

COYOTE SINGS
TO THE MOON

*For Elizabeth and Benjamin,
who think Coyote's singing
got a bum rap — TK*

A long time ago, before animals stopped talking to human beings, Old Woman lived in the woods by a pond. And every evening, she walked down to the pond and waited for the moon to come up.

In those days, the moon was much closer to the earth, and the light from the moon was much brighter. And when the full moon rose above the trees, Old Woman sang out in a strong voice, "Moon, Moon, Full Moon."

And when the moon was a half moon, she sang, "Moon, Moon, Half Moon."

And when it was a crescent, she sang, "Moon, Moon, Crescent Moon."

One evening, all the animals in the woods went down to the pond just to hear Old Woman sing to the moon.

"What a beautiful voice," said the moose.
"Yes," said the ducks. "But we need a livelier beat."

"And a little cool percussion," said the beavers, ba-dopity-bop-bopping their tails on the water.

"Doo-wop, doo-wop," said the turtles and the frogs. "Don't forget the harmony."

So, one by one, all the animals joined in with Old Woman and sang to the moon.

"Moon, Moon, Full Moon."

One evening, Coyote heard Old Woman and the animals singing to the moon.

"Pardon me," said Coyote, smiling his Coyote smile. "Exactly what are you doing?"

"We're singing to the moon," said Old Woman.

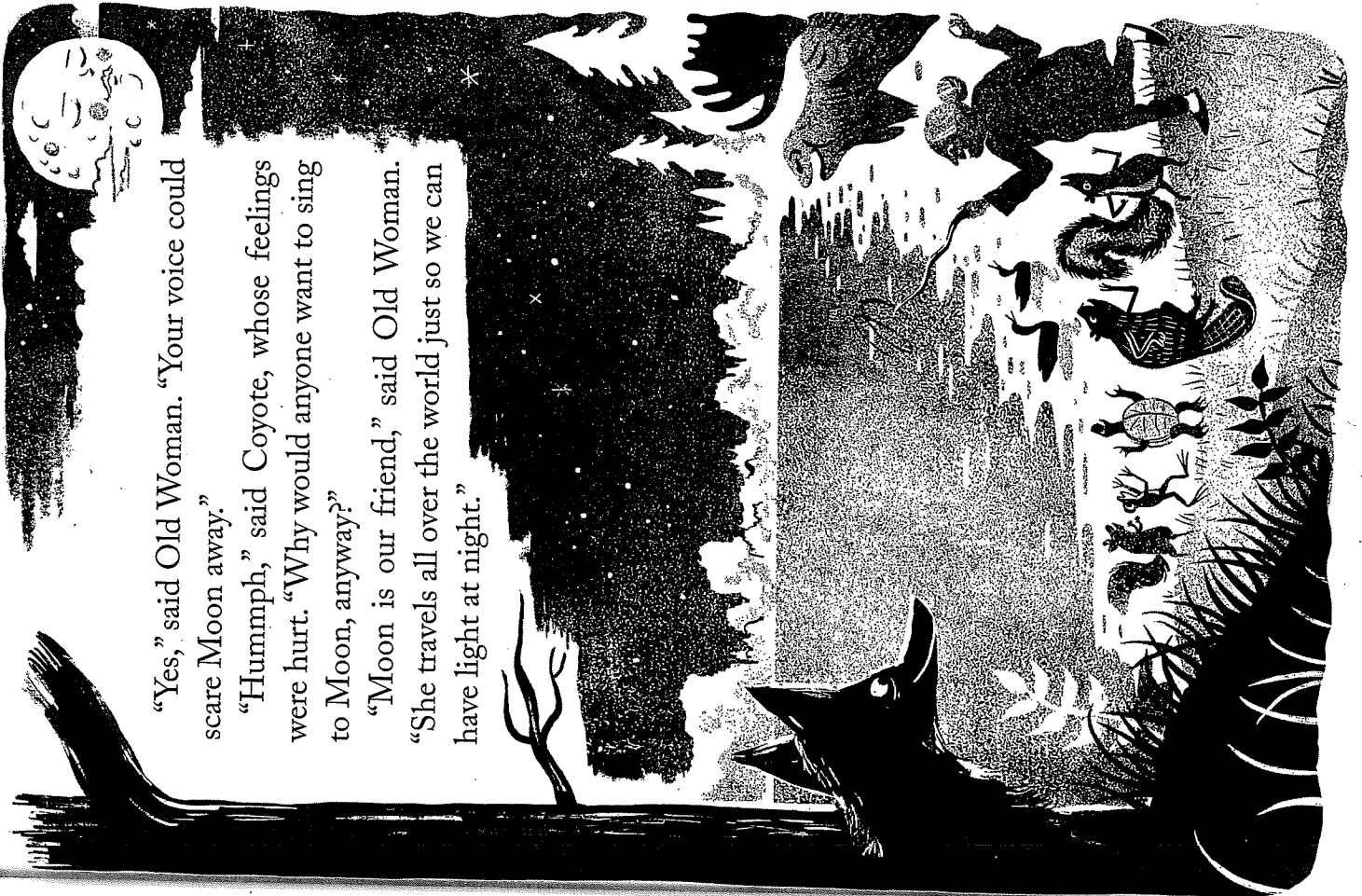
"Well," said Coyote, taking out his comb and brushing his coat, checking his teeth with his tongue and wiping his nose on his arm. "What you need is a good tenor."

"No! No!" shouted all the animals. "You have a terrible singing voice!"

"Yes," said Old Woman. "Your voice could scare Moon away."

"Humph," said Coyote, whose feelings were hurt. "Why would anyone want to sing to Moon, anyway?"

"Moon is our friend," said Old Woman. "She travels all over the world just so we can have light at night."



"Who wants light at night?" said Coyote. "That silly Moon is so bright, I can hardly sleep. Why, I wouldn't sing with you if you begged me."

Now, Moon heard Coyote, and the more she listened, the angrier she got.

"Okay," she said to herself. "Let's see how Coyote likes it dark." And she packed her bags, slid out of the sky and dove down into the pond.

When Moon dove into the pond, the whole world got really bright.

"Hey!" said Coyote. "How come it's so bright?"

And then it got really dark.

"Hey!" said Coyote. "How come it's so dark?"

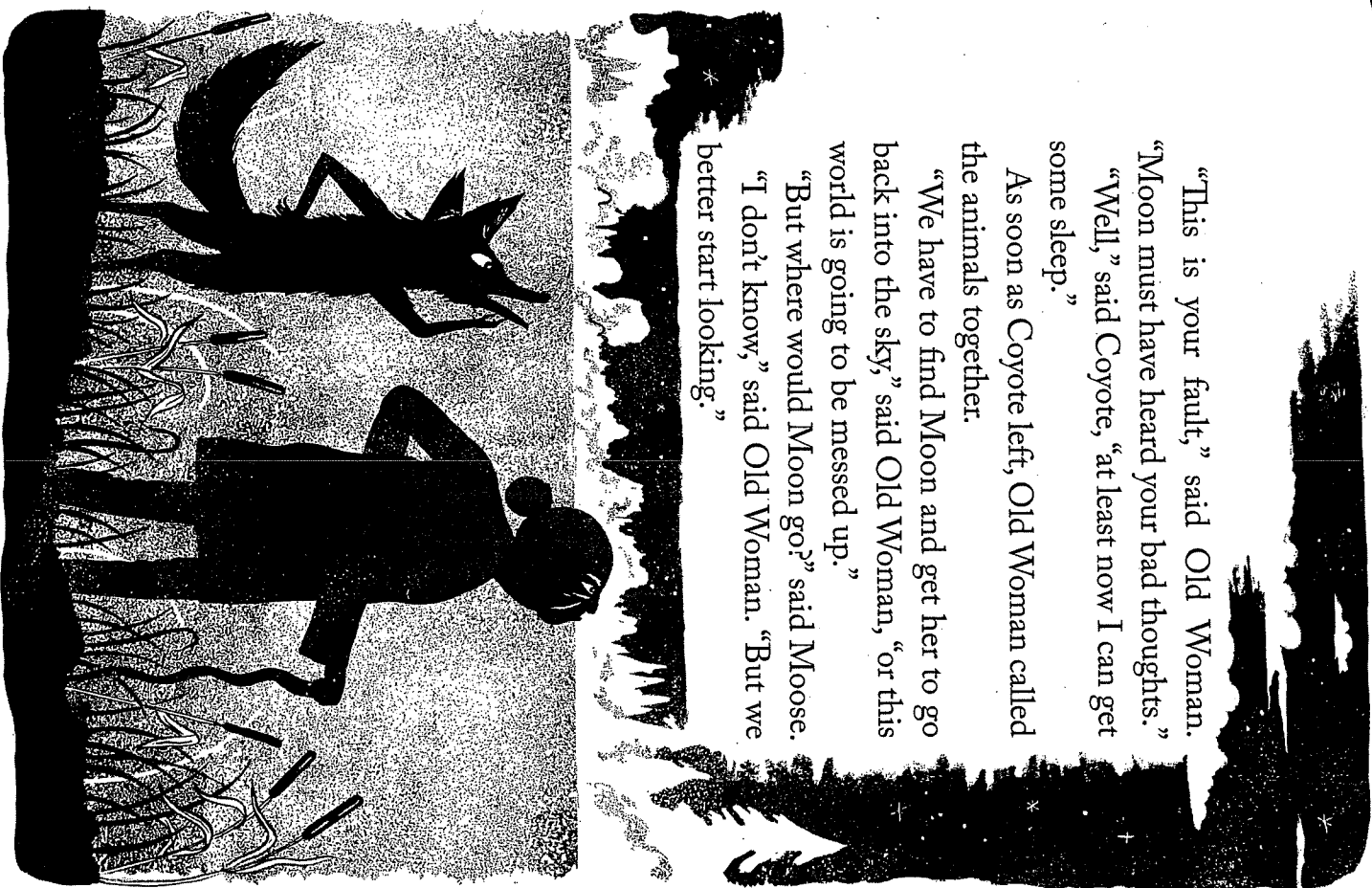
And when Old Woman and Coyote stopped arguing to catch their breath and they looked up in the sky, they saw that Moon was gone.

"This is your fault," said Old Woman. "Moon must have heard your bad thoughts." "Well," said Coyote, "at least now I can get some sleep."

As soon as Coyote left, Old Woman called the animals together.

"We have to find Moon and get her to go back into the sky," said Old Woman, "or this world is going to be messed up."

"But where would Moon go?" said Moose. "I don't know," said Old Woman. "But we better start looking."



So all the animals and Old Woman began searching through the dark for Moon.

While the animals and Old Woman were searching, Coyote was trying to find his way home.

"I think it's in this direction," said Coyote, and he walked into a tree.

"Hey!" said Tree. "Watch where you're going."

"Sorry," said Coyote. "But it's dark."

"That's because some fur-brain insulted Moon," said Tree, "and she has gone away."

"I can see just fine," said Coyote, and he walked into a large boulder.

"I'll bet that hurt," said Boulder.

"Ouch," said Coyote. "I'm trying to find my way home."

"Sure could use a little moonlight," said Boulder.

"Never mind," said Coyote.

Coyote tried to feel his way in the dark, but he kept bumping into trees and rocks and slipping on wet moss and tripping over sneaky roots.

"Maybe I should just sleep here tonight," said Coyote, "and go home in the morning."

Coyote felt around and found a nice flat spot, and he felt around some more and found something soft and warm.

"This will make a cozy pillow," said Coyote, as he fluffed up the soft and warm thing and put it under his head.

Just as Coyote was falling asleep, the pillow began to move.

"Stop that," said Coyote. "I'm trying to sleep."

"So am I," said the pillow.

Coyote couldn't see a thing, but his nose told him that he may have made a big mistake. Coyote sniffed a little here and he sniffed a little there.

"I hope you're a cuddly sack of garbage," said Coyote.

"Try again," said the pillow.

"A warm pile of moose poop?"

"Nope."

"A skunk?" said Coyote.

"Right!" said Skunk, and he sprayed Coyote all over with really bad-smelling skunk business.

"EEEEYYYYOOOWW!" yelled Coyote, and he jumped up and ran off as fast as he could. He ran and ran and ran and ran.

And ran right off a cliff.

"Oops!" said Coyote. "I can't watch ..."
And Coyote closed his eyes and held onto his tail as he fell and fell and fell.
And fell right into the pond.

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In the meantime, Old Woman and the animals were still looking for Moon.

But they couldn't find her.

"Did you look in that old hollow tree?" said Old Woman.



"We looked there," said the squirrels.

"Did you look in the cave?"

"Yes," said the bears. "We looked there, too."

"Maybe she's hiding behind the waterfall," said Old Woman.

"No," said the deer. "She's not there."

Old Woman sat down on a rock and put her head in her hand.

"Now, where could that Moon be?"

When Coyote opened his eyes, he was at the bottom of the pond.

"Oh dear," said Coyote. "This is embarrassing."

Then he noticed something curious. Instead of being cold and dark at the bottom of the pond, it was nice and bright.

"Hmmm," said Coyote. "This is very curious."

Coyote walked along the bottom of the pond a little ways, and there, lying on a beach blanket under a beach umbrella, playing chess with a sunfish, was Moon.

"There you are," cried Coyote.

"Go away," said Moon. "I've almost won this game."

"Checkmate!" said Sunfish, taking Moon's

knight with his bishop. "Good grief, what stinks?"

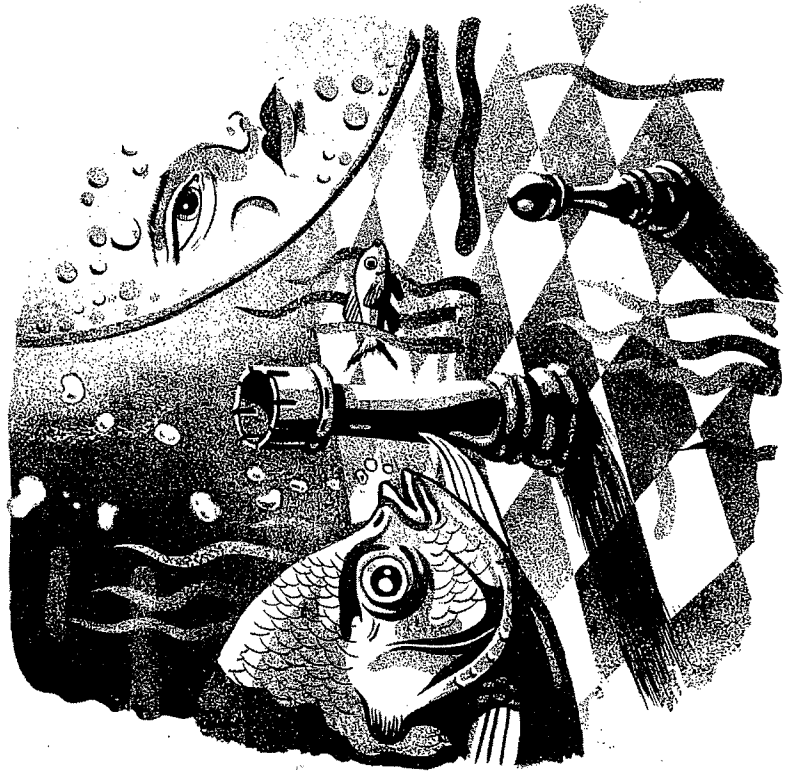
"Never mind," said Coyote.

"Let's play again," said Moon, wrinkling her nose. "Phew, what stinks?"

"Never mind," said Coyote. "You have to get back up in the sky."

"I like it here," said Moon.

"But you have to get back up in the sky," said Coyote.



"Have you noticed that you're underwater?" said Moon.

"Oh boy," Coyote thought to himself. "I better get some help. I better get some air!"

Old Woman and all the animals were sitting at the edge of the pond, feeling glum, when Coyote popped out of the water.

"You again!" said Old Woman.

"Relax," said Coyote. "I've found Moon. She's at the bottom of the pond."

Old Woman and all the animals put their heads into the pond, and sure enough, there was Moon playing chess with Sunfish.

"This is a fine mess you've made," Old Woman told Coyote. "Now what are we going to do?"

So Coyote and the animals and Old Woman sat on the grass by the pond in the dark and thought.

After a while, Old Woman stood up.

"All right," she said. "First, we have to build a raft."

So all of the next day, when they could see what they were doing, Old Woman and the animals and Coyote built a raft. And just before the sun disappeared, everybody got on the raft and floated out to where Moon was lounging on the bottom of the pond.

"All right," said Old Woman. "Everybody sing. Everybody, that is, except Coyote."

"That's not very nice," said Coyote. "After all, I found Moon."

"Just sit there and be quiet," said Old Woman.

Old Woman began to sing first.

"Moon, Moon, come back soon."

And then, one by one, all the animals joined in.

"Moon, Moon, come back soon."

They sang for hours and hours.

"Moon, Moon, come back soon."

But nothing happened. And when Old Woman looked underwater, Moon was still

playing chess and relaxing on the beach blanket under the beach umbrella.

"Okay," said Old Woman. "Now we get serious."

Old Woman moved all the animals off to one side of the raft.

"Stop singing," she said, "and cover your ears."

"Okay," said all the animals.

Old Woman tried to smile at Coyote.

"I was wrong about your singing," she said. "You have a beautiful voice, and I think if you sing all by yourself, Moon will go back up in the sky."

"A solo?" said Coyote, trying to keep his tongue from falling out of his head.

"But you have to sing really loud," said Old Woman.

"I'll sing really, really loud," said Coyote.

"But," said Old Woman, "don't sing until I give you the signal."

Coyote took out his comb and brushed his coat. He ran his tongue over his teeth and wiped his nose on his arm.

Old Woman sat on the raft with the animals and covered her ears.

"Okay," she said, closing her eyes. "Hit it."

Coyote stood up straight, pointed his nose at the stars, opened his mouth and began to sing.

"YEEEOO-EEEEOOO-WAAAAH-YOOOOO-OOO!"



"Yikes!" screamed Old Woman and all the animals.

"YOOOOO-EEEEYYOOOOOOW-YOO-O
OWWWWWW!" sang Coyote.

"Stop! Stop!" screamed Old Woman and all the animals. "It's worse than we thought." But Coyote didn't hear them. He kept right on singing.

Down at the bottom of the pond, Moon was just about to take Sunfish's queen with her rook when she heard Coyote.

"What is that awful noise?" said Moon.

"It's a good thing I don't have ears," said Sunfish.

Coyote's singing got louder and louder. Moon put her fingers in her ears, but it didn't help.

"Who is making that horrible noise?" said Moon, and she packed up her umbrella and her blanket and swam to the top of the pond to see what was happening.

When Old Woman saw Moon coming to the surface, she yelled at Coyote, "Sing louder!"

Just as Moon came out of the water and looked around, Coyote took a deep breath and sang as loud as he could.

"AAAAWWOOOOOOO, AAAWOOOOOOOO-
OOOOOO!"

"AAAGGGGGGH!" screamed Moon, and she leapt up into the sky.

"AAAAWWOOOOOOO," sang Coyote. "EEEE-
YOOOOOOOOOWW!"

Moon climbed into the sky as fast as she could, trying to get away from Coyote's singing.

"Enough!" yelled Old Woman.

But Coyote didn't hear her, and he kept on singing, and Moon kept on climbing.

Old Woman could see that if she didn't shut Coyote up, Moon would climb into the sky until she disappeared. So, quick as she could, Old Woman grabbed Coyote's tongue and wrapped it around his mouth so he couldn't sing anymore.

But Coyote's tongue was long and slippery, and by the time she had Coyote's mouth all wrapped, Moon was much farther away than

before and the light from Moon was very dim.

"Oh dear," said Old Woman. "This didn't exactly work out the way I planned."

"Wouya pwease unwapp ma tongue," said Coyote, with his tongue wrapped around his mouth.

"But I guess it will have to do," said Old Woman.

"Anything to keep Coyote from singing," said the animals.

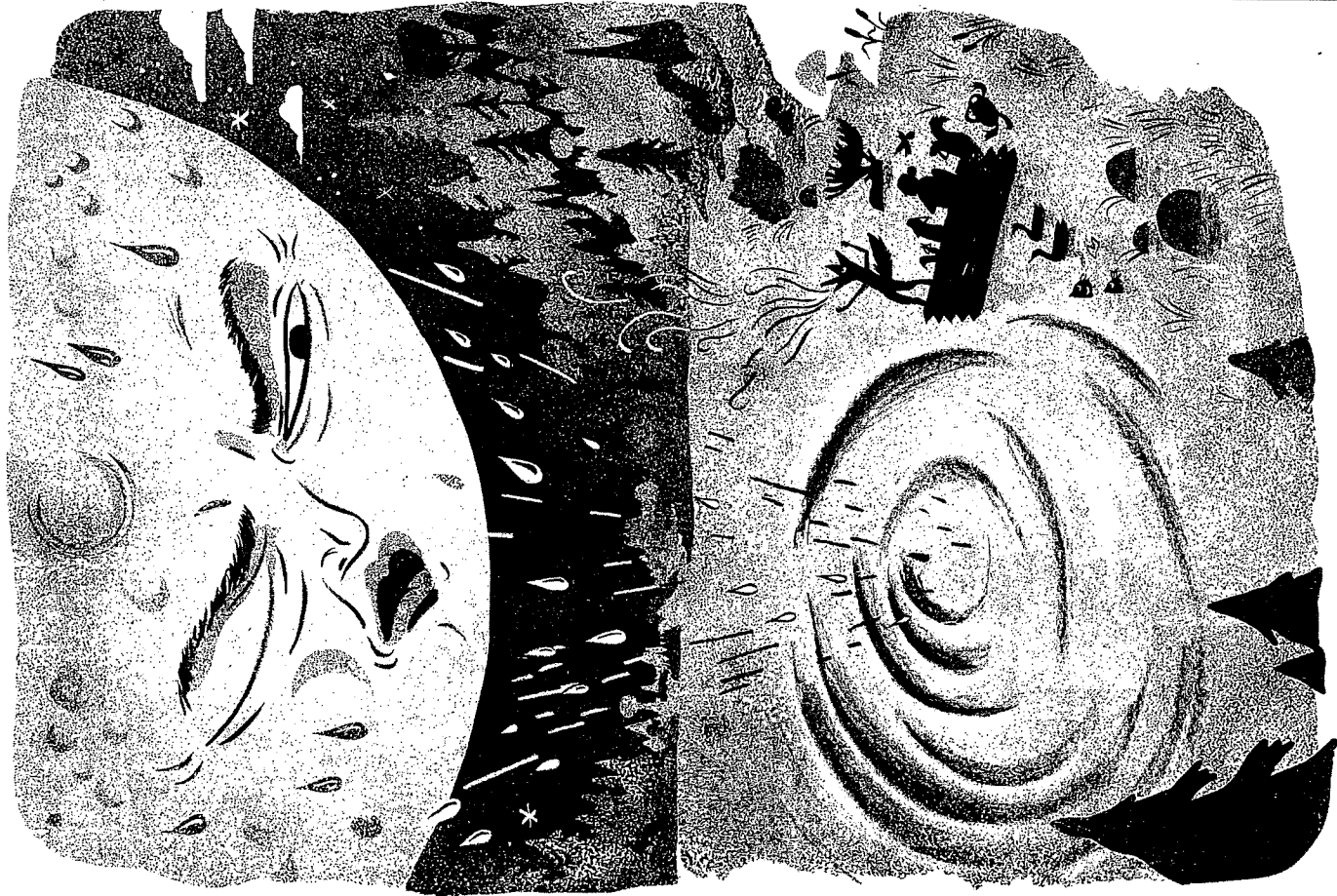
But just then, Moon began sneaking out of the sky toward that pond.

"Look out, look out!" all the animals yelled to Old Woman. "Moon is sneaking out of the sky."

Old Woman looked up. Moon was picking up speed, heading for that pond. Old Woman grabbed Coyote's tongue and unwrapped his mouth.

"Start singing," she shouted.

"Are you going to wrap my tongue around my mouth again?" said Coyote.





"Just sing," said Old Woman.

So Coyote started to sing again.

"EYOOOOOOOOOW, AWUUUUUUUUUU!"

And as soon as Moon heard Coyote start to sing, she turned around and headed back up into the sky.

"Well," said Old Woman, "this is a fine mess."

"I have an idea," said Coyote. "I'll watch

Moon every night, and whenever she tries to sneak back to the pond, I'll sing to her."

"Oh, no," said all the animals.

"Oh, no," said Old Woman.

But it was the only way to keep Moon in the sky.

So every evening, when Old Woman walked down to the pond to watch Moon come up, Coyote sat on a hill and waited. He combed his fur, ran his tongue around his teeth and wiped his nose on his arm.

"Awoooooooooooooooooo," he sang softly to himself, just to stay in good voice.

"Awwwwwwooooooooooooo."