

LEVELED BOOK • P

Coyote and the Star



A Klamath Native American Folktale
Retold by William Harryman
Illustrated by Maria Voris

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In the time before time, animals lived interesting lives. There were no humans, and the animals were free to do as they pleased. Everything was perfect—there was no disease, no hunger, no war, and no suffering. The animals had everything they needed.



Well, almost everything. Coyote enjoyed the nighttime. He would sit on a rock outside his house all night and watch the stars. Every night as he sat watching, he gazed at one particular star that was very beautiful. This large star was more beautiful than all the other stars. She was more beautiful than even the planets. She was more beautiful than even the sun and the moon, and Coyote thought they were very lovely, especially the moon.

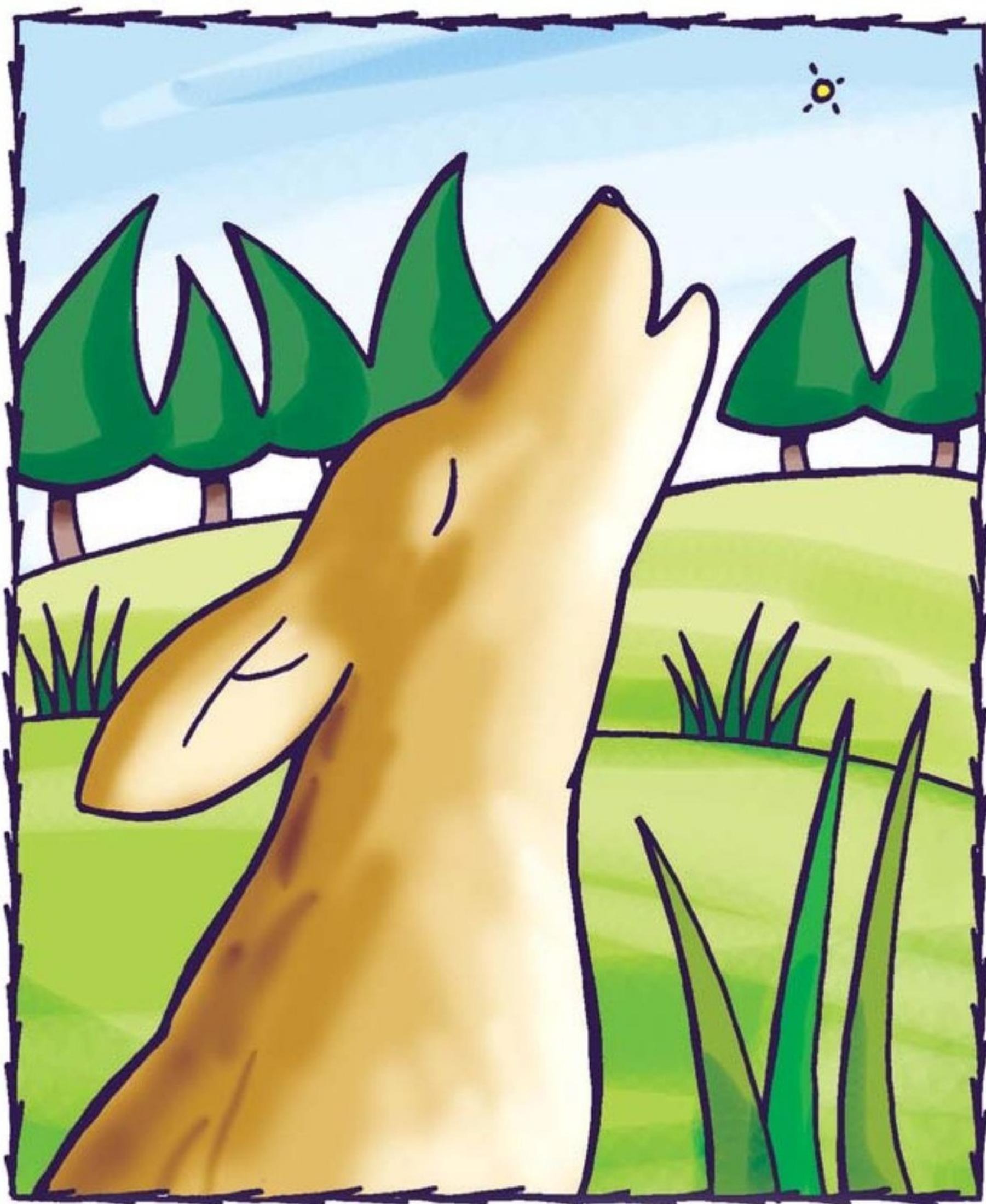
Coyote was in love with the star
and talked to her night after night.
But she would not respond to him.
She floated across the sky and
pretended not to notice him.

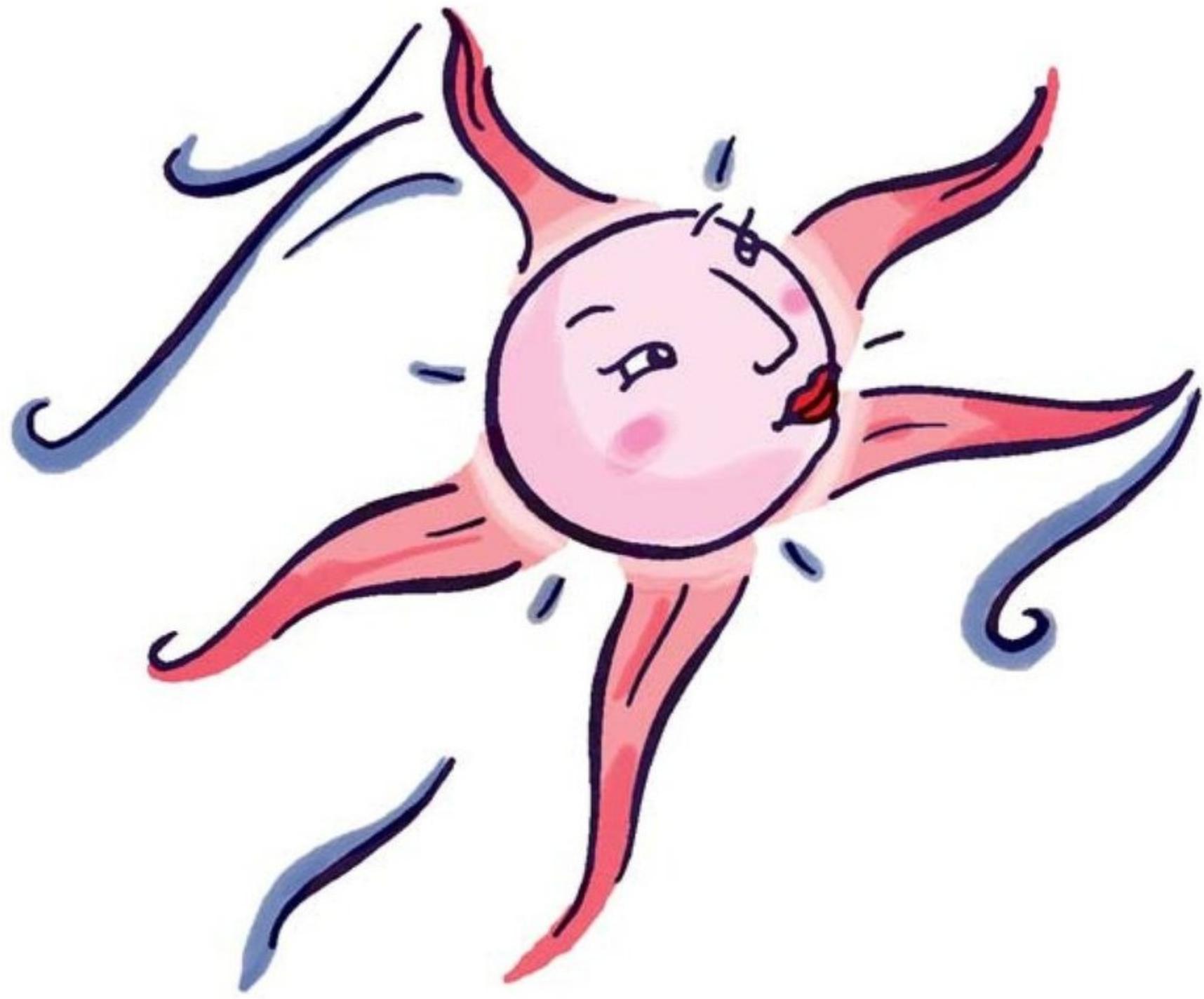




Now, Coyote was known among the other animals as the Song Dog, even though his voice was rather scratchy. He loved to howl and sing his songs. He especially loved to sing when the moon was bright. So Coyote thought that if he could sing a beautiful song the star would notice him. He thought and wrote. After three days he had composed a new song. He was convinced this was the most beautiful song he could sing.

That night Coyote went outside when the sky became dark. His stomach felt a little nervous, and his heart was beating faster than usual. He sat on his rock and waited for the star to rise above the horizon. When she did, he began to sing.





“Oh beautiful star,
I’m waiting for yoouuu.
My heart is open
and my love is truuuee.
I ask for your hand
and your heart to wooooo.
Please give me a sign
that I’m not a fooool.”

And he sang his verse again and again,
hoping she would notice. But she just
flew across the sky and did not utter
a word.

The other animals watched Coyote sing and felt sorry for him. No star had ever loved an animal. They knew Coyote had often been a fool, especially in matters of love. Coyote's older brother, Wolf, just shook his head and sighed. Wolf had helped Coyote out of many difficult spots. He had a feeling that his silly younger brother would get himself in trouble again. Coyote did foolish things for love.



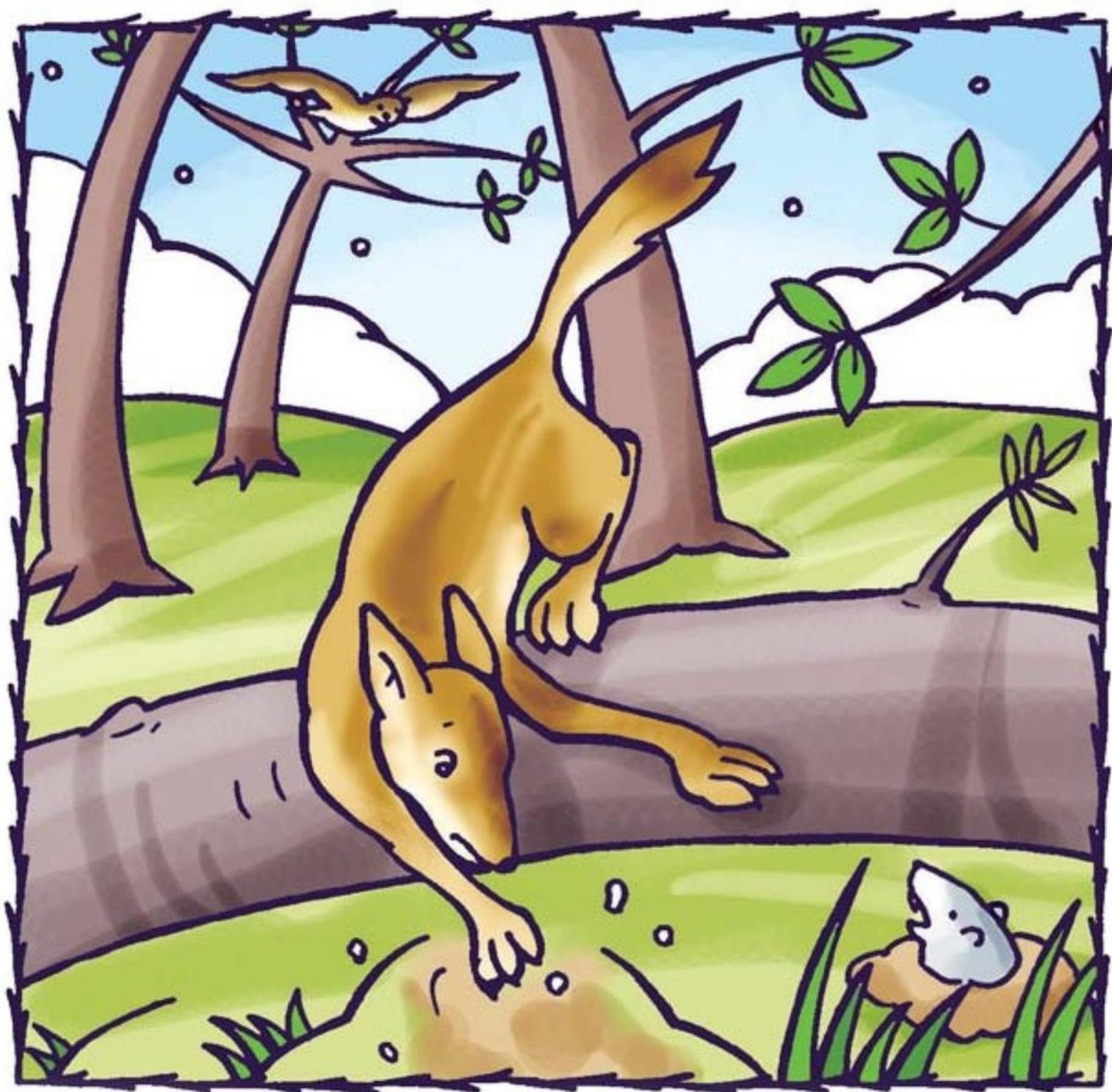


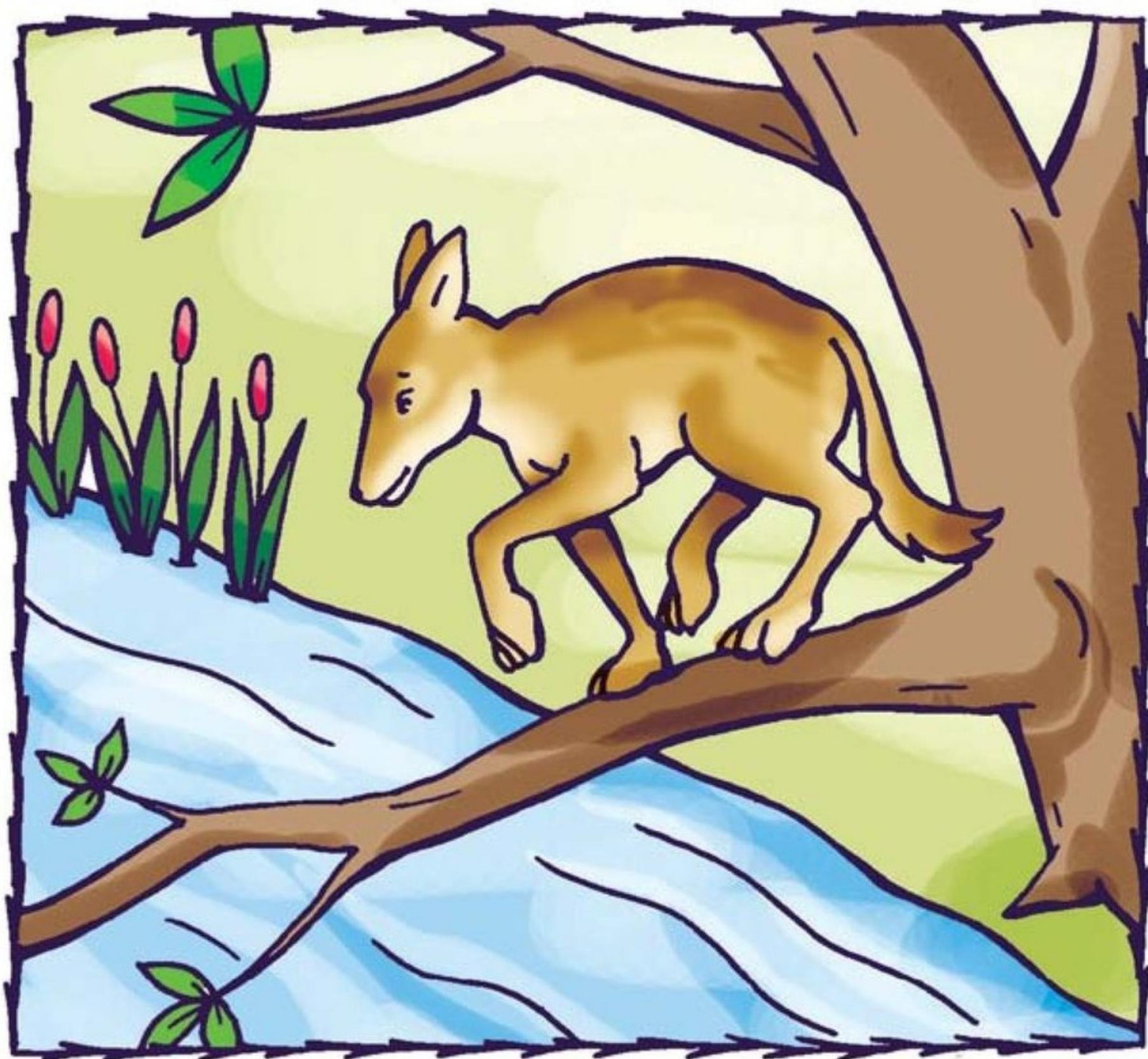
For seven nights Coyote sang his song and received no response. After the seventh night, he stopped singing. He was exhausted. He closed his eyes and dreamed of a ladder that elevated him to the stars. He climbed the ladder and took his star by the hand. They danced and danced, happy to finally be together.

When he awoke, he noticed that in the distance the star passed very close to a mountain. He thought that if he could climb to the top of the mountain, he could touch the star and convince her to love him.



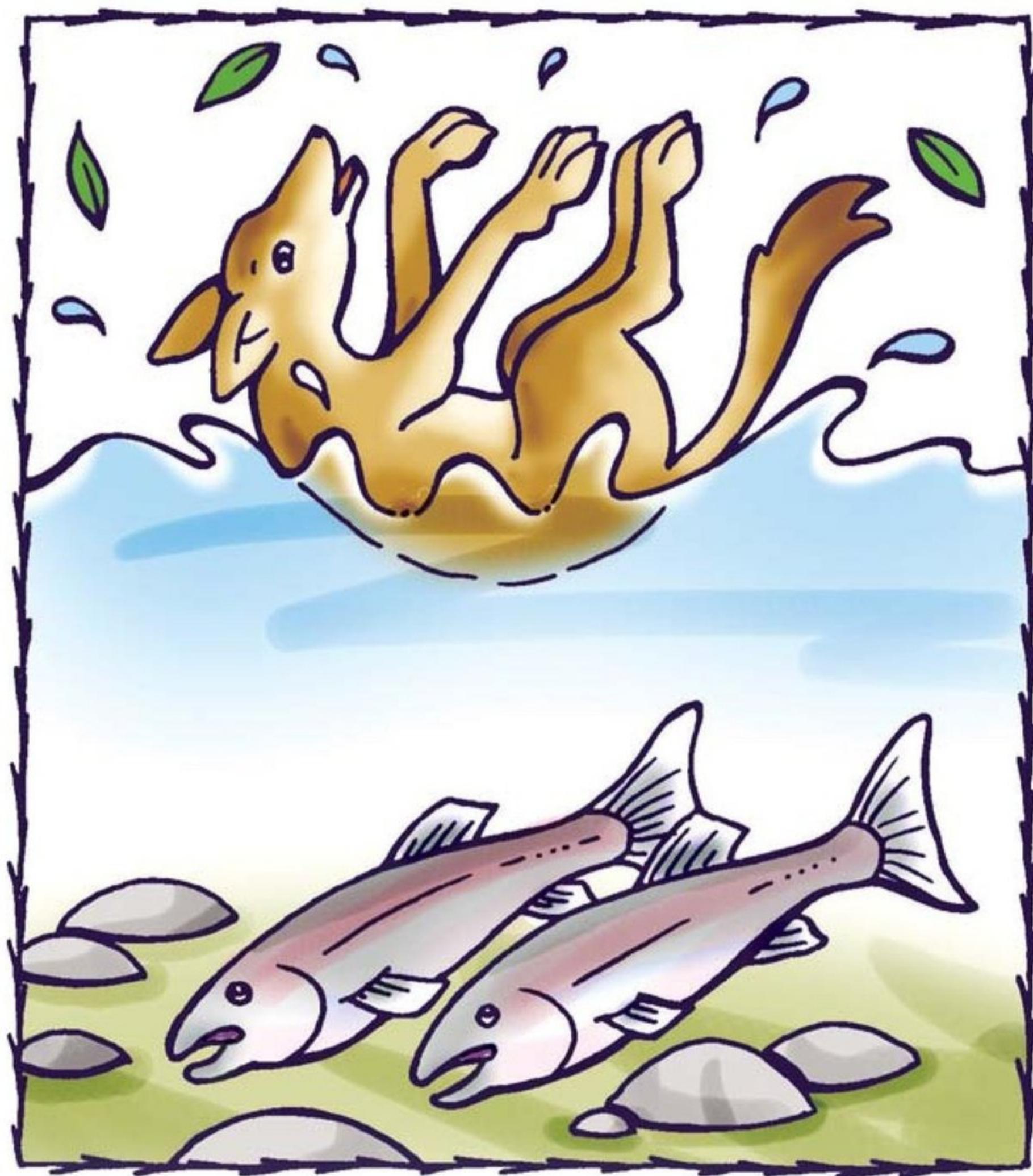
Coyote ran very fast, bumping into trees and tripping over rocks. Owl watched him run through a thicket of blackberries without even noticing. Gopher stuck his head out of his hole just as Coyote stumbled over a fallen tree and tumbled down a hill. But Coyote was resilient. And he was determined to meet the beautiful star.





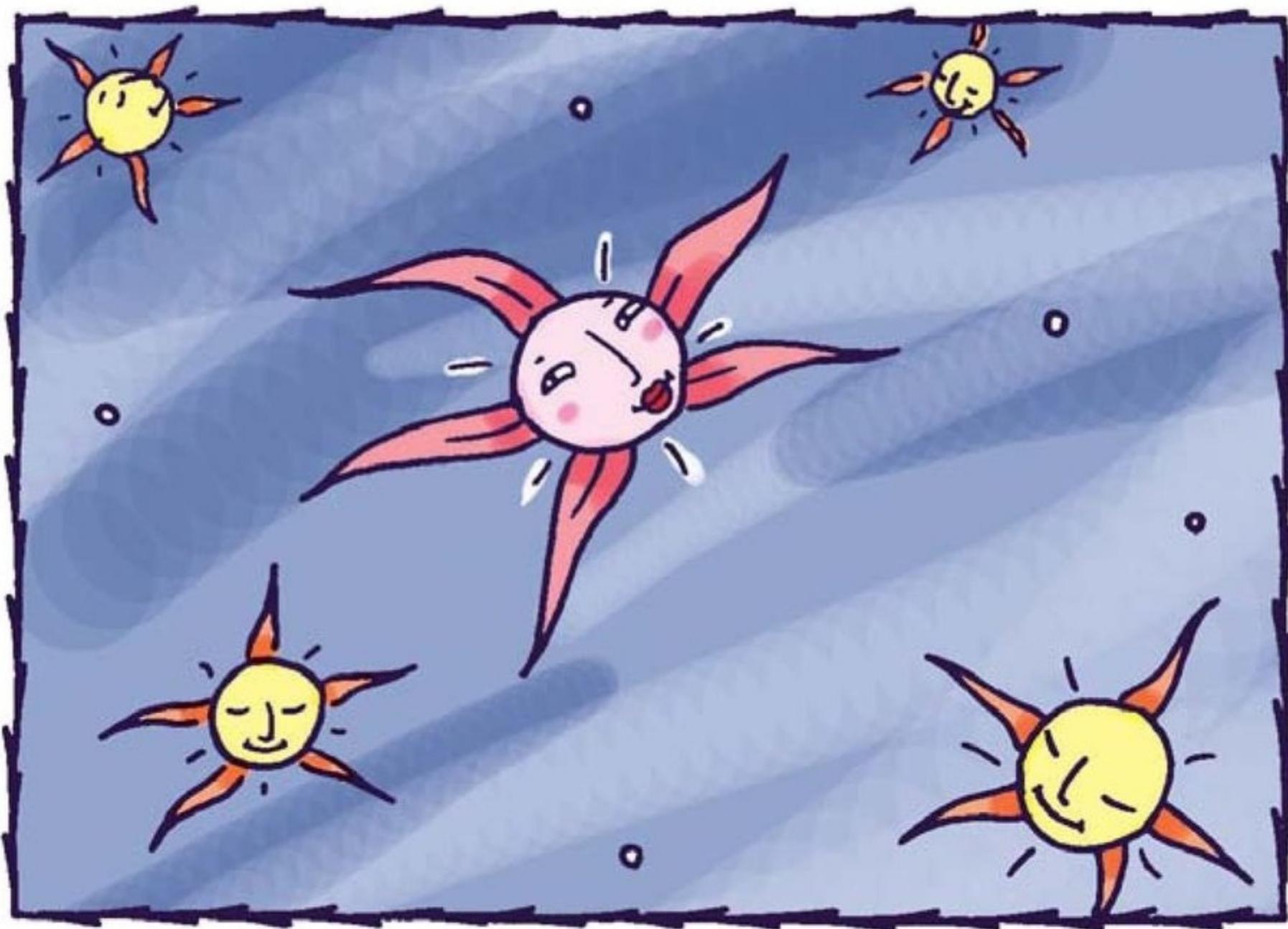
The mountain was almost in sight when Coyote came to a deep river. The water was cold and the current was very swift. Coyote didn't like water. He had almost drowned many times in his adventures. And his long hair always got matted when it got wet. He was getting frustrated when he noticed a tree branch that hung over the river. So he climbed the tree and tiptoed out onto the branch.

Just as he reached the end and thought he could jump to the other shore, the branch broke. Splash! It was a long fall, but the water cushioned his impact. He shook the water from his fur, grumbled about looking like a wet cat, and continued on his way.



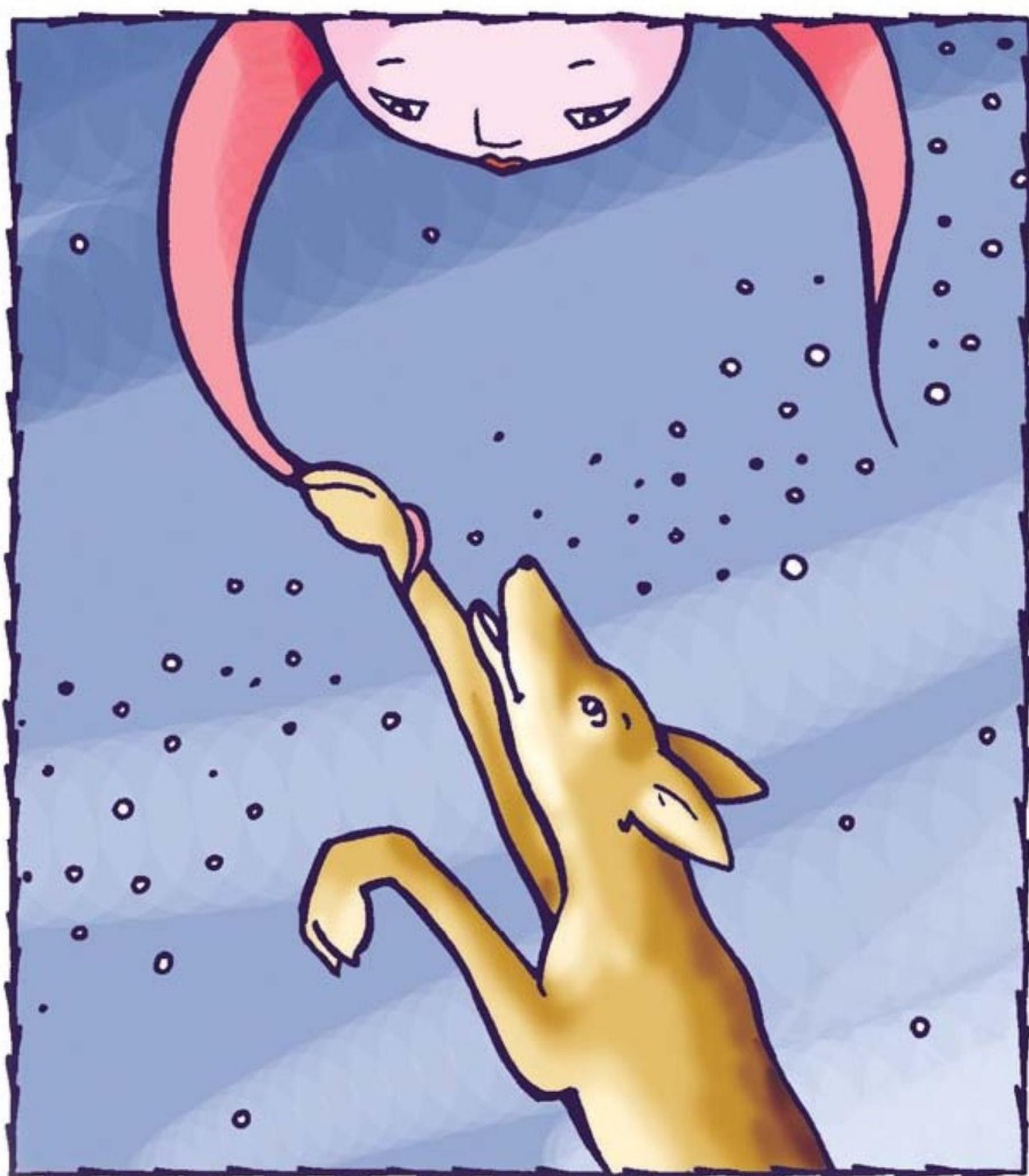


He kept running until he finally stood on the mountain. A whole day had passed and the sun was just now setting. He waited for night.



Soon the star appeared on the horizon. She was brilliant and even more beautiful than Coyote had remembered. He could now see that all the stars were dancing. She and the other stars moved through the night sky dancing elegant steps. Coyote didn't know how to dance very well, but he sure wanted to dance with her. So he waited patiently. He was filled with butterflies, and his heart was beating like a big drum. But he stayed quiet. The star danced closer and closer, until finally she was on the mountain.

Coyote reached as high as he could, but he couldn't touch her. He jumped and tried again, but still could not jump high enough. He begged her to reach her hand to his, and she did. She took his paw into her hand and pulled him up to her.



Slowly she danced with Coyote, up into the night sky. They went far, very high above the Earth. Coyote began to get dizzy and afraid. He did not think he was afraid of heights, but this was very high. His heart pounded even harder.





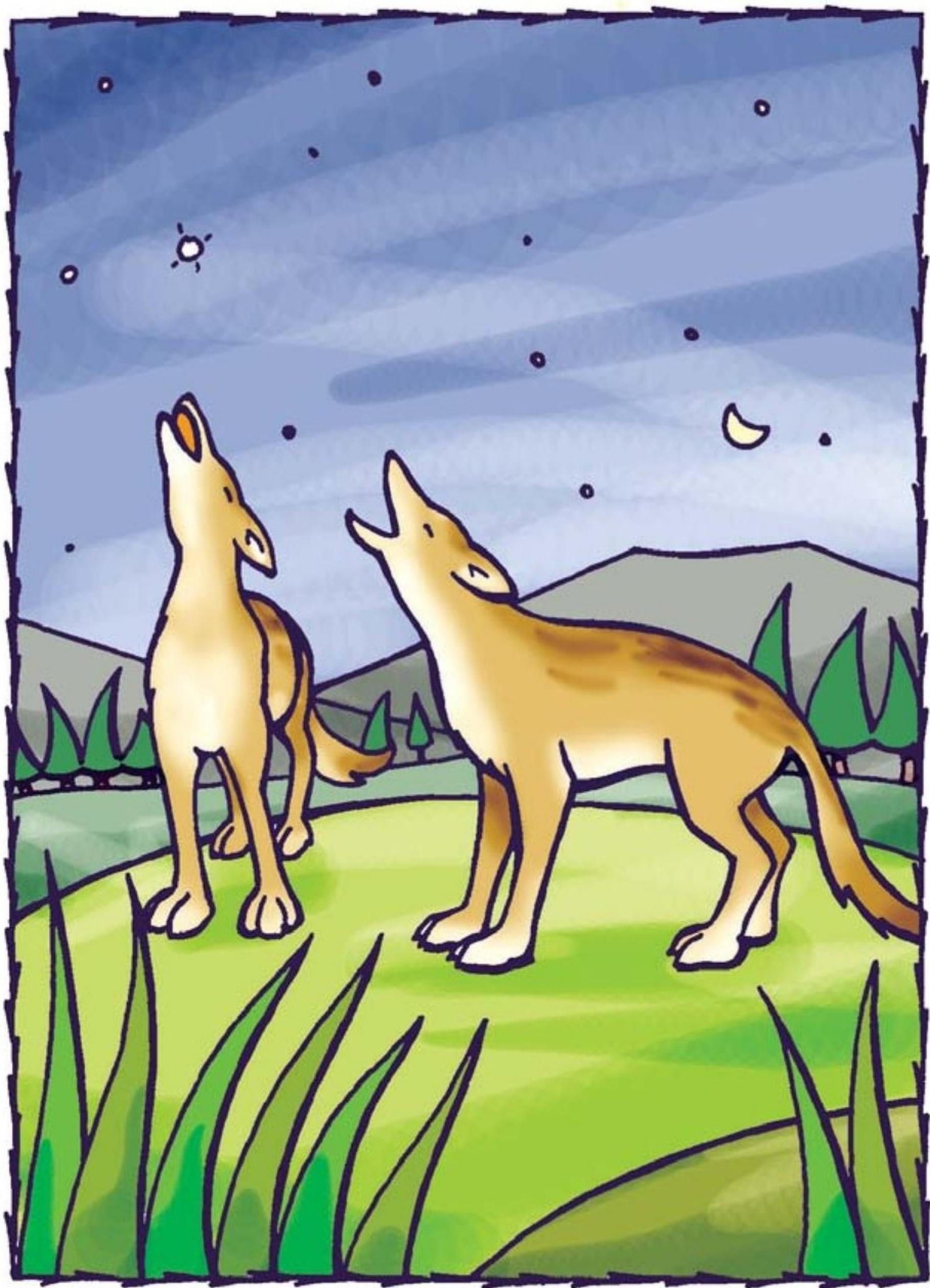
Coyote and the star danced farther and farther above the Earth, among the other stars. It was icy cold, and there wasn't a single sound. None of the other stars said anything. He begged the beautiful star to talk to him, but she was silent. Coyote looked down and saw the rivers as thin lines, the mountains as small spots. His heart became very cold. He begged the star to return him to Earth. He missed the rock outside his house, and he missed the ground.



When they had reached the top of the sky, the star let go of Coyote. For the time of one whole moon, twenty-eight days, Coyote fell to the Earth. He fell and fell, and thought about his life the whole time. He promised himself he would never act foolish again. He vowed to be a good coyote from that day on. But he knew he had committed foolish acts, and he felt powerful regret.

Finally, he hit the ground. The impact made a great hole where once there had been a very large mountain, the mountain he had climbed. His blood turned to water and filled the hole to become a beautiful lake. It is the deepest, bluest lake on the continent of North America.





Now, when coyotes howl at the stars,
they are scolding the star that killed the
first Coyote. They remember him and
his great love in their songs.

This story is an expansion and adaptation of a myth known as "Coyote in Love with a Star," which was told among the Klamath Indians of Southern Oregon. It is a myth told to explain the origin of Crater Lake.

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