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Coyote Takes Us Home

The twins stowed beneath the spare tire tell us a story about a small, square jardín in deep Jalisco with neatly trimmed laurel trees and a cast-iron bandstand where Porfirio Díaz once stood and scratched his balls. Where Pancho Villa farted. Where Lázaro Cárdenas spat. Where Vicente Fox picked his teeth. This was the exact spot where Subcomandante Marcos, Tía Chila's big-balled, black Chihuahua, peed and peed and peed and then mounted little diaperless Natividad. People came running. Nobody had seen a hybrid baby since before the war, since Juan el Oso, whose mother was taken to Acapulco by a circus bear from León.

The twins were waiting on the curb, they say, watching the procession of the bloody martyr, when Coyote finally came out of the cantina. The silver scorpion on his belt buckle clacked its claws and made seven blind sisters dance.

"Will you take us?" the twins asked.

Coyote sniffed the air and measured the moon between his thumb and his forefinger. It was more than half full and the twins had had a strange delivery. But Coyote wasn't concerned. He led them across the bridge and down through the park to the dry creek bed where we were all asleep in the Nova among the stained herons, busted appliances, tires, maricóns, and used condoms. A woman was weeping on a television.

"Move over, little ones," Coyote whispered. "Make room, periquitos."

A few leaves fall for no reason in this story. And even now we hear the band playing, just as the twins say it is: the trumpets and clarinets spiraling like crazy rockets, exploding into pink sparks above the crowd. This all happened at a time of balloons and marionettes, they say. Is that the engine or the tuba? The transmission or the snare drum? Dust and stones become asphalt. A desert appears at blue sunrise. Some rocks, a red-flowering nopal, a thin horse, a goat.

It's fine, we say. That sounds like a beginning. We can believe in that. Éste era and we're gone.

In the morning we see some kids throwing rocks at a woman's head by the side of the road. They ride off on their bikes when we pull over.

"I met a man at a disco," the head tells us. The head of this woman tells us this man was a rich mestizo's son, and how she danced a polka with him and lost one of her shabby little huaraches. How he tracked her down and mashed her toes into a plastic slipper he found somewhere and declared he'd marry her. How he shot twins up inside her that night, and how when they were born her stepsisters sold them to some blue-eyed gringos from New Haven. The husband took his revenge by burying her up to her neck.

"Those bitches are drinking champagne up in Polanco now! But they'll be back for me," she says. "They'll be back, my little ones, my little white children." One of those rocks must've knocked something loose. We throw a few more while Coyote trots up the road to hike his leg on a spot where a woman buried the devil caught in a bottle.

"Mis gringitas!" the head cries. "Bring money!"

Pow!

We hear our parents are dragging long sacks through fields of broad-leafed bitter greens that we don't recognize. They are working in an orchard of small gnarled trees, where children are cultivated with the help of bees. Our parents pluck them heavy from the branches, pinch them off their slender green stems and redeem bushels of those kids for chits that mean food and cable television. The tractors start up and carry them to Chicago. Our parents work in a factory assembling little pink babies covered in feathers. They're waiting for us, our parents, stone-faced. They're laying out our shorts and T-shirts on a firm bunk bed, our parents. Our work clothes.

Coyote says: They found some devils in Arizona, in the desert, mingled in with the bloated corpses of those mojudos from Guatemala and Nicaragua and Mexico. They were looking for work, too. It's not so easy for them either these days, you know.

Coyote says: Those boys, Corrin Corrán, Tirin Tirán, Oyín Oyán, Pedín Pedán, Comín Comán, they got themselves locked inside a grain car in Matamoros. Then they sat trapped in a railyard in Iowa for four months. When they were found, there wasn't much left.

It's like Coyote is trying to trap us with his stories. It's like listening to him read the dictionary. "You can't trust just nobody," he says. We hate the frown of his jade driving mask, the deep stare of its shell eyes. If you look too long, you feel heavy. You feel old. So we let him talk, but we don't listen and we definitely don't keep still. We watch his words tumble out the open windows, turn to vultures on the road picking over something's small carcass. "What did you say, Coyote?" we ask. "What was that? What?" until he gets pissed off and stomps harder on the gas, making the Nova buck and fishtail. Anyway, he has hair in his ears.

The boy in the headrest has a sister carved from coral, and the iron girl beneath the backseat was a present to an old man from three blonde sissies, lottery-winners from Juárez.

Coyote told us to wait in the Nova, but we were hungry. Through the window of her house we could see the Witch of Guamúchil, her tits pounding together like two wet cheeses, Coyote's teeth clamped to the loose flesh of her withers, his pink skinny prick pumping in and out of her hairy rump. Once we threw some water on two dogs fucking. The girl from Tizapán killed a family pig by shoving a lit candle in its ass. As we crossed the highway, Pilar, Carlos, and Miguel were turned to paper by the touch of a southbound RV. They blew into the Sierra Madres. Adiós, muchachitos!

We were in a graveyard, watching our step. When the dead speak, it's like walking through a spider's web.

"Who's there?" they kept asking, but we couldn't remember our names. There was a lot of dogshit around.

"Don't marry a woman who can't keep a secret," one of them said.

"Don't keep idle sticks in the house," said another.

"Don't shelter orphan children," called out a third. We wrote it all down with a stick and some sand, like nothing we'd need on the other side.

We found the elotero sitting under a tree, eating the last of his ears of corn. "But we're hungry," we said.

"Don't whine," he said and threatened us with an umbrella. Everybody got one kernel, except Julio, who got none. That's when we noticed that the elotero was a corpse.

"Someone stabbed me." He sounded apologetic.

"No, I didn't!" a voice objected.

He had a kind face, the elotero, and he led us over a hill to a pile of old silver coins topped by a turd. A sad-looking devil was sitting on a stone, trying to straighten three hairs.

"Diablito, is that yours?" we asked, pointing to the turd or the silver, depending on how you look at it. He gave us three guesses.

Coyote craps at the PEMEX, and we find an empty peanut shell and the body of a princess beside a dry riverbed. Embedded in the soil are immense architectural forms carved with images of jaguars and frogs, lizards and fire. There are rotted clubs and sharp stones like little warriors. There are feathered masks with thick lips and empty eyes watching the sun, and there are images of fanged creatures that we don't know. That we don't want to know. The scene reminds us of the RV we saw outside of Tecuala, turned over in a ditch and on fire, all those bloody Chichimecs dancing around it, and the debris trail of DVDs and underwear and swimsuits stretching like a ragged quetzal plume for a half mile up the road.

"I'm frightened, Coyote," we say. He flicks us with his tail.

The dead princess is like paper. She is curling at the edges and brown. Someone has drawn pictures all over her, like a map, like a journey home. We cannot read them. "Help me, Coyote," we say, pointing, but he leads us back to the Nova and doesn't say a word for one hour.

Still, we are not certain where or when this idea of our parents originated. People you have never seen waiting to feed and clothe you? The perro taught us what

was edible. The gato how to hunt small things. The ardilla to conserve. The vaca to digest. The burro to take blows. We learned to construct our shelters from the arañas, and the mono taught us to stay light, just out of reach. The tecolote taught us to stay alert all night long.

But then one day we woke up all wet thinking of San Diego, Tucson, Denver, Chicago, San Antonio, Atlanta. We woke up waiting on Coyote without knowing we were waiting, watching for the dust of his Nova that would be coming down the dirt track from the cuota. We felt a little sick. A burning in our stomach. Our sinuses, too. Our eyes were itchy. The man we call Tío gave us a black pill, but it didn't help.

"You'll be gone soon," he said. We had never seen him smile like that.

And then the animals wouldn't speak to us anymore. They looked away. They stood dumb in filthy boots and their unpainted wooden masks. They sulked at the edge of the field of stones. They turned the corner when we waved. We cursed their sorry asses. We finally found them at the edge of town, by the dry well, sitting together in a closed circle, drinking tequila and telling dirty jokes. In the mercado, their pale organs had been washed and laid out on a table.

Later, touching the little white feet of the plaster Virgin, we had a vision of the small wet opening between her legs. There was blood and hair and something else. A kind of worm. Who was going to tell us?

The phone rang and the woman we call Tía said: "Es tu Mamá. Es tu América."

A green bird circles the speeding Nova three times screeching warnings about our stepsisters. There's poison in the pipian! There's arsenic in the tamales! There's mercury in the crab soup! There's DDT in the huitlacoche! Then it snatches Adelita out of the glovebox for its trouble.

At the edge of Hermosillo, everybody's looking for a ride North. Before the door of the cantina shuts, we peek in at a nude woman in the highest red heels holding a board painted with the number 8 above her head. Two pretty, cuminscented boys are standing around by the broken car wash with their shirts off, showing their thin, hairless chests to truck drivers who spit, pat their macho hair, tug their belts, pretend not to look. The boys' stiff penises are like industrial tools straining against their loose-fitting jeans. Their oiled cockscombs shine silver in the moonlight.

"What is it, Coyote?" we ask, but he guides us away.

Twins. Like twin cities. Sister cities. And when they turn, their identical tattoos read: **Queremos Engañarte**. What does it mean, we want to know.

Back in the Nova, we are hot and uncomfortable, feeling just too big for our nests, our bodies like chopped pork sweating in the saucepan. We feel coated in a thick fluid.

"Touch me," someone says, before Coyote guns the motor. Then we all shudder and then we are asleep.

The girl in the headlamp tastes roses. Seeds in her mouth. She drools out a trail of hornless flowers and pearls that fly off into the desert. She is incomprehensible and stupid and will marry well to a bastard. That's what Coyote says.

"Shut up!" shouts her stepsister in the other headlamp, black snakes slipping soundlessly from the tips of her syllables, encircling her snugly, sucking and shucking.

We stop for the night at an abandoned hacienda, the engine of the Nova ticking and tocking in the dark. Thorny vines reach over the walls, pick the shadow's pocket. The blue agaves are suffering. The avocado tree wants a word with her brother in the carburetor.

"I gave my fruits to la madre, La Morenita," she says. "What else could I do?"

We can't sleep in the haunted dormitory. "Stay out of the cellar," Coyote says, but then he's snoring, so where else? We find a goat in a closet with the centuries-old reposados. A devil on a three-legged stool insists the goat's a princess, his ransom, his goddaughter, his bride-to-be.

"Pre-ci-o-so!" the devil says, showing his little gold teeth and their ivory fillings.

In the ballroom, scarred films flicker on the wall: plum-suited charros singing from horseback to the grazing herds and a hunchback burning the corpses of emaciated campesinos. The projectionist curled over his womanly machine sings along as he fondles its knobs. In matters of love, one never gets what one wants.

Out on the patio, beside a shattered staircase, a blackbird lies pierced by long shards of the broken glass. One wing's almost off and his breast is sheared open.

The delicate bones! The Pedro Infante face! The fluttering little heart!

This is the film version of our parents' romance.

His amante has madwoman's hair, dirty little virgin feet. The lap of her nightgown holds a heart-shaped bloodstain. Her three stepsisters hang by their necks from the porch beams. One redhead, one blonde, and one brunette. So peaceful, like beloved sleepers. Now we can forgive them.

"I heard them whispering," our mother says, grabbing a pigeon and cutting its throat, draining the blood into a little clay pitcher. There are hundreds more gathering to gossip, perching on the hanging girls, in the trees, on the roof, waddling and pecking around the dry fountain. The empty halls echo with their coos and scratching nails. The sound effect is amplified to emphasize her dementia.

"It's the only cure for his curse," she says, cutting open another bird, spattering the fractured tiles with black constellations. Pure cinema! "What they said, yes, that's what they said, what they said." Our mother looks at us. No fool after all. She is an international star. "The only way you can ever be born," she says as the camera slowly zooms in. She looks away, a defiant tear in her eye. We are in love.

"Mamá," we sing, "your cantarito is only one quarter full, so we'll join in your slaughter just until we get bored." But we work fast. Maybe carelessly. Is it our fault some of the slower kids get in the way?

We wander into the kitchen where beans are bubbling on the stove. A steaming pozole and the moon making fresh tortillas. It has a big ass and smells like canela. "Ay, niños," it sighs, wiping its hands on its apron. "You're so late! You need to eat. But where is Yolanda? Where is Areli? What's happened to Pancho and Enrique?" The truth is not pretty. We are so hungry, but then the sun bursts in wearing stained underpants and throws a brick at us. A watermelon. A mango. A boot. We swear: that was for nothing. Ask the blackbird in the avocado tree, the mad amante hanging herself from the Milky Way.

That pack of dogs snuck up on us. They came up out of a culvert in the dark, quiet and with no eyes in their heads to reflect the moonlight. Before we could roll up the windows they'd carried off Cruz, Rosario, and Virgilio, torn open their bellies and plucked out their eyes.

"Ojos! Hijos! Huesos! Lobos!" they bark. They come at us with bloody jaws and those stolen eyes resting like pearls on their tongues. "How many of us

have been blinded because of you? To prove that the order to kill you has been carried out! Mocosos! You live while we're left to be kicked and to struggle for scraps, run off and run over! Jau! Jau! Jau!"

Coyote has the Nova in gear now and he's swerving through the grove trying to get us back to the road.

They're snapping at the kids in the rear bumper, barking their names like some wild Chichimec gang: Brokerib! Pinchback! Swellfoot! Droptooth!

Little Cuauhtémoc huddles himself around the radio, comforted by the sizzling static and the stone in his mouth shaped like a human heart.

Oh, now it's rush hour, golden hour, and all the Cadillacs chauffeuring our mothers to the suburban Seven Cities Mall are backed up for a glittering mile, and we are here in the Nova making time with some fineass white boys and girls on the service road, passing more public storage units and strip malls, legal services and sandwich shops and blood testing agencies and nail salons, like a never ending, ever repeating commercial for what we call El Norte. Ice cream, Coyote! Starbucks! Party rentals! Outback! 2 for 1 Tattoos and Piercings!

He must not hear us.

You don't believe us?

Okay, so suppose it's just more underdeveloped Sonora sand and cactus out there, squalid shelters rigged out of cinderblocks, sticks, and plastic, and we're tired of playing "I Spy" and "License Plate Lotería". And the sun hurts our eyes because we lost our hats, and Coyote says there's no extra money to buy us any. So there's a young man on horseback, a tejano prince in a tall white hat, Coyote. And he doesn't squint, Coyote. So he's handsome. He's got a million MySpace friends—mostly gay men and twelve-year-old girls—and a great big contract with Televisa. He will be our president. Si se puede! And there's a woman in a maid's uniform who loves him, and who doesn't know yet that she's pregnant, and she's crossing the highway to dust the furniture and vacuum the floors and wash the sheets and towels and sex toys at the Yanqui-owned timeshares overlooking El Mar Vermijo. Each air conditioned unit has tinted windows, according to the brochure, so you have no idea what those sunburned gringos are up to, do you? And the maid lady, Coyote: she's wearing cheap sunglasses and a thong that she borrowed from her nasty prima who's home doing her nails

and getting fucked like a goat by the maid lady's infected boyfriend who's trying to watch the Toluca match and keeps asking: "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?"

So, hey, Coyote: we're getting a little cranky. Are we there yet?

Gol! Gol! Gol! Gol! Gooooool!

Francisco, the Goat-Boy of Ameca, rides round and round in our hubcap stroking the bloody left ear he sliced off Bofó's bald head, a trophy of that championship season in Guadalajara. Cisco's parents clean the lab where he'll be studied in Portland. That's what Coyote says. "CHI-VAS," Cisco shouts every time we hit a hole. "CHI-VAS! CAM-PE-ÓN"

And the girl we call La Sirena. She won't say where she's from. She swims so many laps around the radiator she grows flippers and a tail. She's going to boil and turn red. When the cap blows she'll be riding those flaming plumes of gas, oil, brake fluid, and transmission fluid right into downtown Nogales. La Princesa! La Reina! La Gloria! Wouldn't you like to see? She will have her own apocalyptic cult. Nuestra Señora de la Nova. She is carrying the furious daughter of God.

Coyote's friend Conejo is waiting outside the bus station: all las Flechas Amarillas cocked and aimed south at Celaya, Palenque, Pachuco, Querétaro, Mérida, Pátzcuaro, Potosí, Tollan, Veracruz, Aztlán.

We're going to Gringolandia! Adiós! Adiós, pendejos, adiós! Vaya bien!

Coyote whistles and Conejo gets in, his jeans and work boots crusted with plaster from building walls on the Heights for los ricos.

God damn it's hot.

Conejo strums his guitar. Conejo says, "Let's get the kids some ice cream."

Coyote drives the car.

"Let's get the kids some ice cream," Conejo says and Coyote says okay.

"Ay, qué rica!" Sometimes Conejo will lose his head.

They have a thousand flavors. Las viejitas hand out cups of elote, aguacate, mango, mole, cerveza, sensemilla, cacahuate, nopal, chicharrón, chorizo, lengua, frijol, and there're tents all around selling sopas and tacos—al pastor, bistec, flor de calabaza, gusano, hormiga, chapulín—Cantinflas masks, huaraches, guayaberas, Chiapas amber, Chivas wallets, bikinis, Zapata marionettes, popguns, tops, Jaguares keychains, piggy banks, balloons, Oaxacan silver, chickens, roosters, goats. We don't keep our hands to ourselves until they get chopped off and tossed into the cazuela.

Borrachos!

A procession of staggering Yaquis circles the square with a pig wearing a crown of cactus thorns and a Patriots "Undefeated!" T-shirt. Father Pelotas, waving a feather and a valve from the uncorrupted heart of San Caloca, conjures a bloody little Jesús to scourge them. "Infiels!" Jesús shouts. "Nihilistas! Apóstatas!" He snaps his whip against those bent Indian backs. He hopped out of a perfect little cloud. Every good dog barks fanatically.

And then one thing leads to another. The thirteenth apostle slips out of a mural and sneaks off to a motel with Concepción. Osvaldo and Elvira get sucked into an infernal sphincter. Jaime is forced to enlist with the garrison.

The concheros' rattling chalchihuites start the ritual lucha between La Morenita and La Malinche. Our Lady clobbers the other with a chair. She's bloody. She breaks a nail. She cracks a rib. She gets her ass beat with a cornstalk. That one's got some cojones. Juan Diego and Cortés tag in, slapping, pulling hair, gouging eyes. The loser will be shaved.

Later, we're cruising the Heights with Morenita cuddling her bloody little Jesús in the Nova's backseat, tickling his beard, teasing him with his whip, the tip of it just beyond his delicate grasping fingers with their trimmed nails. He squeals and she nurses him, nurses us all with her Extremaduran rompopo until we're laid out—all except Coyote, whose shell eyes are glowing at us in the rearview mirror—drunk and happy on her magnificent jiggling lap, the map light of her countenance guiding our dreams toward board games and bunk beds. Let there be bicycles. Golden, slick banana seats and temperate, green summer.

"You won't come to my house?" Morenita asks. Her breath stinks. We see one black curling hair on her chin.

These bright, vacant streets, lamplit and sober. Conejo sings a narco-corrido

that gives everyone the creeps. A private security guard in a bulletproof vest raises his atlatl. He says, "Get the fuck out."

"No tocar," Conejo sings. "No tocar, no tocar, no tocar. Ay, que barbaro."

Something smells like Fabuloso. Walls of bougainvillea that protect the beautiful sleeping families.

Conejo says: There was this kid who loved the Dodgers, see. Chávez Ravine, Fernandomania, all that shit. He had this friend who worked in them new fortress-condos in Tijuana, you know? High rise! And they snuck past security and got up on the roof and ran him up the flagpole and he was up there. Way up. Up above the clouds! Just so he could see all the way to Los Angeles.

"José!" they started calling at him. "José! José! José!"

They got so worried. Someone's going to kill them.

Si, le oigo! José calls down. Like a little angel, eh kids? Fucking Angel José, huh?

And, you know, these kids call back:

"José, José...José can you see?"

...a la lu-u-u-uz de la aurora? José is singing.

Lo que tanto aclamamos la noche al caer?

Ay ja ja! And Coyote punches Conejo right in the mouth.

That broke his last good tooth. Conejo sucks a lime.

She's emerging through the static: big-titted Fronterista in chaps and mirrored sunglasses. You've got mother's milk on your breath, chica. You've got a juicy pera, death's-head thighs, semi-automatic eyes. You're a shock to our guts, our inflamed rectum. We do a Mixtec boogaloo, an Otomi polka, a Yanqui Tango. Now we're setting the Nova bouncing like a madrefucking lowrider.

At our last stop to pee before the border, we find an empty peanut shell and

a naked girl in a maguey plant. A shotgun shell and a naked girl. Sea shells. Some spent shells. Coyote has to hold Conejo back, bind his filthy mouth shut with his belt.

She looks crazy as a Huichol, the moon in her eye, the sun in her head. We shudder in the heat.

She says: "Gemelos," and nods. As if it has never been said before. As if she is naming us. There is a busted up Nahua keyboard in the dust, a blown out VGA monitor, a snake or two. We walk around the saguaros, listening to the snap of Wal-Mart bags like little flags flying from the fingertips of the chollas. There is a bullet-riddled phonebook. An empty zapato. There is the tall fence. And the Franciscan shelter where they hold the kids who don't make it over. They reach out through the barred, oval windows, grasping for birds and bugs, and the hooded monks pluck them out with giant tongs. Then they send them back around again to the rear, limping misshapen forms.

"Where are the others?" we ask.

Coyote touches our ears. "What others, periquitos? There's always only been you. You two. The two of you." He looks around. He smiles. "They paid for two."

We suckle the girl's dark, fat nipples, her milk picante, ashy, thick as the sludge of Tía's latrine. We bite. We tug. We tear. We have to try so hard, the girl's coaxing fingers in our hair. She digs in her nails until our scalps bleed. Coyote gets it all on video. She sighs as we sniff her almeja. We crawl up into the uterus and have never slept so well. We sprout feathers and short hair. There is something else curled up in one corner.

The stars are out when we return covered in blood. We have the taste of flesh in our mouths. We just want to dance beside the flaming maguey, let our arms and legs rotate free like the severed, spouting limbs of holy martyrs. We stomp the earth. One bare foot touches a rock. All our blood and sugar runs from our ears, mouths, eyes, assholes. The shit, chocolate, tears, and salt. Watch your fingers! We bite! It's been a long day. Pretty soon, we're over it. It passes.

It's dark.

Coyote licks us clean and puts us to bed while Conejo and a devil play cards for all the diablitos in Hell. As he wins, Conejo eats the diablitos, crushes their strong little bones between his rotten molars, throws the shells on the ground. But the devil keeps gambling. He plays two deer, a frog, and death. Conejo plays

a rooster. Coyote packs beeswax in our ears and covers our aching eyes with dried pasillas.

"It works," we hear the devil say. "I've tried it. My wife, too."

We've been in line for hours and hours, the Nova crawling through the last chance tianguis. Conejo is buying gifts in American dollars: blankets and T-shirts, stinking herbal remedies, shot glasses, ashtrays, and Aztec sun stones carved from Tehuacán coprolites. We huddle, maize seeds in a matchbox. We pray they don't search us, or ask if Coyote's our daddy, or what school we go to. We are suffocating and sick, double-wrapped in plastic bubble-wrap. Coyote is practicing calm responses, but that chingada Conejo can't stop giggling.

"We were visiting," Coyote will say.

"Our tiny little mothers," Conejo will say. "Pobrecitas!"

"Please step out of the car," the armed agent will say.

It's the Padres ahead one nothing in the bottom of the fifth.

We take a chance for a glance. Through the line of cars we can see to the other side. We see the yellow welcome sign beside América's freeway: Our Papá stumbling drunk on his way home, our Mamá running from La Migra dragging our American-born sister Conejita behind by one hand, her feet just leaving the ground.

It's all true, querida! All true!

She is flying! They can fly! Niños fly in Gringolandia!

And now we are too too too, out of the Nova, over Coyote and Conejo spread-eagled on hot concrete, we are flying as if through a windshield, through glass, through steel, through the smoke and haze, the choke and maize, the toke and craze, the Coke and phrasebook, we're flying. It's the way the chicken flies to the pot. Which came first: the fire or the flame? We are flying: feathered and boned to you, querida Mamá, naked and new, Papá, sin entrails y contrails, la raza limpia, raza pirata. Oscuro? How do you say? Deportation? No. It's the way ESPN flies to Fox. Satellite eyes. You're beautiful. Something small on a wind crossing over. But before we forget.

Adipose. Otiose. Adidas. A radio. Game over.