

## *COYOTE AND THE MONSTER OF KAMIAH*

*This story tells how Coyote made the different people, including the Nez Perce, and how certain animals came to look as they do today. Without Coyote's cleverness in outwitting the monster, the people and animals today would still be imprisoned in the Monster's belly.*

Once upon a time, Coyote was tearing down the waterfall at Celilo and building a fish ladder, so that salmon could go upstream for the people to catch. He was very busy at this, when someone shouted to him, "Why are you doing that? All the people are gone now because the Monster has eaten them."

"Well," said Coyote to himself, "then I'll stop doing this because I was doing it for the people, and they are gone. Now I'll go along, too."

From there he went upstream, by way of the Salmon River country. As he was walking along, he stepped on the leg of Meadowlark and broke it. Meadowlark got mad and shouted, "Lima, lima, lima! What chance do you have of finding people, walking along like this?"

Coyote said, "My Aunt! Please tell me what is happening, and I will make for you a new leg from the wood of a chokecherry tree."

So the Meadowlark told him, "Already all the people have been swallowed by the Monster."

Coyote replied, "Well, that is where I, too, am going." Then he fixed Meadowlark's leg with a chokecherry branch. From there, he traveled on. Along the way he took a good bath, saying to himself, "I will make myself tasty to the Monster." Then he dressed himself all up, saying, "This is so he won't vomit me up." Coyote tied himself with rawhide rope to three great mountains, *Tubm-lo-yeets-mekbs* (Pilot Knob), *Se-sak-kbey-mekbs* (Seven Devil's Mountain), and

*Ta-ya-mekbs* (Cottonwood Butte). After the people came, these same mountains were used by young men and women as special places to seek the *wey-a-kin*, or spirit who helped guide them through life.

From there, Coyote went along the mountains and over the ridges. Suddenly, he saw a great head. He quickly hid himself in the grass and gazed at it. Never before in his life had he seen anything like it. The head was huge, and sweating off somewhere in the distance was its big body. Then Coyote shouted to him, "Oh Monster, let us inhale each other!" The big eyes of the monster looked all around for Coyote, but did not find him, because Coyote's body was painted with clay and was the same color as the grass. Then Coyote shouted again, "Oh Monster, let us inhale each other!" Coyote shook the grass back and forth where he sat.

Suddenly the Monster saw the swaying grass and said, "Oh you Coyote, you inhale first. You swallow me first." So Coyote tried. Powerfully and noisily he drew in his breath, but the great Monster only swayed and shook.

Then Coyote said, "Now you inhale me. You have already swallowed all the people, so you should swallow me too, so I won't be lonely." The Monster did not know that Coyote had a pack strapped to his back with five flintstone knives, a flint fire-making set, and some pure pitch in it.

Now the Monster inhaled like a mighty wind. He carried Coyote right towards him, but as Coyote went, he left along the way great *keb-mes* (Camas bulbs) and great serviceberry fields, saying, "Here the people will find them and will be glad, for only a short time away is the coming of the *La-te-tel-wit* (Human Beings)." Coyote almost got caught on one of the ropes, but he cut it with his knife. Thus he dashed right into the monster's mouth.

Coyote looked around and walked down the throat of the Monster. Along the way he saw bones scattered about, and he thought to himself, "I can see that many people have been dying." As he went along he saw some boys and he said to them, "Where is the Monster's heart? Come, show me." As they were heading that way, Grizzly Bear rushed out at them, roaring. Coyote said, "So! You make yourself scary only to

me," and he kicked Bear on the nose. Thus, the bear today has only a short nose.

As they went on, Rattlesnake rattled at them in fury. "So, only towards me you are vicious. We are nothing but dung to you." Then he stomped on Rattlesnake's head, and flattened it out. It is still that way.

Coyote then met Brown Bear who said, "I see the Monster has kept you for last. Hah! I'd like to see you try to save your people!"

But then, all along the way, people began to greet Coyote and talk to him. His close friend, Fox, greeted him from the side and said, "The Monster is so dangerous. What are you going to do to him?"

Coyote told him, "You and the boys go find some wood or anything that will burn."

About this time, Coyote had arrived at the heart of the Monster. He cut off slabs of fat from the great heart and threw them to the people. "It's too bad you are hungry. Here, eat this." Coyote now started a fire with his flint, and smoke drifted up through the Monster's eyes, nose, ears, and anus.

The Monster said, "Oh you Coyote! That's why I didn't trust you. Let me cast you out."

Coyote said, "If you do, people will later say, 'He who was cast out is giving salmon to the people.'"

"Well, then, go out through the nose," the Monster said.

"But then they will say the same thing."

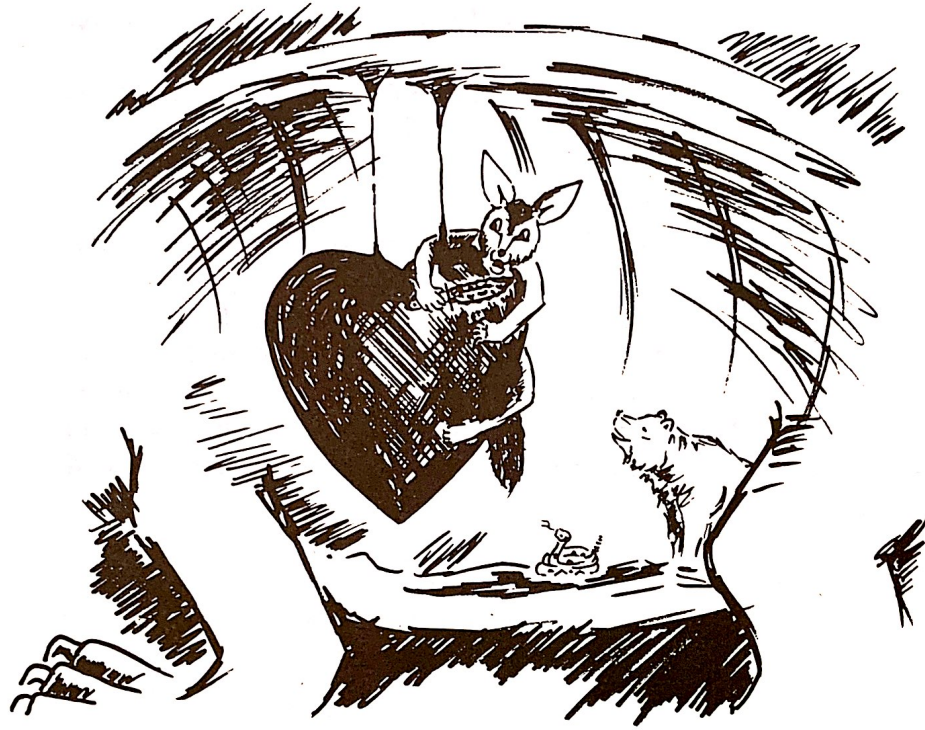
"Well, then, go out through the ears," the Monster said.

"If I do," answered Coyote, "they will say, 'There is old ear-wax, giving food to the people.'"

"Hn, hn, hn, Oh you Coyote! This is why I didn't trust you. Then, go out through the anus."

And Coyote replied, "Then people will say, 'Old faeces is giving food to the people.'"

The fire was now burning near the Monster's heart, and he began to feel the pain. Coyote began cutting away on the heart, but then broke one of his stone knives. Right away he took another knife and kept cutting, but soon that one broke, too. Coyote then said to the people, "Now gather up



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all the bones around here and carry them to the eyes, ears, mouth, and anus of the Monster. Pile them up, and when he falls dead, kick them out the openings." With the third knife he began cutting away at the heart. The third knife broke, and then the fourth, leaving only one more. He told the people, "All right, get yourselves ready because as soon as he falls dead, each one of you must go out through the opening that is closest to you. Take the old women and old men close to the openings so that they may get out easily."

Now the heart hung by only a small piece of muscle and Coyote was cutting away on it, using his last stone knife. The Monster's heart was still barely hanging when Coyote's last knife broke. Coyote then threw himself on the heart, just barely tearing it loose with his hands. Then the Monster died and opened up all the openings of his body. The people kicked the bones out and then went out themselves. Coyote went out, too.

The Monster fell dead and the anus began closing, but Muskrat was still inside. Just as the anus closed he squeezed out, barely getting his body out, but his tail was caught. He pulled and pulled and all the hair got pulled right off it. Coyote scolded him, "Now what were you doing? You probably thought of something to do at the last minute. You're always behind in everything."

Then Coyote told the people, "Gather up all the bones and arrange them well." They did this. Then Coyote said, "Now we are going to cut up the Monster." Coyote smeared blood on his hands and sprinkled this blood on the bones. Suddenly there came to life again all those who had died while inside the Monster. Everyone carved up the great Monster and Coyote began dealing out parts of the body to different areas of the country all over the land, towards the sunrise, towards the sunset, towards the north, and towards the south. Where each part landed, he named a tribe and described what their appearance would be. The Cayuse were formed and became small and hot tempered. The Flatheads got a flat headed appearance. The Blackfeet became tall, slender, and war-like. The Coeur d'Alene and their neighbors to the north became

skillful gamblers. The Yakima became short and stocky and were good fishermen.

He used up the entire body of the Monster in this way. Then Fox came up to Coyote and said, "What is the meaning of this, Coyote? You have used up the body of the Monster and given it to far away lands, but have given yourself nothing for this area."

"Well," snorted Coyote, "Why didn't you tell me this before? I was so busy that I didn't think of it." Then he turned to the people and said, "Bring me some water with which to wash my hands." He washed his hands and made the water bloody. Then with this bloody water, he threw drops over the land around him and said, "You may be little people, but you will be powerful. You will be little because I did not give you enough of the Monster's body, but you will be very brave and intelligent and will work hard. In only a short time, the *La-te-tel-wit* (Human Beings) are coming. And you will be known as the *Nu-me-poo* (later referred to as Nez Perce), or *Tsoop-nit-pa-lu* (People Crossing over into the Divide). Thus, the *Nu-me-poo* Nation was born.

Today, the heart and liver of the Monster are to be found in the beautiful Kamiah Valley in Idaho, the home of the Nez Perce tribe. Thus, the beginning of the *La-te-tel-wit* (Human Beings) was at hand.