

The Tale of the Coquí Puerto Rican Legend

On a warm tropical night, while the breeze is blowing gently and the stars seem to fill the sky with a bright, mysterious glow, find a nice field in the heart of the Puerto Rican countryside, lie back, and listen. Amongst the sounds of crickets and other common creatures, you'll hear a distinct chorus of many tiny native coqui frogs. The coqui is loved and cherished by all Puerto Ricans; many songs and poems have been written in tribute to these famous frogs. What makes the coqui so different from its other green friends? Well, it all happened some time ago.

Back in the times of dukes and dragons, Puerto Rico was still untouched by the rush and confusion of the busy world. Animals, great and small, roamed the island free of danger and human predators. As a result of this carefree, easy life, many creatures became fat and lazy.

One day a proud and colorful bird, the now nearly extinct Puerto Rican Parrot, flew to a perch up high in a tree and loudly ruffled his wings to attract the attention of the animals basking in the sunshine below. With half an eye, they looked at him and immediately recognized him. It was Ignacio, King of the Forest. They all scrambled to attention and expressed their apologies to His Majesty.

“Enough!” He bellowed. The animals fell silent. Not a sound was heard from the forest, except for Ignacio's strong voice. “Look at yourselves!” He said with disgust. “You have allowed the peace and tranquility of the island to make you think that you no longer have to be alert and strong.” He paused and eyed the subjects below. They all seemed to melt under his fierce gaze. “Tomorrow at sundown there is going to be a race, right here where we are now. All you creatures must choose, among yourselves, who will represent your kind in the event. There will be only one winner. The losers will not be punished, but the victor will receive a very nice prize. Remember- tomorrow, here, at sundown.” He raised his mighty wings and flew away, leaving his subjects to vote on who would represent them in the big race.

Since there was going to be no punishment for the losers, most of the creatures hastily elected their strongest member and went back to being lazy. That is, all except the tiny coqui frogs. After all, they were very small, and couldn't even make a sound. They had to take any and every chance to make themselves be noticed and respected among the other frogs. They chose Pepito, the biggest and strongest coqui of them all, and they all helped him train and exercise so he could have at least a chance of winning the big race.

The next day, all the animals gathered in the same area as the day before to witness the event.

King Ignacio set forth the rules. From his tree perch, he said: The race will begin here. I hope you all have chosen a fit representative to run for you. Will all the runners please line up now? When I say go, you will run down the trail I have prepared and touch the pal tree at the end. You then will run back. The first one to cross the line is the winner. Remember, the losers will not be punished, but the winner has a very nice prize in store for him.

“Ready... Set... GO!” They were off! A blinding cloud of dust was all that remained of the runners.

In a little while, they could be seen on their way back. The lizard and the mongoose were in the lead, and the crown was cheering them on wildly. Sadly, the coquíes began to walk away. Pepito probably was stampeded or buried in the dust somewhere. All of a sudden, their faces lit up. There he was, taking long high jumps right past the lizard and the mongoose. Pepito was now in the lead! The coquíes were overjoyed, expressing the silent happiness among one another. Sure enough, he took one more strong jump and went right over the finish line.

It was a clear victory! All the coquíes ran up to him and formed a very happy gang of frogs. Ignacio went up to him to express his personal congratulations. “You are the official winner, Pepito. And, like I promised, I have a very special gift for you and your friends. “Slowly he lifted his massive wings and muttered a sacred chant.”

When he finished the coquíes began to sing. For the first time, Puerto Rico was able to enjoy the soothing magic of their music. In time, they became very popular little creatures. Ever since that night so very long ago, all the coquíes begin to sing their song every day at sundown. It is their way of praising King Ignacio for giving them the ability to show others that being small does not mean you are unimportant.

Coquí, Coquí, Coquí