

COYOTE PUP AND THE LOST TRIBE

There was once a coyote pup named Taika. He had been separated at birth from his mom and dad and brothers and sisters. Growing up he was often lonely, but adapted to being alone and eventually came to see that fending for himself carried its own rewards. He grew to be self-reliant and extremely entertained by his own company—as coyotes are known to be—and would often sleep the entire afternoon away on the side of high cliff overlooking a green valley. Although he was contented by himself, he always yearned to be re-connected to his parents. He dreamed up stories as to what might have happened to them.

One day, a strong, bright-eyed female coyote came upon him while he was sleeping and startled him out of his nap. Her fur was oatmeal-colored and her eyes a smoky gray. She hopped around him, trying to sniff him out. Usually coyotes travel in packs, and Taika was curious why this female was traveling alone. Perhaps she too had grown up an orphan or maybe she was just looking for some other coyotes to play with.

“Are you looking for anyone?”

She pricked her ears and gazed deep into the coyote pup’s eyes. “I am looking for a family, like you.”

He was unsure of how she knew these things but was willing to hear more. “What is your name? Where are you going, or do you know?” he asked.

“I am Sanjay and I am on my way to find the Lost Tribe. Have you heard of them?”

Taika had never heard of the Lost Tribe, and didn't know if it was a tribe of human animals, coyotes or perhaps some other group of animals. He shook his head no and asked for Sanjay to tell him more.

“The Lost Tribe is a large family of coyotes who are not necessarily related. They decided amongst themselves that they would take care of each other, and forge bonds with one another. There are mothers and fathers, babies, sisters, and brothers. There is even an old Grandmother coyote who they say can see everything in the past and in the future. That is the pack I am looking for. It's where you go if you don't have a family.”

Taika blinked wildly at this unusual traveler who had crossed his path and roused him from his sleep. He was wide awake now, hoping he could join her on her journey to find the Lost Tribe. She was very intuitive and could tell he wanted to come, so she simply trotted down a path through the thick wood, looking back and jerking her nose up in the air as if to say, ‘Come on!’

He followed her into the forest. The deeper they went, the quieter the forest became and the two coyotes could hear their rough pads stepping upon the pine needles. The guiding patches of sunlight that streamed through the trees became smaller and smaller and a chill settled around them.

Taika was becoming tired and thirsty. “How much further do you think it is until we find the Lost Tribe?”

“How am I supposed to know? I have never seen them, and I am only going North, beyond the tree line, like the legend says.”

“Legend?” Taika snorted and was not sure if he should have agreed to go on this journey. But he was excited to find a family, a group to call his own and was always up for an adventure so he trudged on, stepping close behind Sanjay’s heels.

Finally, they came upon an alpine lake. The wind was beginning to blow, forming different configurations on the water’s surface. Taika drank and drank from the water, lapping up its freshness and hoping they could stick around long enough to feed on some fish or a beaver. Sanjay once again seemed to read his mind as she gingerly stepped over rocks to a larger boulder. There, she stood as still as a tree and after several minutes, pulled a spotted trout out of the water. She had speared the fish with her paw but then tossed it in her mouth where it flipped and flopped. She brought the catch over to Taika and lied it in front of him. They shared the fish and curled up beside each other and fell asleep.

When Taika woke up, Sanjay was gone. He traced her footprints, which went half-way around the lake, then disappeared into a stand of aspens. The forest was not as thick here, and he could smell and see much better than in the forest they had traveled through. He listened with all of his might, sniffed deeply into the wind. But she was nowhere to be found.

As he walked along, not really paying attention to where he was headed, an old Grandfather Coyote emerged from an abandoned fox den. Taika jumped as he met Grandfather’s eyes but they did not scare one another into defensive postures. Grandfather Coyote seemed gentle and slow-moving.

“What brings you this far North, little fellow?”

“I am looking for my friend, Sanjay, who was looking for the Lost Tribe. We were hoping to be accepted into the Lost Tribe together. Have you seen her? Do you know where the Lost Tribe is?”

Grandfather scratched the earth and steadied his gaze upon Taika.

“Sanjay. Hmm, yes.”

“Do you know her?”

Grandfather took a step towards Taika, bending his head down low as if in prayer.

“Everyone knows Sanjay. She is the Keeper of Coyote Dreams. I hope you told her your wish.”

Taika shook his head and snorted. He knew the beautiful, tireless Coyote named Sanjay seemed a little mysterious, like she had the ability to see into his inner thoughts. But what was this about her being the Keeper of Dreams?

“Wish? She told me about some Lost Tribe where coyotes act like a family, where they love each other as if they were true family and I asked if I could come. That’s where we were headed.”

“Oh, so she saw your true desire without having to ask. Very interesting, very sly of her!”

Taika was confused and feeling nervous. Was this a big trick? He had played so many tricks on animals and people alike that he worried it was now payback time. He grinded his paws into the earth and narrowed his eyes at Grandfather. “What is going on? Is there a Lost Tribe or not?”

Grandfather Coyote chuckled to himself and sat on his haunches. “Dearest son, you cannot search for something that is right in front of you. Look around.”

Taika could feel his blood start to pump through his veins, warming his body. His gaze remained on Grandfather, a look which demanded answers.

“I said *look around you*,” Grandfather pleaded, then closed his eyes, stretched his head to the heavens and began to howl.

Taika first noticed the stand of aspens he had passed shortly before running into Grandfather. Their leaves quaked as the wind rustled through them, and they mimicked the wind, whispering their own kind of music. He looked up and saw a Red-Tail Hawk circling high above, and as soon as he paid attention to the hawk’s pattern, the hawk’s eye become large and yellow and Taika could feel his heart open as the hawk’s eye focused on him. The bird spiraled away and then swooshed closer to Taika. As he flew past, Taika’s fur unexpectedly curled upward on his back. Taika was amazed! He’d seen many a hawk before, but he now wondered if he ever really *looked* at them.

Grandfather continued to howl and Taika took this as a clue to keep looking around. The ground seemed to be vibrating beneath him so he picked up one paw then another and noticed the ants carrying miniscule grains of sand to a big mound. He leaned his head toward the line of marching ants and he could hear them speaking to one another! “Over here” and “this way” and then, to his surprise, he heard one of them say, “Why don’t you give us a hand?” This tickled him and he laughed; when he caught Grandfather’s eye, he laughed too and nodded his head.

Taika walked to the edge of the mountain. He looked down onto the valley floor where a great river rushed over tall grasses, rocks and fertile soil. He couldn’t believe what he saw! Schools of fish swam in an elaborate pattern that spelled out his name: Taika. They then swam back up river and did it again. This brought tears of joy to Taika and he cried freely. Once more

the silver, slick fish swam up the river but this time they did not spell his name but another name: Sanjay.

Taika was overcome with excitement. He, too, wanted to express himself to all of these creatures, all of these beings of nature. He listened to the sounds coming out of Grandfather Coyote. They were ancient, thick with emotion and Taika was afraid his own sound would detract from Grandfather's deep, guttural sound. He pawed the earth, scooching himself closer and closer to Grandfather's backside, waiting for the right moment to join in.

Grandfather felt the warm rump of Taika's body against him. "Everyone has their own song, Taika. Your family is everywhere! Including inside of you, because you belong to yourself as well. Feel the joy there, and then sing. All will hear your song if it starts in the heart."

Taika took a deep breath and closed his eyes. He waited for Grandfather to start up again, which he did. Taika pushed back against Grandfather's back and stretched his head up to the sky. And he began to howl.

At first shy and quite unsure of what his howl would sound like in the company of another coyote, Taika was pleasantly surprised that he and Grandfather harmonized! This made him so happy, since he had spent his entire life howling alone.

As he and Grandfather made their music, Taika opened his eyes for a quick second to see if the hawk was still soaring above them. He didn't even have the chance to look up because what caught his eye was a sight he could not tear himself away from. It was Sanjay, standing on the edge of the forest beside a copse of birch trees. She was much larger than he remembered, her eyes were ringed blue, like a comet's tail, and her fur was longer and thicker. She nodded at

him, closed her eyes and walked slowly along the path. He watched her until she was out of sight.

Although he wished she had not walked away, he knew he would never roam the wild forest alone, ever again. He knew he had family everywhere.