

Old Dog and Coyote

MEXICO—OTOMI



A long time ago in the Mexican desert, there was an old dog who lived with a chicken farmer. One day the farmer found the old dog fast asleep while the chickens cackled and raised a ruckus at a wolf prowling outside their yard. The farmer chased the wolf away and raged at the dog, "Wake up, you lazy creature! You are a useless watchdog! Go and find your own food today!"

Hungry and humiliated, the old dog crept from the farmer's shack into the desert. He poked about the cactus and yucca plants for small rodents and lizards to catch and eat. A howl made him look across the desert, and there he saw Coyote jumping up and down. Curious, the old dog padded over and snarled, "What are you doing?"

Coyote replied, "Do not bother me. I am practicing for my big jump."

The old dog was confused and asked, "Where are you going to jump?"

Coyote bragged, "I am the best jumper in the desert. I am going to jump over a giant cactus."

"You are foolish!" the old dog said. "You cannot jump over a cactus!"

Coyote replied, "Anything is possible with practice. Watch me try."

Before them stood a huge, prickly-thorned cactus. Coyote took a great, running leap and, soaring to the top of the cactus, landed directly on top of the thorns. The old dog had never heard a howl as loud as the one Coyote made as he tumbled to the ground, stuck all over with prickly thorns.

The old dog felt sorry for Coyote's pitiful condition and said, "I cannot bear to see you in such pain. Let me help."

The old dog spent the next few hours gently pulling out the thorns, both big and small, with his teeth. When he was finished, Coyote rolled over and sighed, "Ahhh! What a fine dog you are!"

The old dog groaned with hunger and said, "No, I am not. I am a useless old watchdog. I cannot guard the chickens. No one is afraid of me. See, even *you* do not run away. Now the farmer will not feed me anymore."

Coyote's eyes brightened. "I am your wild dog brother. I will return your kindness to me."

Coyote whispered a plan into the old dog's ear.

That night the old dog returned to the farmer's chicken yard. Coyote crept among the chickens and stirred up such a racket of cackling that the farmer woke up to investigate the noise. He arrived to see the old dog growling and chasing Coyote, who ran with his tail between his legs.

"Good dog!" exclaimed the farmer. "So I see you are not useless after all! Tomorrow I will give you a fine bone!"

Coyote ran to the top of a small hill and howled with laughter.

Every few nights from then on, Coyote made great sport of waking the farmer by stirring up the chickens and pretending to be frightened of the dog. As for the old watch dog, the farmer believed what was useful to him and fed the dog generously until the day he died.