

The Laughing Rabbit—Based on a Mayan Folktale

Many years ago, before you or I were born, an old man and his wife lived in a tiny house made of straw. Their humble dwelling was nestled deep in the jungle, surrounded by thick vines and towering trees. The broken down man and gentle spouse were very poor. All they owned, of any value, was a cream colored rabbit in a cage and a young jaguar.

For many years, the old couple worked backbreaking, odd jobs as farmers. Over time, the old man's body began to wear down. [Constant digging, plowing, and planting caused his back to become bent and twisted](#); severely limiting what work could be done and amounts of money to be earned. One day, the couple used up their last ear of corn. As a last resort, they made the drastic decision to eat their pet rabbit and started heating water to cook him.

Jaguar, who had been raised by the couple from a tiny cub, had watched the downward decline of his loving owners. Being hungry himself, he noticed the pair devour the final corn cob. [Jaguar intently watched as the wife went from empty cupboard to empty cupboard](#). He heard their solemn, hushed voices discuss filling the steel cold stew pot with water and tender rabbit.

Crazed from hunger and jealous from the attention rabbit always received, Jaguar went to rabbit's wire cage to provoke him.

"Oh, Rabbit..? Conejo..? The old man and the old woman are preparing a pan of hot water. They are going to boil you. They are going to eat you. They are going to give some to me."

"Oh no," said Conejo. "No indeed. They are going to make hot chocolate." Conejo paused for a moment to think. "And if you come in the cage with me, they will bring some for you, Jaguar."

Jaguar was clever, but not as cunning as Conejo. "That's not true. They are heating the water to cook you."

“Oh Jaguar, you are wise. I could never be as smart as you. But, I can prove it. Get into my cage and you'll see. Because you are the favorite pet, they'll give you the first drink of hot chocolate.” Conejo spoke smoothly.

Jaguar creaked opened the door of the cage and slinked inside. With a hop and a skip, Rabbit was out of the cage and away into the shadowy underbrush of the jungle.

Jaguar waited there, and waited there, and waited there some more...

“I've been tricked! There is no hot chocolate!” Jaguar fumed. Jaguar leapt out of the cage. He raced into the forest, looking for where Conejo had gone. He pushed through the thick vines and weaved around the thick tree trunks until he came to the mountain. And there in the side of the mountain was a white cave. Inside the cave was Conejo.

Jaguar was furious. He bared his teeth and growled, “I caught you, Rabbit! I'm going to eat you.”

“Who, I?” said Conejo. “You must be talking about some other rabbit. I am making my house here. But see how I am holding up the walls? If I do not hold them up, they will fall down. I must go and find a stick to prop up the walls. Jaguar, you are so strong. I could never be as powerful as you. Would you not help me by putting your paws against the wall of my house?”

“Oh, so you are not the one who tricked me?” questioned Jaguar.

“Of course not! But, please help me. Lean against this wall while I go get a log to hold it up and keep it from falling. And don't let go or it might crush you.”

Jaguar slinked into the dark cave and placed his strong front paws against the smooth wall of the cave. With a hop and a skip, Conejo was out of the cave and away into the forest. Jaguar waited there, and waited there, and waited there some more.

He waited there, and he waited there, longer than before... Jaguar became exhausted. He could no longer feel his front paws on the sleek cave wall. Slowly, one by one, he took his

furry paws off of the wall, shaking them gently. When he saw that the wall didn't fall down, he realized that he had been tricked again.

"I've been tricked! Again!" roared Jaguar. Jaguar leapt out of the cave and away through the forest, looking for Conejo. He sprinted off, even angrier than before.

He could not find him. He stopped and listened for a moment below a tree. He could hear Conejo laughing - 'ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. Hee, hee, hee, hee, hee!' - at how he had tricked Jaguar. Jaguar crept closer and spied Conejo. He was hanging from an elastic vine, bouncing up and down, laughing with glee.

Jaguar prepared to pounce... Conejo was so happy thinking of how he had fooled Jaguar that he didn't notice when the latter took a great leap, pulled on the vine with all his strength and then suddenly let go. High, high into the sky he flew. Conejo went up and up through the air holding his belly and laughing. Finally he landed on the moon with a thump. If you gaze up at the moon when it is full and red, you see Conejo there still, lying on his back and laughing at how he tricked Jaguar.

Blue = actions for storyteller to do

Red = repeated phrase for audience to say