Coyote steals the Sun and Moon



When the people first walked the land, all was dark; no sun shone throughout the day and no moon glowed during the night. It was a time of unending summer as winter had not yet come. Coyote liked the warmth but he needed light for hunting. Unable to see his prey, he could only catch small insects or bugs. His empty belly would complain loudly for it was always hungry.

Eagle never went hungry. Even in the dark, the great bird could find its prey. His sharp hearing meant that Eagle's sharp talons were never far from a rabbit. Eagle caught more during the day than he could hope to eat. Coyote learnt of Eagle's great skill and saw how this might be to his benefit.

"Brother!" he called to Eagle, "you and I should hunt together, for two hunters can catch more food than one."

Eagle thought on this and, finding no fault in Coyote's suggestion, agreed. And so, the two began to hunt in partnership. As before, Eagle found many fine rabbits. As before, Coyote could find only small bugs.

"Brother," said Coyote, "it is no wonder that I cannot find anything. I cannot see. If only there was some light. Then, I would find fine food, just like you have."

"Yes," Eagle agreed, "you should have some light. I have heard that there is light within the lands to the west. With it, everyone could see."

And so, Coyote and Eagle began their search for light. Their travels led them to a mighty river. Flying high, Eagle crossed the water without a thought. Coyote could only swim across. The river was deep and its currents were strong. By the time Coyote wearily reached the other side,

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he had swallowed so much water that he had almost drowned.

Eagle looked down at his friend in puzzlement, “Why did you not fly across the river?” he asked, “it is crossed more easily that way.”

“I have hair... but you have feathers. Without… feathers…” Coyote gasped.

Once Coyote had recovered, the two continued their journey. Soon they came to a pueblo. This was the village of the Kachina people. At the centre of the village, the Kachinas were carrying out their sacred dances, but they greeted Coyote and Eagle enthusiastically. The pair were invited to rest at the village and share the Kachinas’ food whilst the dances continued.

As the companions rested, they became aware of the power of the Kachinas.

“I believe that these are the people who have light,” Eagle said.

Coyote agreed: he had noticed that the sacred dances circled around two boxes. One of the boxes was large and the other smaller. When the Kachinas wanted a lot of light, they would open the door of the larger box. When less light was needed, the door to the second box would be opened.

“Look,” Coyote said, “they have all the light they need in the boxes. Let’s steal them.”

“You always want to steal and rob,” Eagle replied, “we should ask to borrow the boxes.”

“They would not lend them to us,” responded Coyote.

Eagle thought on this and could see the truth in Coyote’s words. “Then,” he announced, “we should wait until they are asleep.”

It was not long before the Kachina people grew tired and retired to their beds. When all was quiet, Eagle seized his opportunity. Two boxes would be too difficult for him to carry, so he quickly poured the contents of the smaller box into the larger one. Then, grasping this box within his claws, he took to the air. He tore out of the village with Coyote

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following behind.



The pueblo of the Kachinas was soon left behind, but Coyote easily grew tired. Panting, he struggled to match Eagle's speed. But whilst his legs grew tired, his mind was never weary. Coyote's thoughts turned to the large box Eagle carried and he wondered what might be trapped inside. These thoughts grew and he became impatient to learn what the box held.

"Brother!" he called out to Eagle, "let me carry the box for some of the way!"

"No!" cried Eagle, "you never do anything right!"

On they went for some time before Coyote cried out again, "Brother. You should not carry the box alone. Let me share the burden!"

"No!" Eagle replied from above.

It was not long before Coyote called out a third time, "Brother! What would people think of me if they saw you carrying the box alone whilst I do nothing?"

"I do not care," Eagle said, for he did not. On he flew with the box clutched within his talons.

Then Coyote called out desperately one last time, "Brother! You are the chief! I am only the Coyote. It is not right that the chief should do all of the work. Let me carry the box part of the way."

This time, flattered, Eagle relented. He dropped to the ground and passed the box to Coyote.

"Promise me," he said, "that if you carry the box, you will not open it."

Coyote always gave his promises easily. He told Eagle that the box would remain closed as he carried it. Satisfied, the great bird returned to the sky. With no weight to slow his progress, Eagle moved faster through the air. Below him, Coyote was already tired and the weight

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of the box did not help him run faster. Soon, he lagged behind and his friend had disappeared from view.

Alone with the box Coyote wondered, “Why shouldn’t I take a peek?” as his paw hovered hesitantly by the lid. “Perhaps there is something more in the box – something Eagle wants only for himself.”

Coyote lifted the lid and was instantly surrounded by light. The box of the Kachinas held not only the Sun but the Moon, too. With the box open, the Moon rose up into the sky. As its silver light entered the world, the air grew more chill and plants shrivelled: the Moon brought with it winter. With chattering teeth, Coyote gave chase, but the Moon danced out of his reach.

Eagle circled back in time to see the Sun escape from the box of the Kachinas. Soon, its golden light was beyond the reach of even Eagle.

“What have you done?” Eagle screeched. “You have released the Sun and the Moon!”

The great bird scowled and flew off in pursuit of the sun. Coyote did not call out in reply for he knew that Eagle spoke the truth. Had he not opened the lid, the Moon would have remained within the Kachina box and the people could have enjoyed the warmth of summer all year long.

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