

Paca and Beetle

SOUTH AMERICA—BRAZIL



A green and gold parrot watched a small brown beetle crawl along the endless riverbank.

“Good morning,” squawked the parrot. “Where are you going?”

“I am on a long journey,” replied the beetle.

Just then, a paca, a small rat-like creature, ran by. The swift-footed paca dashed circles around the beetle and laughed. “You are going on a journey? You crawl so slowly that it will take your entire life to reach your destination! If you could move as I do, you would be more likely to accomplish something. Look at how fast I can run!”

Paca demonstrated his speed by darting to and fro. “You will never get anywhere!” he mocked. “You are too slow!”

The brown beetle ignored the paca’s insulting words and kept creeping along.

The parrot looked down at the two and said, “Paca, your words are boastful but not necessarily true. Beetle is slow, but he gets where he wants to be. Perhaps the two of you would like to have a race. Each of you go to the tree around the river bend as fast as you are able. I will give whoever gets there first a new coat as a prize.”

Paca said, “Surely with my speed I will win! I would choose a fine yellow coat with black spots like the jaguar. That would be a fitting replacement for my brown and white fur.”

Beetle replied, "I agree to the race, and if I win, I want a coat just like yours, my wise parrot friend."

"Very well," said the parrot. "Go as fast as you can!"

Paca dashed off along the riverbank. "Oh, I shall have a long tail too!" he shouted as he sped away. Suddenly he stopped, breathless, and said to himself, "Why rush? The beetle won't arrive for hours!" He walked the riverbank at a comfortable pace, thinking about his beautiful new fur.

When he arrived at the tree, a small voice said, "What took you so long, my friend?"

Paca's eyes grew wide at the sight of the little brown beetle.

"How did you get here so quickly?" asked the paca.

"I flew," the beetle replied.

"You flew?" screamed the paca. "I didn't know you could fly! You cheated!"

The parrot interrupted, "Beetle did not cheat! I told you both to go as swiftly as you could. Beetle won the race fairly. Just because you were unaware of Beetle's hidden talent doesn't mean that he shouldn't have flown to win. Beetle does not brag about flying. He keeps his wings modestly folded and uses them only when necessary."

Paca grumbled and went away wearing his plain brown and white color. Meanwhile, the little beetle's back began to shine, for all time, a bright green like the wing feathers of the parrot. Tiny golden spots, the color of the parrot's head, twinkled all over his shell.