

COYOTE
THROWS
HIS SONS
INTO
THE SKY

Long, long ago, before Coyote was the headman of the village, he went looking for a wife. "If I am going to be headman, I surely need a good wife who will be my partner and friend," he told himself. Coyote was a handsome and ambitious young man. Already the villagers had their eye on him, thinking that one day in the near future they would elect him as their leader. "How will we know when Coyote is ready to take office?" Skunk asked the Council of Wise Women Governors, who determines such things. "We will know," answered the four Wise Women, "for he will do something that will show us that he is ready to assume his position as headman of our village. He will do something great."

Regarding finding a good wife, Coyote was doing everything right. He consulted four old men who gave young bachelors advice on what qualities a man must possess and utilize in order to be a good husband.

"Be kind," Yellow Jacket told him.

"Be warm, stay close to your wife," Flea told him.

"Be talkative, let her know when you are home," Blue Jay told him.

"Be hardworking," Bear told him.

And a fifth person, a woman named Hummingbird, told Coyote that he must follow his heart. "And one more thing,"

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Hummingbird said. "Each good woman has a song and you must learn to hear that song and answer it with a special song that she will teach you, for only that way will you be her true husband."

"Thank you all for the good advice," Coyote told the four old men and Hummingbird.

Then Hummingbird said, "Make sure you listen well to your beloved's song," and the four old men agreed and reiterated Hummingbird's advice.

At long last Coyote found the young maiden he wished to marry; and, as you may already know, that fair maiden was none other than Frog Woman. Truth be known, Coyote had had his eye on Frog Woman all along and hoped that one day she would become his beloved wife. One afternoon, while Coyote was traveling through the hills, he came upon Frog Woman alone next to a pond of water and she was singing thus:

Clearing the reeds

Pushing aside the swamp grass

Dreaming

Dreaming

I am clearing the reeds

Pushing aside the swamp grass

Near the water

Near the water

Seeing a family

Coyote thought Frog Woman's song was the most beautiful song he had heard. His heart was so touched that for the longest time he was speechless.

"I've never known you sounded so lovely," he said at last.

"Oh, I didn't know you were there, listening behind the bushes," said Frog Woman, a bit startled. "I had my back to you."

"I didn't mean to startle you," said Coyote. "I was coming to see you anyway, and now my heart is touched..."

Frog Woman blushed.

Then Coyote said, "But I must tell you—and perhaps you already know—it is you who have touched my heart all along. No fair maiden on this Mountain has such beautiful big shiny eyes. Your eyes are so black and shiny I can see the green hills and blue Sky in them."

"Oh, you flatter me," said Frog Woman. "But you must know that beauty is not everything. What is most important is what lies in a person's heart."

"Oh, yes, and right now my heart is beating really fast," said Coyote. "So I must finally ask if you would so honor me and teach me a special song in order that I might answer the lovely song I heard you singing and become your true and good husband."

HOW A MOUNTAIN WAS MADE

“The wise old men and Hummingbird have given you good advice,” answered Frog Woman, and she began singing thus:

Near the water

Near the water

Your beloved friend

Seeing you

A partner I will be

Helping

Helping

Even with a million children helping still

And that way, singing, Coyote led Frog Woman back to the village and married her there. He built her a fine house of pine logs near the creek so at night she could be comforted by the sound of gurgling water and be reminded of her old home next to the pond in the hills. They lived there for a long time, and Frog Woman was much loved in the village. She was helpful to people and kind to everyone. Often her cousins, the two Toad Sisters, were sad, worried that they were too spotted and ugly for anyone to love. On several occasions Frog Woman sat outside her house, alongside the creek, talking to them all night long, assuring them that they were beautiful. “Your spots are marks of beauty,” she told them, “and inside your

hearts are beautiful songs and stories.” By morning the Toad Sisters were always happy and confident again.

Though he didn’t say anything to Frog Woman, Coyote was often bothered when she stayed out all night talking to her cousins. He preferred it when she was in the house with him. He thought the two Toad Sisters were ugly, and he consoled himself with the fact that Frog Woman didn’t look like her cousins.

Meanwhile, the villagers wondered when the Council of Wise Women Governors would appoint Coyote as their headman. “When will Coyote be our chief?” the villagers asked.

For some time Coyote had been demonstrating good qualities for leadership. He settled arguments when people squabbled. He was a brave hunter and could lead other hunters far to the other side of the Mountain to gather food the villagers needed. He was an expert shot with a bow and arrow, and he was smart and as clever as could be.

Then Coyote and Frog Woman had two sons, handsome boys who were fat and healthy, for Frog Woman did a fine job caring for them, proving that indeed she was an excellent mother. But Coyote was beginning to feel left out. At night Frog Woman still often visited with her cousins, and much of the day she was preoccupied with the two boys, the younger one and the older one. She spent long hours making them clothes and warm blankets; each and every morning she made fresh, steaming acorn mush.

“What about me?” Coyote complained one evening after

Frog Woman put the boys to bed and was leaving to visit the Toad Sisters.

“Oh, now don’t you worry,” said Frog Woman. “A good wife takes care of her children and doesn’t forget her cousins. And a good wife doesn’t forget her husband. It’s quite a job I have, isn’t it? Have I forgotten you, dear Husband? Don’t I still cook excellent meals? Don’t we sit together still and share our thoughts and dreams? You know the answer, dear Husband.”

Coyote did know the answer: Frog Woman was an excellent wife. In fact, in caring for the two sons and still consoling her insecure cousins, the Toad Sisters, Frog Woman proved more than ever what a fine person she was—truly suitable to be a chief’s wife, for to all of the villagers she set a fine example of caring and kindness.

“Listen, Coyote,” she said to him. “Come down to the creek in the mornings and help me prepare the boys’ acorn mush. You don’t have to spend so much time drinking tea. Come with me at night to visit my cousins; you could assure them of their worth and beauty too. You don’t need to spend so much time at night sharpening your arrowheads. You have plenty of sharp arrowheads.”

But Coyote didn’t listen. One day while Frog Woman was out gathering pine nuts, Coyote took the two boys and with great force hurled them into the Sky. He threw each of them so hard that they disappeared behind the Sky’s blue cover, completely out of sight. When Frog Woman arrived home, she asked where the boys were.

“They must have run off someplace,” Coyote told her.

“Oh, they wouldn’t go far,” said Frog Woman.

After four days the boys still had not returned, and Frog Woman was beside herself with worry.

“Where are the boys?” she asked frantically.

“I took them and threw them into the Sky,” Coyote said, “because you spend too much time with them.”

Frog Woman cried and cried.

“Now you can spend more time with me,” Coyote said.

But that was not what happened. On the fifth day Frog Woman packed her clothes and returned to her pond in the hills. Coyote followed her and begged her to come back, but she would not listen to him.

Coyote found he had even more trouble back at the village. People saw how upset their dear friend Frog Woman was, and now they too knew what Coyote had done with the two boys. “How can this man be our leader?” they asked. “He has not done something great but instead something terrible.”

Coyote himself knew he had done something terrible. He knew he had made a great mistake. He went to his nephew Chicken Hawk for help. Chicken Hawk was very young then, but already he flew high in the Sky. Because he flew so high in the Sky, Chicken Hawk was a good friend of Thermal Wind, the great and wise old man whose invisible flowing beard carries all soaring birds high above the earth.

“Please,” Coyote begged his nephew, “would you ask Thermal Wind to help me get my sons back? I have thrown them

into the Sky, past its blue cover. I have done a terrible thing. But since Thermal Wind lives so close to Old Father Sky, maybe he could ask Old Father Sky what happened to my sons. Maybe Old Father Sky could find them and send them back to earth. That way I could get my wife Frog Woman back and once again have the Council of Wise Women Governors consider me as the villagers' leader."

"Well indeed what you have done doesn't sound good at all," said Chicken Hawk, "but I will go and consult with my old and wise friend Thermal Wind."

Chicken Hawk went off then. He was gone for several days. But when he returned he didn't have Coyote's two sons with him. Instead a very old man in white robes the color of his long hair was with Chicken Hawk.

"This is Thermal Wind," said Chicken Hawk. "We have some bad news."

The villagers gathered around—everyone except for Frog Woman, who remained at her pond in the hills. Coyote was beside himself with dread at the prospect of hearing bad news regarding his thrown-away sons.

"Please step forward," old man Thermal Wind said to Coyote.

Coyote, trembling with fear and trepidation, did as the old man bid him and stood in front of the large crowd of silent villagers.

"Oh, please," said Coyote, alone in front of the crowd, "don't tell me you haven't found my sons."

“Your sons are dead,” said Thermal Wind.

Coyote was puzzled then. He had not heard of Death—nor had any of the villagers, and they were equally puzzled.

“Where is that?” asked Coyote, thinking that Death was a place he hadn’t heard of.

“Listen carefully,” said Thermal Wind. “Your sons will not return, at least not as you have known them. Because of what you have done, Death is now upon the Mountain. From now on, all things must die. People will grow old and die. Sometimes accidents will happen and people will die. Sometimes people will get lost and die. They won’t ever come back, not exactly as they were before. When you threw your boys into the Sky, they became lost and died.”

“Do you mean I killed my sons?” Coyote asked, shocked.

“You didn’t know about Death. You didn’t intend to kill your sons, because you didn’t know yet that Death could happen, but still you must suffer the consequences.”

“You mean I’ll never see my sons again?”

“You will see your sons,” answered Thermal Wind, “but, like I said, you won’t see them the way you once did. There will be ways to remember and still see people after they are gone. There will be stories. People will sometimes change into things after they leave us, and we’ll see those things. Some people will turn into rocks, others may turn into flowers or trees. But always it will be stories that remind us of them, of their lives and of what happened to them. Your boys will always remind us of how Death came to Sonoma Mountain.

But they will remind us of so much more when we see them. There will be so much light, and we will be able to see and appreciate life all the more.”

“But where are they?”

Thermal Wind then pointed to the Sky. Coyote and the others looked up, and, with utter amazement, found in the Sky a huge golden ball of light.

“You see,” said Thermal Wind, “I talked to Old Father Sky just as Chicken Hawk asked, and Old Father Sky went looking for your sons and found them behind a large rock. They were glowing there; they had died and turned into round glowing lights. He carried them back as far as he could, to his blue curtain. Thus, your oldest boy became the Sun, and your youngest the Moon. Sun will give us warmth and light. When Sun leaves at the end of each day, the younger boy, Moon, will then appear. Moon will shrink and expand again and again, leaving us at times with little light, but that is only to remind us that we must never forget him and his older brother, lest we be without light.”

“But why couldn’t Old Father Sky bring my sons all the way back to the village?”

“Because Old Father Sky doesn’t ever come close to earth.”

“What of my nephew?” pleaded Coyote. “Couldn’t he carry them back?”

“They are too big now for Chicken Hawk to carry,” answered Thermal Wind. “So they must stay where they are.”

At that point, Coyote—understanding that he would never

see his two sons playing happily outside the pine-log house again or joyously singing alongside their mother as she worked and visited amongst the villagers—began to cry.

“Now you know the sorrow of Death,” said Thermal Wind.

“My heart is broken,” said Coyote. “And what of my lovely wife? I suppose after what I have done she will never come back.”

“That will be for you to find out,” said Thermal Wind. “But maybe now you can see that you were not such a good husband. You were not always warm and kind. You were selfish, often thinking only of what you wanted. You didn’t listen to Hummingbird’s advice to listen carefully to your beloved’s special song. Didn’t you hear the word ‘helping’? Didn’t you sing that you would be a partner, helping? Nor did you listen to your beloved Frog Woman when she told you that beauty is not everything, that it must not be the only thing that appeals to your heart.”

“Oh, oh,” cried Coyote. “How horrible I have been! My beloved Frog Woman told me that what is most important is what lies in a person’s heart. I kept looking at her pretty big eyes, listening to my own heart racing, instead of seeing how truly beautiful she was. I didn’t see that in Frog Woman’s heart lies all the caring and kindness in the world. Oh dear, think how that caring heart must hurt now that she’s lost her sons.”

Coyote himself hurt so badly that he collapsed in a pool of tears. And that way, with Coyote crying uncontrollably,

Thermal Wind took leave of the village, and Chicken Hawk flew up and followed after him.

Then, just before the villagers began to leave, the Council of Wise Women Governors stepped forward and made a pronouncement that shocked everyone, for in unison the four Wise Women said, "Coyote is now ready to be our leader."

"What do you mean?" protested Skunk, speaking up before the others. "What great deed has Coyote done? What has he done other than throw away his two sons?"

"He has learned to see and understand the heart of another person," the Wise Women, speaking again in unison, answered. "That is the greatest accomplishment for anyone, for a husband, and for a leader. Coyote has seen his wife's heart and felt his own heart—now he can know the hearts of all the people he will lead."

Coyote, now kneeling on the ground, could not believe his ears. Yet he knew what the four Wise Women Governors said was true. Feeling his hurting heart, he rose to his feet. Later, at a formal ceremony, Coyote humbly accepted his position as chief of the village. But not before he went looking for Frog Woman.

He found her again at her pond in the hills and sang to her thus:

Near the water

Near the water

Your beloved friend

Seeing you

A partner I will be

Helping

Helping

Even with a million children helping still

Frog Woman turned and saw him. She knew his heart had changed, and she knew this time he was true. But, as it turned out, she continued to spend much of her time at the pond, but it didn't matter, because Coyote would always be there with her. And, oh, did the words to the song ever turn out true, for Frog Woman and Coyote had many more children—frog children. Every year, after the first heavy rain, you can hear them singing, millions of them, all over the Mountain. And Coyote still thinks of his first two sons; sometimes at night he howls for them. But he knows where he can always see them. As Frog Woman sits the way she does, always looking up at the Sky, all Coyote has to do is find the boys, one during the day and the other at night, reflected in her lovely big eyes.