’m not sure yet, Hut and I just came to this area and settled down last week. We’ve had a few folks in, but mostly I’ve been baking. And how are you my dear?”

“Oh, sorry, this is Amber, my mate.”

“So very good to meet you, Coyote’s mate. My my, how lovely, and how lucky for you, Coyote. She’s beautiful.”

“Thank you Auntie. She is, isn’t she.”

Amber had been stunned since walking through the front door. This was not at all what she expected of a child-eating old crone.

“You two shall be my guests, what would you like?”

Amber’s head snapped around when she heard the world guest, and the old woman laughed. “Oh my dear, the stories that have accumulated around me over the years... OK yes, they used to be true, there has to be some evil in the world, some bad people to keep children from wandering off and getting lost in the woods and I was happy to help, but I don’t do that any more.”

Coyote smiled at Amber, “Baba came here in the last world and stayed in our woods. The woods of her homeland don’t exist any more, they are all blasted stumps, the forests are pitted with bomb craters and the children have another fear. It’s not Baba Yaga who kidnaps them now and keeps them captive.”

Amber was almost speechless, “Oh...”

“You two look like you’d like some coffee, I’ll bet you came from the Bonze’s place, he makes terrible coffee.”

“Thank you Auntie, that would be most kind.”

As the old woman vanished into the back of the shop, Amber turned to Coyote, her mouth open, “You know her?”

“Of course, she asked me if she could come here and I told her yes. She shows herself and the hut to the people around here once in a while, and they tell their children about the witch in the woods, then they drop in for tea and scones.”

“Coy...”

Coyote laughed and raised his hands, “Now, now, it wasn’t a very big trick.”

Amber finally smiled, “You did have me going there for a minute, I’ll admit it.”

At that moment, the old woman came out with a tray, coffee black and thick, and scones, light and fluffy, with orange marmalade.

“Oh my, that looks delicious, thank you Baba Yaga.”

“Call me Auntie, dear, most folks around here do. Baba Yaga is more of a professional name. And before you ask, I don’t serve raspberry or strawberry jam to first time customers. It sometimes gives the wrong idea.”

Amber looked up from her scone quickly, but then she heard Coyote stifle a giggle. She kicked him hard under the table and smiled at Auntie Yaga. Taking a sip of the coffee, her eyes went wide, “Oh my this is coffee all right.”

“Like we made in the old country, the scones are an old recipe

too, no ground bones, I promise.”

Amber saw that Auntie Yaga was smiling and so tried the scone, again she complimented the old woman, who nodded and went back into the kitchen, leaving the two alone to enjoy their coffee and treats.

Amber ate half of her scone and then sat back with another sip of coffee. “Coyote, the wolf I talked with said that Megan was there at the beginning of the world.”

“You know she was, you were there singing with me.”

“No, the one where you drowned all the Humans.”

Coyote looked a bit sad as he muttered, “Wolf and I will have a bit of a chat. Yes, that was the last world, and I was still trying to fix things. The Humans were cruel, Beelzabub would call them evil. I felt that I should try again.”

Amber could feel the sadness and regret coming from Coyote, she made no comment, but reached over and patted his hand.

Coyote dropped his eyes and broke off a piece of his scone and ate it. After a few moments, Amber squeezed his hand to show him she understood.

Baba Yaga bustled out of the back, “What’s this, so much sadness in my shop, no, no, no, that won’t do. I’ve brought you salmon sandwiches and clotted cream to cheer you up.”

“Thank you Auntie, I reminded Coyote about the beginning of the last world, I just learned about it.”

“What, the one about the flood? Wolf is going to get a ding around the ear, he shouldn’t be telling that story to you. It isn’t true anyway. The very beginning of the world was in water and sky, on the water was an egg that cracked and Svarog came out.” At this point, Baba Yaga pointed her thumb at Coyote and winked at Amber.

“From the powder of the egg, the sacred tree grew up and pushed the sky away from the water, Svarog then dove down and collected some clay which he put in the egg to grow into the land, and all the creatures on it. You see, Wolf got it a bit wrong.”

Amber looked over at Coyote, who shrugged.

“Oh don’t ask that old fellow, he forgets things. Now, this new world, it’s got a new origin story doesn’t it, you and Coyote sang it into existence. No water, no big tree, no egg shells. Just a cafe and a bunch of helpers. I predict there will be a whole lot more cafe’s like mine here in this new world, as soon as the story becomes a new religion.”

Amber was shocked, “What! Oh no!”

Again, Baba Yaga smiled, “Well, maybe not, the world religions are still here aren’t they, they won’t have any room

for a new one. Your secret is safe from the Humans, I suspect. I mean, who would believe it anyway?”

The Pond

Amber was leading the way, threading through the bush in her slim coyote form, Coyote was somewhat behind her, following along but seemingly distracted. Amber stopped and waited.

“What is it Coy? Are you thinking about the world again?”

“What? No, actually I was thinking about you, you’re a bit down but I can’t figure out why.”

“Ah, you don’t do well with existential angst do you? I mean you’ve always been here and you know exactly who and what you are.”

“Yes...”

Amber smiled, “Come sit and I’ll tell you what I’m thinking in plain words, or as plain as I can. You see, I’ve had a great life, even before I met you, and so much better when you came into my life. Right now, though, there’s this feeling of the other shoe about to fall.”

“The what?”

“It’s an old saying, trying to describe the feeling that something bad is going to happen. That I’m going to be judged and found lacking, or undeserving of my happiness, so bad things are going to happen.”

“That doesn’t make sense, Amber, what... no why would you be judged for having a good life, for being happy right now?”

“That’s just it, there’s no reason at all. There’s just this feeling of dread that we Humans get when things are going well. I think it has something to do with being careful of the Tigers hiding in the jungle.”

“You want some Tigers in the woods here?”

“No, no, I mean when we were apes living in the jungle in Africa, those instincts are still here with us.”

“Oh, Evolution. OK I know that one, but genetics is about your physical body, not your thoughts, right?”

“Well some people have suggested that our thought patterns are also handed down, they used to call those memes, but social media took that term over and made it silly. Ideas, they have persistence.”

“Is this like when you explained that language influences thought patterns?”

“Sort of. Look, Humans have short lives and we mostly have to make our own meanings up, why we’re here, what’s life for.”

“Seems a bit silly, life is, and you’re here, what else do you need. If you’re not here, you don’t know it, and if you are, why feel guilty about it?”

“You understand this better than you let on, Coy. Look, I’m just being a bit down because it’s been so good so far, and the odds should turn.”

“That’s not how probability works, Amber.”

“Yeah I know, but still.”

“Would it help if you could see the future?”

“Can you give me that power?”

“Well, sort of, I mean you have that power to anticipate tigers in the bush and how to calculate probabilities right? But I’m talking about something else, a way of looking in on the future.”

“So not a power you can give me?”

“No, but I can show you how anyway, come on, there’s a pond not far from here that should be good to use.”

Amber followed Coyote for about an hour until they came to a large pond that seemed to have no inlet, but a very small outlet.

“What is this pond? It seems to just be sitting here for no reason.”

“It’s a kettle, it was a huge chunk of ice with dirt around it as the glaciers retreated. The water down there is thousands of years old. What water drains is replaced by rain and snow. That’s why it’s so good for what we want, it’s very still.”

“It sure is, it makes the forest look like it’s repeated upside down.”

“That’s why it’s good for this. Now, come to the edge and look down. What do you see?”

“Us, looking up.”

“Look deeper, keep looking.” With that, Coyote tipped a stone into the water and it rippled across Amber’s vision. As it did, the scene changed, Amber was looking at a family of coyote, young pups were looking back, with a father and mother sitting proudly in the middle. They all looked healthy and behind them was a clear blue sky, and green trees. In short, it was a lovely scene with no hint of a problem.

“What is that, Coy? What am I looking at?”

“A possible future, what do you see?”

“You can’t see it? A family, our family, you and I and pups, in a peaceful world. Is this real?”

“No, it’s a possible future, a likely one. Is it one you would like?”

“You know it is.”

“Well it can happen, and I’d like that future too, would you like to see another.”

Amber stopped him from tossing in another stone, “No, this one will do nicely. Was that you who created that scene?”

“No, any pond that is still enough will show you a possible future, this is one of the oldest ways to scry”

“Isn’t it just wishful thinking?”

“It can be, were you thinking of a family?”

“No, no not really. I was just looking at our reflection, I wasn’t thinking of anything at all.”

“Not wishful thinking then, but it does come from you. Maybe call it a link to your unconscious.”

“I don’t know if there is such a thing, Coy.”

“Then your desires, or an access to the firing patterns of your neurons. Some way to disconnect your present thoughts and emotions from your deeper considerations, to let them rise to attention.”

“Oh dear. You’re talking stories here aren’t you?”

“We are nothing but stories, dear. We are what we play as actors in our own story.”

“So this is another story, this reflection. Why is it still here?”

“Because you’re looking at it. It will go when you look away.”

“Oh. They are beautiful pups, aren’t they?”

“They are yours, how could they not be.”

Amber looked at Coyote long enough to hit him hard on the arm, then looked back, “Oh, oh they’re gone.”

Coyote put his arm around her and gave her a small squeeze, “They can return.”

Just then, Amber heard a sound in the bush, as she watched, a great Boar came near to the pond. Amber began to turn into a wolf, but Coyote put his hand on her arm. “This is an old friend. Hello my friend, it is good to see you are still here.”

The Boar nodded and then bent to drink from the water. When he had his fill, he nodded once again to Coyote and then to Amber and trotted back into the bush.

“You know him Coyote?”

“From a very long time ago, yes, he was my friend.”

“Will you tell me?”

Coyote and Boar

Once, I was wandering alone as a man. There was nobody on the plains, nobody that I had seen for years. One day I lay down in the grass and in my loneliness, I heard a voice.

“Pick me up and I will be your friend and you will always be successful.”

I saw nothing, but the voice came again and I looked deep into the grass. There was a strange little animal there. “Pick me up and put me in your belt, then you will always be successful.”

It was good to have someone to talk to, so I picked him up and sewed him into the lining of my belt. We walked for two more days when I came to a village. It was a strange village, there were buildings on both sides, but on one side they were empty.

On the other there were Humans living in the lodges.

The people made me welcome, and introduced me to their chief. I was given a place to live, and fed well. After a time, the villagers told me they liked to play games, and that their favourite was the frozen water game.

“Coyote, was this the place where that village was? Beside this kettle lake?”

Coyote nodded and continued.

The young men asked if I would like to try the frozen water game and I told them I was willing. That stream there was a bit larger then, and that night several of the Humans and I lay down in the stream. The one to stay the longest as the water froze around him would be the winner.

I kept my belt on, for the strange animal kept me safe. I was warm in the water and stayed for many hours, the ice forming around me. The young men were very competitive and they stayed in the stream until they were frozen solid.

I got up and looked at them, then went to tell the Chief that I had killed them because I was warm, but he shook his head, “No you are the bravest, you stayed in the stream and are still alive.”

With that we went back to the stream to collect the bodies, but they were gone, they had turned into Buffalo and walked across

the trail to the empty lodges and began living there.

I stayed in the village and the Chief gave me his daughter for a wife. Over the years, several other contests were held and I killed many of the young men, who turned into various animals and lived across the path.

Of course, the young men of the village began to hate me, and one day I lay down for a rest in a field. I took off my belt and left it beside me. The young men came and challenged me to the freezing contest and I stood and went with them, leaving my belt behind. I had forgotten it.

This time I froze to death, I didn't have the little animal to help me stay warm. The young men saw that I was dead and they were glad, they took their knives and cut me up, then scattered me all over the village.

When my wife heard this, she wept bitter tears, but after a while she remembered my belt. She went to where it was lying on the grass and picked it up. A voice said, "Release me from inside this belt."

She did, and the little animal came out. He shook himself several times, getting bigger with each shake. He was eventually a dog and he took off running. He collected all my parts from all over the village and assembled them on the ground by my wife. When he had them all, he howled, and the parts started to come together. He howled again, louder and they knitted into my body. The third time he howled it echoed

back off the mountains, and I came awake.

“You should not have left me, I could not protect you, and now I will leave you with some powers, but I will go away. You can now eat the animals, instead of them eating you, but you must never eat me or my kind.” With that he shook himself again and became the Boar you saw here.

Coyote stopped talking and Amber shook her head. “You always leave questions about the story. What does this one mean?”

“Does life have a meaning? Why should a story have a meaning? This is something that happened to me, you asked me how I know the Boar, so I have told you.”

“The animals that came from the people, are those the animals you hunted and ate? Is this the story of the separation of humans and animals? And what happened to your wife?”

Coyote smiled and looked again at the pond. Amber shook her head again and punched him hard on the arm. “Mutt.”

The World Under the Water

Amber was looking at the pond, and because she was Coyote, she saw something beneath the surface. “Coy there are beings there, upside down in the water.”

“Yes, of course there are.”

“But who are they? How are they there under the water, or is it just a trick of the light?” Amber looked around and behind herself just in case there were beings there being reflected in the water.

“No tricks, they are really there.”

“I’ve never seen... oh, you can see them.”

“Sure, but anyone can see them if they believe they’re there.”

“Same as for anything right? You have to believe it’s there before you can see it.”

“Well, I don’t know, now you say it, if believe is the right word. You have to pay attention, the mind tends to slide off of things you think shouldn’t be there, or that don’t fit with what you’re doing or seeing at the moment. Common phenomenon, actually. If you don’t expect to see something it’s more or less got to hit you in the face with a fish for you to see it.”

“That was a lot of words for you old boy.”

“Yeah, sorry.”

“So I could have seen that world if I’d expected to see it.”

“Yes, and that’s what stories are about, those who have heard a story about the beings under the water, will be more likely to see them.”

“All right, I see them, do they see me?”

“Perhaps, if they are paying attention.”

“Is that a separate world Coyote?”

“No, it’s this world, just under the water.”

“With the fish and the weeds?”

“Ah, no. They don’t see the fish and the weeds. How do I put this, they’re sort of to one side of the things we usually see in the water.”

“So that’s why we don’t hook those beings when we fish?”

“Yes.”

“Can we visit them?”

“Sure, but now you see them, don’t stick your head under the

water, it's a bit disturbing to see someone pop up from under the ground."

"What?"

"The underside of the water is their ground, if they can see you, if you can see them, it will be like walking down the sidewalk and having someone pop up through the concrete."

"What?"

"Come on, over here where the water is more shallow and hidden a bit from the beings under the water."

Amber and Coyote eased themselves into the pond, which was very cold, the kettle lake was very deep and only the first few inches got warmth from the sun. As they went past their waist, they flipped. Amber let out a squeal and gave Coyote a dirty look, "You could have warned me."

"Oops, sorry."

"You're not, you're grinning, wait 'til I get over there, you're going to get.... such.... Coyote I can talk, and breathe, and it's warm."

"Yes, no fish, no weeds, like I said, it's a little bit to one side."

"Anything else you're not telling me?"

“Well, you might put a coyote head on, there are very few beings here that are full Human or full Animal. They are considered to be disabled, so most beings keep it half and half to avoid discrimination.”

“So, just like above the water.”

Coyote made a face and nodded. Prejudice existed everywhere.

They appeared to be around the corner from the main pond, or perhaps Amber should think of it as being the village. They began to walk toward the main part of the village when one of the beings shouted, “Hello Coyote! Haven’t seen you for a while.”

They spoke English? Amber wasn’t surprised that they knew Coyote, “But how can I understand them Coy?”

Coyote was waving at everyone, and greeting them back, he turned briefly to Amber and said, “magic,” with a grin on his face.

Amber put on her, ‘We’ll talk about this later,’ face and looked around.

There were beings with animal heads, and some with animal bodies and Human heads. She couldn’t figure out any sort of reason for the split, and she just assumed that, like Coyote and herself, they simply took whatever form seemed most efficient at the moment. Sure enough, as she watched, a being with a cat

head changed to a cat with a human head and said hello to her.

Amber smiled, "Hello, nice to meet you."

"You're Coyote's mate?"

"Yes, we saw your village in the pond and came to visit."

"The what?"

"Oh, sorry, we came to visit, we've been walking through the forest and thought we would drop in."

"It's nice to see you both. I'm Serena, and you are?"

"Sorry, I'm Amber."

"What a sweet name, I'm so glad you came to visit. Is this your first time in our village?"

"For me, yes, obviously Coyote has been here before."

"Indeed, there are many of his children in the village."

"Are there now?"

"Oh, perhaps I should not have said. They are all full grown now, with children of their own."

"No, it's fine, I know Coyote has lived a very long time."

“Indeed, our legends say he was the very first being. Can I show you around the village?”

“Thank you, that would be nice.”

Amber and Serena walked around the village, with Serena showing off the lodges and the children. There were corn fields and many other things growing in fields. At the edge of the village was an impenetrable forest which Serena said kept out the animals.

“I don’t understand, said Amber, there are animals beyond the forest that you are afraid of?”

“Oh yes, the animals killed all of us except a brother and sister who lived here in this place, far away from the animals. Would you like to hear the story?”

Amber nodded and Serena began to tell her story.

How the Doormouse Got Small

Long ago, the animals decided to kill all of the beings who could change to Human form. They killed every one except for a brother and sister, who went very far away from where the animals were. The sister was a normal being but the brother

was very small, like a toddler, and remained so.

The sister did all the work, gathering wood for the fire, growing corn, cooking and cleaning because the brother was too small. She took the brother everywhere she went, he was too small to leave by himself.

One day, when she was gathering wood, she gave a small bow to her brother and said, “See if you can shoot a bird for our supper. Come back when the sun starts to go down.”

The boy agreed, but came back that evening crying, he had not managed to kill anything.

“Don’t worry, go and try again tomorrow,” said the sister.

The brother went out the next day and managed to shoot a bird. “Skin this and stretch the skin to dry it, when I kill more birds you can use the skin to make me a nice coat.”

The sister agreed and the brother came home with enough birds to make him a pretty coat which he wore all the time. He continued to go hunting and his sister warned him not to go too far or he would be seen by the animals. He agreed not to go too far, but as boys do, he went further and further.

One day he walked so far that he became tired, he lay down on some grass and went to sleep. He slept so long that the sun dried out his skin coat and it became very tight on the boy. When he awoke, he was furious. “You have done this Sun, I

will get my revenge on you some day.”

With that he went home to his sister. She didn’t know how to get the coat off, but the boy said, “Leave me alone, I will get it off and then I will have my revenge.”

With that he stopped eating and went to his bed. For ten days he stayed on one side and slept. Then he turned over and slept for another ten days, all without eating. At the end of twenty days he could get the coat off.

He called to his sister, “bring me some rope, I intend to snare the sun.”

“We have no rope, but will these deer sinew do?”

“No, they will not do.”

The sister was perplexed, “What about my hair, would it do?”

“No, it’s no good.”

The sister didn’t know what to do, she left the lodge and wandered around looking for something that her brother could use for a snare. Eventually, she took her hair and braided it. She took it to her brother who said, “Just the thing, thank you.”

The brother took the braid and ran it through his mouth where it became a red metal thread. This he looped around and around his waist, and, saying goodbye to his sister, set out to snare the

sun.

He travelled a very long way until he came to the place where the sun came up. There he made a snare and waited until the next day. As the sun came up it was caught in the snare.

“There, now I have you, take that for shrinking my beautiful coat.”

Far away, the animals noticed that the sun had not come up. They were frightened, it always came up and if it didn't the world would freeze. They came together in a group and argued over what could be done.

They decided that someone must go to where the sun came up and see what was the matter. “Who shall we send?” Bear said.

Beaver said, “Let it be Doormouse, he is the biggest of us, and the bravest, he should go.”

And so they looked for Doormouse, but they could not find him. Weasel said, “He is afraid, he is hiding.”

Beaver scoffed at Weasel, “He is not afraid, nor is he hiding, I will call for him.” With that, Beaver called and slapped his tail on the earth.

Soon the animals felt the ground shake, and heard trees falling. The great bulk of Doormouse came into the clearing and in a voice that shook the air said, “What is it, why do you call?”

The animals explained that the sun had not come into the sky, and that they wanted Doormouse to go find out why.

“I will do this thing,” he rumbled, and immediately set off in the direction of the rising sun.

After a long time, Doormouse came to where the sun was trapped in the red snare. He instantly went through the glare of the sun and began to chew on the rope. The sun’s glare started to burn and sizzle his fur but Doormouse kept chewing.

In the bushes, the brother, who had snared the sun, was terrified at the power of the sun, and at the bravery of Doormouse.

For a long time Doormouse chewed at the ropes and all that time his fur sizzled and he began to shrink from the heat. Eventually, with a final bite, the rope parted and the sun could rise again.

Doormouse had been sizzled and shrunken down to a tiny size, and to this day that brave animal is one of the smallest. That is the story of how the Doormouse became small.

Amber nodded and said, “Thank you for that story.”

Later, Amber asked Coyote, “These people under the pond, they were descended from the brother and sister weren’t they?”

“They were.”

“And you slept with the sister and gave her many children.”

“Yes, you are correct.”

“And you gave them this safe place behind thick woods to live.”

“I did.”

“You are a good being, do you know that Coy?”

“I am very glad you think so my love. You are not upset that I have fathered these people?”

“How could I be upset? They are fine people, friendly and kind. I am happy to have met them. Shall we take our leave and continue our journey?”

“Tired of company already?”

“Just a little. I guess I’m not quite ready to go home yet.”

Coyote took her hand and they went around the corner to the pond where they stepped out of this village.

The Mountains

Coyote and Amber came to a vast lake surrounded by mountains. These were not new mountains, all upthrust and jagged, these mountains had been around for millions of years, perhaps even a billion or two. Glaciers, rain, snow, and wind had worn them down to the slumbering monsters they were now.

“Coy, I can feel the old spirits here, how are they present in this brand new world, why did you make them.”

“They are as they were in the old world, they’re perfect like this don’t you think?”

“But they are so aged, I can feel their heavy bodies on the world, they say nothing more to me than ‘I endure’, they are a great sadness to me.”

“How sad? They do indeed endure.”

“But they don’t have the thrust, the youth of the mountains out west, their best days are behind them, millions of years behind them.”

“Do you think so? They have calmness, they have wisdom, the new mountains shake and shudder and spew molten rock at each other. These mountains, like the ancient beings, have experience, they contemplate, they are no longer angry.”

“Could we speak to them?”

“Think how old they are, my love, to ask them a question would take years, and you would grow old waiting for the answer.”

“Have you talked to them?”

“A few sentences only, it took thousands of years, but it was worth it.”

“What did you ask?”

“The meaning of their existence, I was trying to define my own purpose in the universe.”

“And what did they say?”

“Simply, ‘We are,’ nothing more.”

“We are?”

“Is there anything else needed? Some purpose that flashes across the sky like lightning? Some brief flurry of activity that ends when you die? No, the meaning of their existence depends on nothing more than their existence. They are. I am, and you are.”

“I am... I am. Coy, why does that feel so comforting? It is so much less than what I have been taught.”

“My love, what more meaning could your existence have than that you are? You feel it because you understand it, you have from the very first cry you gave when you were born, that cry said to the world, ‘I am’ and that is sufficient. The world hears and agrees.”

Amber turned back to the mountains and looked for a long time before bowing deeply toward them. Coyote put his arm around her, leaned his head toward hers and said, “And I love you.”

“I am, and the being that I am loves you too. There is no other time, no other place than me, beside you here, loving you. The mountains have taught me that, you have taught me that.”

Coyote squeezed her shoulders a bit as they both looked at the mountains.

“Tell me a story of love, Coy.”

Coyote began to speak.

South Wind and Dandelion

Long ago, but not so long ago as the youth of the mountains there, South Wind came across a meadow and saw a beautiful maiden. She wore green and her hair was a bright yellow.

South Wind had never seen anyone like her before, and he was very old. Perhaps as old as these mountains.

Even if he was old, he was gentle, and shy, and he watched the girl from afar, vowing that the next day, he would talk to her.

The next day came, and he still hadn't talked to her. Then the next, and the next. South Wind was very shy. One day, when he came to the meadow, he could not see the girl, he thought "perhaps she has pulled her green hood up over her head. Maybe she will be here tomorrow."

The next day, South Wind did indeed see the maiden, but her hair had turned completely white. "Oh, she is now an old woman and I have missed my chance to tell her I love her."

South Wind watched as her hair fell out and as it did, he gently blew it away because he had finally realized he had waited too long.

As Coyote looked at Amber he noticed that both their eyes were shiny with almost tears. Amber sniffed and said "That is almost too sad, I am so glad you spoke to me Coyote."

"And I am glad that you answered, my love."

"The maiden was Dandelion wasn't she?"

“She was indeed.”

“Then she had children, South Wind helped to scatter them around. Did he ever talk to one of them?”

“That I don’t know, the story says no more, but Dandelions have spread everywhere, perhaps South Wind helps to spread them.”

“I would like to think so. Perhaps he loves them all.”

“Oh I am sure he does, Dandelion is such a helpful being, with so many qualities, it is only Humans who no longer see just what a wonderful person she is.”

“My mother and my neighbours try to get rid of Dandelions from their gardens and lawns. Are they wrong?”

“A weed is simply a flower in the wrong place, but they miss so much. I remember the Europeans coming to this land and bringing Dandelion with them. They were grateful for the spring food, the leaves are better, more nutritious than spinach, the yellow flowers can be brewed into wine, or used to colour fabric, the roots can be roasted to make a morning drink like coffee. Not only that, but in August, a lawn with Dandelion will remain green with the long taproots finding water, while the grass is brown and drab. Bees feed on the pollen as they wake up in the spring. Oh surely if only your mother and her neighbours knew more about Dandelion they would learn to love her like the South Wind.”

“What a wonderful thought, I will tell my mother the story of the South Wind and Dandelion when I see her next.”

At that moment, a warm breeze moved past Amber’s cheek. She lifted her hand and felt nothing but her cheek of course, but she turned to Coyote who nodded off to one side.

“Was that?”

“Yes, South Wind just kissed you for your promise to praise his love. You were right, he still loves Dandelion, and since she makes such beautiful seeds for him to play with, I suspect she still loves him.”

Amber smiled and kissed Coyote on the cheek. “I am, you are, South Wind is and I think I will pass it on.”

Coyote smiled.

Eli’s Bar

“Coy, why is there a bar in the middle of the bush here?”

“It’s a special bar run by a friend of mine.”

“What are those things parked outside, they look like flying cars.”

“They are, this bar was built about three hundred years from now, but it moves back and forth in time.”

“Eli?”

“Indeed, he learned that in the new world he could take a building back and forth through time, so he built a bar.”

“This area is a town in the future?”

“It is, but a small one, don’t worry, there are still lots of woods around.”

“How do you know this, Coy? Can you see into the future?”

“No, but Eli is tending bar and like I said, he’s a friend.”

“Mutt, can you read my mind too?”

“I can, but I never do my love, that would be a bad thing.”

“But you read Eli’s mind.”

“I did, because a bar in the middle of the woods with flying cars is something I want to know about, so I looked. It might have been dangerous.”

Amber frowned, but nodded. Beings who could read minds must be conflicted about doing so.

“Not really, love, I do it when I sense danger or anger. I have for many years because once I did not, and was surprised into an act I was not proud of.”

“You just read my mind, Mutt.”

“You broadcast that at me, you may as well speak when you do that, I can’t not hear it.”

Amber wasn’t sure whether to hug Coyote or hit him on the arm.

“I’d rather the hug.”

Amber laughed and did just that. “Can we go to the bar?”

“Of course, I’d like to say hello.”

As they walked through the door, Marissa greeted them warmly, “Your usual table?”

“Marissa! Hello, good to see you. How are you?”

“Better for seeing you, Amber. It’s been a while.”

“Coyote, this is Marissa, one of my students all grown up.”

“We’ve met often, you and I will go to this bar quite a lot, Amber, in the future.”

Marissa smiled, “At least once a week, your table is available, I’ll take you to it. Would you like menus?”

“Yes thank you, is Eli in?”

“He’s stepped out to get some muffins from next door.”

Amber and Coyote sat down in the back at a table that Amber felt was sort of familiar, “Coy this is confusing, it’s the first time I’ve ever been here but I have the feeling that I’m a regular.”

“Deja Vu is how people often name it, the feeling of doing something again, that you haven’t done before. It’s remembering the future.”

“It’s weird, that’s what it is.”

Coyote grinned and nodded as Marissa dropped two beers onto the table, along with menus.

“Coy I remember this beer, but I don’t think I’ve ever drunk a bright blue beer before.”

“Probably hasn’t been invented yet. Want to taste mine?”

“What is it? It’s got red and orange swirls.”

“Tastes like a strawberry orange IPA.”

“Do you like it?”

“It’s very good.”

“I’ll take your word for it and stick with my stout, it’s got a blueberry sort of note, but at least it tastes like beer.”

Coyote laughed, “You don’t know what you’re missing but OK, here’s to you, my love.”

Amber, always practical, asked Marissa about the stock markets when she came back to get the food orders.

“Um, well, actually Amber I think you’d have to ask Eli that, I can’t remember anything about the markets.”

“But you were just starting to get into them when I was teaching you.”

“I remember that, but I can’t remember what happened after that.”

Amber shrugged and ordered the fish and chips, and Coyote had a burger. When Marissa walked away, Amber turned to Coyote, “What’s up with that? Do you think she just didn’t want to tell us?”

“I think she would have, but the future is a tricky place, Amber, it may or may not happen, it’s best not to remember what is going to go on, if that makes sense.”

“I suppose it does, still, it would be nice to know what to put our money in.”

“Amber, we’ve got more money than we need, and we don’t need money in any case.”

“Well...”

“Capitalist.”

“Mutt.”

“Look, if she could remember the future, than that future would happen, it would be determined. Then where does free will go?”

“Oh lord Coy, let’s not get into that. I hate the idea that things are predetermined.”

“You know, I tried that once, in one of the worlds, I figured I would sketch out the entire history of what would happen, to make sure it didn’t go pear shaped.”

“What happened?”

“An asteroid.”

“What?”

“Something that I didn’t think of when I planned it all out.”

“You didn’t think of an asteroid?”

“I told you, I’m not a God.”

Amber laughed. “You are to me, my Lord”

“Goddess”

Amber opened her mouth to show Coyote some half eaten fries while she stuck her tongue out.

“OK maybe not.”

Eli came over to the table, “Hello Coy, hello Amber, good to see you.”

“Hey, Eli, Amber wants to know how the markets have done.”

“The markets will go up and down and the rich people will make money.”

Amber looked shocked, “That’s it? That’s all you can tell us?”

Eli grinned, “Rich people make sure they keep making money, you know that, so stay in the market, buy what the rich people

buy and they'll always make sure they make money. You don't need the details."

"But what about the crashes?"

"Sure, that's when you buy at a bargain."

"I knew that, didn't I?"

Coyote grinned, "She knew that, Eli."

"So why ask me?"

"Oh go soak your heads, both of you."

Eli pulled up a chair and the evening passed pleasantly, Coyote and Eli discussed the goings on in the spirit being world and Amber listened with half an ear. She looked around at the other patrons and wondered where they had come from, or rather when. She made up stories about them and vowed to make some music based on what she had imagined.

Toward the end of the evening, Eli stood and said he had better think about taking the building back to the time they came from, and offered to take Amber and Coyote along for the ride.

"Better not, Amber will just go buy newspapers for the financials," said Coyote, to a slap on the arm from Amber.

Eli grinned, "OK, thanks for the evening, the beers are on me."

Amber stood up and hugged Eli, “Thanks, that’s very nice of you.”

As Eli walked away he said over his shoulder, “No problem, I just bought some penny stocks that will go nuts over the next fifty years.”

“What!”

Amber Has a Story

As Amber and Coyote loped through the woods, they came upon a small hut with some colourful items displayed outside.

“For the deep woods, there sure are a lot of people around here Coyote.”

“Beings will find spaces and fill them up, that is certain.”

“Let’s go see what’s on the table there.”

Amber walked over and gasped, it was jewellery made of feathers and stones and other bits and pieces of the woods. She instantly picked up a pendant that was strung on a cedar root string, tied with a complicated knot that could be adjusted.

As she showed it to Coyote, a strange old being came out of the hut and smiled at her. “Do you like it?”

“It’s wonderful, of all the items here it seemed to talk to me.”

“Then it is the one for you. All of my pieces wait here for the one who will see them for what they are.”

“May I buy it?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I don’t take money, what would I do with it out here in the woods?. My price is a story.”

Amber’s face fell, “A story, but I don’t know any stories, Coyote has been telling them to me.”

“That is unfortunate, I don’t want a second-hand story, I want a new story.”

Coyote’s face grew a bit thunderous, “All stories are second-hand, that is what they are.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t make myself clear, I don’t want a story that you have told in the last week or so, I have very good ears and I have heard all of those, I would like one I haven’t heard for many years.”

Amber was feeling a bit sad. She turned her head to go when a warm, gentle breeze ruffled her hair. She looked up and said “South Wind?”

Coyote shook his head, “No, love, this is Chinook, the West Wind, I wonder what he is doing here, so far from his home.”

Amber’s eyes widened, “Coyote, he has given me a story.”

Coyote bowed toward the west and turned back to Amber. “Perhaps you would like to tell us your story?”

Amber smiled, “It would be my pleasure, I hope you like it.”

And with that, she began to speak.

The Windmaker

Long long ago there was a village in the mountains. They knew the mountains well, living and hunting there. One day, a young man, a strong hunter, moved toward the East, looking for game. He walked a long time, and noticed that the mountains became lower, less snowy, and he was fascinated.

He forgot about hunting and walked on, wondering what was beyond the low hills. After several days, during which he rested at night and walked by day, he came to an amazing sight, a flat land that stretched far into the distance until the land met the sky. “I must tell my people about this,” he said and turned around to go back to his village.

When he got back, the people were amazed that there was such a land under the sky. Imagine, a flat land. “We must see this land for ourselves, and see what is on the other side.”

The headman of the village heard this and said, “We are children of the mountains, we have always been here, we should not go to a new place when this place is where we belong.”

But the people were insistent, they wanted to see what was beyond the flat land. The argument went back and forth for many weeks until the headman realized his people wanted to go.

“Very well, I am your headman and I will lead you across this flat land because I love you and I want you to be happy.”

With that, the entire village packed up their tents and gathered their animals and set out down the mountain. They travelled until they found the lower hills, and finally, after a long walk, came to the flat land that the hunter had seen. “This is as far as I went, the rest of our journey will be unknown, said the young man.”

“We must see what is beyond the flat lands,” said the people of the village. The headman took one last look toward his beloved mountains and then turned to the flat lands and began to walk.

The people walked for weeks, stopping at night to rest and

walking every day. It was a hard trip and they grew thin, but they kept on, their desire to see what was beyond kept them going.

Eventually, they came to a massive river, so broad they could hardly see across it. They set up their camp and wondered what they could do. Before they could decide, a great wind came up and blew their tents into the water, the wind almost blew the people in as well, but they managed to hang on to each other. All their belongings and their food was gone.

When the wind died down, the headman said, “This was a wind from the Windmaker, back in our mountains. He is angry with us for leaving.”

The people were angry, “What right does he have to stop us.”

The young hunter stepped forward, he loved the headman’s daughter and wanted to prove himself worthy of her. “I will take my sharpest arrows and go kill this Windmaker who has tried to stop us.”

“He will not be easy to kill,” said the headman.

“I will go anyway, I will shoot him with my arrows,” and the young man began to run back the way they had come.

Eventually, he was back in the mountains and looking up, he saw a giant figure sitting on one of the tallest mountains. “That must be the Windmaker,” said the hunter, and began to climb

up the mountain. It took him days to climb up, and as he did, the giant being would shift as he sat, sending rocks bouncing down the mountain. The young man skipped out of the way and kept climbing.

When he got close enough, he selected his sharpest arrow and drawing his bow, fired at the giant. As the arrow flew straight and true, the Windmaker flapped one of his giant ears and blew the arrow aside. The young man fired again and again, but the giant flapped first one ear and then the other, and the arrows never reached him.

When the hunter was out of arrows, he didn't know what to do, but as he thought, the Windmaker flapped both ears and blew the hunter all the way down the mountain where he landed in some bushes.

Disheartened, the young man walked all the way back to where the villagers were camped by the river.

When he got there, the headman heard his story and said, "You are a brave warrior, you will have my daughter's hand and will be my son. Now I will go back and fight this Windmaker myself, because you villagers wish to go on with your journey."

The headman began running back to the mountains and when he got there he didn't bother with a bow and arrows, he drew his handaxe and climbed up the mountain.

Again, he had to dodge stones and boulders that came down the mountain at him, and as he approached, the Windmaker flapped his two ears at the man. The brave warrior was blown off of the mountain and half way back to the villagers. When he landed he was dead, and the Windmaker flapped his ears once more to blow the headman all the way back to his people.

Seeing that their leader was dead, they cried out at their foolishness which has caused such a brave man to die. They looked to the young hunter and he said, "We will go back to our mountains and live there as we always have."

This the villagers did and they are still living in the mountains where the Windmaker takes care of them.

And that is the story of the Chinook.

The old man smiled, "That was a good story, the pendant is yours and I'm pleased that you have found each other. I am also pleased to see that you, Coyote, have found such a good companion for yourself."

Coyote bowed to the old man and said in a formal voice, "As am I."

The Gift

“Coyote, what’s that sound?”

“Sounds like a crying child, we should go and look.”

Amber and Coyote left the creek they had been following, just to see where it went, and walked into the bush. After a kilometre or so, they came on a clearing where they found a toddler, crying. He was sitting on a stump, and behind him was a log cabin that had burned to the ground.

“Oh no, Coy, what happened here?”

“Looks like a wood fire that got out of hand, stay here with the boy and I’ll go see.”

Amber had a terrible feeling in the pit of her stomach. She knelt by the boy and quietly asked him his name.

“Meg... Megiwaywin.”

“Megiwaywin,” Amber repeated.

“Where is my Mom?” The boy started to cry again. Amber figured he couldn’t be more than three, but he seemed to know how to speak quite well.

Coyote came back and shook his head. He had found the parents, they were just at the door of the cabin. They must have

pushed the boy out and collapsed from the smoke.

Coyote sat down on the ground by the boy and waited until he stopped crying. “Mike, your parents are no more. Do you understand?”

The boy nodded gravely, as only three year-olds can do.

“Do you have any family around here?”

The boy shook his head.

“Is there anyone who can look after you, anyone you remember visiting your parents?”

Again, the boy shook his head.

Coyote looked at Amber, who nodded. “Mike will you come with us so we can look after you?”

The boy looked over his shoulder at the smouldering cabin, looked back and nodded, in a small voice he said, “Yes.”

“That’s good, I know where there is another cabin, it’s not far from here, shall I carry you?”

The boy nodded and lifted his arms, Coyote picked him up. Amber took a look around the clearing to see if there was anything to take. Not far from the front door was an old stuffed rabbit. Somehow she knew it had come from one of his

parents. They must have thrown it out of the burning house along with the boy. She picked it up, brushed the dirt off and gave it to the boy.

From the way he hugged it to himself, Amber realized this was his comfort toy. Her eyes were full of tears as she thought of how the parents had saved the little rabbit along with their son.

Soon the boy was asleep in Coyote's arms when Amber asked, "How did you know they called him Mike?"

"I read it in his mind, and it's a common nickname for his long name.

"What does it mean, his name?"

"Gift."

"Oh God. Coyote..."

Coyote nodded, "Sometimes I don't like my world."

Amber put her hand on his arm and walked beside him.

After a while they came to another clearing, in it was a log cabin and there was a fire going, smoke rose from the chimney, a proper chimney. Coyote walked right in and Amber understood he must have created it just then.

As she got in she looked around. Two bedrooms, a wonderful kitchen, a loft attic, and a common room at the front with a wood stove.

On the roof she saw solar panels and a wind turbine.

She could feel somehow that there was a basement with a cool room and all the modern appliances, including enough battery power to supply everything.

Amber looked at Coyote with a small frown. It looked like he intended that they stay here, and yet, he talked of going back to Guelph.

Coyote put the boy to bed in his room. He made sure to tuck rabbit in beside him. Amber noticed there were toys all over the room, and a hobby horse.

When they went back to the main room, Amber put a kettle on the wood stove and they sat silently while it boiled. After making tea, Amber looked at Coyote, “Will we be staying here?”

“Until he is old enough, yes I think so, is that all right with you?”

“You know it is, love. Where you are is where my life is.”

Coyote dropped his eyes, “I don’t deserve you.”

“Mutt, if anything, I don’t deserve you. Will he be all right?”

“I hope so, do you want me to make him forget his parents?”

“No, don’t do that, he should remember them. Will we make good parents?”

“You’re kidding, you are parent to every child you’ve ever taught. We will be just fine.”

“OK then. Coyote how did you know this cabin was in the back of my mind.”

“It wasn’t, as soon as you saw the boy you broadcast this place to me. Is it close enough to your desire?”

“It’s perfect, and I knew there was a cold room in the basement as soon as I walked in, that’s how perfect it is.”

“Coyote smiled, shall I make some food?”

“Don’t you dare, I’m the first to use my kitchen, you sit here and enjoy your tea.”

Coyote smiled and watched as Amber discovered her ideal kitchen. Only once did she frown, a pot that she wanted wasn’t hanging by the stove. “Look in the third drawer down.”

Amber did and it was there, she grinned at Coyote and took it out, looked at the hooks and there was a place for it.

The boy slept through the rest of the day and all night. When he woke in the morning, Amber had breakfast ready for him. The boy seemed fine, and Amber looked at Coyote who shook his head. “Youngsters recover fast.” was all he said.

The boy explored the main floor before settling down with a wiggle at the kitchen table. He had his rabbit in his arms and put it beside him on the big captain’s chair. The rabbit fit into the chair and was prevented from falling by the arms. Coyote had another arm chair on the opposite side of the table, and Amber had a regular arm-less chair for herself.

Mike ate his oatmeal and toast, and said little except to thank Amber while he did. When he was done, he looked up and said, “Can I look upstairs?” pointing at the loft.

“Of course you can,” said Amber, who hadn’t looked there herself. She followed him up and found, to her delight, a child’s library, a child-sized violin, her own violin, and just about everything else she would need to educate a child, including crafting supplies.

She looked over the rail at Coyote and shook her head. “Mutt,” was all she said, and he grinned.

Mike had found the cubbies with construction materials and was busy making something or other. Amber climbed down the spiral stair and left him to it.

Mike Grows Up

Amber sat close and said quietly, “Coyote, tell me the truth, did you create Mike.”

“I wouldn’t do that, Amber, he is real.”

“But a cabin in the woods, no relatives...”

“I don’t honestly know, Amber, I didn’t pick up the story when I checked the place. Things like that happen. Maybe they were hiding from someone, maybe they were created and died when we created the world.”

“OK then, we’re here and we’re parents. Are you content with that? You don’t want to take him back to Guelph and raise him there?”

“Do you think that would be best?”

“I don’t know. He’s never known a lot of people, we’ll stay here for a while and see how it goes.”

“There are people around here, not family, they don’t know of Mike or his parents, but there are some people a couple of kilometres away in a small village. There is a store that an old

friend runs, so we can shop for things there.”

“OK that will do I suspect. We can change things if we need to.”

“Will you teach him?”

“We will both teach him, Coy, I’ll home school him and you will teach him about the woods.”

Coyote nodded and went to fill the kettle for morning tea. Upstairs he heard the boy start to cry, he was heading for the staircase when Amber hissed. Coyote looked and Amber shook her head, ‘let him mourn,’ she thought at Coyote and he nodded. After a while, the crying stopped and they could hear him moving his construction logs around.

When Amber called Mike down for lunch, he came carefully down the stairs and sat in his chair. “Is this my home now?”

“It is, will it be OK for you?”

“Yes.”

“Here is a grilled cheese, do you like it?”

Mike looked a bit doubtful but he tried it, “I’ve never had chilled grease, but it’s good.”

“That’s nice, I’m glad you like it, it’s what I liked best when I was a little girl.”

“But you’re not little now and you’re eating a chilled grease.”

“Big people can like chilled grease too.”

Mike nodded seriously, as if he was filing that away.

“Did you have fun building, this morning?”

“Yes, I built a cabin.”

“Would you like to show it to me after lunch? And then maybe we could do something together?”

“Yes please.”

For the first few years, Amber taught Mike to read and write, and do math, and all the other things that children like to do. She started teaching him violin and he loved that. He would practice on his own for hours at a time.

Amber went outside once, to check on him as he practised his music and she discovered that he was almost covered with butterflies, they seemed to be dancing to his tune. Mike was laughing as he played.

Amber quietly went back inside, “Coyote, is Mike magical? He’s out there calling butterflies to himself and making them dance.”

“He’s learning from you, Amber, and from me. Even though we don’t make a fuss about it, he watches us and learns to use his own magic. We don’t just teach him schooling and woodlore, but we give him a lot of who we are too.”

“Is that wise? What will he become?”

“Himself, he will become himself.”

Amber nodded, of course he would, their child would be who he became and that would be the whole of it.

When he was thirteen, there was a cold snap and Amber went into Mike’s room to check that he was covered up. He wasn’t, but there was a coyote and his nose was tucked under his tail for warmth. Amber’s face showed thunder as she began to sing, but at the last moment, she realized it was her Son, curled up on the bed.

She left quietly and went to sit beside Coyote, “He’s a shape changer, he’s a coyote. How can that be?”

“Art changes now, he was taught by Okami and Stan.”

“Have you been teaching him?”

“Yes, as we ran in the woods, I changed him to a coyote so we could run further. Was I wrong to do that?”

“No, no you weren’t Mutt, but you could have warned me. Before I knew it was Mike, I almost attacked him.”

“I’m sorry love, you’re right, I should have told you.”

“I’ll talk to him, he’s started to go into the village and make friends when we send him for supplies, I’ll tell him not to let anyone see him change.”

“The shopkeeper knows who I am, he’ll keep an eye on Mike for us.”

“Good. Coy I have to ask you, you’ve had children before haven’t you?”

“Yes, you know that, the village under the pond, for example.”

“Do all your children end up shape changing?”

“No, not all, especially when I took a Human wife. Sometimes they have powers, sometimes not.”

“But Mike isn’t yours, not genetically.”

“Amber, he became ours the moment we picked him up in our arms at his cabin. We’re spirit beings, both of us, and when he became our child, he changed.”

“What? No, that isn’t right. We took his genetics away from his parents?”

“No, added to. It’s nothing we can decide on, just by being with us his genetics change. There’s so much more than the DNA sequence, you know this.”

“So by being with us, his epigenetics changes and he becomes ours?”

“Yes.”

“Coy, how many children have you adopted?”

“More than I can count, love, more than I remember.”

“All those worlds, all those years, you watch people come and go, you watch children grow old and die...”

“Yes.”

“Is that why you forget? Why you live in the present and hardly ever talk about the past?”

“It’s all there, Amber, I can remember it all, but I try not to. I’m not like Ingrid. A Goddess can remember it all, keep it in her

head but she's a Goddess, something else, and I've known her to be sad about those she's lost, but she's built differently than us."

"Us? You mean you're part Human?"

"No love, you're part Coyote and part your own power."

"Is that why you made me Coyote? So I wouldn't die and leave you alone again?"

"Oh love, no, I would never do that for such a selfish reason. It really was nothing more than you insisting I fix the world, and me letting you have a try at it. You know I'm not terribly bright, it just seemed like the right thing to do at the time. Do you hate me for it?"

Amber sat closer and hugged Coyote, "Silly Mutt, I love you for it, we'll have more than a lifetime together. That is a greater gift than anyone could ever give me. I thank you for making me Coyote, and for teaching me who you really are."

"A crazy trickster spirit?"

"A man, a being who cares, who, despite what happens, despite how badly Humans and other beings screw up the world, keeps trying to be kind, to make life better."

Coyote was quiet, eventually he said, "You give me too much credit."

“Mutt, I’ve been you. I remember every time you tried to fix things, and for most of those it worked. I remember that one time you made someone never exist, and I don’t blame you. I would have done so much worse. You are a good being, so much better than most of the so-called Gods we Humans have created.”

“Let me put another log on the fire and we can join Mike in dreamland.”

“Eventually, Coy, eventually.”

Mike grew into a handsome young man, he went more and more often into town, where he met a young woman and fell in love. He brought her back to the cabin to meet his parents, and he met hers.

When Amber realized he was serious about her, she looked closely at the girl. There was magical potential there, a lot of it. She was the shopkeeper’s daughter and she’d known Mike all her life. Fine, Amber took Mike aside one day, “Does she know what you can do, Son?”

“She knows, Mother, when I fell in love with her I told her, and showed her. Her father is a Shaman, so she wasn’t frightened. She can talk with the spirits herself.”

Amber cupped Mike's cheek, she had tears in her eyes, "I'm happy for you, Son, to have found someone at your age is a special thing. Please be gentle and kind."

Later, when Mike had gone out to be with Marie, Coyote came to sit with Amber. "How can he not be gentle and kind, with a mother like you. I sense that he will be leaving us soon. He has asked her father for her hand, and he agreed, we have talked about this, Albert and I. Now it's time for you to give your blessing too."

"Of course I do, they love each other, and she is a sweet girl who knows what Mike is. What agreement have you made with Albert?"

"I thought they might have this cabin, and Albert will pass the store along to them when it's time."

"We will leave?"

"Can you let go of our home and our son?"

Amber was quiet. After a few moments, Coyote realized she was crying. He got up and made tea, leaving her to her thoughts. When the tea was ready he handed her a cup and she looked up, thanking him.

"I think I can let him go, I've had almost twenty years with him, he's a magnificent young man, who knows well the lessons we have taught him. Yes, I can let him go."

“We will see him again.”

“Will he grow old, will they both grow old?”

“Yes.”

“Oh Coyote, how have you lived with this, to see so many people, so many children grow old and leave you?”

“It breaks my heart, every time love, as it will break yours, I’m sorry for that.”

“Is it worth it? The pain?”

“A thousand times over, would you have missed watching our Son grow up?”

“Never, never would I have passed this life up to save the pain later. But I know about a Human lifespan, I was Human. What about you?”

“I have lived forever, I suppose, but I have lived a lifetime at a time, and I would never have it any other way.”

“We are blessed, aren’t we?”

“I know for certain that I am, love. I’m not so sure about you.”

Amber kissed Coyote and then tugged his ear.

Leave-taking

Things worked out as Coyote had arranged them, Mike and Marie moved into the cabin Mike grew up in, and Mike took over half the work in the store. They looked happy, and Amber was content that they would be happy for a long time. She and Coyote said goodbye, promising to visit often and walked out the front door for the last time.

At the edge of the clearing, they turned back to wave at the new couple standing on the porch.

When they walked into the woods, Amber asked Coyote if it would turn out well. “That’s up to them, as it always is with new couples. You raised Mike to be kind and patient, and Albert will keep an eye on him. I think that’s as good a start as anyone will ever have.”

“I think you’re right, Coy. I’m so pleased that he found someone...” Amber stopped, she had felt something, a dislocation in time, as she realized.

“What have you done, Coyote?”

“We are back to our timeline, about a week after we found Mike.”

“Why? No, don’t, how will we visit Mike!”

“The why, my love, is that your friends and students would mourn your loss because of the two decades that we’ve been gone. They will think you dead. As for the visits, maybe it’s a good time to tell you that we own 49 percent of a certain bar.”

Amber stopped, thinking about that, “49 percent of... Eli’s bar!”

“Yes, he stops regularly in the village, and when we want to visit, all we need do is invite Mike and Marie to come for a meal and a beer.”

“Oh you clever dog you, did you plan that all along?”

“Certainly, one of us has to think ahead.”

“Think ahead, oh ha ha. Well I’m glad you never told me, I so much enjoyed raising Mike and watching him grow into a wonderful young man. And now I can keep an eye on him and watch as he moves along with his life. Coyote, we won’t go visit during the time up to now will we?”

“Why? We have been there, and we would meet ourselves, that would be a bit awkward, think of all the advice we’d be tempted to give ourselves.”

“Oh dear, can you imagine me telling me how to do things?”

“No, I would be running when you tried to do that.”

Amber laughed hard, and as they walked on she would break into chuckles as she thought up more and more advice for her younger self. It was too much fun imagining how she would respond to her older self. Coyote, for his part, walked slightly behind with a silly grin on his face.

“Coy, tell me a story, it’s been a long time since we’ve walked to nowhere while you’ve told me one.”

Coyote started to speak.

Moowis

Amber I’m not sure you will like this story, it is about a couple but it doesn’t turn out very well.

Amber nodded for him to go on, so Coyote began.

There was once a village far out west of here, and in it was a beautiful maiden, the daughter of the headman. She was very good to look at but she was aloof, no man in the village was good enough for her.

Hunter after hunter came to woo her but she gave them all the same answer, a rude gesture with her hand, and then she would turn her back in contempt. For many years she did that, and her father despaired that she would never be wed.

There was a young man in the camp, whose name was Beau-man. He was very proud, and dressed very finely. One day he approached the maiden and asked her for her hand. Although he was very handsome, a man any maiden would be happy to wed, she was especially rude to him.

When this happened, the other young men in the village laughed at him, glad that he had finally got his comeuppance.

The young man was angry and depressed. He retreated to his tent and refused to come out, or even to eat.

This was just before springtime, and the village had been hunting for the winter. Soon it was time for them to go back to their summer location and they began to pack up. They asked Beau-man to go with them, but he refused, staying in his bed.

The village packed up, and even picked up Beau-man's tent right from over him and moved away, leaving him in his bed out in the open.

After a few days alone at the old campsite, Beau-man got up. He had an idea. He looked around the camp and found old beads, ribbon, dirty feathers, bits of cloth, and other things that were discarded, ground into the dirt and wet with snow. These

he arranged roughly into clothing lying on the ground. Next he found bits and scraps of leather and made rough shapes like moccasins, these he put with the clothing.

When he was done, he gathered up dirt and snow and stuffed the shoes and the clothing so that a rough man-shaped thing was there. Beau-man then asked the spirits to help him and they made the fake man come alive. Beau-man said “your name is Moowis and you should go to a certain village.”

This Moowis did, and once there, he was received very well. He had the appearance of a proud hunter, well dressed and of impeccable manners. The maiden was smitten, she fell deeply in love with this wonderful young man.

The headman invited Moowis into his tent, and asked him to sit beside him close to the fire. Moowis did so, but soon shifted back a little bit, putting a boy between him and the fire. As the maiden looked longingly at him, Moowis shuffled and shifted closer and closer to the door. He was in danger of melting.

Seeing how his daughter looked at Moowis, the headman asked him to sit in the bridegroom seat, which meant that Moowis was married to his daughter. This Moowis did.

Soon it was nighttime, and Moowis took his leave of the headman, saying there was somewhere he had to go. The maiden asked to go with him, but he said no, he had to go alone.

Still she asked and asked, and finally Moowis said she could come along. The maiden bid farewell to her father and left to follow her husband, who was already walking out of the village.

Moowis walked swiftly, all night, so fast that the maiden had to run to keep up, but by the time the sun came up, he was far ahead. Soon the sun was warm enough to start to melt the snow man and the maiden found a scrap of a moccasin, then another, then a pile of filthy and wet strips of cloth and feather.

On and on she ran, trying to catch up with Moowis and calling his name, but he was no more. Still the maiden ran on, and for many years she searched from village to village for her husband, never finding him. The village maidens felt sorry for her and made a sad song that they sang when she came into sight. They still sing that song to this day as a warning to each other about looking for the perfect man.

“That was indeed a sad story, Coyote, but I can’t see Marie being that picky, or Mike melting in the sun. Still, it’s a good warning, and I’m not so picky as that maiden. Am I?”

As Amber looked hard at Coyote, he laughed and laughed, “Lucky for me!”

Time Travel

Coyote looked serious, “Amber, Eli says that you’re monopolizing the Bar, visiting Mike every day, and Marie says that she appreciates you teaching her all of Mike’s favourite meals, she thinks that maybe you’re being a bit of a Mother-in-law.”

“What? What are you talking about, we just left them and I haven’t gone anywhere near them yet.”

“Ah, well apparently you will, Eli says so.”

“You’re kidding. And so what happens now? Do I change the future by not visiting so much?”

Coyote smiled, “It’s the future, you can’t change it, it hasn’t happened yet.”

“Now you’re making my head hurt.”

“Sorry love, you’ll get used to it eventually now that you’re going to be moving back and forth in time.”

“Listen, why are we at the cabin of Mike’s parents?”

“We just sort of ended up here. Should I recreate it for us to be near Mike?”

“If you do that am I going to get pregnant and are we going to have Mike and then die in a fire?”

“Amber, it’s a week after we found Mike, not nine months before. How do you come up with something like that and still complain you don’t understand time?”

“Bad Science Fiction stories, I read a lot of them when I was a kid.”

“Oh, that might explain it. Anyway, no, nothing like that happened, don’t worry about it.”

“I’m not ready to go back to Guelph quite yet, but let’s move on. Will Eli’s bar be near us if we keep wandering?”

“More time travel stuff, yes the world moves around in space, so if you move back in time you need to go to where it is... You see?”

“And if you can change your celestial position, you can adjust it a bit.”

“See, you do know this stuff.”

“It still makes my head hurt. Coyote, how many time travellers end up in the middle of space?”

“Most of them I’m afraid, which is probably a good thing. Too much killing your Grandpa really destabilizes a world.”

“Oh, I remember that one. Ouch. Whatever possessed you to create a world where time travel was easy?”

“Have you met me?”

Amber hugged Coyote and took his arm as they walked away from Mike’s old cabin.

As they walked, Amber asked Coyote to tell her a tale of love.

The White Hawk

There was a great hunter once, whose name was White Hawk. He always came back with birds or game, because he was very skilful.

One day he walked far enough that he saw a vast grassland, and he was amazed for he lived in the woods. He walked out onto the plain and knew that nobody lived there, he could find no sign of footsteps at all.

Eventually he came to a flat area of the grass, a perfect circle. He thought to himself, ‘someone must have come here to make this circle.’ and he decided to wait to see who it was. He sat in

the tall grass for a while when he saw a large woven basket come down from the sky. The basket landed in the middle of the circle and twelve beautiful maidens stepped out and began to dance in a circle.

He was enchanted, they were all beautiful, but he decided he liked the youngest the best. Rising from the grass, he walked toward the dancing maidens and tried to embrace the one he had chosen. When the girls saw him they ran quickly to the basket and sang it back up into the sky. He had not even got close to the girl.

White Hawk was sad that he hadn't caught the maiden, but he decided he was not going to give up. He came back the next day and changed himself into a possum and hid in the grass. Sure enough the basket came down and the maidens began to dance. As they did, the possum approached but they saw it and ran back to the basket. "Perhaps it has come to show us how mortals dance" said the oldest, but the youngest said, "Oh no, let us go up to the sky," and that is what they did.

White Hawk was disappointed that he had once again frightened the sisters off, but more determined than ever to meet the maiden. The next day he found an old stump, with a family of mice living inside. White Hawk changed himself to a mouse and moved the stump next to the circle.

When the sisters came down, they noticed the stump, and approached to see what it was. As they did, the mice ran out and the girls chased them down and killed them. As the

youngest came near the last mouse, White Hawk changed to a man and embraced her.

The other sisters cried out and ran to the basket and sang themselves up into the sky, leaving the youngest there. White Hawk took the maiden to his camp and treated her kindly and gently. Eventually she was happy to be there, and they had a son together. After the boy was able to walk, the young woman began to miss her father, the Star.

One day when her husband was hunting, she took the boy to the magic circle and wove a basket. Putting the boy into the basket she stepped in too, and sang them up into the sky. When White Hawk came back to the camp he was very sad to see that his family was gone.

The young woman was joyous to be with her sisters and her father the Star, but after a few years, the boy wanted to go visit the place where he was born. The Star said to his daughter, "Take the boy to see his father, and when you come back, bring White Hawk, but tell him to bring a piece of every animal that he hunts."

This the woman did, and White Hawk was very happy to see her and his son once more. When he heard about the Star's request he set about killing all the animals he needed. This took some time and the family was happy together. Eventually he killed many animals, and from some he took feet, from others a wing, and from some a tail.

Gathering all the pieces together, he took them and his family to the basket, where the young woman sang them up into the sky.

It was a joyous reunion there and the Star was pleased with the gifts he received. He called all his people together and told them to pick what parts they were most pleased with. As each person took a part, they were changed into that animal and flew or jumped from the sky back to the earth.

For his part, White Hawk took the foot of a white hawk, as did his wife and son. The three of them spiralled down to the earth, flying a long way until they came to some tall trees. "That is where we will build our nest," he said and the three landed in the tallest of the trees.

"Thank you Coyote, but you forgot to say that they lived happily ever after."

"But I don't know if they did or not, why would I make up something like that?"

"Isn't that a story of how all the animals came to be?"

"The animals were there for the hunter to kill, you're being circular again Amber."

“Well, it was a lovely story anyway.”

The Maze

“It’s a maze.”

“A what?”

“A labyrinth, someone has created a puzzle out here in the middle of the woods.”

“Who would do that? And who is it for?”

“I don’t know, shall we go walk the maze?”

“Sure, and Coy?”

“Yes?”

“Will we be A-Mazed at what we find?”

Coyote walked into the maze without saying anything, after a few feet he muttered, “It’s probably time to go back to Guelph.”

“I heard that Mutt.”

They walked on, turning and turning again. Amber wasn't worried about getting lost, not when Coyote could put them back anywhere they wanted to be, but she was soon quite lost. "This is a big maze, Coy, have you seen anything like it?"

"No, it's new to me, I have a feeling it's not entirely of this world."

"What? Like the tunnel under the mountain that the Elves use to get to the other world?"

"It's possible, new worlds tend to leak a bit. This thing is certainly made, it's not natural like the tunnel is. Shall we keep going?"

"Of course, what do you and I have to worry about? You've got your powers and I've got my violin."

"Not to mention your other powers."

On they went, it took three days of travel and they were still not at the end, Amber was getting a bit annoyed. "Why don't we just jump to the end?"

"With these things, if we do that we won't get where we're supposed to go. You've walked mazes before right? You can step over the lines or the rocks and be at the end just as you start, but you don't get the benefit."

"Well I'm getting tired of this thing."

“Patience, love, you just spent 20 years raising a child, you know it’s not a short-term thing. Besides, I am curious to know where this thing comes out.”

“Not the other world of the Gods and the Elves?”

“It doesn’t feel like it.”

“Not the things that made holes in the old world? Surely not.”

“No, someplace else, and we should make sure it’s harmless.”

“Oh you had to say it, look up ahead, it looks like a big snake hanging down over the path.”

“So it does, have you seen anything like it before? You like snakes.”

“Well it looks like some kind of a constrictor from the size of it, what’s it doing out here in the north woods? Should be too cold for it.”

“I get the feeling we’re not in our woods any more Dorothy.”

“Doro... oh, thanks for the bulletin, Toto. You’re right though, that green and gold colour scheme is all wrong, unless it’s from Jamaica.”

“Sssaint Jamaica wouldn’t have someone like me.”

Amber jumped back a couple of feet, “You talk!”

“Ssssure, why wouldn’t I?”

Coyote was looking at the snake carefully, “You’re part of the tree.”

“Sssso what if I am? Where’s your host?”

“No hosts for us, we’re independent units.”

“Ssssacrilage, don’t go any further, they will kill you as ssssports. Independentsss aren’t allowed in the home.”

“You come from a place called Home?” asked Amber.

“Of coursss. Are you dim?”

Coyote smiled, “Most worlds are called Home, what other name would there be? And you’re one of “The People” I suspect?”

“You know our namessss?”

“Just a guess. We would like to go on, regardless of the risk.”

“Be it on your own headsss, but tell me, where did you come from?”

“Just down the path.”

“What path? What is a path?”

“Right, thank you for your help, we’ll move along.”

“Jussst remember, I warned you.”

Coyote and Amber moved along and now that they were looking, they saw many creatures in the trees, they all watched as the two walked by. They seemed amazed and a little angry to see such a display of mobility, but nobody tried to stop them.

In half a day, they came upon a village with a river. Amber’s eyes lit up, “It’s Elora, we’ve walked back to Elora. But why are their Halloween decorations up?”

Coyote shook his head, “Have another look. This isn’t our Elora.”

Amber looked closer and realized that the paper and wire sculptures she expected were actually alive, and attached to the buildings. Not only that, but they were anything but cute, in fact they were angry looking and some of them were reaching for the two.

“Maybe go to the middle of the street, Coy?”

“No sense getting into a fight, yes.”

As they walked down the street, the creatures from the buildings reached out and called them names, “Abominations! Sports! Runaways! Get over here and we’ll reattach you, you’re going to die if you don’t get rooted again!”

Amber shook her head, “Equal parts hurtful and helpful.”

Coyote was a little way ahead, kneeling down. Amber walked up to him and looked, he was petting a small grey cat. As she bent over she heard the cat speak, “What? Another loose cannon? What’s with you two?”

“What do you mean, we’re walking around unattached? Well, unattached to a tree or a building.”

“So you’re attached to each other?”

“Clever kitty, yes. And how are you walking around free while everything else is attached?”

“Same as you, I came down the path, obviously.”

“Um, cats don’t speak on our end of the path, and what do you eat over here?”

“How do you know cats can’t speak? Because you’ve never heard one? That’s a bit autocratic don’t you think?”

“So cats can talk in our world?”

“No, but they could do, right? Just because you’ve never heard one doesn’t mean it couldn’t happen.”

“Right, so you started talking over here in this world. And what do you eat?”

“Mice, rats, bugs, things that came along the path, things I followed over here.”

Coyote cut in, a talking cat didn’t much disturb him, “What is this world? And more important, is it a threat to our world?”

“As far as I can see, sir, it’s a harmless place if you keep to the paths and the streets where they can’t get hold of you.”

“Paths and streets...”

“Yeah, I can’t figure that one out either, why are there paths and streets if everything is attached to everything else. They really like being attached to things, I’ve seen mice and bugs caught and stuck on to buildings where they stay. They don’t seem to be hurt, or hungry so I think it’s just that kind of a place.”

Amber looked concerned, “Coy what if everyone here was once free to move around, but they stuck each other onto things so they wouldn’t? Maybe it was a religious thing? No wandering off? That would explain the old streets and paths. Can we help? Can we free the beings from the trees and buildings?”

“Amber, why would we free beings who don’t want to be free. I can see your point, and maybe it was religion but I’d be willing to bet it was a pretty basic religion, called social pressure. Don’t go away from home, there be dragons, that sort of thing.”

“But don’t you think they’d be happier to be able to move around?”

“They look happy enough, and they want to stick us to a wall, I’d say leave them be.”

Amber wasn’t sure, but didn’t say anything more.

Coyote looked at the cat, “Do you want to come along with us? We’re eventually going back to our world again.”

“Sure, this place is a bit dangerous to someone like me who doesn’t want to be tied down.”

Amber was concerned, “What if you can’t talk any more when you get home?”

“Talking isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, Mistress, I got along just fine by purrs, merrrs, and yowls. The trick is to find humans smart enough to know what it is you want.”

The Other World

Amber, Coyote and the cat walked along out of the town and back into the woods. Almost every tree and rock seemed to have something attached to it, and as the cat said, many beings were from the old world.

“Cat, when did you come over here?”

“A year ago maybe, why do you ask?”

“Because the world back on the other side of the path is brand new, less than a year. This world and the maze must have been attached to the old world.”

Amber looked puzzled, “But how can that be, Coyote you told me there were no other worlds, and this one would make number four.”

“Four plus another fourteen if you remember love, but the old world wasn’t supposed to have any others attached. I suspect it got older and a bit leaky. That happens, if you remember.”

“I remember that the one just before the last one was full of other worlds.”

“Yes, and it was a real problem, that’s why I made the last one a loner. Other worlds are out there but not always accessible.”

“You tried to make this one a loner too?”

“No, not specifically, what’s the point? Worlds seem to have a mind of their own.”

“What?”

The cat looked around at them from up ahead, “What are you two nattering about? Look, it goes on like this forever, woods and towns, how long do you want to walk?”

“You getting tired, cat? And what is your name anyway?”

“Cat. Just like yours is Coyote.”

Amber was startled, “You know his name?”

“He told it to me.”

“No, I mean you know that, um...”

“That his name is what he is, and that nobody seems to notice that? Sure, you think I’m stupid or something? Same thing happens to me.”

Amber shook her head, she wasn’t going to get into this with a cat.

Coyote was smiling, “Think of it as a title, people don’t have any trouble saying “Doctor” so why would they have a problem with Coyote.”

“Because they know what a Doctor is, and they know most of them have names as well, but you don’t have a name.”

“Sure I do.”

“What!”

“It’s Poochy, Poochy McDoggie”

“What!”

“And my nickname is Mutt.”

Amber shook her head and walked faster down the path to leave Coyote and Cat to laugh behind her.

Eventually they came back to the start of the maze they had arrived on. Coyote looked around thoughtfully, “Either this world is tiny or something doesn’t want us to see what’s really here.”

“We need to figure that out, Coy, we can’t leave a dangerous world attached to the new one.”

“Pick up Cat and take my hand, let’s go up.”

Amber wasn't sure what Coyote meant, but took his hand. The three of them rose up into the sky, and at a tremendous speed, headed at 90 degrees to the path they had walked on. Soon they realized that the world was indeed just a tiny piece of ground.

Back at the start of the maze, Amber commented, "Well what do you expect from a place where nobody ever goes anywhere, when everyone is so set in their ways, what would they need of a big world?"

"Unkindly put, but accurate I suppose."

Cat shook his head, "Let's go see this new world of yours, I'm tired of this place."

As they started along the path, Cat looked back. "I'm not going to miss this place."

That was all that was said about the world of fixed folk for the next day. On the second day of walking, Cat looked up at the humans, "you guys are boring, anybody got a story?"

Amber took offence, "Boring? No we don't have a story."

"Well then, I'll tell you one. This is from about 300 years ago when I was living on the edge of the prairie."

"What? How old are you?"

Coyote put his hand on Amber's shoulder, and she listened to Cat's story.

Koto and the Bird

Long ago, there was a boy named Koto and he lived in a village near the plains. I lived in the same village and was treated kindly so I stayed around. Also food, they fed me.

Koto's father was a great hunter and Koto wished to be the same. One day all the hunters went off on their horses, and Koto was left with the other children and the women, along with a pony who was a bit lame. Koto got a great idea, or at least he thought it was great. The pony was almost recovered and he decided that he would ride it out onto the plain.

He jumped aboard and called for the pony to gallop, which the pony did. They had not gone far when the poor beast stepped into a badger's hole and fell, throwing Koto off of his back. The pony had broken his leg and Koto's own leg was trapped under the pony, it was broken too.

The boy and the pony lay there for a long time until Koto's mother noticed they were gone and went out to find them. This she did and carried Koto home again. "Your leg is broken and so is the pony's, the hunters will have to kill him when they return."

Koto was upset, not about his leg, but because he had caused the death of the pony. He lay in his bed for the rest of the summer, and then the village moved into the woods for the winter. They moved the entire camp and then his father carried Koto to the new place saying, “You will not live in a tent this winter, I have a surprise for you.”

When they got to the new camp, Koto was amazed to see a log cabin, some Europeans had built it and then left it. Koto was amazed to be inside such a place. He spent a long, boring winter there, until one day a small bird flew in through the door to get away from the cold.

The bird stayed near Koto and he fed it from his hand. The bird kept him company for the long winter, until one day in spring, another bird came to the open door and sang. The little bird looked at the visitor and flew out the door. Koto was sad, his friend was gone and didn't come back.

By this time Koto could walk a little, and went outside to sit against a tree. One day he spotted his bird friend, who came to him and sang her song. A short way away, another bird watched but would not come near.

As the days went on, Koto watched the two birds fly toward the cabin and disappear. He went back in but they never showed up inside, even though he was sure they had gone in.

This went on for a while, the birds flew to the same place on the wall, seeming to disappear. Finally, Koto looked hard in the

cabin and saw an old coat the Europeans had left hanging on a nail. He picked up the coat and to his surprise, his little friend poked her head out of a pocket to chirp at him.

Koto put the coat back over the hole in the logs, and eventually, the eggs in the pocket hatched. At that point, the father bird finally came into the cabin to help feed the young.

Eventually, Koto's leg healed and the bird family grew up enough to fly away. This time Koto was not sad, he knew his little friend had a mate and was happy. And that's the story of Koto and the bird.

Amber shook her head. "It is a nice story, but does it have a point?"

Cat stared at her, "Does it have a point? What, like a moral or something? It's a story that I saw, and I've now told you. What more do you want, honestly, does a story have to have a point? It's just a story."

"So Koto learned to be happy for someone else?"

"Sure, yes, that's the moral of the tale, be happy for someone else and not sad for yourself. Why not?"

Amber was a bit angry to be cided this way. Coyote was one

thing, but a Cat? “Listen you, were cats even in North America when this story happened?”

“Cats have been here since the Vikings, about a thousand years ago, but I’ve been here a lot longer.”

Coyote smiled behind his hand and kept walking.

ZZZZZZZZ

The Trickster War

Finally, the walk along the maze came to an end. As the three travellers stepped off the labyrinth path, the cat took off running as fast as he could go. At that exact moment, Coyote shoved Amber hard, and she flew many metres into the bush to land with a thump.

As she turned to ask why Coyote would do such a thing, she saw him half change, at the same time a bolt of lightning hit him, singeing his fur and setting much of the bush around him on fire. Amber was stunned, and started to get up to go to him, but he waved her back down again with a growl.

Coyote looked into the sky and aimed his hand, palm open, at something high up. Ice rain appeared in a ball around a tiny object, which Amber watched fall toward the ground.

When it was almost crashing into the earth, the ball seemed to shake and Raven broke free. The bird opened its beak and again, a lightning bolt flew at Coyote, but he was ready this time. He waved his hand and it flew to the side to split a tall oak tree. With the same movement, he caused a deluge of water to fall all around him, putting out the fires and driving Raven into the muddy ground.

Raven wasn't finished, its wings twitched and the ground under Coyote heaved and bucked. Coyote rose into the air and Amber could see that he was as angry as she had ever seen him. He roared and trees fell over Raven, followed by more ice rain that coated the trees in a thick dome. Under that dome, impossible fires began and the unmistakable smell of burning feathers rose into the air.

“Coyote!” Amber screamed, “Coyote! Stop!”

Seeming to see Amber for the first time, Coyote appeared startled, he shook himself and settled down onto the ground, looking at Amber as he did. When he landed, he seemed to come back to his senses and waved his hand toward the frozen dome. The ice, the trees and the flames disappeared to reveal a badly singed Raven.

Amber sang six notes and Raven was whole again, all of its feathers in place. She sang again and Coyote's fur was shiny and new once more.

By now, Amber was between the two fighters and she put her hands on her hips, making it clear that she was not going to tolerate any more. The three beings stood that way for a long time, when Raven shifted its wings, as if to shrug. Amber's face whipped toward him and she hummed a note. Raven was bound tightly with vines so that it could not move. Turning her head the other way she glared at Coyote and said, "Hmmm?"

Coyote backed up, raising his hands in surrender. Raven struggled to get free and Coyote carefully made no movements at all.

"You two are tricksters, and I expect you are both trying to decide how you can start fighting again. I warn you to put those thoughts out of your heads. This stops now!"

Both Coyote and Raven must have believed her because their shoulders dropped and they looked away from her.

At this point, Cat showed up again, "So this is the new world is it? Are we at war with each other?"

Amber stepped back a short distance so she could keep an eye on the two combatants and said, "It is not, Cat. I have no idea what this is about but these two should not be fighting each other, and how is it that you're speaking?"

"All cats can speak, mostly we don't have anything to say."

"Bullshit, now shut up while I figure out what's going on."

Cat could see that Amber was angry and he did what seemed the right thing to do, he sat down and started to clean his paws.

Amber looked first at Coyote and he nodded. She then looked at Raven, and the bird stared back with hate in his eyes. Amber held its gaze and lifted an eyebrow. Still Raven stared. Finally, Amber's jaw twitched and Raven quickly nodded, dropping its eyes.

“Understand, the two of you, that I am not a trickster, I promise you both that if you continue to fight I will flatten you. Do you understand?”

Raven and Coyote both nodded. Amber had raised a child and she was using her Mother's voice. They both understood she meant what she was saying.

Coyote changed to a man and sat down on one of the fallen trees. Raven nodded at Amber and she released the vines, at which point Raven changed to a dark haired, black eyed woman.

Cat stopped cleaning himself as he looked at her, “Oooh” he breathed, “beautiful.”

Raven heard that but merely glanced at him before looking once more at Amber, waiting for what she would say.

Amber sang a few notes and a table and chairs appeared, with hot tea and three mugs. Cat murr'd and she added a fourth. With that Cat became a handsome young man and held out a chair for Raven. When she sat, he sat beside her.

Coyote and Amber sat on the other side, taking their own chairs with no fuss, as a long together couple would do when they had other things on their minds.

Amber poured tea, and frowned at Raven who was about to talk. Raven fell silent and waited until the tea was ready. Amber spoke first, "Now, drink and while you do, think carefully. What is this all about?"

Taking her time to sip the tea, Raven looked at Amber who nodded. "Coyote destroyed my world" she said simply.

Amber was startled, but said nothing except to look at Coyote, who frowned. "I did not."

Raven began to rise from her seat, "You call me Liar?"

Cat put a gentle hand on her arm and she settled back down. Cat gestured to her tea and Raven took another sip.

Amber nodded thanks to Cat and said, "Explain please Raven."

"I created the world from a stone I found in the spirit world, I found Men in a clam shell, and women in a mollusc, I found the sun, the moon and the stars and gave them to Man, and then

I found fire and gave them that too. After all that, Coyote here sings the world out of existence.”

Amber looked at Coyote, she had helped sing the world away and back again, but she felt it was Coyote who should answer.

“I am not aware of your world, Raven, but the last world is one I sang into existence and I would not have sung it away if it was not rotted through with the nothing beings. That was my world, as is this one. I know nothing of yours.”

Raven again became angry, “You call me liar once more.”

“I know what I know,” said Coyote, becoming angry himself.

Cat looked from one to the other and said softly, “Peace, I might be able to explain.”

All three beings looked at Cat and waited.

“I have been friend to Man for thousands of years. I have shared their houses, shared their lives. I have slept in their beds and allowed them to stroke my fur, leaving them more calm than they were. In short, I have been with Man much more closely than you two have. I know something of their beliefs.”

Coyote scowled, “What has this to do with the creation of the world?”

“Everything. You think the spirit beings are independent? They

are beings unto themselves? It is Man who made you who you are, and it is Man who keeps you. I know this because I am Man-made, what power I have was given, has been bestowed upon me by Man.”

It was Raven’s turn to scowl, “I found Man in a clamshell, they did not make me, I made them.”

“This is what you believe and it is true, just as it is true that Coyote sang the world into being, just as it is true that I have always been friend to Man, keeping his home free of vermin. All these things are true, and they are not opposed, one story to the other.”

“Why should we believe you, Cat?”

“Because my story too, is true. Believe it or not, both of you know the truth.”

Cat fell silent, but Amber had been listening carefully. “Raven, I also sang the world away and back again, so I am as guilty as Coyote of destroying your world. However, please consider that we had no choice, and that we tried as hard as we could to bring the same world back again, without the holes that were tearing it apart. Please let me ask if you noticed the holes?”

“I did, and Copper Woman was helping me find a solution.”

“Did you find one?”

“No, damn it, we did not.”

“Raven, what have you lost from your world? We tried to bring it back as it was, but some things were lost.”

“Not much was gone, I have to admit, a mountain or two, some of the lesser beings, but you have a point, it is mostly still there.”

“And yet you come looking to fight, before asking for reasons.”

“I saw my world disappear, I was angry.”

“Do you still feel you need to punish us for that?”

“No. What was in that tea?”

Amber smiled, “It is just tea.”

Cat Explains the World

Raven looked again at her tea and then at Amber, “There is nothing in the tea? But why am I calm? I came here to kill Coyote for killing my world, but now I sit and sip your tea and talk.”

“There is always talk. No matter which war, or who fights, there is always talk sooner or later. I would prefer it be sooner, before half the world is destroyed once again. You and Coyote are evenly matched, and you both have right and might on your side. Neither of you would die easily, and so eventually, you would have to talk.”

Raven considered this and nodded.

“And really, could you two not have fought me when I stepped between you? Were you not, somewhere, interested in a peacemaker stopping this fight which is obviously not going to bring about a solution to your grievances?”

Coyote growled, “I won’t fight you to defend myself, Amber.”

Raven shrugged, “Perhaps you are right.”

Amber seemed to move into teacher mode, “Every fight, every war begins with the idea that a quick victory will happen, that the enemy will be defeated before much damage is done, but that rarely happens. I have watched mankind begin countless wars, thinking that the enemy will collapse and a new regime will somehow come into being that will be obedient to the invaders. It doesn’t happen, especially when the invader refuses to stay and make an empire of the defeated country.

“And then there is talk?”

“Yes, then there is talk. As we must talk now, so that this fight does not begin again. Who will lose if you fight? The two of you have resources to call on, allies to recruit, it will spread, and the innocent will die or be injured in the fallout. The inevitable result of wars that include that sort of power, is that civilians die. Now some may think that there are no true civilians and to a large extent, for Mankind, that is now true. Every military leader for the last hundred years has assumed that the enemy civilians are either begging to be set free from their government, or once that does not happen, will surrender when their houses and lives are destroyed. And every military leader for a hundred years has been wrong.”

Coyote frowned, “How do you suggest things should change, Amber?”

“By talk, by honest negotiation. Solutions can be had, if a government is corrupt and you must oppose it, change hearts and minds, don’t destroy houses, communities, civilizations, on the pretext of fighting bad guys. Make it so that those civilians really do want a different government. Look, some of our Human empires have spent many times the money on a war, than it would have cost to buy every single square metre of land in the country of their enemy. They could have bought the country and not killed a single person.”

“That isn’t how it works, Amber.”

“No? But it could be tried, just once, or should I say once more, vast lands have been purchased by countries in the past.

But that does us no good right now, with this war in this place.”

Coyote shook his head, “Man’s wars are often started by someone who wants to remain in power, Amber, their war is a way to that power. Talking is the last thing someone like that wants.”

Raven’s eyes flashed, “You think I came here because I wanted to stay in power back home? What home? You destroyed my world!”

Coyote stared back mildly, “My world.”

Amber held up her hands, “Cat, you say you know the right of this, how can two Gods both create the same world?”

Raven and Coyote said together, “I am not a God.”

Cat grinned, “They are not Gods, not as the European Gods exist, but to those in their place, here on Turtle Island, they are world creators, both of them.”

“The Europeans?”

“The Humans across the ocean, yes, they have world creators too, like the North European Gods created the earth from a dead giant. Or in the south, the earth, Gaia emerged as a Goddess out of Chaos. All these are true. Equally true, and a good thing too.”

“Why is it a good thing?”

“Because if each group did not have ownership of the earth through their own Gods, then one group would claim ownership and all others would be lesser. And then there would be war. These two are fighting a war over ownership of the world.”

“Cat, how do you know this?”

“I am universal, sometimes worshipped, but always present with all Humans. I know this.”

“So this is Raven’s world?”

“It is.”

“And Coyote’s world, and Woden’s world?”

“It is.”

“But Coyote sang the world away and back again.”

“Yes.”

“And Raven?”

“Created the world by finding a stone and dropping it into the water.”

“Wait, and the water is chaos.”

Cat smiled.

“And Sky Woman fell through a hole and Muskrat found some mud for the turtle’s back”

Cat nodded.

“And Beelzabub’s brother created it in six days on the waters.”

“And Yggdrasil, the world tree split the sky from the waters, yes.”

“All these are true at once.”

Cat spread his arms, “And the world is a dust-ball created over billions of years from the dust between the stars, yes.”

“How are all these things true?”

“Because they explain what is, to those who can ask. Man can ask, and Man answers and we spirit beings are drawn into the story.”

Amber looked at Coyote, who nodded his acceptance of this, she then looked at Raven, who also nodded, “Good enough.”

At that, Cat reached into his pocket and handed a bead to Raven saying, “This is from the old world, it is your bead,

would you like to create this new world?”

Raven grinned, took the bead and dropped it into a puddle on the ground. To the astonishment of all four beings at the table, they saw and felt a wave of power grow and spread outward until they no longer could tell where it was. They could feel that the world, although no different at all, had just been created in that instant.

Amber was startled, “What was that?”

The other three shrugged, but Coyote said, “I suspect, my love, that was the world being created by Raven. Never again will I presume to think that it was I who sang the world into being.”

“And I will not think that I created the world from a small pebble.”

A rumble in the sky caused the four to look up. A distant cloud fell to earth quickly, and from it trotted Woden’s six footed horse. He looked at the strange tea party in the woods and cleared his throat with a tremendous Harrumph. “You folks are creating the world in a most noisy way, I’ll have you know we are out of our giants, I’m going to have to ask for a volunteer if I’m also to create the world again.”

Cat laughed, “Perhaps you could simply let things be and pretend the world is the world, Lord Woden. After all, if you created the place once, perhaps you have created it again just now.”

“Good point, good point. Lady Amber, would you have another cup for an old friend?”

“Tea?”

“Tea... well...”

Cat reached down, “Perhaps this my Lord?”

Woden reached for the mug of beer and nodded his thanks.
“Shall we toast to our new world?”

There was a larger table, and a seat at that table for Woden. He sat and smiled around at his fellow world-makers. “Isn’t this nice.”

Coyote noticed Woden’s spear on his horse’s trappings, but said nothing.

Raven looked at Cat, “Woden has named us world-creators, have you created the world too, Cat?”

“Oh yes, but it isn’t much of a story, a hair-ball coughed up one day long ago.”

Woden laughed hugely, “Spoken like a true cat, all disrespect and disdain. Good for you, Cat!”

Cat bowed toward Woden and then toward Amber. “What about you my lady peacemaker, do you have a story of the creation of the world? Will you tell us of the triple God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims?”

“You forget the Bahai, but no, that story is not really my story.”

“No? But I would have thought it was.”

“Oh I was taught that story, and could tell it to you, but I have a different story now. It is titled, ‘The Urge To Be’ and I would be happy to tell it to you.”

Amber Creates the World

Amber poured more tea, and beer for the group around the table. The rest of the beings nodded thanks and then gave their attention to her.

Raven reached for the pitcher of beer with a nod, and poured a mug for Cat, who accepted with a deep bow and, saluting Woden, drained it. Woden laughed again and drained his mug before holding it out politely to Raven.

Amber, sure that Raven was playing hostess and was no longer inclined to try to kill Coyote, began to speak. “This is the story of the Urge to Be. It is a long, long story but I will tell it to you

in a somewhat shorter version, as all stories are told.”

Coyote grinned, Amber was becoming a real tale teller, although as he considered this, he realized that she had always told stories through her music. That was what she was doing when he met her, the day she saved the little brothers. The day she started to drag him out of his depression.

As he looked down, he saw that Raven had poured him a mug of beer as well. He raised it to her with a smile and drank half so that she could pour a bit more. This earned him a bright smile as Raven then gave Amber her attention as well.

A war always brings allies, and from the woods around the clearing, many beings began to appear. As the war had started, beings from both sides had come to ally themselves with one side or the other. Ray Keen walked out of the wood and was conflicted, he was a natural ally of Coyote, but he walked to Jaat and his daughter who were on Raven’s side of the table. Things often become confused when former allies become enemies. Coyote smiled at Ray’s choice.

The table got bigger, the allies sat, and Raven poured. This let everyone know that the war was over and a story was about to begin.

Yes, there is a formality to these things, and more than most, these beings appreciated the rituals.

The Urge To Be

Amber began to speak.

Once, long ago, there was nothing at all, not chaos, not water, not time, nothing. There could be nothing because there was nothing. We beings want there to be something, we long for there to be beginnings and endings and stories in between, but there were no stories, no beginnings and no endings. There was nothing.

Suddenly, there was something. Nobody knows how that came to be, perhaps an explosion, perhaps something spilled in from some place else that had something. All that can be known is that there was an Urge to Be. In the nothing, there was an Urge and then something came to Be.

Time began. And space, before that there was not even space. Small things, smaller than dust, smaller than atoms became at the same time as time began. They all had an Urge to Be, and those urges brought them toward each other.

Time was not like it is now, the Urge could have taken a very long time to gather things together, or it could have taken no time at all. We will never understand it, because we were not part of it.

Eventually, time became what we know of it now, and the long, long ages of longing began. Things had an Urge to Be, a longing to be together and eventually, things found other things and dust appeared, spirit appeared, what we call energy appeared, but it was simply the Urge.

Countless millennia, more time than someone like I could ever understand, passed, and dust found dust. Clinging together tightly, dust became stars and began to shine. Clinging together, dust became planets, things smaller than stars and not so hot, but things anyway. Some planets clung to stars, taking their warmth.

Water was one of the things that appeared, and on one planet, water covered the surface and made a circle in the air. As the planet cooled, our planet, it began to rain and eventually the surface was completely covered with water.

In the water, the Urge brought small things together until one day, the chaos of what we came to call entropy was overcome, and things began to reproduce. Eventually, as the world cooled, the water seeped down deep into the earth and the land appeared. Or perhaps it was Raven with a stone, or Coyote with a song, or Woden with the body of a giant, but the land appeared.

From now on, the Urge sought to reproduce, to create more things, similar things. As these things came into being, vast numbers of them failed, and were gone forever, but some things persisted. The Urge continued to try to Be. Things tried

to Be, and as the conditions changed, as those things that surrounded certain other things changed, the reproducing things changed as well, becoming. The Urge to Be drove all.

Eventually, through long years, the animals and plants became, and some discovered the land. These, very recently, also included Man and the world became what it is today.

The listeners began to lean back, thinking the story over, but Amber continued. The Urge to Be created what we now call Matter, but it also created the Spirit. That means you here at this table, world builders, tricksters, Gods and Goddesses all. Some of you have been here since the beginning, some have arisen because the Urge to Be remains with us. It will never be lost because it was here before the beginning.

As for Man, the Urge to Be is what makes us search out others, it has made me search out Coyote so that we could Be. It made us search out our son, who will soon be grown, and he searched for and found his wife. The Urge to Be has had many names, from many people, Existence, Life, Love, as well as Greed, Selfishness, and Death. Even in Death, the Urge persists, for what is Death except the breaking apart and recombination of the parts that make up Life.

Man wishes for life after death, longing for some other place where they can continue forever, just as they have done for a few years. This is a poverty of imagination, the inability to imagine something beyond what we are. If we truly understood the Urge to Be, we would rejoice in the breaking apart of our

selves and the recombination into other ways of being, other ways to Be. The Urge to Be should include the Urge to Be More than we are now.

And that is the story of the creation of the world.

Coyote's eyes shone as he looked at Amber. "That was a tale well told, my love. What of Raven and I? Did we not create this world?"

"Of course you did, both of you and many others at this table, for the Urge to Be is at the very heart the very root of all of us, if the Urge wasn't present, there would be nothing. The world is the result of all of us, together. We have come together and we have all created and here, today, at this table is, the result of our collective Urge to Be."

Ray was confused, "How can there be multiple worlds created that are all the same world?"

Julie, his daughter grabbed his arm and hugged him. "Silly father, can you not see, each and every one of those who created the world, worked with each other, whether they knew it or not, and the result is what you see. None of those who created the world ever got what they expected. Look at Coyote and Amber, here they have sung the world into being, yet they wander around looking for things to fix, places that surprise them. Perhaps those surprises are the result of other beings who

have also created this world.”

Woden roared with laughter, “Out of the mouths of babes, Ray, I believe she has the right of it. This would also explain why Mankind, Humanity, will continue to ignore we beings who have brought them into existence. Too many voices of command. They can pick and choose to suit themselves and we are left to pick up the pieces of their greed and folly. Oh yes I have enjoyed this story immensely and I thank you Amber, and you Julie for your explanation. Wait until I tell Ingrid of this.”

Amber bowed her thank you to Woden for his kind words, “A story shared is a story that continues to Be.”

That set Woden off again and he was laughing as he mounted his horse to ride off back to his hall.

Cat and Raven

Tea and conversation turned into a full blown picnic, complete with food and a lot more beer. Eventually though, all such things tend to end, usually when folks have full bellies and empty glasses. Still, it was a lovely pot luck and like all such things, those who attended felt much better about the others after sharing the meal. It seemed that each being who arrived, had a wonderful dish, or an amazing drink to share, and each

empty dish or bottle caused a full heart.

Zaat and Julie decided that since they were near to Ray, they would spend a week or two with him before going back to their own world under the sea. This made Ray's top ten list of things that happen, and Joan, who was also Ray's partner, and his roommate, was also delighted to see her niece Julie.

One by one, and sometimes in groups, the guests said their goodbyes and left the table, which got smaller once more and finally, only the original four were left.

Somewhere during the dinner, Cat's eyes, a lovely green, had turned gold. It happened while Raven, her own black eyes becoming more lustrous, was gazing at him.

"Raven and Cat? Coyote what's that all about?"

"Just because they're archetypes, doesn't mean they have to live up to the stereotypes, Amber. It looks like they are attracted to each other."

And why not? Raven was beautiful and Cat was handsome, both appreciated that surface beauty that first attracts one to another, but more than that, they had talked through the dinner and found that they liked what they heard as much as they liked what they saw.

"Shall I tell you the story of Raven and Cat, love?"

“What? You know it already? But it’s just starting.”

“It is indeed, but much of their courtship happens in Eli’s bar and Eli has told me the story.”

“I’m not sure if I want to hear how it turns out, or if I want to watch it happen. Why did you ask Eli?”

“Because I’m curious, not quite as curious as Cat, but the little brothers get their curiosity from me, after all.”

“It turns out well?”

“It turns out.”

“Oh dear, is it a sad story?”

“Amber my love, stories don’t happen that way, you can’t ask how they turn out, how they go along, before you agree to hear them. Those sort of questions are called spoilers for a reason.”

“You are a cruel and evil man.”

Coyote changed to a mangy old mutt and turned his head away into the woods. Amber laughed and threw her arms around his neck. “But I love you Mutt.”

“Even if I’m cruel and evil?”

“Despite you being cruel and evil.”

“Oh, well that’s all right then.”

Amber turned to Raven and whispered, “Do you like Cat?”

Raven grinned, she knew Cat’s ears had perked up. “Oh, he is well formed, certainly, and seems bright enough, if somewhat cruel in his attitude toward mice, but his lovely eyes make up for many of his faults.”

Cat’s mouth was open in disbelief, “How can you call me cruel when you visit the battlefields and eat the eyes of those who have fallen.”

“Oh I did not say that I was less cruel than you.”

Cat smiled at that, as Raven nodded toward him. Point for point.

Amber said, “Coyote has offered to tell me the story of your relationship with each other.”

Raven was surprised, “You think we would want to hear it too? Oh my sweet young girl, what would be the point of a relationship if you knew how it would progress? Or how it would end? Or... No, you must not tell us, Coyote, for the delight of a relationship is not knowing where it is going or how it will end. Otherwise what is the point?”

Cat nodded as well, “If we know what will happen, why begin

at all? We would simply sit around a table and tell stories of what will be, rather than live.”

Amber nodded, “I can see that, I would not want to know what will happen with Coyote and I.” She looked closely at Coyote and asked, “Do you know the story of you and I, Mutt?”

“I am not fate, and I have explained, the future is not set, much as some Shamans would have you believe. I know a possible story of you and I, certainly, and I didn’t need Eli to tell it to me. That story has you and I living a very, very long time together, until the end of this world.”

“Hah! Around you that could be next week.”

Raven’s eyes narrowed, and Coyote threw up his hands, “Not unless I talk it over with you and the other world creators first, I promise.”

Raven smiled, “And in return I will not take back my bead from the puddle without warning.”

Cat looked from one to the other, “Well there’s no chance at all that I’m going to eat that damned hairball, so no worries on my account.”

Raven laughed, then reached for Cat’s hand, “I know a bar nearby that does a lovely eyeball soup, shall we go and leave these two to tell their stories?”

Cat stood, assumed a formal position, bent his lips over Raven's hand and said "My lady, it would be my deepest pleasure."

To Amber's surprise, Raven, eternal spirit and world creator, giggled and rose to curtsy. "My lord."

They turned and bowed to Coyote and Amber then walked, hand in hand, in a very stately manner about three steps from the table before fading from view.

Amber fanned her face with her hand, "Oh my."

Coyote grinned, "And the story?"

"Just tell me if it is a long one."

Coyote paused, teasing. Finally he said, "Years and years."

"Good, that's enough for me."

Amber and Coyote rose and the table was gone, they turned and walked on through the woods, Amber took Coyote's hand and asked, "what animal would I have been if I were one of the Archetypes, Coy?"

"You are Coyote, same as me, love, and you would have been Coyote if you were with the rest of us when the Urge to Be created us."

“So I would have been like you?”

“You would have Been me. We are the same being. I have been here from the beginning and you are the end result of the Urge. Exactly the same.”

“Oh, that sounds very Zen.”

“It is simply a fact, the Taoists, the Buddhists, most philosophies, understand that everything is connected. It takes a huge amount of self-delusion to imagine that one is a separate being from all that is around us. Your story is wonderful because it makes plain just how inter-related the Universe is. There is room for so very much, but it is all linked.”

“You are becoming quite wordy, my philosophical love.”

“I’m sure I can become silent and moody again should you like.”

“Don’t you dare.”

Going Home

“Coy, let’s go home.”

“Are you sure, love, you seem to be getting quite comfortable out here in the bush.”

“Yes, but the holidays are coming up, and I’d like to see our friends. The picnic has reminded me that I love to be with people as much as I love being alone with you out here.”

“Very well, shall I flick us there or shall we hike?”

“Well let’s not get hasty, we can spend another day or two on the trail, I believe you owe me a story anyway.”

“As you wish, shall we begin, the day isn’t over yet and unless you’re tired, I’m good for a couple of hours.”

“By all means, let’s walk the sun down and a bit beyond that, I hear a wolf pack ahead of us, perhaps we will sleep with them once we get to them.”

“Very well, now let me think, a story of the spirit beings perhaps, and of going home. This one is from the before time, when the spirit beings were the only ones in the world.”

“And the name?”

“Let’s call it the Humpbacked Manitou.”

The Humpbacked Manitou

Long long ago, when the world was very young, this story began. I hope you like it, Amber.

There were a pair of brothers, both of them Manitou, or spirit beings. They lived a long way from anyone else in a lodge deep in the forest. One very like this one in fact.

Bokwewa was very wise, with many skills, but he was hunched over, his back was deformed and because of this he didn't leave the lodge very often. His brother was very tall and straight, but not as skilled as his brother. Bokwewa taught him many things. He taught him how to hunt and fish, and the brother would go out to get food and bring it back to the lodge.

After a few years, the brother turned to Bokwewa and said, "It is very lonely here, I am going out to find the other people and to get a wife."

Bokwewa tried to talk him out of it, but his brother was stubborn and went out into the wider world. A few days later he returned with a beautiful woman and Bokwewa welcomed them warmly. The woman and Bokwewa became good friends and the lodge was happy for a while.

One day, while the brother was out hunting, the lodge door flew open and a strong warrior came in. He went to where the woman was sitting by the fire and seized her. She screamed and fought, and Bokwewa tried to fight the stranger, but that man

struck Bokwewa and threw him against the door, injuring his back.

Bokwewa cried bitter tears over the loss of his brother's wife, and when the brother came home and heard what had happened, they both cried.

Later, the brother said that he was going to go find his wife and take her back from that powerful Manitou. Bokwewa saw that he could not talk his brother out of this, and warned him, "She is in a village where the people care for nothing but pleasure. You must be careful not to lose yourself to that pleasure."

The brother refused to be talked out of it, so Bokwewa warned him, "On the road to the village you will come across a grape vine. You must not eat the grapes for they are poison and will make you become careless. Later you will come across a jelly that looks like clear bear fat, again you must resist eating it for it is a mass of frog's eggs and it will make you forget your home here."

The brother nodded, and left the lodge to go find his wife. He walked the trail until he saw the grape vine. The grapes looked so plump and delicious, he could not resist eating some. Later he came across the jelly, and since he was now careless, he ate some. He lost his memory of his home and of why he was travelling.

Eventually he came to the village where many people came running and said, "Look, look, it is Bokwewa's brother,

welcome, welcome!”

The brother joined the village that seemed to be a joyous place, with many people singing and dancing. Soon he was happily grinding corn with the women, something a warrior would not have done, but he seemed happy to do it. He had forgotten all about his wife and his brother, even though his wife was in that same village, he did not know her.

After several years, Bokwewa knew that his brother wasn't coming back and so he set out for the village. He passed the grape vine and the jelly, he knew not to eat them and so they were no threat. When he got to the village the people cried, “Look, look, it is Bokwewa who is so wise, he has come to visit us!”

Bokwewa saw his brother grinding corn and went to him. “Come home brother, you do not belong here doing women's work.”

The brother did not even recognize Bokwewa and so was very much lost. Seeing that, Bokwewa went to the river and turned himself into a grass snake, one of those waving bits of grass that are tangled on a branch in the water.

Soon his brother's wife came to get water. “My sister, pick me up and put me in the water jug and take me to your home.”

This the woman did, and late that night, the Manitou who had stolen her, woke with a thirst. Not seeing the grass snake in the

jug, he drank it down and was dead in a very short time. Bokwewa turned into a man once more and went to find his brother. When he did, he could not talk the brother into taking his wife back, so with much sadness, Bokwewa returned to his lodge alone.

After he left the village, the brother, no longer under the influence of the dead Manitou, began to remember his life, and when he saw his wife in the village, he recognized her.

Taking his hand, he asked her to forgive him for not knowing her, and he asked her to come with him to their home. This the woman did and the two of them returned to the lodge and to Bokwewa.

Amber looked thoughtful. “Thank you Coy for that story. I am glad it had a happy ending and that the brother found his wife again. Is this how you feel about going home now, like we have been away for a long time and have finally remembered our home?”

“Not at all, my dearest love, I am home where you are, I am home in the woods, I was home for twenty years while we raised our son, and I will be home with you in Guelph once more. My home is here, walking beside me right now.”

Amber didn't know what to say, so she reached up and tugged Coyote's ear to bring his lips down to hers.

The Fight

“What do you know about it? You’re like fifteen minutes old.”

“Oh? Once upon a time there was a mutt who was forever years old and thought he knew everything. The problem is, in all that time he never learned a thing.”|

“You see, this is why I usually recreate the world empty and let life filter in, I get a few years of peace and quiet.”

“Whose damned idea was it to bring it back the same? Tell me that, why did you sing it back in with all the people if you wanted your peace and quiet?”

“We. We sang it back not just me.”

“Oh so now it’s my fault that you don’t get your peace and quiet is it?”

“That’s not what I said.”

“Well it’s what you meant, isn’t it?”

As the two argued, the trees around them began to tremble, and the sky began to darken as storm clouds gathered. Far in the

distance, a circular pattern of clouds began to revolve. Various animals who could run, were doing just that, away from the path.

Amber wasn't finished, "And what is it with Raven, how long have you known her? Was she your girlfriend in that long long ago you keep harping on about?"

"What? Where did that come from, is that what this is all about?"

"Just answer the question, you're avoiding it, just like you avoid all my questions."

"I don't avoid your questions. What are you on about? I've had nothing at all to do with Raven, in all the time we've been alive."

"Oh, throw your 'all the time' back at me again will you!"

One might have thought that Coyote had been through one or two of these arguments in his life, but he was surprisingly innocent. He really didn't know how to deal with an enraged partner and so he did what he should have done in the first place. He shut up, in the hope that Amber would eventually cool down.

They walked along for quite a while, and eventually the trees stopped shaking. It's fairly typical that neither Coyote nor Amber could remember what started the argument in the first

place, it simply took on a life of its own.

Eventually, Amber decided that Coyote wasn't quite the pig-headed ogre he was twenty minutes before and started to wonder what had caused the fight. It wasn't their first and probably wouldn't be their last, but maybe it was a nutritional imbalance. Amber was craving a salad.

"Snails," said Coyote from several paces behind Amber.

"What?"

"We might be selenium deficient, the area around here is low in selenium, but snails have a lot of it."

"You figure we're fighting because we haven't been eating snails."

"Um..."

"Seriously? You're not just pulling my leg?"

"Seriously, snails contain selenium, they concentrate what little is in the soil around the lakes, around here, yes."

"That's ridiculous."

Coyote said nothing, he shrugged only when Amber had turned her back on him to continue walking. He was capable of learning, after all.

“I saw that, Mutt.”

Coyote smiled, at least she capitalized his name this time.

“OK Coy, we’ll eat some snails, there’s a nice clearing there and I can hear them eating the forest plants. Do you have a pin?”

“Why?”

“To winkle the cooked snails out of the shells.”

“I usually eat them shells and all.”

“Shells.”

“Good roughage?”

“Shells.”

“I’ve got a pin right here,” Coyote said, holding one up.

“I bet you’ve got a story about snails too, don’t you?”

“Well.”

The Tribe That Came From a Shell

Far to the south of here is a mighty river. On its banks there lived a snail. He was happy and when he had eaten his fill one day he fell asleep. As he slept, the river rose high and swept him away and downstream for a long distance. A great deal of mud had also been swept down and eventually the snail was buried deep in that mud.

When the waters went down, the snail woke and tried to get out of the mud, but he was stuck fast. He tried for a long time but eventually gave up, he would die here.

As he was wondering just how these things had happened, he felt his shell crack, and his head began to rise, arms and legs appeared and he grew and grew. He eventually grew out of the mud, and from that mud there came a man.

This man wandered away from the bank, but realized he was very hungry. He knew how to eat as a snail, but as a man he was starving. He sat down when his energy was exhausted, and hung his head, "I wish I was still a snail."

Just then a great spirit on a white horse, with flowing white hair appeared out of the air. The spirit glowed with a fiery white light. He looked down at the man and said "Wasbashas, what is the matter?"

"Is my name Wasbashas?"

“I name you so, what is the matter?”

“I have not eaten since I was a snail, oh great spirit, and I fear I will die.”

On hearing that, the spirit took a bow from under his robe and an arrow. He saw a bird in the tree and he shot it with an arrow. He saw a deer and he shot that too. “Here is a bow and arrows, I give them to you, and I will teach you how to skin the deer and the bird, and how to make a blanket from the deer. You will not starve.”

When he had done that, the spirit disappeared and the man could feed himself.

One day the man came to a pond and saw a beaver on the shore. The beaver greeted him and asked his name. “I am Wabashas, I was a snail and now I am a man, blessed by the great spirit.”

“Very well, if you are favoured of the great spirit, come with me and I will show you how I build my lodge.”

With that, the beaver showed Wabashas how to cut down trees and dam the river with the help of mud and twigs. He then took him to his lodge and showed him how to weave the branches together and make a lodge in the pond.

The beaver, who was a headman for his kind, invited Wabashas into his house and his wife and daughter served him the inner

bark of the poplar and larch. Wabashas found the food bitter, but ate some, as is proper.

He was pleased with the hospitality, and very pleased with the daughter of his host, she was pretty, polite, and obedient to her father. Wabashas asked the father to give her to him for his wife.

The beaver agreed to this and called all the beaver tribe together to witness the marriage. Each beaver came with an offering of mud on his tail, and many other animals came too to enjoy the feast.

After the couple were joined together, the beaver guests moved down the river to a nice clearing and took branches from the bush, and mud from the river and made a dome on the land. This the beaver headman led the couple to and showed them their home.

The snail man and the beaver maiden were happy and had many children who became the Osage tribe.

“I see why you chose that story, Coy, and it was a nice one. The great spirit, was that you?”

“I don’t ride a horse. Why would I? Perhaps it was Woden on his white horse.”

“Do you know that?”

“No, I know the story and now I’ve told it to you so that you know it too.”

“Thank you Coy, the snails seem ready to eat, would you like me to winkle one from its shell for you, or will you just crunch them down whole.”

“I will eat them as you eat them, I have another pin.”

The two ate their snails and after tidying up the area, went on their way, Amber once more in front. As she was walking she heard a crunching behind her. Coyote had saved the shells and was eating them like potato chips as he walked. She smiled to herself and pretended she didn’t hear.

Home Again

After a few days more walking, Amber and Coyote walked into Guelph. The first place they went was Mike’s Coffee Shop for a couple of coffees. The place looked the same, it was different. It was always different because Liz remodelled the place almost every day. Today it looked like a Starbucks, which surprised Amber a little.

They went to the cash and Amber smiled, “Good morning, could we please have two large dark roast coffees.”

“You want two Grandes?”

Amber pointed at a cup, “That size please, and is Liz here?”

“Who?”

“The owner, or maybe Mike, her partner?”

“I’m sorry Ma’am this is a Starbucks, I could get you the manager.”

“Oh, I see. No that’s OK thank you for the coffees, can you put them on the tab please.”

“Ma’am we don’t run tabs here, that will be fifteen dollars please.”

“Fifteen.... Coy do you have any cash on you?”

Coyote smiled, reached into his pocket and pulled out a thousand dollar bill. He handed it to Amber who looked at it and handed the girl a twenty. Not before sending a bit of a warning look at Coyote, who was grinning.

As they sat down to drink their coffees, Amber was thoughtful, “Did you notice there were no Christmas lights up in town?”

“Not really.”

“Well there weren’t and yet it’s only a week or so from the holiday. What’s going on Coy, can you tell?”

Coyote closed his eyes. When he opened them he frowned, “There doesn’t seem to be anything wrong, it’s all as it should be as far as I can see, but it’s not like it was before.”

“It’s right, but it’s wrong?”

“Pretty much, yes.”

“Can you get in touch with any of the spirit beings around here?”

“There are none.”

“What! Are you kidding?”

“No one, Amber there is no bar under this place either.”

“The St. George? Is it there?”

“There’s a building, but it isn’t alive, it’s just an apartment building.”

“Coy I don’t like this, what’s happening?”

Coyote shrugged, “Maybe it’s the new world settling into a different formation.”

“Coy, that could mean that you and I disappear like the other spirit beings.”

“Well, we’re outside the world, so probably not, but this isn’t what we meant when we sang it back into being. We tried to bring everyone back. Maybe we ought to check things out and see what’s really happening.”

“You don’t suppose Raven....”

“She could change the world, but she promised not to. Same with the other world-builders, it’s considered rude to change someone else’s world. On the other hand, tricks are allowed.”

“Raven is playing a trick on us?”

“Perhaps, or someone else. She has reason to be angry, as we saw when she tried to kill us. But she didn’t seem too upset when she left. There are lots of tricksters in the world, perhaps someone else.”

“Ray? Crow? You? Are you playing a trick on me?”

“We’re the same being, Amber, look inside yourself did you do this?”

“Not exactly the same, but no, I don’t feel like you did this.”

“Let’s go home and see if anything’s changed there.”

As the two walked through the town, Amber got more and more anxious, she wasn’t sure why until she thought about Mike at the coffee shop again. “Coy! What about our son Mike? Is he still here?”

Coyote put a hand on her arm, “Check, Amber, you can tell.”

“Oh, yes he’s there with us now. Coy how do you deal with this being able to be in two places in time and space at once?”

“You get used to it, I guess. Mike is fine, don’t worry.”

“We lived twenty years there until he grew up, does that mean this is going to work out here?”

“I have no idea, to tell you the truth, things get a bit weird just after you create a world. Let’s go home and see what’s there.”

They walked through streets that seemed OK but seriously, no decorations at all. Maybe not on the public streets, but there were no lights on houses, no blow-up Santas, no wreaths on doors. It looked like the middle of September.

Amber stopped at the entrance to their apartment and closed her eyes, concentrating. “Coy, there’s no spirit at all, no Christmas, no Santa, no religion. It’s not just that the spirit beings have gone, it’s that all thoughts of anything to do with

spirituality is gone. These people have no idea of anything beyond themselves.”

Coyote looked up and down the street, “They believe in corporations.”

“What? Oh I see what you mean, every single store is a chain. Where did all the independents go? The restaurants, the gift shops, the book stores? We may as well be in the suburbs. Oh this is just too much. What have these people done?”

“Let’s go up, you’re being a bit loud and folks are starting to look upset.”

They climbed the stairs to their apartment and Amber was relieved to see it looked the same.

“Not completely the same, Love, look at the decorations, all the things you’ve bought from local vendors at markets, they’re all from Canadian Tire and Dollarama now.”

“My viola! It’s got a big Addidas logo on it! Who did this, I’ll kill them.”

Coyote was thinking hard. “Amber I think, perhaps, there’s been a rebound.”

“A what?”

“I think that maybe when we sang this world into being there was a lot of magic right here in town. Much more than should have been in one spot. Magic is sort of like gravity, sort of like a big trampoline, you know how when there’s more than one kid on a trampoline, when one bounces, it rebounds and the others go up?”

“I guess so.”

“Maybe the magic bounced up and out of town.”

“And how does that explain the lack of independent stores, my hand made things becoming something from Walmart?”

“Can you think of anything less magical than a chain store?”

“Good point that’s..... Oh no, no, NO, no no, this is just too much, no I am not going to tolerate this!”

“What?”

“The little things my students made for me, on the shelf there, they’re all plastic movie figures and other such garbage! No I’m not having this Coyote, you find out what caused this and I’m going to go and burn it, them, him, down!”

“Amber...”

Amber turned such a thunderous look at Coyote, he put up his hands and sat down in their Poang Ikea chair. He closed his

eyes and concentrated while Amber muttered and swore, looking through the rest of the apartment.

Coyote on the Hunt

Amber was staring out the window, where there was a dry cleaning shop, owned by Al and Flo, there was now a Harvey's. Down the street where Joe's bar used to be there was a Wendy's. Amber was muttering, "Honestly, downtown Guelph now looks like the outskirts of Brampton or Milton or something, might as well have an auto mall just... Oh you have got to be kidding!"

Down the street, where the Knox Presbyterian church used to be was a Ford dealership. Half the lot was pickup trucks and the other half, SUVs. Amber groaned, shut her eyes and dropped onto the Uppland Ikea couch, which produced another groan, "And where did the couch my mother re-finished go? And where are her paintings? What are those things on the wall, they look like they came from Homesense."

She got up, pulled one away from the wall and groaned yet again. She turned to Coyote who was still concentrating, eyes closed, but he winced anyway. Amber looked down at her right hand to a large round crystal-shaped, glass candle-holder. Her knuckles were white as she gripped it. With an effort she

relaxed her hand enough to turn it over and to no surprise at all, she saw it had a big tag saying Winners. “Coy, I’m going to go lie down on our bed, which no doubt at all, came from Leons or The Brick.”

Coyote nodded, winced again as she slammed the candle holder back onto the shelf she’d plucked it from, and walked heavily into the bedroom. He wasn’t surprised to hear another small scream and more muttering.

There was something... it was hard to pick up any trace of the recent history of the town, all the corporate modernity was covering up anything that was older than the last shipment of merchandise. Nothing in the town seemed to be older than last week’s big blowout sale, except maybe the buildings, and Coyote could feel the urban renewal pressures building up around the downtown core. Old houses were being knocked into their basements and condos were rising in a ring, as if to circle and squeeze the downtown into submission.

Yet there was resistance. Coyote could feel it somewhere, not too far away. Something was pushing back against the homogenization, the corporations were getting a fight from... there, the library. Someone was in the basement of the library, trying to prevent the last few buildings from being remodelled and rebuilt.

The books, that was it, whoever was there, they were using the books to resist, the history of the town, the old stories of the time before Guelph was founded. Those history books, the

imagination of the novels, it all combined to provide a small, but tenacious shell of resistance.

Coyote looked into the bedroom and saw that Amber had fallen asleep, ah yes, on the Sleep Country double with the Costco sheets and the JYSK pillows. Being quiet, and putting a note on the dresser in case she woke up, Coyote went out to find the resistance cell in the basement of the library.

As he walked around the corner and down the block, Coyote started to feel like Amber did. He usually ignored the changes in the world, having seen them come and go many times, but this was starting to get a bit oppressive. He hadn't realized just how homogeneous the chain stores were, they all had identical merchandise, and their window displays were depressingly similar. Yet they sold and sold and sold.

When he got to the library the door was locked. The place had a dusty, unopened look to it, which didn't surprise Coyote much. It seemed like people would rather spend money buying a brand new book than borrow one. Glancing across the road, Coyote saw that the used book shop was gone, a small Indigo shop replacing it.

Coyote faded through the door and walked down the stairs to the basement, not bothering to be quiet. At the bottom, he was met with a rather large and antique blunderbuss. "Really? You're going to shoot me with rock salt?"

Ray Keen lowered the gun, “Coyote, nice to see that you’ve managed to remain yourself in this town.”

“What happened here Ray? I was thinking it might just be a rebound from when we sang the world into being, but it looks like you were expecting someone.”

“I was, this is the work of a sorcerer, Coy, it’s not a natural rebound, it’s the work of someone who is harvesting magic and making money. I can’t tell who but I’ve been resisting the effects, not very well I’m afraid.”

“The buildings are still here, the library is still here.”

“Yes, but I’m losing. I sent the girls away, they’re in BC now, Zaat wanted to stay but I wouldn’t let her. I’m so glad you’re here. The independent shops are selling out to the chains, their own choice, and I can’t do anything about that. Once the chains get into a couple of blocks, they end up with yet another town councillor on the side of what they call progress. Pretty soon they controlled the city, and that’s when we would lose another block.”

“How long has this been going on?”

“I’m not sure, I didn’t notice until a month ago, and I’ve been fighting ever since.”

“Why didn’t you call me?”

“Can’t get through the encirclement, and I didn’t want to leave the town for fear it wouldn’t be here when I got back.”

“Looks like others have left.”

“Yeah, but there are too many of my Human friends here, I don’t want to abandon them to whatever is attacking the place.”

“Do they know?”

“No, they can’t see it. It happens too slowly for them to understand, one minute they’re in a lovely place with a strong sense of local community, then it starts to get nibbled away and they find themselves in the corporate world. Problem is, by that time they don’t notice that what they’re buying is the same as everything else. Or they don’t care.”

“That sounds a bit like disappointment, Ray.”

“It is, these people don’t seem to understand they are giving away their local culture to be ruled by multinationals.”

“So there’s no boycotts? No resistance?”

Ray scowled, and Coyote sympathized. It’s hard to be the only one who sees the coming disaster. “I’m here now, I’m going to find out who’s doing this and then maybe I’ll let Amber loose on him.”

Ray looked up and grinned, “I bet she’s pissed.”

“As white faced hornets with their nest poked a couple of times.”

“Good, what’s the plan?”

Amber Takes Over

“First thing is we need to figure out who is doing this and where he is.”

“I’d have nailed him if I could find that out, Coy. I can’t locate him.”

“Maybe with three of us, just a second.” With that, Coyote woke Amber from her nap and asked her to come to the library. This she did instantly, popping into the middle of the music section.

“Ray, great to see you, I thought we were the only spirit beings left.”

“Ray’s been fighting back, he knows it’s a sorcerer and how he’s been doing it, but we need to figure out a way to locate the fellow.”

“Coy can’t you just see him in your mind?”

“Tried it first off, but this guy is good. It’s easy to see a burst of magic, but a burst of normal? A burst of no magic? How do you see that?”

“I’d say look for a hole in the magic, but that’s the whole town now.”

Coyote nodded, “Why don’t you two push back and I’ll try to figure out where the resistance comes from.”

Amber shook her head, “Just a minute now, we’re not thinking about this the right way. This guy is an egomaniac right? That’s almost a requirement to be a sorcerer. So think about it, where would he be in this town?”

Ray stepped out of the library onto the main street and looked toward the hill. When he came back in he was grimacing, “Damn, the basilica has its spires back, and it’s all painted neon blue. Why didn’t I see that?”

“Basement, remember.”

“Well OK. But I should have thought of the church, of course he’d take over the most impressive building in town.”

Amber held out her hand and her violin, complete with logo was there. She frowned at it and the logo disappeared, then she headed for the door.

“Amber wait, let Ray and I try first from here before you go exposing yourself out on the street.”

Amber nodded and walked over to where Ray and Coyote stood, she took Coyote’s hand and lent her power to him.

Nothing.

Coyote grunted, I see what you mean, Ray. I can feel all sorts of different powers that he’s stripped from buildings and beings. I don’t know how he combines it all.”

Amber was thoughtful, “Coy I have to go and find more help. I’m going to visit Raven.”

“Are you sure?”

“We can’t do it as Coyote, Coyote, and Fox, yes I’m sure, I have to use my other powers for this Coy, and I have to have other help. We’re up against a lot of different powers all mixed up. I’m going to have to write a symphony, a song won’t do.”

Ray laughed, “Sounds like a lawyer’s office.”

Coyote ignored Ray and nodded toward Amber, “Be careful love, it won’t be easy. Ray and I will stay and defend for as long as we can.”

Amber grabbed Coyote’s ears and pulled him down for a kiss, then she was gone. She knew she could flick from point to

point in the town and so she could pop back to the clearing in the forest where the war started and stopped. As she thought about that, she was just a bit offended, did this guy figure she wasn't worth worrying about? She would show him different.

“Raven, Cat, Ingrid, Copper Woman, Kit, and whoever else can hear me, I need you.”

The trees crackled with power as one after another of the spirit beings showed up in the wood. Amber was well liked.

Raven was first, she looked hard at Amber and nodded, “I’m off to squash this bug.”

“No, please Raven, stay. He’s too powerful for one of us alone. He’s stolen many powers and we need to work together to beat him.”

“No offence Amber, but you don’t know my full power.”

Cat, who had come with Raven smiled a bit and settled back against a tree. His eyes were very good, he could see Amber for what she had become, and this might be amusing.

“Raven listen to me, Coyote and Fox together couldn’t get through to this being. One of us can’t do it.”

“One of us? Are you counting yourself one of us, mortal?”

Raven reached up into the sky and clouds began to form. Having seen the lightning she could call down, Amber swung her violin under her chin and began to play. The sky over the clearing filled with Crows and Ravens. One of the crows dropped to the ground and became man-shaped.

Caw looked at Raven for a moment, then turned to Amber, “You called?”

Raven sputtered, “You take her side, cousin? And mine, you lead mine against me?”

Caw looked bored as he answered, “Not against you, cousin, it isn’t about you, as much as you think it always is. Amber has the right to call us, and she never does unless the world is at stake. I would suggest you not bring that lightning down or you will lose all of us, crows and ravens.”

Raven looked at the sky which had continued to blacken with birds. She looked at Caw again, “You’re serious, cousin. You will side with this half-coyote?”

“Look again, Raven, open your eyes and look again. This being is not an imitation of Coyote. She has her own power, look!”

Raven did, and after a moment, she nodded. Caw continued, “Now look at that young fox over there. She is Amber’s student and she also has her own power.”

Raven looked at Kit, who lowered her own violin and looked

back at Raven with calm eyes that held a hint of grey flecks which swirled.

“Now do you see what I see? These two command the elemental forces of the world. This little one was tried by Nanabozo herself because of her power. Many spirit beings arrived to defend her, yet it never came to a fight, she proved herself to Megan and Stan, who both wait over there.”

Raven looked at Megan, who nodded back slowly. As more and more beings showed up at the clearing, Raven saw the shape of things to come. She nodded at Amber and with no sense of defeat, said, “Tell us what you need, we will play your tune.”

The sky was black, it was hard to see how many birds had answered the call, jays and magpies and even several nutcrackers. Caw flicked his head and the Corvids scattered. Above them the clouds had parted and Woden was there, his spear an impossible size, ready to ground the lightning. Copper woman was behind him on his horse, she too had been ready to absorb the lightning.

Seeing the number of beings of greater and lesser power, including Kit’s partner Dave, who held a rifle which he was just lowering toward the ground, Amber smiled. “Thank you all, you know what is happening, we are about to stop it. Kit, are you in practice?”

Kit made a face and played a scale that went up into the stratosphere in half a second. Around them wolves and coyotes

howled in response. The trees waved as if they were bowing. The grass waved as if a strong wind had blown past.

“Good, shall we see what powers exist in the forest here, who might help us?”

Raven was shocked, surely the beings who were here could take care of anything, yet Amber looked for more power. Raven frowned, perhaps this is more dangerous than she thought, surely Amber wasn't showing off, not in front of these beings.

Kit began to play, and in a few moments, Amber joined her. It was a call to arms, and almost instantly, the assembled people could feel it, there was a swirling of elemental magic pouring into the clearing, and into the beings assembled there. Forces of air, earth, water, fire and the very essence of spirit. As Raven felt herself being filled up she could find no sense of force or resentment, the elements themselves were joining the fight, Amber was not commanding them, she was including them and they came willingly.

As one voice, in response to the accumulating power, the clearing erupted in noise. At first a shout, a response to an overwhelming urge to deal with the internal pressure, then it settled down into a song, a battle hymn that had never been heard in the worlds yet. A hymn of such coordination and power that the entire wood crackled and shook as the power leapt from tree to tree, to the edge and back again.

In the basement of the library in Guelph, Ray looked at Coyote who grinned back. “She has found her power.”

Into the Corporate Realm

Amber, thinking they could begin, ran up against a wall. The Elementals wanted to know that their power was going to be used correctly. They demanded that Amber open her mind to them, this she did and felt an acceptance. But that wasn't the end of it.

Each spirit being, every one of them, felt the blow, and blow it was, as they were commanded to give witness to Amber's suitability. It was a humbling experience, even as each nodded their acceptance of Amber's direction. Many of the beings closest to Amber nodded and then looked at Raven.

When Raven's call came she was rocked back on her heels. Cat caught her before she fell, and she managed to speak, “Such power, who knew the Elementals had such power. Yes, yes I approve of Amber's leadership, and I pity her for what is about to come. I would not want such power.”

Cat hugged her and rubbed his cheek against hers, “Well understood my lady.” Before he met Raven, he had thought himself the most proud being in existence. She was more proud by half and they both learned something in that moment. The

two of them stepped back into the crowd surrounding Amber and Kit. Woden was there with Mishelle, Ingrid took Art's hand, and in the other, Art held his sword, Excalibur.

Amber and Kit began to play once more, taking the power from the clearing and putting it into the battle anthem that was still being sung. Amber sent a question to Coyote, "Where and what?"

"Punch a hole in the defence, then go, we will join you and the others will keep the hole open for you."

Amber heard what Coyote was saying underneath his words. He would sacrifice himself so that she could get back if it all went wrong. She would have to make sure it didn't go wrong because she would choose to sacrifice herself so that he could return, which would mean they would both perish.

Nodding to Kit, they punched their hole. The city shook, one of the four spires of the church fell to the ground. Amber was gone, through the hole and into the Sorcerer's realm. Coyote took Ray's arm and followed her.

Kit smiled grimly and kept playing, she would hold the opening for as long as it took. She looked around, from the faces of those she could see, she understood that they would be there as well.

Inside the defences of the sorcerer, Amber, Coyote and Ray found a trade conference, it was massive, much larger than the

city, let alone the former church. Booths stretched away into the unseen distance, every one of them containing merchants, hawking their wares. Looking closely, Amber saw fifty three varieties of cola flavoured sugar water. Pop, each and every one being touted as the very best. It was insane, “Coy, there aren’t this many varieties of pop in the world are there?”

“Many more, love, every one roughly the same, each in a different shaped container with a different label, but all roughly the same.”

“This is insane.”

“It’s commerce, each merchant trying to sell a product, or claiming to. In fact they are selling the advertising, the labels, the dreams. You know this love.”

“No, not until now, I shopped local, bought from friends, I never really got into Malls and chain stores.”

“Here it is then. In all it’s glory, the corporate world.”

“But half of these brands are owned by the same company. I can tell.”

“Ah, what little regulation there is, makes it mandatory to admit you’ve got five different cola flavoured pop brands. Clever of you to notice.”

“Coy this isn’t different from what it was before, is it? What is this Sorcerer doing? Surely he isn’t just a merchant, is he trying to own everything?”

“Perhaps, perhaps that’s all it is. Commercialism can destroy the magic of existence simply by homogenizing everything, so there’s no room for variation.”

Ray had been prowling, “No, there’s something else, Coy can you feel something underneath all this neon and glitter?”

Coyote reached for Amber’s hand, borrowing some of the power running through her. His eyes widened, “Ray you’re right, this is illusion. I mean more than the usual advertising, this is covering up a dead world. No trees, no grass, no magic, just desolation. All the power of the world funnelled into whoever set this up. Let me strip all this noise.”

Amber gasped as Coyote allowed her to see beneath the disguise, and she saw the true effects of corporate life, or rather death. The world was dying, each and every resource, and especially the magic, packaged and sold until there was nothing left, and at it’s heart, like a spider at the centre of a web, was the sorcerer. She could see him. “Coy, stand away, I need to destroy this.”

A booming voice began, “You would kill all these people? What sort of a monster are you? They are just trying to make a living.”

Amber glanced at Coyote who shook his head. She yelled, “No people here, just your illusions of how life ought to be. It will be undone.”

With that Amber began to play, Coyote and Ray joined in, a looping, soaring anthem to beauty and magic. As they did, the trade fair began to dissolve, the three could just barely see it in outline as it crumbled.

“No, you shall not,” screamed the Sorcerer and directed a deadly blast directly at the three.

The thing is, three is a powerful number, and while Amber and Coyote were tearing down the stalls, Ray built a wall between them and that attack. Sparks flew high over that wall but nothing came through. Ray was pulling power from Copper Woman and Susume, who threw the magic of the Yokai to him.

Everywhere the Sorcerer turned, triples of power met him, each direction he turned, he met three beings who combined to hem him in. He weakened, but would not give up. He had almost infinite resources, or at least all the resources of the world, as owned by the corporations.

As he weakened, but didn’t break, Kit called out, “Beelzabub, we could use your skills, Amber has opened a way, can you get in?”

A great red beast, goat legs and massive horns appeared, winked at Kit and was gone through the hole. Amber hardly

had time to notice, but Beels swept on into the centre of the barren lands. The leftover earth after the merchants got done with it.

“Look, Coyote, Beels is opening holes of his own.”

Sure enough, through the desolation, patches of beauty began to appear. The great deceiver was worming his way into the Sorcerer and punching holes in that being’s deceit. Huge laughter could be heard around the centre of the spiderweb. Then, “Papa Legba, my brother, my cousin, come and bring the Elementals, they will enjoy this.”

Again, Amber felt a breeze move past her head and she heard two booming voices laughing. “Oh these poor beings that think they can lie and cheat. They never know they are moving into our world, and now, and now we release the powers that have been stolen, we release the Men who have been ensnared, we release these elemental magics that have been excluded from this city, and we release this Sorcerer from the burden of life!”

Amber began to object, she did not wish anyone to be killed, but she was too late, and in the next instant the Sorcerer was forgotten. He had never been. Only a very few beings remembered what had happened, those beings and Gods who were outside the world, who had lived before the first world was sung into being. None of them had any sympathy to spare for a being who wished to steal and cheat their way into such power.

The elements were released and spread out from the church, a church again, and set the city right. In the clearing, the spirit beings stopped singing and with many smiles and nods of recognition, vanished back to their own places.

Raven nodded to Kit, “Tell your teacher that Raven thanks her, and she may call on me any time.” Cat grinned, and as he faded with Raven, only his grin remained. Kit rolled her eyes and turned to Dave, “Shall we go back home, the George ought to be back by now.”

Art looked down at his hand to see he held Excalibur, “When did I....”

Ingrid smiled gently, “When Raven began to attack Amber, I had to hold you back, they needed to work it out themselves.”

“Ah, and Amber?”

“She’s fine, walking from the Basilica to her place with Coyote, and Ray is on his way here to visit with his family and with you. Here is Joan, in fact, and Zaat. I had better put on a meal, there are many who will be hungry, including a certain bewhiskered God. Put the spear aside Woody, you don’t need it, and here, a goodly cask of ale for us.”

“Where’s mine, wife?”

“Fine, casks for everyone.”

Tea and Biscuits

Amber was curled up on her mother's couch, her feet tucked up underneath her. Coyote was sitting beside her in his big floppy mutt form and she was leaning on him. On a shelf attached to the opposite wall, her hand-made bits and bobs from her students were proudly displayed.

She had prowled through the entire apartment, making sure that everything was as it should be, and she had only needed to make one adjustment, the old claw foot tub tap didn't drip. She fixed that so that the very faint dink... dink could be heard and each time she heard it she smiled.

She was drinking a cup of tea, the pot on the coffee table under a tea cozy, and beside it was a plate with biscuits and a few dog treats. Reaching for one, she turned to Coyote, "Here you go Mut, don't make crumbs."

While Coyote wolfed down the treat, Amber settled herself more comfortably on the couch, leaning harder into Coyote's back. "This is better. It's a comfortable life here isn't it Coy."

Coyote growled softly, "wrrr-rrr-rrr" and flicked his ear.

Amber grabbed it and stroked it while Coyote sighed.

“Everyone got back to where they belonged right?”

Again, the ear flick.

“Good. It was nice that so many helped out when we needed them. Can you tell me another story please Coy, I’m feeling very comfortable and a story would be nice.”

Coyote moved into his human form and put his arms around Amber, she snuggled deeper into his chest and he kissed her on the top of her head. “This is the story of how the people obtained their Indian Corn.”

How the Ojibwe Got Maize

The Ottawa tribe lived on Manitoulin Island for a long time, but their enemies were the Iroquois on the mainland. One day there was a battle and the Ottawa were defeated. They left the island and moved south toward the Mississippi river.

One man, a Shaman stayed on the island to keep a lookout for the Iroquois, and with him were two boys who would help him and who would paddle his canoe.

The three stayed on the island for a long time, they would paddle close to the shore during the daytime to stay out of sight

of the mainland, and at night they would camp deep in the woods where their campfire would not be seen.

One morning, the Shaman got up early and left the boys in the camp while he went out to hunt. He walked a long way through the bush when he came to a large meadow. He began to walk through it when a small man suddenly appeared to him. “Good morning friend, you look like a strong man, are you strong?”

The Shaman replied, “I am strong, but no stronger than any other man.”

The little man nodded, “We must wrestle, and if you can throw me you must say ‘I have thrown Wegamena.’ Let us smoke first.”

With that the man pulled out tobacco and a pipe.

The Shaman looked at the small man and did not want to wrestle him, because he was afraid of hurting him, but the man insisted and so they grabbed hold of each other. The small man was strong and he was quick, so the Shaman tried his best.

After a time, the Shaman tripped the other man and he fell to the ground. “You have defeated me, now you must say the words.”

The Shaman said “I have thrown Wegamena,” and at that moment the little man vanished. He had become an ear of corn. As the Shaman looked at the corn, it spoke.

“Take off my outer skin and break off the seeds. Scatter them around the meadow and then break the cob into three pieces and throw the pieces under the trees at the edge of the meadow. Come back in three moons to see what has happened.”

The Shaman did what he was told, scattering the seeds and the pieces of cob, and then he returned to his camp.

He spoke nothing of this to the boys, and in the proper time he went back to the meadow. There he found the green shoots of corn plants and the vines of pumpkins growing. He found a deer on the way back to camp and shot it, taking it back for the boys to cook, but he did not tell them about the meadow. The rest of the summer, the three kept watch on the enemy and lived quietly.

At the end of the summer, the Shaman went back to the meadow and saw full plants of corn with ripened ears, and huge pumpkins. He picked several ears and two pumpkins to take back to the camp. As he did so a voice said, “You have defeated me. If you had not you would have died, but now you will have my body to feed your people from this day forward.”

And that is how that tribe got Maize, and they always took great care of their vast fields of grain.

Amber snuggled in once more, “The little man was one of the

Elementals was he not? It is wonderful how they have provided for and taken care of Humans for so very long.”

“I suppose he was,” Coyote said in an equally contented voice.

The two stayed on the couch for a long time, the tea got cold but they didn’t mind.

They talked and dozed the rest of the afternoon away until it was time for supper. Like the old times, Coyote changed to a shaggy dog and lay on the kitchen floor while he watched Amber cook. Either of them could have instantly created a magnificent meal, but old habits are comfortable, and so they cooked without haste.

They ate on the kitchen table, and when they were done, Coyote washed the dishes by hand. He made more tea and the two spent the evening as they had the afternoon, sitting together on the couch. This time Amber lay with her feet up on the arm, her head on Coyote’s lap as she read a book. Coyote was content to sit and let his thoughts and his awareness wander through the town.

Once more he reflected on his good fortune to have found someone like Amber to be with.

The day turned into night, and the two drifted off to their bedroom where they lay together on the bed. They drifted off to sleep, arms around each other and Amber thought about their son Mike, and the many nights she and Coyote had lain in bed

together, listening to their son sleep.

After a couple of hours, the two of them woke enough to make love to each other in the easy manner of those who have lived together for a long time, and then they went back to sleep to wait for the sun in the morning.

Amber's Itchy Feet

In the morning, Coyote was rubbing Amber's feet. She had complained that they were a bit sore, but Coyote knew better. They weren't sore, they were itchy.

"Mmmm, Coy please tell me another story."

"Another, don't you owe me a story after last evening?"

"Please Coy."

Coyote nodded, and with a bit of sadness in his voice, he began.

The Magician of Lake Huron

This is another story of the Shaman who discovered Maize. The same Shaman I told you about yesterday. He was sleeping one evening when he heard voices. “We must get his heart, how shall we do that?”

And another voice, “I will reach into his mouth and get it that way.”

With that, the Shaman felt a hand go into his mouth. He waited until all the fingers were in, and then bit down hard, cutting the fingers from the hand. A great cry of pain resulted and when the Shaman opened his eyes, there was nobody in the room.

Later that day, he went down to the shore, and found a canoe with two people sitting at opposite ends facing each other. Their arms were spread and they were made of stone. One of the figures had the fingers missing from his hand, and so the Shaman knew these were his attackers, and that they were fairies, small spirits.

He carried the stone figures into the woods and turned to go back to the canoe when a voice came from one of the stone figures saying, “From now on the canoes of your people will be well laden with goods, just like our canoe is. The great spirit will look after you even though you have been thrown from your home by a cruel enemy, you will have many treasures in your new home.”

The Shaman then took the boat back along the shore and unloaded many bags of meat and other treasures and took them

back to his camp. There were indeed many treasures there.

Shortly after that, the Shaman began to miss his parents. “I will go get them and bring them back here to my camp.” As he thought that, he began to feel light as the wind, and with great speed, he flew many days journey to where they were, in just moments. As he arrived at their lodge, he saw that his parents were asleep, so he picked them up and flew back to his own camp.

In the morning his parents woke and were very happy to see their son, as well as his lodge and the many provisions contained in it.

Some time after this, the Shaman noticed his father looking into his tobacco pouch and sighing. He told his father that he would get him some tobacco to smoke. That evening, the Shaman looked out at the lake that was frozen over. He travelled swiftly over the ice and came to the mainland where his enemies were camped. As he walked into their camp, they welcomed the Shaman and asked him to join them in their lodges. The Shaman declined the invitation, saying he would camp on the lakeshore.

The people of the village asked why he had come and the Shaman said he wanted to get tobacco to take to his father. The chief of the village opened his pouch and said, “Here, take some of mine.” With that the rest of the village offered tobacco as well and soon the Shaman had a good supply for his father.

Thanking the villagers, the Shaman went to the shore to camp. That night, many of the young warriors of the village crept down to the shore and when they were ready, shouted, “Now you will die, our enemy.”

The Shaman shouted back, “It is you who will die,” and he laid about him with his tomahawk and killed all the warriors. With this, the Shaman went swiftly back across the lake and to his lodge. When he gave the tobacco to his father, that old man was happy and thanked him many times.

When spring came, the Shaman built a beautiful lodge for his parents near the meadow, and all through the summer they watched the corn and pumpkins grow.

Amber smiled, “Thank you Coy for that story of going away and coming back. I could listen to your stories forever, but my love, I’d like to talk to you about something.”

Coyote answered in the same formal tone, “What is it Amber?”

“I know that you spent a lot of time in your life, on a spirit quest, why haven’t you done so since you’ve been with me?”

“I am a spirit, no need to search for myself, I’m right here.”

“Coy...”

“Call it a walkabout then, and I haven’t felt the urge since I met you, love.”

Coyote waited patiently, Amber nodded her head as if deciding something, and said, “Coyote, I would like to ask if you would mind if I go walkabout.”

Coyote smiled, “Of course I don’t mind my love. I will miss you while you are away from me but you will not be gone from me. I will be with you in spirit, and I will be with you in the flesh, the instant you call my name.”

“Thank you my love, I would like to tell you why.”

“Amber, my heart, I can feel that your feet are itchy, what more reason do you need? What more reason do I need to hear?”

“Hush, and listen. I have found Time, when the Elements were flowing through me, when you held my hand, I found Time. You know what that is, but I have an urge to find out for myself. I slipped away and back again early this morning to go visit Mike.”

“I felt you go and return, that was a risk for you.”

“It was, and I was almost lost, which is why I need to go. I must learn, and I suspect, I know, you cannot teach me.”

“I cannot, you must learn this for yourself. Remember always that I will hear you no matter what time or place you are, and remember always that Eli’s bar will be near as well. You will always have help to hand.”

“That makes me feel better.”

“But you will not need it, my love. You are so much stronger than you know.”

“Will you be all right? I intend to go and witness the stories you have been telling me, and then I will return to tell you my stories if I can.”

“I will wait here, an anchor for your wandering. I will collect your stories as you go. I will be the harbour you can return to when you are ready.”

“Coyote, I promise you, I will return within a day of leaving, should I be able to.”

“I will find you, if you cannot return. Believe always that I will find you and bring you safely home.”

With that, Amber lifted her head and took a half step forward. Coyote enveloped her in his arms. She felt the strength and the love there. She knew his love.

Coyote felt the same love from Amber as she faded out of his arms and into Time.

Acknowledgement

Many of the stories that Coyote tells here are not mine. They come from a book titled “Thirty Indian Legends of Canada” by Margaret Bemister. The book was originally published in 1877 and republished by Douglas and McIntyre in 1973. ISBN 0-88894-025-4

I thought they were worth reviving. They are told in my own words. For those who want to read them all, you can find the book online at:
https://scienceviews.com/ebooks/thirty_indian_legends/index.html

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Kim Taylor Dec 30, 2023

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