

Trickster: Tales of Mischief from Around the World

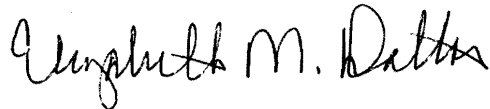
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth M. Dalton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'E' and 'D'.

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Abstract

Every culture tells stories about tricksters. Tales of their mischief are told all over the world. These stories do not merely entertain; they also explain the rules of society by showing how the creatures who disregard them are often punished. The trickster is an outcast, a cultural hero, a creator, a destroyer, and a wonderfully amusing character who captures the attention of millions. The stories that follow focus on four tricksters, each with roots in multiple cultures around the world, each with different personalities depending on the culture they appear in. These stories blend the different characteristics of each trickster to highlight the differences and similarities between the cultures in which they appear, emphasizing the connections between these cultures.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Elizabeth Dalton for advising me. Her guidance and encouragement were invaluable throughout the semester. This project would not be half of what it is without her.

I would like to thank my family for supporting me during this project as they have for my entire college career.

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Author's Statement

For my Senior Honors Thesis, I wrote four short stories using folktales from around the globe to show relationships between cultures. Because I'm a creative writing major, I decided that writing short stories would be the best course for my thesis, hoping that the experience would expand the knowledge I have been gathering in my creative writing classes. In my stories, I focused on the trickster character. I have always found tricksters to be interesting and versatile, so I thought they were the best choice of the various archetypes found in folklore. I love folktales and the way they reveal so much about the cultures they come from. I have read hundreds of these stories, so I am familiar with the genre and I enjoyed working within it.

I wrote these stories for teenagers and young adults. I believe that this age group is still interested in folktales, but they are old enough to understand the connections that I am making. By choosing trickster characters, I want to both entertain and educate my audience. Tricksters are highly amusing, but they also serve to show what is and is not acceptable behavior within a culture. For example, the stories of *tomte* and other household spirits encourage people in Sweden to reward hard work and loyalty. By using elements from the cultures in which these tales originate, I want to show readers similarities between familiar and unfamiliar lifestyles and fuel their curiosity in cultures that are very different from their own, such as African or Asian cultures.

When I began, I knew that I wanted to write stories about tricksters, but I wanted a way to connect the stories and give them more meaning. I started my research by reading books that only contained stories about tricksters. One of the books, *Trickster Tales* by I.G. Edmonds, reserved an entire section for tricksters that appear in more than one culture, and that is what gave me the idea for my thesis.

After that, I started researching trickster characters that appeared in more than one culture. I found about ten, and then narrowed my choices to Hare, Fox, Coyote, Jack, and leprechauns. All of these are characters that I had come across before, and I think that my audience will have some knowledge of them. Next, I scoured the internet for stories about each of these characters so I could get ideas about what to write. After reading many stories for each character, I drafted a list of traits that I felt were typical of the character and common plotlines or situations and then combined these across cultures to create my basic plotlines. After writing an initial draft for each, I revised each at least four times before being comfortable with the material.

Over time, I made slight changes. Since Fox's traits are similar to Coyote's, I included him in Hare's story instead of giving him his own. Both can be found in North America and Latin America, although Fox also appears in Europe and Asia. Both are usually depicted as greedy predators who prey on weaker animals and often end up being tricked themselves. I felt that Fox and Coyote's stories would be redundant and I wanted to save time so I could revise my other stories more thoroughly. I also changed the leprechaun to the Swedish *tomte* and Russian *domovoi*. I originally planned on using them as the leprechaun's distant relatives, but I decided that leprechauns did not fit well with the other two. The *tomte* and *domovoi* are household spirits who only resort to trickery when vexed, while leprechauns are small men, generally shoemakers, who trick people to protect their gold. The other two characters carried over from my original list. Jack can be found in England and in Appalachia. In both areas, he can be depicted as either a mighty giant killer or a simpleton or both. Hare exists in many stories in Africa, although his identity was warped when he arrived in the southern United States and he became the well-known Br'er Rabbit.

I included head notes at the beginning of each story because I felt this was a quick way to give the reader information about the characters and cultures that would be awkward to present in the story itself. In his book, Edmonds also included head notes for each of its stories. I found them to be very insightful and invaluable to my initial research. Reading the head notes gave me ideas for my stories and a direction to go in. My advisor, Professor Elizabeth Dalton, also suggested that I include them, to clarify the characters for anyone unfamiliar with them.

I included both a works cited and a works consulted list for my research. The works cited list holds all of the sources I cited specifically in the head notes. The works consulted list contains every other source that I read, but did not borrow words or ideas from for my own stories. Most of the sources I used were indirect, so the works consulted list is much longer than the works cited list. Also, most of my sources come from the web, so the reader could use the works cited and works consulted to read the stories I read and make further connections between the characters and the cultures they come from.

Overall, I had a pleasant experience in writing my thesis. I enjoyed the topic I picked, and I learned much about folktales and how to write them. This experience has helped me immensely as a writer. I was able to utilize the creative writing techniques I have been learning and the experience I have been gaining for the last four years. I read the folktales and gleaned common situations and plotlines, then find a way to incorporate them into the stories I was writing. In English 407, Advanced Fiction, which I took while writing my thesis, we studied several books to learn about the author's craft. Using this knowledge, I dissected the writing style of the folktales and applied it to my stories, particularly in the dialect seen in "Hare's First Trick."

The vast number of tricksters that appear in more than one culture surprised me. In addition to the four I used in my thesis, there are several others. The *lutin*, for example, is a

shape-shifting creature who tricks people for fun and appears both in France and in Canada. Tortoise appears in Native American, African, Indian, and Japanese folktales, among others, although he is not always depicted as a trickster. Tyl Eulenspiegel is a human trickster who is seen as heroic or greedy depending on whether the story comes from the Netherlands or Germany. The extent to which tricksters cross cultures surprised me. By studying them, I have found new ways in which different cultures are connected that I had not thought of. The movement of folktales from one culture to another creates a complex web of information that connects all people across the globe. I can only hope that my audience will be inspired to read other folktales to learn more about other cultures and the way that the different peoples of the world influence each other through their stories.

Hare's First Trick

By the late 1800s, the American South was thick with tales of Br'er Rabbit, a cunning trickster (Roberts 17). Although Rabbit already existed as a Native American trickster, Br'er Rabbit, who arose from tales brought to America by African slaves, was different (Berner 28). While all three cultures use these tales to show how a weak, defenseless creature can outsmart much stronger predators, the Native American and African tales often contain mystical elements. Br'er Rabbit, however, relies only on his wits to achieve the impossible (Windling 3). Written in the style of the Uncle Remus tales, this tale shows how African Hare learned to survive in Br'er Rabbit's world.

A long time ago, Hare lived in a burrow on the African savannah. Actually, it was his mother's burrow, and she thought it was past time for him to fend for himself. She started dropping some not-so-subtle hints, mostly about him taking up the family business. Eventually, the house was covered, floor to rafters, with clippings from the local newspaper that told stories about Hare's father and his legendary tricks. She even stuffed Hare's pillow with them, hoping that the idea might seep into his head while he slept. When that didn't work, she started telling stories whenever Hare was near.

"Did I ever tell you about the time that your father outsmarted that old baboon? Or when he tricked those two snakes into playing tug-of-war with each other? Or how about when he got a job at the old ranch and made off with all the cows?"

"Yes, Mother. All of them. Three times each just today."

Hare cared about was running around the savannah with his friends. She watched him leave home every morning, hoping that he would be caught by a lion, or at least a crocodile, so he would be forced to trick someone. She was sure that all he needed was a push in the right direction, and he would be outsmarting the whole continent. Then maybe he would be able to support himself, get a girl, and get out of her house.

The poor thing didn't have that kind of luck. Every day, Hare came home intact and unruffled, with no tales of mischief to brighten her day.

Hare's mother had family over in the States, a sister who went there once on vacation and never came home. They had never been close – it was hard to form close bonds in a family of seventy-nine – but Hare's mother was desperate for a solution. She had heard a story or two about some of her nephew's exploits and hoped that her sister could mold Hare in the same way.

Dear Sis,

I just don't know what I'm going to do with my boy. He just never wants to get up to any tricks. I've done everything except push him into the lion's den. I'm just sick of having him laze about the house like he does, wasting his wit – the only thing he ever did inherit from his poor father. Any advice you have would be sorely appreciated.

Mother Hare

It seemed like no time at all passed before Hare's mother received a reply.

Ma Hare,

Ya know ya coddle that boy too much, that's his problem. Throw him out if ya feel that way. Better yet, send him over. Just the fox we deal with is smarter than all the lions in all of Africa put in a heap, and that's without adding in the farmer and that darn wolf. Turn him loose over here for a year and ya won't know yer own boy. He'll need to be sharp as a new tack to live that long. Of course, we'll do our best to make sure he don't get hisself ate.

Sis

Well, Hare's mother made out a reply right then, saying that Hare would be there just as soon as she could arrange everything. She had heard stories about the southern States before and thought it would be the perfect place for Hare to get into some trouble.

Hare took the news better than his mother expected. Before long, she had him so turned around that he thought it was his idea to go in the first place. As soon as Hare arrived at his aunt's house, she wasted no time shooing him and his cousin, Rabbit, out the door.

As they walked along, Rabbit told Hare about fishing and the swamps and other things that Hare would have to deal with while staying there, including Fox.

"Ya gots to watch out for that Fox, Hare, and I mean that. He'll have ya turned around in a minute and in his stomach the next. I been dealin' with him since I was born, and I've come near 'nough to bein' dinner. I remember one time he had me stuck but good to some kinda tar person. I thought I was a goner, for sure."

"Why would he do something like that?"

"Well, the week before, I made a fool of him by dressin' him up like a horse and a-ridin' him through town. Mostly, he's just looking for somethin' to eat, though. Bad news is that somethin' is usually me or Ma or one of the other kids."

They arrived at a creek, and Rabbit left Hare there with a fishing pole.

"Ma says I'm to leave ya here to catch a fish for supper. Imma go hunt up some fixings to go with it. Jus' stay here and ya won't have no trouble. If ya see Fox roamin' about, don't pay no mind to his nonsense and keep on fishin' till I get back."

Hare was still worn out from his long journey, and he figured there was no better time for a nap. He set his pole up, pulled his hat down, and drifted off to sleep.

Hare woke a few hours later to a hard tug on his line that nearly jerked him right off the bank. He grabbed the pole and started reeling. It was a hard fight, but pretty soon, Hare had a nice sized fish lying on the bank.

An animal with red fur and shifty eyes crept out of the underbrush while Hare was fighting with the fish. It was Fox, of course, but Hare didn't know that.

"Nice looking fish you got there," Fox said. He slid in between Hare and the fish, licking his lips.

"I suppose it is," Hare said, trying to be neighborly.

"Don't believe I've ever seen you around these parts before."

"You haven't," Hare said. "I just arrived today. Staying with some of my relatives down in the briar patch. Name's Hare. Who are you, if you don't mind me asking?"

Fox grinned. "Why, I'm the game warden. Just checking to make sure you've got a fishing license. It's illegal to fish in this creek without one, you know."

Hare said that he had no such thing and had never heard of one, either.

"Well, that's a shame. I could toss you in jail right now. Seeing as you're new around here, I'll be lenient today. Of course, I will have to confiscate this fish."

Fox snapped the fish up in his jaws and skittered off into the forest before Hare could argue with him. His tail hadn't hardly vanished just as Rabbit came walking up, towing a canvas sack. Hare told him what had happened.

"Hare, you're duller than an old bar of soap. There ain't no game warden around these parts. That was Fox. Didn't I warn you about him?"

"You didn't say anything about what he looked like," Hare argued. "How was I supposed to know it was him? I've never seen a fox before."

Rabbit shook his head. “Well, you’re lucky that fish was layin’ there, or it’d been you that Fox gobbled up. Luckier still that I swiped enough food from the farmer’s garden for supper.”

Hare gathered up his fishing pole, and they set off for home. “What’s in the bag?”

“Oh, this and that. Some corn, peas, loaf of bread. The usual.”

“You said you got that from a farmer?”

“Yup. Ol’ Farmer Johnson over the hill. He always leaves out a couple traps, but they’re nothing I ain’t seen before. Last time I went, he was sittin’ on his front porch with a shotgun. Still came away with a bagful of taters and some ham. Had a little buckshot in it by the time I got it home, but it tasted fine so long as we chewed careful.”

They finished the walk in silence. Hare was too in awe to ask anything else.

Hare’s aunt scolded him well and sent him to bed without supper. The next morning, he went without breakfast, too. His aunt thought an empty belly would sharpen his wits better than anything.

That day, Rabbit left Hare in the blackberry patch, and Hare picked until his fingers were sore. He was determined to stay alert. He’d never missed a meal before, and he wasn’t going to let it happen again. He was ready for Fox this time.

It wasn’t long before Fox appeared next to Hare’s bucket, licking his lips.

“How do, Hare?” Fox asked.

“Poorly,” Hare said. “You got me into a lot of trouble with that stunt you pulled yesterday, Fox.”

Fox chuckled. “Don’t let a little thing like that ruffle your fur. I didn’t mean nothin’ by it.”

“All the same, don’t go trying anything today. I won’t fall for it. In fact, I’m dead set on ignoring you.”

Fox just grinned and sat next to Hare without saying a word. Whenever Hare took his eyes off the blackberries, Fox dipped his head into the bucket and took a big bite.

It irked Hare to let Fox eat all of the berries he bruised his fingers for, but Fox was doing just what Hare wanted him to. He slipped his hand into his pocket and threw a few petals into the bucket. They were from a bunch of buttercups that Hare had picked earlier with his aunt's help. Hare would have never guessed that the yellow flowers were poisonous, and he doubted that Fox knew, either. Hare let Fox sneak a couple of mouthfuls, then the next time Fox stuck his head in the bucket, Hare thumped him on the back of the head. In a second, Fox was on top of him.

"Now what'd you do that for?" Fox growled. "You said you wasn't gonna pay me no mind."

"I said I wasn't going to fall for any more tricks. I won't just sit here and let you steal from me," Hare said.

"Well, if you won't let me have them berries, I'll just eat you!"

Hare was surprised at how well this was going. "You really shouldn't do that," He said. "I'm poisonous, you know."

"Rabbits ain't poison," Fox laughed. "I should know. I done ate plenty of them."

"Rabbits aren't poisonous," Hare agreed, "but I'm a hare. An African hare, too. Everyone knows an African hare is just about the most poisonous thing there is."

"I don't believe that mess for a second," Fox said.

"Go on and eat me, then," Hare said. "At least I'll take you with me, so you won't bother my family anymore."

Fox licked his lips and lunged for Hare. Just as his teeth brushed fur, Hare added, "Of course, you won't mind if I say my prayers first."

Fox growled, but he backed off. “I suppose you might, as long as you’re quick about it.”

Hare folded his hands and bowed his head like he was praying, but he kept one eye cracked, watching Fox. He didn’t have to wait long before Fox turned green. He stumbled away from Hare, gagging.

“What did you do to me?” Fox cried. “Oh, my stomach!”

“You went and took a taste of me, didn’t you? If you’re going to eat me, you might want to be quick about it. You’ve only got about five minutes after the poison starts circulating before you drop dead.”

“I’ve been poisoned!” Fox screeched.

“Calm down, Fox. You know, I’m sure there’s a cure of some kind. There usually is, if you know how to ask.”

“Please,” Fox begged, “I’ll do anything you want. Just give me the antidote.”

Hare rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Well, I may be able to recall it – if you promise on your life to not bother me or my relatives anymore.”

Fox lowered himself to the ground and whimpered. “I swear I’ll never do anything to you or your kin ever again. Just please help me!”

“Well, I believe Mother Hare told me once that the only way to stop hare poison is to dilute it. So, you’ve got to get down to the creek and drink until you think you’re going to burst, then keep drinking. You can’t be too careful, you know.”

Fox took off like a shot and all but leapt into the creek when he reached it. He stayed there two days and a night, guzzling water until he could hardly walk. When he finally stumbled home, he fell straight into his bed and didn’t get up for a month. Of course, as soon as Fox was

on his feet, he was up to his old tricks, promise or no. No matter how hard he tried, though, he never did outwit Hare again.

The next thing Hare knew, the year was over. Instead of going home, he wrote to his mother and said he wanted to stay. He had finally started using his brain, and the animals back home didn't seem like enough of a challenge to him. Not long after, she came to visit. Mother Hare was so pleased with her son that she moved to the States, too, just so she could hear about his adventures. She never did get tired of hearing how Hare first tricked Fox, and Hare never tired of telling the story.

Jack in the City

Most people have heard of Jack's adventure with the beanstalk, but there is much more to Jack tales. Jack is a trickster and an unlikely hero (Thompson par. 5). In all of his tales, Jack begins nearly every tale in poverty (Thompson par. 8). By force or by choice, he leaves home to seek his fortune. Often, he helps a stranger along the way and receives advice or aid in return (Thompson par. 27). By the end of the story, Jack vastly improves his way of life by acquiring treasure or improving his social standing (Thompson par. 8).

Jack migrated from England to North America, where he took up residence in the Appalachian Mountains (Thompson par. 31). In this tale, Jack is pulled out of the mountains to deal with a problem as immense as the giants he is so famous for slaying.

Not too long ago, Jack and his family lived in the slums of the big city. As Jack grew up, he couldn't remember a single day going by without someone ringing the bell, looking for his father. Sometimes, the visitors came in when it was dark out and Jack was in bed, but he could still hear everything that they talked about.

When Jack was old enough to go around the city by himself, his father wanted him to take messages and packages to all his business associates, but his mother put her foot down. It was the only time Jack ever saw her argue with his father and win. It wasn't long before Jack figured out why. His father dealt with the city's gangs. Everyone knew it, but when the police came around, Jack's father made sure there was no way to trace anything to him. His errand boys often found themselves stuck with the contraband and the blame.

One day, when Jack was in high school, his father said that it was time Jack started learning the family business. After that, Jack spent every afternoon shadowing his father. He didn't want any part of his father's work, but he had learned long ago that arguing was useless and often painful. When his father was finally arrested two years later, Jack knew everything about the city's underground. He knew who to go to for guns, drugs, fake I.D.s, and forged documents. He knew how to cover up a crime and how to shift the blame. He knew which judges

and politicians could be bought and which ones needed to be blackmailed. He knew that the city was crumbling from the inside out, and these people were the cause.

The day that Jack's father went to jail, each of the gangs sent a couple of new initiates up to Jack's apartment complex. Jack knew that the gang leaders wanted him to take his father's place. Jack's father guarded the names of his associates closely. If the gangs found out who he went to, they would go straight to the source instead of giving the middle man his due. Jack was the only one who knew all of his father's contacts, and he wasn't about to give up that information willingly. Of course, there was no way he could tell this to the gangs and live. So, Jack let the gang members come up, but one at a time. He didn't want anyone to get shanked in his living room.

The novice gangsters were obviously nervous. Nearly every one stuttered. One's hand shook so badly that Jack thought he might be having a seizure. Each had a bandana tied around one arm and a single tattoo on the other, both indicating which gang they came from. They all wore pants that were a size too big and gave speeches that sounded exactly the same, as though they practiced together while they waited.

"Come on, Jack. The big guys know you know all of your daddy's friends. They want you to come work for us, exclusive-like. They'll pay you real good for your trouble."

Every time, Jack rubbed his chin a while, thinking before he answered. These new members were harmless, but they were at the bottom of the heap. If he just said no, Jack, his mother, and these kids wouldn't live to see the morning. He had to stall for time.

Well, guys, I'd love to help you," Jack said finally, "but I've got cops swarming all over this place, day and night. Besides that, I have to get my father's affairs in order. Give me a week. Things should calm down by then."

The initiates didn't know what to do about that. Some tried weak threats. Others pleaded. Most of them just turned red, cussed, and said they would come back.

Jack spent the week talking to his mother, trying to figure out what to do. From his experience, he knew there were only two options: join one gang and hope the other six didn't kill him, or run and hope that he got away. His mother had family in England. They might be able to hide there.

When the week was up, Jack was no closer to a solution. There was no one gang strong enough to protect him from the others for very long, even if he wanted to choose that option. Running was no safer. Jack knew exactly how far the gangs' reach was, and they would find him in England. He couldn't afford plane tickets, anyway. His father drank almost every cent he made, and what was left was seized by the cops. Still, when the new group of gang members showed up, he talked to each of them.

These guys were from somewhere in the middle of each gang's organization. They wore long shirts and pants two sizes too big. Backwards caps covered their gang bandanas. Jack saw the outline of a switchblade in every pocket. The gang tattoos were still on display, but they were joined by others and at least three piercings. When Jack brought each one to his apartment, he said the same thing as before, except a lot meaner. Jack knew these gangsters wouldn't be put off as easily as the first batch, but he finally shook them off, using the same excuse as before.

Jack knew that he had to answer the next group or run before the week was up, and it was going to get messy either way. The first thing he did was borrow some money from his mother's relatives and send her on a long vacation. She had given him all the advice she could, and there was no point in making her stay and watch him get killed.

Then Jack decided to go on a walk to clear his head, so he went to the park. He bought a couple of hot dogs from a street vendor and sat on a bench to eat and think. Not long after, a homeless man shuffled up and sat beside him.

“Those look mighty good,” the homeless man said, sniffing Jack’s hot dogs.

Jack was starving. He hadn’t eaten anything since his mother left the day before. Still, she taught him to be kind to the less fortunate, so he broke one of the hot dogs in half and gave it to the homeless man.

“Thank you, son,” the homeless man said, taking a bite. “My name’s Steve.”

“Jack.”

“Not the Jack that all the gangs around here are talking about?” Steve asked. Jack nodded. “They come around here all the time, and all they do lately is complain about you.”

“Yeah, it’s getting to be a problem for everyone,” Jack said. “They all want me to take over for my father, but I don’t want to. Of course, I can’t tell them that, and running won’t get me anywhere except an early grave.”

Steve finished his half of the hot dog and stared hungrily at the other half until Jack gave it to him. “Well, I guess you know what you have to do, then.”

“No, I don’t. That’s the problem.”

“It’s simple,” Steve said. “If you can’t join them, and you can’t run away, then fight. Sure, you’ll probably get killed, but from the sound of things, you’re going to get killed anyway. Might as well go out with a bang.”

“Not much of one,” Jack said. “All they need is one bullet to shut me up forever.”

Steve thought about that while he finished eating. “I know! Go see the mayor. He’s been trying to get rid of those gangs for years. He can help you.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Jack said. “Steve, you just earned yourself another hot dog.”

At city hall, Jack found the mayor in his office and explained his problem.

“I’m sick of these gangs coming after me all the time,” Jack finished. “You’re the mayor. Why don’t you send your policemen to take care of this mess?”

“I would love to, Jack,” the mayor said, “but your father has them so wrapped up in this city that my officers can’t shake them loose. Before he came here, we only had one gang, and they didn’t do anything but talk big. I’ll tell you what I can do, though. Elections are coming up soon, and I really need something to boost my numbers in the polls. If you can find a way to take care of this gang problem, it’ll make me look good to the voters. I’ll even give you a thousand dollars for your troubles.”

“I’ve got an idea.” Jack said. “But I’ll need a few things.”

Three days later, the gangs sent over some of their highest level members to see Jack. They all arrived in white tank tops and pants that were three sizes too big, decked out in their colors. Jack let them all wait in the lobby again and he let them up, one by one. While they waited in the lobby of Jack’s apartment building, Jack could see them eyeing one another, keeping their hands in their pockets with a firm grip on the guns they hid there. Each one was surprised when Jack greeted him like an old friend and said he was ready to make a deal.

“I want to meet with the leader and work this out so everything’s official.” Jack said. “Send over a messenger later today. And tell him not to mind if there are guys here from the other gangs. I’m trying to let them down gently so I don’t wake up at the bottom of the river.”

For the rest of the day, whenever he was sure there was a messenger on the other side of his door, Jack picked up his phone and started shouting.

“Mom, you’re not going to change my mind. I don’t care if you think the idiots who run the gangs will catch on. They won’t think to check the rusting pile of junk that’s tied up on the north dock, anyway. I’m leaving at midnight tonight and I’m not coming back. No, I’m telling you that it’ll work. All these sissy little gangsters are scared of me, anyway. They wouldn’t come near that boat even if they knew I was on it.”

Jack carried on the one-sided conversation until he heard footsteps moving away from the door. At the end of the day, all of the gangsters in the city were buzzing like hornets, and Jack headed down to the dock to get ready for them.

At midnight, all of the gangs showed up. World War III would have broken out on the dock if Jack hadn’t gotten onto the ship’s PA system and started laying on the insults, hoping to distract them from each other and get all of them on the ship. The gangs remembered what they were there for and hurried aboard, ignoring each other in their search for Jack.

At the wheel, Jack pulled away from the dock. This was the tricky part. The door was locked and barricaded, but Jack could already hear pounding and cursing from the other side. He didn’t have much time.

As soon as Jack thought the ship was too far out for anyone to swim to shore, he smashed the controls and climbed through a trapdoor. After a long climb down a rusty ladder, Jack came to a small opening in the hull with a rope dangling out of it. He heard voices from above. The gangsters had broken through his barrier. It would only take a moment for someone to find the trapdoor.

Jack clambered over the pipes between him and the hole, grabbed the rope, and shimmed down into the motorboat tied to the other end. He could see the gangsters on the deck pointing at him and shouting as he sped away.

Jack went straight to the mayor to collect his thousand dollars, but the mayor turned out just as crooked as Jack's father. Jack had to go to court to get his reward, and then he turned around and used the money to fund his own campaign for mayor. Jack won without any trouble. The people of the city knew who really got rid of the gangs, and they ran the corrupt mayor out of town. He brought his mother back to live in the city and spent the rest of his life in office. No one ever saw the gangsters or the former mayor again.

Coyote Waters the World

Coyote plays a number of roles in American folktales. In Mesoamerica, Coyote is a shifty dunce who is rarely successful in his tricks. In Native American tales, Old Man Coyote was one of the First People who lived before humanity was created. This Coyote is not a simple trickster, but a cultural hero who creates humans, provides them with fire, and kills monsters that threaten them (Bright 19- 21).

This story mixes the two styles. Coyote's hunger encourages him to trick Tortoise out of a meal, but in the end Coyote is fooled into doing a service for humanity.

At the beginning of world, the Sky People gathered up all of the water and hid it from the other people. Because of this, the whole world was a desert and food was scarce. Coyote was walking along one day and he was hungry. He saw someone moving in the distance and hurried to catch up. When he was closer, he recognized Tortoise.

Coyote licked his lips. Here was a prime opportunity. Tortoise was so slow that he barely moved. It would be easy to catch him and throw him in a stew. Of course, Coyote meant to trick a meal out of him first. Coyote made a point to never do anything that he could get someone else to do for him.

“Hello, friend,” Coyote called, trotting up beside Tortoise.

“Oh, no. It's you,” Tortoise sighed when he saw who it was. “What do you want?”

“Do I need a reason to walk with you and enjoy this fine day?” Coyote asked.

“You want something to eat, don't you?”

“Now that you mention it, I would enjoy a bit of refreshment.”

“That's bad for you, then,” Tortoise said. “It hasn't rained in months and it's not likely to anytime soon. Nothing grows in this desert. I hardly have enough food for myself.”

“Surely, you can spare a bite of food and a swallow of water,” Coyote said.

Tortoise sighed. “You're not going to leave me alone, are you? Fine. I suppose you can come home with me.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Coyote said, falling back to hide his toothy grin.

They walked on for hours. Coyote had to stop after every step and wait for Tortoise to catch up. Before long, he was so footsore that he could barely stand. He panted, his dry tongue hanging out of his mouth. They passed no other animals. Every one of them was hiding from the sun, waiting for sundown so they could walk around a bit more comfortably. Coyote had no other opportunities for a meal, so he did his best to keep Tortoise’s pace, but he was not above complaining about it.

“Are we nearly there?” Coyote asked.

“Very nearly,” Tortoise replied. “Just a bit further.”

“I don’t think I can go on any longer,” Coyote whined. “I’ll die of hunger! Why don’t I carry you to your home? We’ll get there much faster and you won’t be tired out by the long walk.”

“Well, that sounds nice,” Tortoise agreed. He climbed up on Coyote’s back and gave him directions. Coyote walked on for a long time. The sun shone fiercely on the earth in those days, and poor Coyote perspired until his fur was soaked. How he envied Tortoise’s cool skin and the shell that gave him shade!

“Tortoise, I’m so hot,” Coyote said. “Talk to me about something to distract me.”

“Well, I have been meaning to ask you about something for some time now,” Tortoise said. “I’ve heard that you used to be able to do all kinds of interesting things. You know, magic and whatnot. Is it true?”

“Of course it’s true!” Coyote said. “And what do you mean, ‘used to?’ I’ve got more magic in one paw than all the other animals on the earth put together.”

“Well, I heard from some of the other animals that you’ve gone soft. Lost your touch.”

Coyote stopped. “What? I’m just as good as I used to be. Better, even! Just last week, I killed a giant who was as big as a mountain. The week before that, I flew.”

“Of course, of course,” Tortoise said condescendingly.

“I did,” Coyote insisted. “Get down off my back and I’ll show you a new trick I just learned yesterday. I can take my eyes out of my head and juggle them.”

Tortoise climbed down. “There’s only one thing you can do to prove that you’re still great. You know that the Sky People are hoarding all the water in the world while we suffer in this desert. It only rains when one of the Sky People spills his bowl. If you can bring water to the world, I’ll cook you a feast so grand that you’ll burst, and I’ll tell the other animals that you’re still fearsome and powerful.”

Coyote’s stomach growled. “Don’t you think you should feed me a little first? The Sky People live at the top of a tall mountain. I’ll starve to death before I reach them.”

“No, no. We can’t do it that way,” Tortoise said. “I know you too well. If I feed you now, you’ll get lazy and forget about your promise. Besides, it will take a long time for the food to cook. Go and bring back the water, and I will have everything ready when you return.”

Coyote agreed and trotted off. Back in the mountains, he found the highest peak and started to climb. He walked for days. The further Coyote walked, the hotter, drier, and greedier he became. Halfway up the mountain, he decided to keep the water for himself. Then all the people would bring him mountains of food to get some of his water.

Just when he thought that he was going to collapse, Coyote reached the village of the Sky People. Carefully, he snuck through the bushes until he came to the edge of the village. All of the Sky People had gathered in front of the chief’s house to dance around a blue jar. Every

time the dance brought one of them close to the jar, the dancer dipped his bowl into the jar and took a long drink of water.

“So, that’s where they keep the water,” Coyote said to himself. “How lucky for me! That will be easy to keep in my home and hide from the other people. I just have to grab it while the Sky People are all sleeping.”

Coyote settled in beneath the bushes to wait for night. The Sky People stopped dancing and disappeared into their homes as soon as the sun fell below the horizon. Soon, only the chief and his son were left.

“Son,” the chief said, “It is your duty to guard our precious water tonight. Be wary. The birds speak of one who has come from below to steal it.”

“Of course, Father,” his son replied. The chief went inside and his son sat next to the water. He held a thick club in each hand.

Coyote waited until the chief’s son began to nod, his head heavy with sleep. Every time the boy’s head touched his chest, Coyote crept forward a tiny bit, until his nose brushed the side of the jar. The next time the chief’s son closed his eyes, Coyote snatched up the jar and ran.

The chief’s son jerked awake and shouted an alarm, but Coyote reached the edge of the village before any of the Sky People started chasing him.

Only the stars shone on the world, but Coyote could see perfectly and easily found his way on the rocky path. The Sky People were almost blind in the darkness, but they had walked the path every day and knew it well. Even with better vision and a head start, Coyote could hear them catching up.

Coyote came upon a cliff just as the chief's son reached out and grabbed his fur. Coyote lost his balance and dropped the jar of water. The chief's son let go of Coyote and leapt for the jar, but it rolled over the edge of the cliff with Coyote tumbling down after it.

At the bottom of the cliff, the jar broke and all of the water rushed out, flooding the world. All of the people saw the water rushing down from the mountain and took shelter on high ground. The dry earth soaked up the water quickly. By the time the sun rose, the water was gone and the people returned to their homes to find the world covered in plants. Rivers cut through the land, emptying into lakes and eventually, the newly formed ocean. The people rejoiced. Now they could cultivate the land and grow enough food to keep themselves well-fed.

Poor Coyote was swept out to the middle of the ocean and had to paddle for a long, long time to reach land again. When he finally returned to the desert, it wasn't a desert but a fertile plain. Tortoise was nowhere to be seen. When he saw the water come down, Tortoise had hidden beneath a boulder. The Great Spirit saw that Tortoise had broken his promise, even though Coyote kept his word. Some parts of the world were still deserts, even after soaking up much water, and Tortoise was sent to one of these places to live as punishment for his dishonesty.

The rest of the people welcomed Coyote and held a feast in his honor. Coyote ate and drank until his stomach was round and heavy as a boulder.

The Mistreated Domovoi

The Russian domovoi and Swedish tomte are both domestic spirits who protect the home. They can take on many forms, but it is often thought that the domovoi takes on the appearance of the master of the house, while the tomte is a very short old man in ragged clothing. In exchange for his help, the spirit is rewarded with a bowl of porridge. If he is forgotten or shown disrespect, both the domovoi and the tomte will play mean tricks on the household until they are appeased (Hempel par. 8; Ivanits 51-53).

In both cases, the benevolence of the spirit was essential for the household to function properly. In the twentieth century, however, Christianity and education entered the rural parts of Russia (Ivanits 51). The domestic spirits began to be portrayed as evil creatures that needed to be banished, an idea that causes trouble for the domovoi in this story (Ivanits 62).

In the northern part of Russia, near St. Petersburg, there lived a farmer and his wife. For a long time, they kept their *domovoi* well fed, and their farm prospered.

The *domovoi* loved living with the farmer and his wife. They fed him porridge every week, and he was satisfied. In return, he spent his nights doing chores. He tended to the livestock faithfully, brushing the horse's coat, milking the cows, and feeding all of the animals only the best grain so that they grew plump and sleek. On cold days, he fetched water so the farmer's wife wouldn't have to go out into the snow. In the summer, he weeded the garden and made small repairs to the house so that they would all be comfortable come winter.

One day, a priest came to the small town and established a church. The farmer's wife, out of curiosity, started attending. The priest told the woman that the *domovoi* was an unholy spirit and not to be trusted. Every night, the *domovoi* could hear her arguing with her husband. She wanted to have the house exorcised and the *domovoi* driven out. The priest said their farm would be even more prosperous if the *domovoi* was gone.

The farmer came from an old, old Russian family, and he knew better than to anger the *domovoi* when his farm was doing so well. He told his wife that he didn't want the priest and his

ideas anywhere near his home. Every Saturday night, the farmer made his wife heat up a bowl of porridge and leave it for the *domovoi's* tribute.

The farmer's wife hated doing this for the *domovoi*. One Saturday night, she made an excuse to stay up later than the farmer and ate the porridge herself.

That night, the *domovoi* came in from working hard on the farm to find an empty bowl sitting on the kitchen table. Angry, he threw it against the wall. Then, the *domovoi* spent the rest of the night stomping up and down the stairs, keeping the farmer and his wife awake until the sun rose.

The next day, while the *domovoi* was sleeping, the farmer's wife showed the farmer the pieces of the broken bowl.

“Look here, husband. Look at what your precious *domovoi* has done. He eats the food that we provide for him, then breaks one of my best bowls and keeps us up all night with his stomping. He must be gotten rid of.”

Still, the farmer refused to let the priest near his home. The *domovoi* had served him well for many years, and he wasn't going to let one temper tantrum ruin his prosperity.

The next week, the wife again made an excuse to stay up, and ate the *domovoi's* porridge, leaving the empty bowl on the table. When the *domovoi* saw that he had been cheated for the second time, he vowed to do nothing but cause mischief until the farmer made amends for the *domovoi's* mistreatment.

From that night on, every morning the farmer went to the barn to find the feed troughs upended, their contents spread across the floor. The *domovoi* still filled the water buckets regularly, but he left them precariously balanced on the tops of doors. After a few cold showers, the farmer and his wife developed a habit of shoving doors open and leaping away from them.

The horse's mane and tail were tangled into impossible knots. Weeds and brambles sprouted up in the garden and choked all of the vegetables, so that the farmer and his wife had none to eat.

“It's that ungrateful *domovoi*,” the farmer's wife said, helping the farmer up after the chair he sat on collapsed underneath him. All of the nails had been hammered out of it. “Every week, we feed him, and this is how he repays us? We should have the priest come right now and banish the heathen from our home so that we can live in peace.”

The farmer still refused. “I'm sure that the *domovoi* is upset about something,” he said. “If I could only figure out what, I would remedy it so that he is happy again. I haven't bought any new livestock lately, and he's always liked the animals we keep, so I don't think that's it. There must be something wrong with the porridge. You don't salt it, do you, wife?”

“Of course not.”

“And every week, you leave it here on the table, just like always?”

“Of course.”

The farmer scratched his head, but he stopped asking questions. He knew the *domovoi* must be angry about the porridge. He didn't suspect his wife of any intentional mischief, but he watched closely as she heated the porridge, assuring that it was cooked perfectly. The farmer set the bowl on the table with his own hands and placed a large pat of butter on top of the porridge, hoping that would pacify the angry *domovoi*. The farmer's wife tried to make excuses to stay up again that night, but the farmer insisted that they both go to bed as soon as the sun went down.

When the *domovoi* woke and entered the kitchen, he saw the bowl of porridge still steaming on the table and smelled the melted butter. It made his mouth water horribly, but he left it alone and hid in a corner, determined to find out what was stealing his food and thrash it soundly.

As soon as her husband was asleep, the woman crept downstairs to eat the *domovoi*'s porridge. She wasn't about to let him think that they were going to start feeding him again.

In the kitchen, the woman stirred up the fire a bit to light up the room, but not enough that she noticed the *domovoi* standing in the corner. The *domovoi* saw her pick up his bowl of porridge and eat it greedily, not stopping until every bit was gone. She set the bowl down again and licked her fingers clean.

The *domovoi* became enraged that the farmer's wife would cheat him after so many years of faithful service. He grabbed her around the waist and dragged her outside. The woman was so surprised that she was unable to call to the farmer for help.

In the yard, the *domovoi* held fast to the woman's waist and hand, forcing her to dance until she labored for breath. It was the traditional punishment for this kind of misdeed, though not one that the *domovoi* had ever needed to use before. They twirled around the yard, raising dust so thick that it hid the moon from sight, dancing until the sun came up. The *domovoi* vanished and the woman collapsed in the yard, where her husband found her.

When the woman awoke and remembered what happened, she placed all of the blame on the *domovoi*.

“I just went downstairs to check on the fire. I thought I had forgotten to bank it properly. That thing, the *domovoi*, was in the kitchen. He grabbed me and forced me to dance with him. If the sun had not risen, I would be dead right now!”

The woman pleaded with the farmer so hysterically that he consented to have the priest bless their home to drive the *domovoi* out. That afternoon, he came with his Bible and a vial of holy water. Speaking prayers and verses, the priest sprinkled the holy water in every corner, calling on the Holy Spirit to enter the home and banish the *domovoi*.

The *domovoi* heard the priest chanting, but he burrowed further into his bed and ignored it. He knew that he was a good *domovoi*, and he was the one who had been wronged. The priest's blessing could not drive him out.

The priest made several visits to the farmhouse to try and exorcise the *domovoi*, but it never worked. Every day, the animals became thinner and wilder. The weeds in the garden grew taller, and were rooted so soundly in the soil that no one could pull them. The house started to fall down around the farmer and his wife.

One day, a peddler came to the farm to sell his wares. The farmer and his wife couldn't afford to buy anything from him, but they offered him shelter for the night in exchange for a few goods. That was, as long as he didn't mind sleeping in the kitchen with the unruly *domovoi*.

"Oh, the little master won't bother me a bit," the peddler said. "I come from Sweden, you know, and we have little spirits to help us in our homes as well, although I call mine a *tomte*. My granny taught me how to handle the *tomte*. All he wants is a little food and respect."

"We've had nothing but trouble from the ungrateful thing for some months," the farmer's wife said, hobbling around the kitchen. She had developed a limp after her night with the *domovoi*, a reminder that she would keep for the rest of her days. "You're not to feed him. He steals enough from our pantry to keep himself fed, the little thief. The priest told me that the *domovoi* is the spirit of a dead sinner and a servant of the devil, and I'm inclined to believe him!"

That night, after the farmer and his wife retired, the peddler still sat up, telling stories about the Swedish *tomte*. He knew the *domovoi* was listening, but he pretended to be talking to the fire. He could tell by the woman's speech and manner that it was her fault the *domovoi* was misbehaving. Before he fell asleep that night, the peddler cut up a bit of bread and cheese and left it on a plate by the fire.

“I know this isn't the porridge that you love, little master,” the peddler said, “but I hope it will please you and allow me a peaceful night's rest. I can tell that you have been mistreated here.”

After the peddler was asleep, the *domovoi* ate the bread and cheese and thought about the stories. In Sweden, household spirits were respected the way he had once been. They might not get porridge as often, but it would be worth it if there was butter in it.

By morning, the *domovoi* had made up his mind to go to Sweden. He hopped into the peddler's bags and left with him. He travelled with the peddler to the edge of St. Petersburg and then left for the port. Once there, he climbed aboard a ship that was sailing for Sweden.

The passage was smooth, and the *domovoi* passed the time with the *tomte* he found already aboard. The Swedish were good to their domestic spirits, just as the peddler had said. The ship's *tomte* was kind enough to share his porridge with the *domovoi* in exchange for some help keeping the ship in order.

Although he enjoyed the trip, the *domovoi* was happy to reach land. He bid farewell to the ship's *tomte* and hid in one of the crates that was being delivered to an inn that the *tomte* had recommended. Once there, the *domovoi* found the family of the *tomte* that protected the inn.

The eldest *tomte* was a shriveled little man, stone gray from head to foot and bent over from age. He allowed the *domovoi* to stay until a home could be found for him. With the *tomte's* encouragement, the *domovoi* shed the Russian farmer's image and followed a newly married couple to their home in the country. He went back to the chores that he had done in Russia, tending to the garden, the animals, and the house. The couple followed the new religion, like the Russian farmer's wife, but they remembered the old ways. They were pleased with their new *tomte* and asked him to stay. They never forgot to leave out porridge with butter during the holidays as a reward for his hard work.

As for the Russian farmer and his wife, another *domovoi* moved in when the old one left. This *domovoi* had been homeless for nearly a century, and he was quick to claim the farm as his own. He was much more spiteful, and gave the farmer and his wife no peace until they moved into a new home. Even then, the new *domovoi* followed them, taking on the form of a black dog and prowling around the house at night, waiting to be invited inside. No matter how often the priest came, the farmer and his wife were plagued by this *domovoi* for the rest of their lives.

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