



By D.B. Pacini-Christensen

Prologue

Señora Gabriela is a respected storyteller. Her exact age is unknown, but it is years more than ninety.

One warm afternoon, Señorita Margarita, a fourteen-year-old girl, whose blonde hair is silky soft, unlike the coarse black hair of everyone else, decides to spy on Señora Gabriela.



It is a desperate decision that grieves Señorita Margarita. Señora Gabriela and the others have been so kind. Señorita Margarita has been loved, fed, clothed, and since she was an infant, she has lived with Señora Francisca and her family in their hacienda.

Señorita Margarita does not wish to spy, but she doesn't know what else to do. Señora Gabriela is unwell. She will pass on soon.

Where does she hide her extraordinary treasure chest of untold stories? Everyone knows there is such a remarkable chest, but nobody knows where it is. If it can be discovered, they will be able to have wonderful new stories after Señora Gabriela is gone.

Señorita Margarita tiptoes to a window of Señora Gabriela whitewashed adobe hacienda.

Señora Gabriela is relaxing in her dwelling that is sparsely appointed, but it has everything anyone could ever need --- a rectangular kitchen table and tiled bench, a creaky rocking chair, a woven rug, a tidy stack of raffia ribbon-bound notebooks on a low stool, a comfortable bed, a carved dresser, a wrought iron lamp, and a cactus plant with a beautiful white bloom.



Señorita Margarita has always felt welcomed and comfortable in Señora Gabriela's humble home.

Suddenly, the old storyteller stops rocking in her chair. She leans forward and folds the faded rug back, revealing a worn leather pull-tab that is nailed to the floor. She tugs on the tab and a section of a floorboard lifts up. She reaches down and retrieves an undersized and unadorned wooden box. Señorita Margarita had always imagined that it would be a large and elaborately jeweled treasure chest.



To Señorita Margarita's surprise, Señora Gabriela opens the chest and removes a clay-colored stone about the size of a small tomato.



Next, she removes a little hammer and a slender chisel. She carefully taps off a chip of the stone, so tiny that Señorita Margarita can't even see it. Señora Gabriela then puts the stone, hammer, and chisel back into the chest, returns the chest to its hiding place, replaces the floorboard, and smooths the rug.

Señora Gabriela's feeble hands take a notebook from the stool. She unties its raffia ribbon binding and folds open the papel picado cover. She then puts the stone chip in the center of the top page. A rising puff of smoke swirls like a miniature tornado.

As quickly as the smoke materializes, it disappears. Margarita is flabbergasted to see fresh parchment pages. It is a story!

Señora Gabriela binds the crisp new pages into the notebook with the raffia ribbon, slips the notebook into her tapestry bag, and retrieves her walking stick.

Señorita Margarita hides while Señora Gabriela hobbles to the community courtyard, where everyone congregates to sing, talk about interesting things, and listen to stories.

When Señora Gabriela takes her honored place, all the others, including Señorita Margarita, gather to listen.

Señora Gabriela speaks with a frail but persuasive voice, "Dear ones, I cannot tell stories anymore, stories that encourage us, and fill our hearts with joy. It is time for someone to come and live with me so that I may teach her the art of storytelling. When I pass on, my home will be hers."

Señora Gabriela looks at Señorita Margarita. "Respect and cherish her because she will be the trusted keeper of our stories. Tonight she shall read a story that should interest her very much because it will answer some of her lifelong questions.

Señorita Margarita, please take this book.
You are our new storyteller."

Señorita Margarita is stunned. With tears streaming down her cheeks and with a strong young voice, she begins to read.

The Brave Coyote

This unusual love story begins fourteen years ago. Gerardo and Javier set out to hunt as the blistering hot orange sun starts to sink in the sky. They have hunted all their young lives together. Now they are grown, formidable, and agile. They know the desert intimately.

It is abnormal for them to remain together in a pack, but their mates insist on sharing a den and nothing can change their minds. Female

coyotes can be as stubborn as human females, perhaps even more so.

Gerardo's keen eyes scan the barren landscape. He sees the shadow of distant movement. The scurrying animal is probably a vole. He dismisses it. Such a small rodent is not worth physical effort yet. Life is undeniably harsh, but hunting is measured as half-game and half-survival, unless you are famished.



"Javier, I think I will head over there.
What catches your fancy?"

Javier glances in the opposite direction,
"I'll wander that stretch for a spell. I'm
detecting a strong whiff. I will explore it and
see what I can find."

Javier draws a deep breath and pretends to
be excited by a prospect. He distinguishes
absolutely nothing, but he self-assuredly says
to Gerardo, "Yes indeed, I definitely smell
something."

Gerardo leaves in a huff. It aggravates him
that Javier can frequently smell many things
that he isn't able to smell at all.

But frustration is bad for one's health, so
Gerardo relaxes his body and calms his
thoughts.



He takes a moment to appreciate the quiet beauty of the desert. Unexpectedly, he sees a wagon ahead, but he does not know it is a wagon since he has never seen one. The peculiar contraption smells like horses, but no horses are in sight. Apparently, they've been set free.

Two embracing creatures lay inside. They look similar to the brown-skinned creatures Gerardo has occasionally seen riding on the

backs of horses, except they have pale skin and yellow colored fur on their heads. They are warm, but the scent of death is on their bodies. Gerardo yips and howls, calling Javier to come.

Gerardo hears something and cautiously approaches. The whimpering creature looks like the two larger creatures, but it is the size of a young rabbit. Gerardo is a loyal parent to his own pups, and as a tenderhearted father, he tries to comfort this little one.

"Do not be afraid. I will not bite you. You can trust me. I won't let harm come to you."

Where is Javier? The lingering smell of horses is pungent, and several foreign odors are saturating the air. They are interesting scents he'd like to explore if time would permit such an

indulgence. With his teeth he takes hold of the cloth that is wrapped around the pup and hurries back to the den with the bundle.

Along the way, he suddenly understands something. Javier, his friend, his comrade, his brother, is also a trickster. Gerardo realizes that Javier does not have a superior sense of smell. If he did, he would be here by now!

When Gerardo enters the burrow with the human pup, his mate Rosa and Javier's mate Teresa are dumbfounded.

Rosa is alarmed by the pup's fragile condition, "Gerardo, she cannot survive long. You know what you must do. It will be dangerous, and you may not accomplish the task --- but you must try."

Teresa stammers, "Gerardo, go quickly! The pup will surely die if you do not hurry!"

Javier enters the den. He recognizes the grave moment at hand. Rosa is trembling. Gerardo nuzzles her affectionately and speaks confidently. Javier knows that Gerardo is trying to reassure Rosa. When he looks into Gerardo's eyes there is no confidence looking back at him. Gerardo will do what must be done, even if it costs him his life.

"Javier, you know that I must trespass to where the brown-skinned creatures dwell. I must take this pup to them, or she will die."

He looks at Rosa and their pups one more time, seizes the cloth wrapped around the precious bundle with his teeth, and leaves.

Outside he speaks in a low voice to Javier, "My trickster friend, you have been my brother. I thank you for that wonderful companionship. We both know that I may not make it back home. Javier, please take care of my family if I am unable to return."

With all his heart Javier understands the solemn promise he is making, "Gerardo, trust that I will take care of your family. I will protect them with my life. My friend, I promise I will."

Gerardo's one chance of survival is to remain unseen. Only the shroud of night's darkness will protect him.

He studies the landscape, calculates the great distance he must travel, and estimates the limited time he has until the rosy color of

dawn arrives. This will be a difficult and dangerous endeavor. To save the pup, he will be risking his own life.

Before beginning the journey across the desert, Gerardo remembers some dangerous encounters with the brown-skinned creatures that aimed sticks that spat fire at him and killed an old friend. He also wonders if he will make it without water if none is to be found.

Despite his misgivings, he is determined to take the baby pup to the brown-skinned creatures. He hopes that help would be given to a pup of his if it were found desperate and alone. His sense of duty drives him forward.

Gerardo looks at Javier, "We must do what is right. That is what determines our character. Thank you my friend, thank you."





He runs as fast as the wind --- will his lungs burst with his next breath? His paws become raw, his aching muscles cramp, it feels like a sharp knife is stabbing his side.

At last Gerardo reaches the remote village that is surrounded by cactus. Without a sound he enters an area that is a courtyard.



It is a place he has never seen. The ground is odd to him. It is covered with smooth stones, winding pathways, and large clay containers filled with flowering plants.

The courtyard is flooded with early light. Gerardo nervously creeps to the porch of one of the strange structures and leaves the pup where she will be seen. His bloody paw prints reveal that he had the courage to come inside the enclosed compound.

Señora Francisca wakes and is stunned. She thinks she hears a howling coyote at her front door. She quickly assumes she is mistaken. No coyote would dare enter their compound. She rises to prepare her family's morning meal. She then hears a crying infant! It is a familiar sound to her because she has six children.

Since the girl is nobody's child, she becomes everybody's child. They name her Margarita. Margarita longs to know where she came from, but no one can tell her anything except that a brave coyote saved her life.



When she was a youngster she occasionally saw a coyote at a far distance. It always seemed to be watching her. This morning she saw him once again, standing at a safe distance, watching her with loving eyes.



The End

The Brave Coyote is dedicated to Joyce Francis. It was first published in *Starry Night Stories - For Children & The Young At Heart* in 2018. It is for readers of all ages, but especially for children and teens.

Most of the text is Comic Sans 18-font bold. It is a popular font for visually impaired and dyslexic readers. It is also a font many young readers can read with ease.

The coyote and desert photographs are private and/or free-use photographs by Joshua Wilking: <https://unsplash.com/@wilking>.

The other photographs are free-use Unsplash or Pixabay photographs.

2020: D.B. (Donna) Pacini-Christensen is a vocalist and a published writer. She writes novels, novellas, short stories, poetry, songs, and literary/music reviews. She has a passion for photographing live performances. Many of her music photographs are on websites and in print publications.

For eleven years, before COVID-19, Donna and her husband Tim co-hosted monthly open mic music showcases. They have also co-hosted numerous poetry showcases and assisted with monthly bluegrass music jams. For nearly a decade, before COVID-19, they performed at private events and performed approximately ten times each month at numerous senior rehabilitation and senior care facilities.

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May your imagination always be your sanctuary.
