



How Coyote Became a Friend to Man

The Karok Indians live along the Upper Klamath River in the very northern part of California. They love Coyote, and they have reason to love him, for Coyote is their friend.

After the rains have gone, when fresh green grass is pricking up like green arrows pointing to the sky, the Karok story-teller brings his people a treat.

First he puts on his best fur-and-feather cape. Then he gets out his story-telling staff and calls the Indians to come out and listen. He sometimes tells them this tale about how Coyote became a good friend to the Karoks.

Chareya, the maker of all things, first made fishes to use the water, then he made animals to use the land and birds to use the air. Last of all he made a man—a Karok.

Chareya gave this Karok the power to rule over all the animals and to tell each animal its duties and position in the world.

The Karok man thought and worried about the great power that *Chareya* had intrusted to him. He wondered how he could decide which animal should be chosen to be the swiftest runner, or which should be the strongest, and which should be the most cunning.

“And which of all animals shall sing the loudest?” he asked himself, and scratched his head, trying to decide.

“Who is to have the most beautiful fur?” he wondered. That was a hard choice. He wanted to be fair to all.

After many moons he got an idea.

He called all the animals—the bears, the mice, the mountain lions, the rabbits, scampering chipmunks, and the bristly porcupine. At the sound of the Karok’s voice, the animals came leaping and crawling and hopping through the woods.

“Sit around me,” the Karok ordered. “And listen well!” The animals scurried into their places in a huge circle.

There they sat, waiting breathlessly for what Man, their ruler, had to say.

“Tomorrow, early in the morning,” the Karok began, his black eyes fixed upon the animals, “I want every one of you to be here at this spot. I am going to give a bow with arrows to each of you. The animal to whom I give the longest bow will be the highest ranking animal of all. The one to whom I give the smallest bow will be the lowest in rank.”

The animals looked at each other nervously.

“Now remember,” the Karok said, “be here early.”

Coyote, who was sitting in the front row, twitched his tail in excitement. He pictured himself getting the biggest bow of all. He would be the highest of all the ani-

imals. Only — there was no way to be sure that the Karok would choose him.

Coyote trotted back to his den, wondering how he could manage things so that he would get the longest bow.

The Karok had said to arrive at the place early. Coyote wrinkled his brow in thought. What if he got there earlier than anyone else? Perhaps, then, the Karok would give the biggest bow to him.

“Yes!” Coyote exclaimed. “That’s what I will do. In fact, I won’t even sleep. I’ll stay awake all night and then race to meet the Karok.”

Instead of curling up in his den as he usually did, Coyote began to pace in circles in order to keep himself awake. Every time he caught himself yawning, he made himself pace a little faster.

But the rapid pacing made him very weary and the yawns started coming faster and faster. His eyelids grew so heavy that at moments he found himself running around with his eyes shut.

Coyote stopped and sat down and shook himself. His eyelids drooped, so he shook himself again, harder than before. He shook so fiercely that his bones rattled. He tried to shake sleep from his eyes.

His eyes closed for an instant and he grew alarmed. He had almost fallen asleep that time! Somehow, he had to try to find a way to stay awake until it was time to go and get the great bow which he was sure the Karok would give him.

There was a stream of water near Coyote’s den, so he ran, yawning and shaking himself, and plunged in. The water was cold and dark. Coyote hated the feel of Water

against his skin and fur. Just the same, Water was a help. Its wetness stung his eyes. Its coldness made him shiver. He felt certain that now he would not go to sleep.

No sooner had he got back to his den than he got sleepy again. Desperately, he started singing songs to himself, songs about the giant bow and what he would do with it.

And then — just before dawn — his eyelids slipped down and down. His head drooped. His knees buckled. Coyote slid down in a snoring heap, sound asleep.

He woke up much later, with a start. His heart sank as he realized what had happened.

Coyote raced from his den. He ran faster than he had ever run. He ran into the meeting, breathless, — the last animal there!

All that was left for poor Coyote was the very shortest bow of all.

Coyote was so disappointed that he sat on his haunches and howled for a whole day and a whole night. This made the Karok Indian take pity on him.

“Coyote,” said the Karok, “I’ll talk to *Chareya* about you. I’ll tell him how you tried to win the longest bow.”

“Don’t forget to tell him how I shook myself to keep awake,” Coyote reminded.

“I’ll tell him.”

“And don’t forget to tell him that even though I hate cold water, especially in my ears, I went for a swim in the cold and dark to keep awake.”

“I’ll tell him,” the Karok promised.

“And don’t forget that I sang songs — lots of songs, to try to keep awake,” urged Coyote.

"I'll tell him everything about you," the Karok said. The Karok went to talk to *Chareya*. Coyote was so restless that he ran around and around until his tongue was hanging out.

Old Hawk laughed, "Silly! Running around won't help you. Keep still and wait."

But Coyote couldn't keep still. His pride was hurt because he had dreamed of having the longest bow and here he was carrying the very shortest bow of all the animals. He sat down and scratched at his fleas to pass the time until the Karok man would come back. At least, fleas didn't have any bows at all, and that helped his pride a little.

When at last the Karok came back, Coyote leaped to his feet and stood trembling as he waited for the Karok to speak.

"I told *Chareya* everything," Karok reported. "He saw that you were good in some ways even if you are too proud and too eager to be the top animal of all."

"Well, what did he decide?" Coyote asked, his voice squeaking with impatience.

The Karok told Coyote that *Chareya*, after careful thought about Coyote, had decreed that Coyote should become the most crafty and cunning of all animals.

Coyote was so pleased that he threw away his bow. He was so grateful to the Karok Indians that he made a promise:

"I'll always be your friend and the friend of your children and your children's children. I will do everything I can to help you Karoks."

