



Coyote, Bobcat and the Corn

A Navajo Tale

Cultural Note

According to Navajo tradition, this is a winter tale. Coyote stories should only be told in the winter time

Vocabulary

decoy

eagerly

exhausted

glanced

trust

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Coyote was on his way home from an unsuccessful hunt. He was hungry, and he was in a foul mood. He mumbled to himself and kicked at the dead branches in his path. As he passed beneath a tree, he glanced up and spotted Bobcat crouched on a limb. He was ready to pounce on a big fat bird.

"Hey, Cousin Bobcat," Coyote shouted. "What are you doing up there?"

At the sound of Coyote's voice, Bobcat jumped and lost his balance and fell from the tree. "I was about to catch a bird for my supper, but you've scared her off. Now all I have is an old nest with nothing but rotten eggs in it. I am hungry. Thanks for nothing, you loudmouth!"

"Don't be sore, Cousin Bobcat," said Coyote. "Why don't you come with me? We can get some free food."



You can have all the sweet, juicy ears of *naadaqá'* (corn) you can eat. Come on down out of that tree."



Bobcat climbed out of the tree and asked, "Ears? Of corn? Is that what I heard you say? So corn has ears?"

"Oh, yeah. You can tear them right from the corn stalk, pull the husk back, and eat the juicy kernels"

"That sounds good," said Bobcat, "but I don't usually eat ears! I guess I've never seen corn before."

"Corn is the best tasting food I've ever eaten," said Coyote. He smacked his lips and rubbed his tummy. "Come on. Let's not just sit around here gabbing. I'll take you to the cornfield, and you can see for yourself. You can have all the juicy corn you can eat or haul away."

Bobcat didn't trust Coyote. "I don't know," said Bobcat. "How far is it to this corn? Remember, I'm hungry and weak, and I can't run very far."

Coyote knew it was a long way to the cornfield, but he didn't want to risk losing Bobcat. He needed Bobcat as a decoy, so he could sneak past the farmers who would be guarding their fields. He said, "Oh, don't worry about that. It's nothing. I can help you. I know magic ways to make you run fast. Even faster than me."

"Magic? You can make me run fast? Hmmmm. Tell me a little bit more about these corn ears."





"Well, they're green, they have big leaves, and they grow on stalks. They're soft and yellow, and the kernels are milky and delicious. They're wrapped in husks, and you peel them back and eat them right off the cob."

Bobcat asked, "Yellow? These corn ears are yellow?" "No, not all of them. Some of them are white,"

answered Coyote.

"Like snow?" questioned Bobcat. "Yes. There are red ones too."

"Like blood?" said Bobcat. "Now that I can understand."

"Some of them are blue, too, like the sky at night," explained Coyote.

"I'm with you all the way, then," said Bobcat eagerly.

That was just exactly what Coyote wanted to hear Bobcat say. "Let's hurry then. Let's get going."

Coyote took off, and soon he was way ahead of Bobcat. Bobcat struggled to keep up with Coyote. Pretty soon he was panting and staggering, and his tongue was hanging out of his mouth. He was exhausted! "I can't go any further," he called out to Coyote.

"Just walk up to the top of this hill. You can see the cornfield right below here. You can make it. Come on, just a little farther."

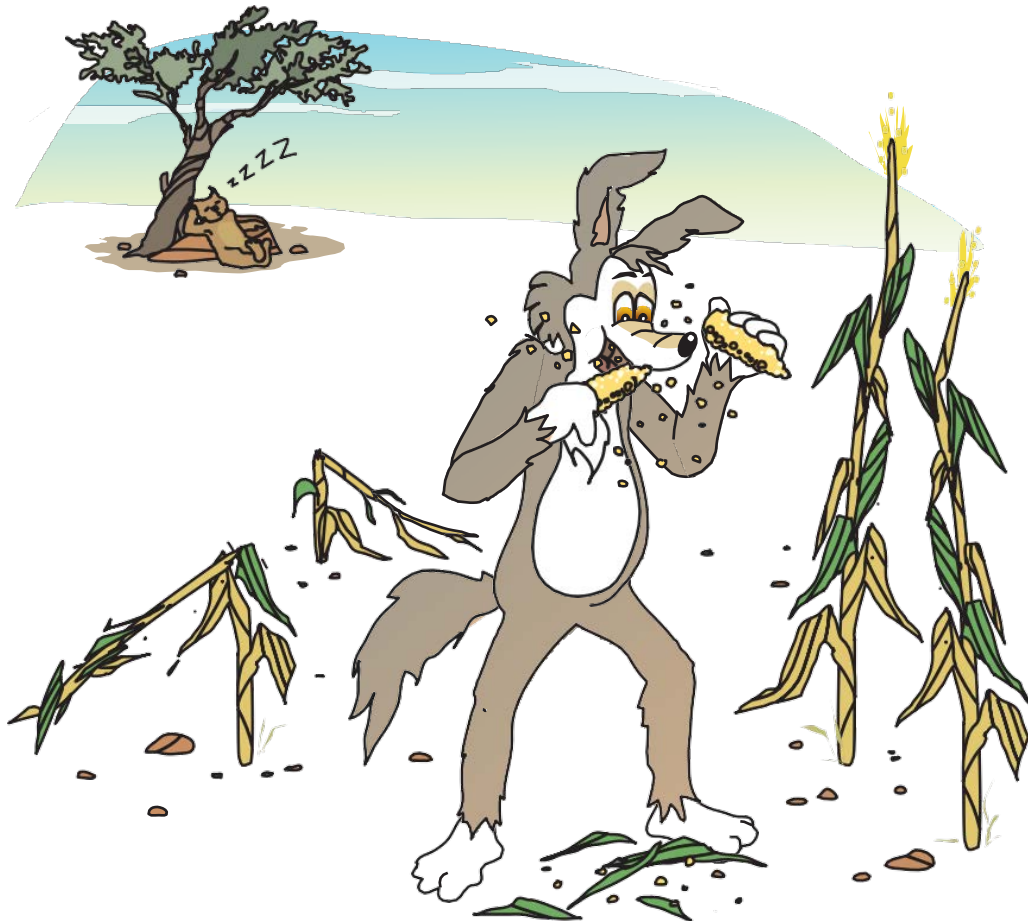
"Just go on ahead of me," Bobcat panted. "I'll catch up with you as soon as I can. Be sure to save me some ears."



“Oh, don’t worry about that. There’s plenty.” Coyote charged down the hill to the middle of the cornfield and started gobbling corn as fast as he could. He knew that the farmers would soon spot him and chase him away, and he wanted to get a full stomach before that happened.”

Meanwhile, Bobcat had plopped himself down to rest in the shade of a small tree.

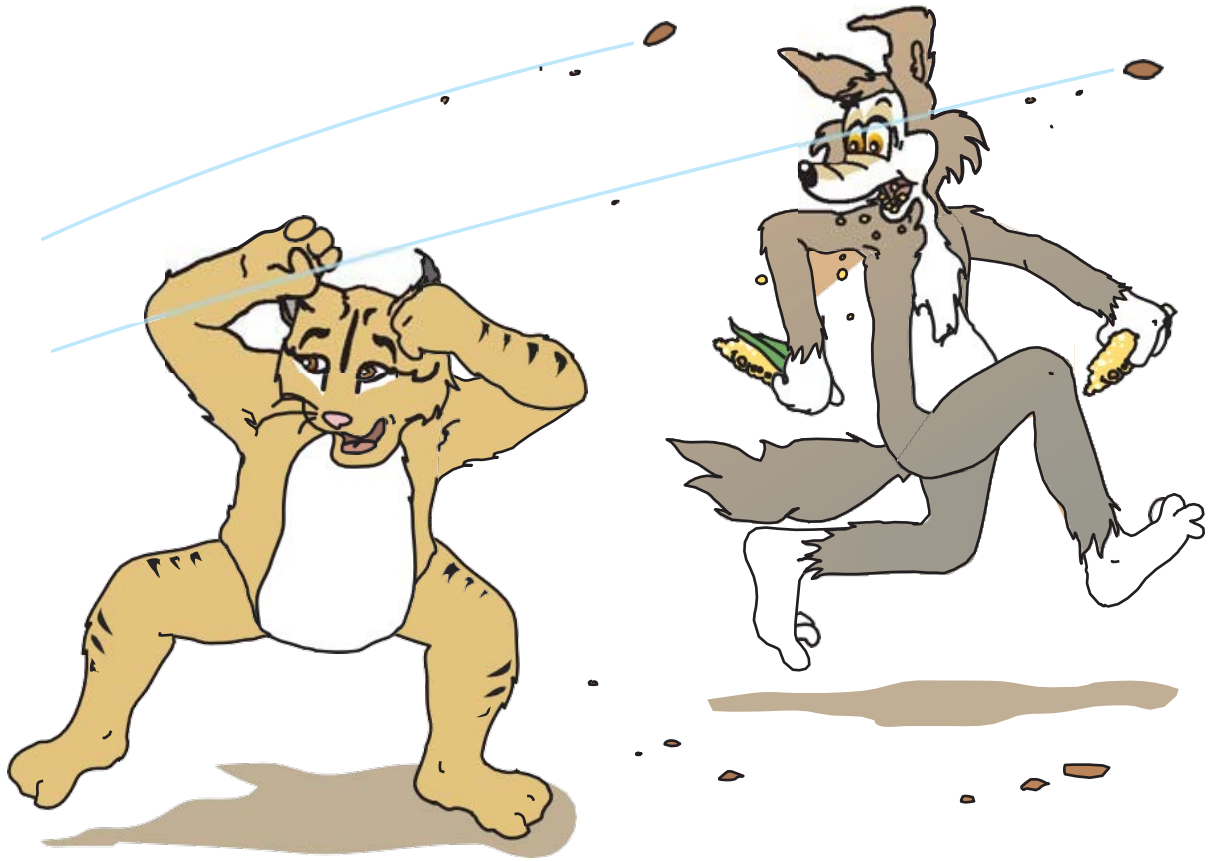
Coyote ripped his way through the cornfield, making a horrible mess and a racket. He had his stomach bulging out, his mouth full, and his arms loaded with as much corn as he could carry.





Suddenly, a rock whizzed by his head. Then another just missed his shoulder. It was the Diné farmers after him. He turned around in panic and headed back to where Bobcat lay resting. He ran past him and shouted, "Run for your life! The farmers are after you. Get out of here if you value your life!"

Bobcat jumped up and ran after Coyote, but he was way too slow. A rock whizzed by his head. He yelled out, "What's the magic that will make me run faster?"



Coyote's mouth was so full of corn, he couldn't speak. He was flinging corn everywhere to lighten his load. He turned his head to answer Bobcat, but his mouth was too full of corn, and he couldn't speak. He turned his head the other direction and tried to yell, but he still couldn't get anything out.

Bobcat could see Coyote running way ahead of him along the edge of the canyon, but he couldn't hear a thing. All he could see was Coyote's head going from side to side as he arched his back and pumped his arms. Then he disappeared over the hill.

Bobcat thought, "That must be the magic. That must be what I'm supposed to do to run fast."

Bobcat started twisting his head from side to side. The farmers were hot on his heels, and the rocks kept whizzing past his head as he reached the canyon rim. He panicked. "I'm not turning my head fast enough," he thought. He arched his back and pumped his arms and jerked his head from side to side as fast as he could. Faster and faster, he pumped and twisted until he was so dizzy he didn't even know where he was.

Suddenly, he disappeared over the edge of the cliff, where he tumbled and rolled into a thicket at the bottom of the canyon wall. He lay there in a heap, covered with dirt and thorns and bushes. He blended right into the canyon walls, safe from the angry farmers.





The farmers stopped in amazement. "Where did that thief Bobcat go? He disappeared just like magic!" They looked around for him, but finally gave up and returned to their fields.

Bobcat lay still until it seemed safe to emerge, then he licked his bruises and limped back home. He grumbled, "That Coyote has done it again. He's full, and I'm still hungry, and I'll never know what one of those delicious ears of corn tastes like."

To this day, Bobcat never goes near a cornfield.

Glossary

awos – shoulder

Diné - Navajo people

ma'ii - Coyote

naadą́ą́ - corn

náshdóí - Bobcat

Reading Suggestions

- Find a corn bread recipe and follow the directions to make corn bread with your family.
- A simile is a comparison using “like” or “as.” Look on page 4 of the story, and you will see “white like snow,” “blue like the sky,” and “red like blood.” Write a story and include a simile of your own.
- Sing “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.” Substitute words from other languages if you can.

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