

In the first days, a powerful being named Humpback owned all the buffalo. He kept them in a corral in the mountains north of San Juan, where he lived with his young son. Not one buffalo would Humpback release for the people on earth, nor would he share any meat with those who lived near him. Coyote decided that something should be done to release the buffalo from Humpback's corral. He called the people to a council. "Humpback will not give us any buffalo," Coyote said. "Let us all go over to his corral and make a plan to release them." They camped in the mountains near Humpback's place, and after dark, they made a careful inspection of his buffalo enclosure. The stone walls were too high to climb, and the only entrance was through the back door of Humpback's house.

After four days Coyote summoned the people to another council and asked them to offer suggestions for releasing the buffalo. "There is no way," said one man. "To release the buffalo we must go into Humpback's house, and he is too powerful a being for us to do that." "I have a plan," Coyote said. "For four days we have secretly watched Humpback and his young son go about their daily activities. Have you not observed that the boy does not own a pet of any kind?" The people did not understand what this had to do with releasing the buffalo, but they knew that Coyote was a great schemer and they waited for him to explain. "I shall change myself into a killdeer," Coyote said. "In the morning when Humpback's son goes down to the spring to get water, he will find a killdeer with a broken wing.

He will want this bird for a pet and will take it back into the house. Once I am in the house I can fly into the corral, and the cries of a killdeer will frighten the buffalo into a stampede. They will come charging out through Humpback's house and be released upon the earth." The people thought this was a good plan, and the next Morning when Humpback's son came down the path to the spring he found a killdeer with a crippled wing. As Coyote had foreseen, the boy picked up the bird and carried it into the house. "Look here," the boy cried. "This is a very good bird!" "It is good for nothing!" Humpback shouted. "All the birds and animals and people are rascals and schemers." Above his fierce nose Humpback wore a blue mask, and through its slits his eyes glittered.

His basket headdress was shaped like a cloud and was painted black with a zig-zag streak of yellow to represent lightning. Buffalo horns protruded from the sides. "It is a very good bird," the boy repeated. "Take it back where you found it!" roared Humpback, and his frightened son did as he was told. As soon as the killdeer was released it returned to where the people were camped and changed back to Coyote. "I have failed," he said, "but that makes no difference. I will try again in the morning. Perhaps a small animal will be better than a bird." The next morning when Humpback's son went to the spring, he found a small dog there, lapping at the water. The boy picked up the dog at once and hurried back into the house. "Look here!" he cried. "What a nice pet I have."

"How foolish you are, boy!" Humpback growled. "A dog is good for nothing. I'll kill it with my club." The boy held tight to the dog and started to run away crying. "Oh, very well," Humpback said. "But first let me test that animal to make certain it is a dog. All animals in the world are schemers." He took a coal of fire from the hearth and brought it closer and closer to the dog's eyes until it gave three rapid barks. "It is a real dog," Humpback declared. "You may keep it in the buffalo corral, but not in the house." This of course was exactly what Coyote wanted. As soon as darkness fell and Humpback and his son went to sleep, Coyote opened the back door of the house. Then he ran among the buffalo, barking as loud as he could.

The buffalo were badly frightened because they had never before heard a dog bark. When Coyote ran nipping at their heels, they stampeded toward Humpback's house and entered the rear door. The pounding of their hooves awakened Humpback, and although he jumped out of bed and tried to stop them, the buffalo smashed down his front door and escaped. After the last of the shaggy animals had galloped away, Humpback's son could not find his small dog. "Where is my pet?" he cried. "Where is my little dog?" "That was no dog," Humpback said sadly. "That was Coyote the Trickster. He has turned loose all our buffalo." Thus it was that the buffalo were released to scatter over all the earth.