

COYOTE

When Coyote saw Bird he was hungry, and when Coyote was hungry, he was very hungry. There was no-one hungrier than Coyote right then, so when he saw Bird he had only one thought in his head: he would eat Bird, feathers and all. There was very little meat on Bird but just the thought of Bird's bones snapping in his jaws made Coyote's mouth water. The hunger was upon him all right.

But even hungry, Coyote was no fool. He saw how fast Bird was and how Bird raced down the road and over the mountains. Bird never seemed to stop to eat or drink or rest. Bird was fast: and Coyote knew he would have to use all his cunning if he was going to catch the fast Bird. If Coyote had known more about Bird or the stories people told of Bird then perhaps he would have gone and found something else to eat, like the Rabbit, but he had not heard the stories. Instead he thought and he thought until he could hear the voice in his head over the noise of his stomach.

"Build a trap for Bird," the voice said. "Bird may be faster than you, but he is not cleverer."

So Coyote took birdseed and scattered it over the road. Then he went up the mountain beside the road and he took the biggest boulder he could find, a boulder as big as ten bears, and he rolled it to the edge of the mountain and he waited. Soon enough, he saw the dust of Bird's running and the cry of Bird and he waited. His plan was good! Bird would see the pile of seed, and stop to peck at it, and as soon as he began to peck, Coyote would push the boulder over the edge of the mountain.

Bird saw the seed, and stopped to peck. Coyote pushed the boulder as hard as he could: but there was a small heap of pebbles behind the boulder that Coyote had not seen, and the boulder would go no further. And now Bird had nearly finished pecking! Coyote ran around the boulder and cleared the heap of stones. Just as he did so, far below Bird gave his cry and ran off.

Enraged, Coyote smacked the boulder. The boulder shook, wobbled and began to roll towards Coyote. Coyote ran, forgetting that he was on the edge of the mountain. He ran and he ran, and then he remembered where he was, and he remembered that nobody can run on sky, not even Coyote.

Coyote fell through the air and landed on his back. As he opened his eyes, he saw a shadow above him. It was the boulder, and it fell on him so hard it crushed him flat.

Now Coyote was angry as well as hungry.

He went home to his wife Mole and when she saw him she shook with laughter.

"What have you been doing, husband, to look so comical?" she asked.

"It is not funny," Coyote replied. "I was hunting Bird."

Mole laughed again.

"Bird!" she said. "There is no meat on Bird. Come, we have venison."

They ate, then, and Coyote went to sleep with a full belly, and thought no more of catching Bird.

Time passed, and Coyote was on his way to visit his brother Fox in the mountains when Bird's cry sounded out in the clear desert air. To Coyote's surprise, his stomach began to rumble.

"This is strange," he thought to himself and walked on.

But a few miles later, once more Bird's cry echoed around the canyons. Now Coyote's stomach rumbled so loudly that the snakes of the desert slithered into their holes, thinking it was an earthquake.

Coyote could stand it no longer. He knew that he would find no peace until he had slain Bird.

And once more the voice in his head spoke.

“You are Coyote,” it said. “You are more cunning than Bird. Make a trap and catch that stupid animal.”

So Coyote made a sign, that said DIVERSION, and he placed the sign so it pointed to the side of a mountain, and on the mountainside he painted the shape of a tunnel, with paint as black as the night. His plan was this: when Bird saw the sign, he would turn to go into the tunnel, but it would not be a tunnel: it would be the side of the mountain, and Bird would be killed. Coyote thought his plan was good, and he hid behind a rock for Bird to see the sign and run into the mountain. It was a good trick, thought Coyote.

Later, but not much later, Bird came hurtling down the road and, just as Coyote had known he would, turned at the sign and ran towards the painted tunnel. But instead of hitting the painted tunnel, Bird ran into the tunnel, and was gone.

Coyote could not believe what he had just seen. He came out from behind his rock and went to look at the side of the mountain where he had painted the tunnel. And, just as he was about to touch the painted tunnel, there was the screech of a train whistle, and a steam engine hurtled out of the tunnel and ran Coyote over, killing him dead.

Coyote lay there dead for a long time. He would be there still if it wasn't for his brother Fox who passed by and, seeing Coyote dead on the floor, stepped over his body three times and brought him back to life.

“Who killed you?” asked Fox. “It must have been a mighty warrior.”

“No,” Coyote replied. “It was Bird.”

Thinking Coyote must be making a joke, Fox laughed.

“Bird!” he said. “Bird could not hurt a fly!”

And he went on with his journey.

After that, Coyote was full of rage about Bird, but he did not give up. He was cunning, was Coyote, and wily, and he thought up many ways to trap Bird.

Firstly he made a firework, a rocket big enough to tie himself to, and when Bird ran by, Coyote lit the touchpaper and the rocket flew at such a speed that it raced alongside Bird. But just as Coyote was reaching out to grab him, Bird suddenly turned right and took a different road, and the rocket crashed into a mountain, killing Coyote.

Then he spread quick-drying cement all over the road so that Bird would get stuck in it and Coyote could catch eat Bird, but when Bird ran over the cement, he did not get stuck, and he splashed through the cement so much that Coyote was covered in wet cement and became a statue and died.

Next Coyote scattered bird seed all on a railroad track to trick Bird into stopping to eat at the exact time a train was coming. But Bird was so fast that he ate the seed and ran before the train came. Coyote was so angry that as he stood on the tracks he didn't see a train coming from the opposite direction, and he was killed.

Each time Coyote was killed, and each time he had to wait for his brother Fox to pass by and step over his body three times to bring him back to life.

“Why are you doing this?” asked Fox. “Return home to your wife, who is preparing you a banquet.”

But Coyote was not listening because he had his head buried in a mail order catalogue. This made Fox angry, and he said:

“So be it. If you die again, I will not save you.”

And he left Coyote by the roadside, reading the catalogue.

Coyote loved the catalogue. It was full of beautiful devices: catapults and cannons and trebuchets and tommy-guns. And one of the devices was the most beautiful device of all. It was expensive, more expensive than anything in the entire world, but Coyote had to have it. So he sold all his possessions, and all the possessions of his wife and his children, and some other things besides, and the day came when a package arrived.

“Is this the nonsense you have sold all our belongings to buy?” asked Mole. She was on her way out with the children, having decided to leave Coyote to his foolishness.

Coyote did not hear her. He was already reading the manual.

That afternoon, Coyote stood on a bluff by a winding mountain road. Soon, he knew, Bird would be passing by.

And sure enough, there was the puff of dust that signalled Bird’s coming.

Coyote pulled the tarpaulin from the device.

It was an atomic bomb. Not only that, it was the most powerful atomic bomb in the world.

Bird was below.

Coyote pushed the atomic bomb over the cliff, and it exploded on impact.

The world disappeared in a burst of fire.

When Coyote woke, he was lying in a heap of ashes. The mountains beside him, the valleys and ridges, were gone. There was nothing but a sky full of dust.

Coyote had destroyed the world. The only things remaining were Coyote, and his catalogue.

“What have I done?” he said. He looked down at his arms, his legs. He was puzzled: how could he still be alive? Fox had sworn not to help him.

Just then Coyote saw something in the distance.

A cloud of dust.

Coyote got to his feet, just in time for the cloud of dust to stop moving. It was Bird. Bird looked him in the eye, and as he did so, the voice in Coyote’s head spoke once more.

“Beep beep!” it said.

(with apologies to Mourning Dove, Chuck Jones and Grant Morrison)

David Quantick