

Sometimes, when you need something, it just falls into your lap. That happened while I was looking for images of coyotes recently. I am writing a story about three kids who visit Bandelier, New Mexico during the Depression and shortly before the Civilian Conservation Corps arrives to develop it into a national monument. The book will be a sequel to *Vagabond Wind, the Adventures of Anya and Corax*. In the new book, before the kids take center stage, I needed to call upon those mythic characters, Coyote and Raven, to help fill in the background story of Frijoles Canyon.

By chance I tripped over a photo that perfectly illustrates the encounter of these two rivals. It led me to Coyoteyipps, Janet Kessler's wonderful site. Janet has very kindly allowed me to use this amazing image in this, a sample from *Twist a Rope of Sand, More Adventures of Anya and Corax*. If you'd like to be occasionally updated about the progress of this book, you can e-mail me at [kmdelmara dot com](mailto:kmdelmara dot com), or check [www.kmdelmara dot com](http://www.kmdelmara dot com).



## TWIST A ROPE OF SAND

There has always been a Trickster.  
Since the Time of Beginnings, the Old Ones knew him as  
a symbol uniting opposites:  
Transformer and Destroyer, Joker and Truth-Teller.  
He is contradiction and paradox,  
because everything in our world is balanced by its opposite.  
We may complain that nothing ever changes,  
but if that Trickster puts his nose over the doorsill  
our life can turn in the space of one pawprint.

And herein lies a tale.

A PARADOX  
Circa 1050 C.E.  
Near Frijoles Canyon, New Mexico

She rides the hot thermals with barely a flap of her wings. High she soars, impenetrably black against the sky.

That is how Raven is the first to see what is coming, one day while she circles lazily over the sweltering Parajito Plateau.

Out there, far away across the mesa. Something unfamiliar.

But this distraction is forgotten a moment later when she spies her enemy. Coyote! That enemy she so loves to hate. It's that old trickster Coyote himself, creeping along the rim of the canyon, slinking among the boulders, probably stalking a marmot or a pica.

Haha, Senor Coyote! No pica for you today, Raven croaks to herself.

Coyote, glimpsing the shadow of Raven hovering above him, crouches low and prepares to lunge at her. With a scream, Raven dives and swoops past him, nearly clipping his ear and hoping to alert any prey to Coyote's presence. Coyote rears up, snapping his ferocious jaws but catching only the odor of Raven's dirty feet. So intent on Coyote is she, that she nearly collides with a branch of a pinon tree.

As so often happens for Coyote, though, the encounter works in his favor. Raven's attack alerts him to another danger. Out there, what *is* that he sees? Anxiety sharpens his perception. Vague, indistinct forms, rippling in the shimmering heat of the plateau, the oddest band of creatures he has ever seen. He sits up and watches them, yipping small panicked cries, ears alert, nose scenting. What are those strange animals? There are many of them, definitely coming his way. Alarmed, Coyote turns, disappears over the rim of the canyon, and threads his way down the cliff.

He and his extended family have made homes in this canyon for time out of mind. What would happen if those strange creatures discover this beautiful place? Would they want to stay? He fears that, in a blink of his yellow eyes, his life could be upended, his home dislocated, his children endangered, the prey he hunts no longer in their customary haunts. Everything would change.

Ah, Senor Coyote, you are right to be afraid. Yes, even you, with your breed's superior ability to adapt. Your old habits, old comforts may have to be left behind, and it may happen that you are allowed only a sliver of time in which to move on. Things can change just that quickly, and suddenly the dark angel of fear is standing at your shoulder.

But you, Senor, you best of all, realize that you must release this dark angel, as you have needed to do, time and again. Because then and only then do the archangels enter; you discover what is waiting for you. And Time spins loose from the eddy that snagged it, and flows on to its secret destination.

Meanwhile, far out on the dusty plateau, those strange creatures wander, with no set destination. Some dark angel stalks them, surely, because the People are dragging their feet. Why they have been displaced from their former land, no one today can recall. Perhaps they did not belong to any land. Perhaps they are nomads searching for new territory. But in any case, the last of their water is gone. There is not a drop to be had. They can find no place on this scorched plateau that would shelter them from the hot furnace of summer sun, from the blasting winds of winter, from greedy enemy tribes.

Some of the People begin to complain, and complaints start arguments. They have made a mistake. They know there are sacred places in the distant mountains that ring the plateau. They should have gone there, because it will take a miracle to find sustenance in this flat dry place where only scrub juniper and sagebrush grow.

It would indeed take a miracle, and as miracles go, the one that appears just now might not seem auspicious. He is, in fact, terribly deadly, but when they spot him, the People know that finally there is hope for them. If he, creature of dust and rocks, can thrive here, they could as well. Crawling on his belly, so well camouflaged they almost don't see him until he is right at their feet, his rattle is what warns them.

A snake, even coiled and ready to strike, is to them a blessing. His presence means that water, most precious of all the world's gifts, must be close by. Water, more valuable than gold. Respectfully, with heartfelt thanks, they give him wide berth and pick up the pace. Water, somewhere near. At this point, in this sere landscape, they would rejoice to find any little trickle.

Then, abruptly, the plateau ends. They hadn't even detected the long fissure of a canyon that now blocks their way, so narrow it is. They stand at the edge and stare at the high rocky cliff wall opposite. Granted, there are good-sized trees clinging there, box elder, pine, and pinon, but no waterfall. When they look down, however, peering cautiously over the cliff edge and deep down to the canyon floor, they almost weep with relief. They never expected paradise.

The canyon walls are steep. It means a difficult descent. It takes hours to pick their way through the treacherous rocks. The men hurry ahead and women, children, old people, and a few bony animals follow slowly, carrying everything they own in this world. When they finally reach the bottom they find, not a narrow stony stream bed, but a broad green and hospitable shore. Not a trickle of water, but a river, flowing from out of the mountains to the west even in this dry time.

The river canyon seemed to them a gift from the gods. They gave up their nomadic existence and stayed for many generations. The People carved, literally carved caves to make homes in the soft *tufa* of the pink cliff walls. Game was abundant. They formed clay into pottery, and found pleasure in painting it beautifully. They learned to plant corn, beans, and squash, and their children's children inhabited this place and worshiped its gods for three hundred years by our count.

Then life turned for them, too. This time, they moved down to the Rio Grande River, where their descendants live to this day. Again, no one knows why they had to go, apparently in great haste. Was it fear of enemies? Plague, or drought? Their men did not even take time to gather all their weapons. Some, they hid. Others they just dropped. Women left tightly woven baskets and their precious pots, too heavy to carry. A child forgot one little shoe, a grandmother discarded an image of her fertility goddess. They left these things behind, and the years buried them.

Almost every trace of the People, buried by Time.

They were gone. No drums, manifesting the heartbeat of Mother Earth, sounded in that canyon for another six hundred years. The deeply worn foot trails blurred a little more with passing seasons. The hand-and-toe trails, leading straight up sheer faces of rock, eroded and became impassable. Forsaken shrines lay untended, and the wind wailed lonely through the hollow canyon.

Empty.

The canyon, riven into the volcanic *tufa* more than a million years ago, once again seemed empty.

But in truth the gods of the place had never left. Occasionally a passing hunter would honor them with a turquoise shard or a piece of shell from some far shore, laying it beside the boulders that had long ago been arranged in a keyhole shape. A few of the Old Ones sometimes came back to pray next to the two stone lions that guarded the entrance to Shipapolima, their underworld.

But mostly the gods now kept their vigils alone. Wisps, phantasmas, they waited in their sacred places. Perhaps one day a traveler would come through and recognize them, commune with them; some traveler who would know without seeing, who could feel without knowing. For him or for her, the unchanging gods of ancient earth were waiting.

Come to us, be quiet, feel.