

Chapter One

Coyote still walks this earth, stirring up trouble for us. I know that for a fact. He sure stirred up trouble for me.

Coyote is that trickster spirit my granny told me about. He was the most important of the animal spirits in my people's stories. My people are one of the many First Nations who live in British Columbia. My ancestors were here long before anyone came from Europe or anywhere else.

Granny said the Old One, the Great Spirit my people believed in, put Coyote on this earth to help make things right. Coyote gave my people salmon and taught us how to catch them, for example. But Coyote also loved to play tricks on people, just like he did on me.

One minute I was happy enough. I was married to a decent guy and had a wonderful daughter. I liked being a stay-at-home mom. The next minute, well, let's just say Coyote turned my life upside down.

I first saw Coyote at the big Roots and Blues Festival in the town of Salmon Arm. This festival attracts musicians and crowds from all over.

But I didn't know the animal I saw at the festival was the Coyote spirit. At first, I thought it was a dog. Then I thought it was an ordinary coyote. But I soon found out how wrong I was.

My daughter Rose and I stood in front of a festival stage. We listened to Fred Penner, who played his guitar and sang for the children. My daughter danced to his music with some of the other kids in the crowd.

Young Rose was already a performer, like me. She loved to dress up. She loved to dance and sing, just as I once had.

Rose would start kindergarten in a month, in September. The thought of my daughter starting school made me sad. I would be all alone at home during the day. I wasn't sure what I would do with my time. Sometimes I wasn't sure who I was

anymore. I was “Mommy,” I was Rob’s wife, and I liked being both. But what about me, Sara?

My daughter looked like me. She had the same long, dark hair. She had my dark brown eyes. Her high cheekbones were the same as mine. She also had my long arms and legs, a dancer’s body.

I took a photo of my daughter as she lifted her arms and danced to the music. Then I saw an animal trotting towards me through the crowd. It was a dog—no, it was a coyote. The other people at the music festival didn’t seem to see it. The coyote sat in front of the stage and looked at me.

“Do you see that?” I asked my daughter. I pointed at the coyote. But Rose watched the singer on stage. I couldn’t pull her attention away.

I saw coyotes all the time in the fields and on the golf course. I saw them in my backyard on the Native reserve where I live. I even saw them in town sometimes, trotting across lawns. But coyotes are wild animals; they run away from people. This one just sat in the middle of the crowd.

I snapped a picture of the coyote with my camera to show my daughter later. Then, through my camera lens, I saw my old friend Jim standing right beside the animal.

Jim and I were in a band years before, when I was in my twenties. The band played country music. Jim was the lead guitarist and singer. I was the backup singer. I hadn't seen Jim for many years.

In the view screen of my camera, Jim hadn't aged a day. His hair was black and shiny. His skin was brown and without wrinkles. He looked exactly the same as when I knew him nearly fifteen years before. How was that possible?

I took his picture and lowered my camera. I planned to wave at him. But he disappeared. I checked the photo on my camera screen. Jim wasn't in the picture I just took. Neither was the coyote.

But the coyote was still standing right there in front of me. Why hadn't the coyote shown up in my photo? Why hadn't Jim shown up in the picture? Were they both ghosts?

I knew then that something really strange was happening.

The coyote nodded its head as if to say, "Follow me." Then it trotted off.