



The Story of the Coquí

A Folktale From Puerto Rico

Había una vez (There once was a time...) Long ago, before the island of Puerto Rico had roads, buildings, and the hustle bustle of modern life, animals big and small were free to roam the land. There was plenty to eat and no dangers, so life was easy for them. All they did was eat and sleep all day long. While this was very relaxing, it was not good for their health — their bodies needed exercise too!

Only the wise Puerto Rican Parrot, with its colorful feathers, could see what was happening to the animals on the island. Too much snacking and not enough exercise was making them all unhealthy! The parrot knew that this was a problem, and ruffled its beautiful green feathers to get everyone's attention.

"Friends!" said the parrot. "I am disappointed in you! You have allowed the peace and tranquility of the island to make you think that you no longer have to be alert and strong. That is why I am challenging you all to a race. All of you creatures will choose one to represent your kind in the race. Only one will win, but you must work together as a team to get yourselves ready. The winner will have a very nice prize!"



The animals were all excited, and each chose the biggest and strongest of their kind to race against the others. The snakes, the pelicans, the iguanas, and even the mongooses started exercising. All the creatures were working together, except the tiny coquí frogs! They were so small, and couldn't even make a sound. They didn't think that they had a chance to win. The wise parrot reminded them that even the smallest creatures can make a big impact if they work together. So, the coquí decided to enter the race. They chose the biggest of the small frogs and all joined in to help him exercise and get ready for the race.

Finally, the time for the big race arrived. The parrot perched high up on a branch and spoke to the animals: "Friends! I am glad to see you all here today and proud of all of your work to prepare for the race. I hope that you feel stronger and healthier too! The race will begin at this tree. Run down the path to the tallest palm tree, then turn around and come back to this spot. The first animal to cross the finish line will be the winner!"

All of the animals lined up along the starting line. The tiny coquí frog was pushed off to the side — no one even noticed him because he was so small, but he was excited and ready to race.

The parrot squawked, "Ready...Set...GO!" and the animals were off! A blinding cloud of dust was all that remained behind the runners. The snakes slithered! The pelicans flapped! The iguanas crawled! The mongoose scampered! All of the animals moved, in their own way, as fast as they could. But the tiny coquí frog was stuck behind them all! How could he get ahead, he wondered?

Then, all at once, he knew. He gathered his strength, bent his knees, and sprang up with all of his might. The coquí leaped right over the mongoose! He jumped by the iguana! He hopped past the pelican and sprang over the snake. As the animals reached the palm tree, the coquí was in the lead!

The rest of the coquí who were watching the race were overjoyed, expressing silent happiness among one another. They all jumped up and down happily as the coquí made it over the finish line first. He had won the race!

The parrot flew down to congratulate the coquí on their victory. "Congratulations, my friends! The coquí have indeed shown us all that even the smallest among us can do great things. And, as promised, your prize!" Slowly, the parrot lifted his massive wings and muttered a sacred chant. When he finished, the coquí began to sing for the first time! And that is how Puerto Rico was able to enjoy the soothing magic of their music. In time, coquí became very popular little creatures. And ever since that night so very long ago, all the coquí begin to sing their song every day at sundown.

