

## Uncle Rabbit and the Wax Doll

(English translation of a story recorded in Nahuatl audio available at <http://www.balsas-nahuatl.org/catalyst> download file Serakokoneetl.mp3)

<sup>1</sup> Once upon a time there was a rabbit, a rabbit who would gaze longingly across a river.

He'd be thinking, "Isn't there anyone who might want to take me to that nice garden patch over on the other side? Mm. I'd really love to go—those sweet potato leaves are my favorite dish. But there's no one around to take me. No one at all!"

He really suffered from this longing. Every day he'd just sit and stare across the river, across to the other side.

And he'd call out as loud as he could, "Ferryman!" He said it just like that. "Ferryman! Ah, if any one of you would just take me across, I'd let you gobble me up once we got there. There's a nice flat slab of limestone where you'd be able to eat me up. I am one tasty rabbit, you know!"

<sup>5</sup> They say that one day, he caught a glance of Old Man Crocodile coming towards him through the water. Crocodile called out, "Hey there, Uncle Rabbit! What do you want?"

"You know what I want, Old Man Crocodile? I want to get over to that side of the river. I really like the look of that slab of limestone. It's a nice spot for a picnic, really smooth. Do you know of anyone who would want to ferry me across? Whoever did could eat me up right there once we got to the other side. I'm really juicy, but if anyone were to eat me up here, my fat would just spill out all over the ground. The earth would just soak it up. But there on that limestone slab, whoever took me across could lap up my fat. That would be a real treat. I'm super fatty!"

"So, that's it? You want to go?"

"Yep!" he answered.

"So, just to get this straight, it's really true—really, really true—that I'll get to eat you if I take you across? Just let me know for sure if that's the deal!"

<sup>10</sup> "Yeah, that's it. I'll jump out onto the other side while you're getting out of the water and then I'll just be there waiting for you. I'll be lying down, stretched out, waiting for you to come and gobble me right up."

"Ah, that sounds good." Old Man Crocodile liked what he heard. "So hop on my back and let's go!" Uncle Rabbit hopped up.

So now he was traveling along, and he was even able to sit up on Crocodile's back. He was in good spirits.

But then Old Man Crocodile started to think, "Ah, I'll just go underwater. It would be a lot simpler for me to eat him up right here. That's right! I'll eat Uncle Rabbit up right here. I'll drown him first and then I can devour him here in the river. Otherwise I'm starting to think that I won't get to eat him."

Ay! Uncle Rabbit started to feel his paws getting wet. "Ay, ay! Please don't—please don't go underwater Old Man Crocodile. I already told you the plan and where you can eat me. If you do it here it will be a real disaster. My blood will just spill out into the water, and all my tasty fat too. It would be a lot better if we waited until we got to the other side. Yep, that's what I told you we should do. I'll just hop off your back and wait for you. I'll lie right down on that slab of limestone so you can just come over and gobble me up."

Well, Rabbit moved a little farther forward as the water started soaking his thighs.

He didn't want to get his thighs wet, but Old Man Crocodile was now almost completely underwater. And he was swimming into the deepest part of the river. He was just about there when he turned and said, "Now then, my honorable Uncle Rabbit, this is as far as we go."

<sup>15</sup> "No!" Rabbit shouted, "just turn so you are facing upriver, into the water flowing downstream. Just stop right here! I'll jump off onto that slab of limestone and then I'll wait for you while you get yourself up out of the water and over to where I'll be waiting."

So Old Man Crocodile sidled up to the river's edge and positioned his body parallel to the river bank, right near that slab of limestone. And then, what do you know? Uncle Rabbit jumped right off. Bye-bye! He darted off. Uncle Rabbit just ran away as fast as he could. He knew exactly where he was going to get his meal!

"Rats! Now what? He's tricked me! He tricked me. I'm not going to get my tasty meal of rabbit. What am I going to do now? I guess I'll just stake out his watering hole and wait for him to come get a drink. That's where I'll eat him! First I'll thrash him around in the water with my tail. I'll lash out at him right when he's taking a sip of water. He won't know what hit him! He won't even realize that I'm going to get to eat him. He won't even see me until I've knocked him underwater."

Well, that's what Old Man Crocodile was thinking. And then he took off to carry out his plan.

<sup>20</sup> Back now to Uncle Rabbit: The sun had set and here comes Uncle Rabbit, walking down the trail. It's getting cooler and he's wondering if the farmer has already left. He's all set to sneak into the sweet potato garden to chew up those delicious leaves. So he snuck into the garden and started to eat them. He kept at it for an entire week. The farmer, however, was getting more and more upset. His garden was ruined. All the sweet potato and watermelon vines were nibbled off at the ends. Uncle Rabbit had been feasting himself on the most tender parts.

The farmer started wondering, “Who’s been coming to eat up my garden? I should just set up a wax doll at the entrance, where it seems that some small little animal has been breaking in. I’ll find out who the culprit is, I’ll catch whoever’s been feasting in my garden. I’ll set up the doll.”

He started right away and made a wax doll almost as tall as himself. It was big and fat and made entirely of wax.

Well, they say that when he had finished making the doll he went to set it up right where Rabbit was sneaking in.

He went there and thought, “In the early morning I’ll come back to take a look. It’s a sure bet that if that pesky animal comes back it’ll get caught.” The farmer knew that wax is soft and that if the animal ran into it, it would get stuck.

<sup>25</sup> That same day, as the sun was setting, Uncle Rabbit came along. The farmer had already gone home and had left the wax doll behind.

“What’s with this?” Uncle Rabbit asked. “What are you doing here?” He got to the fence and asked, “What’s this? Who are you? What are you doing here? Why are you blocking my way? This is where I go through the fence. Move out of the way right now—if you don’t, I’ll give you a thrashing you won’t soon forget!”

Well, the wax doll didn’t move. Uncle Rabbit repeated his threat. He thought it was getting late for his meal. He was hungry.

“Hey, young man, you’ll soon see what’s in store for you. I have real strong arms and I’m going to pulverize you. One swift shot with my right hand, eh, and you’ll be sent reeling back, head over heels!”

<sup>30</sup> But the wax doll didn’t budge. Because it was just wax it stayed put where it was. Now Uncle Rabbit was fuming.

“I’m not kidding around. If you don’t get out of the way, I’m going to knock you down right now. My right hand really packs a wallop.”

Mm, Uncle Rabbit started to land some blows. He punched that doll as hard as he could. But all he got for his efforts was a hand stuck in the doll.

“Rats. He’s grabbed hold of my arm. What do you say? Are you going to let my arm go? Now it’s my left hand’s turn. You’ll see if you don’t wind up knocked down way over there.”

So then he let loose with his left hand. But it got stuck too. Eh, now he only had his hind legs free.

<sup>35</sup> “Now what? Now it’s time for another blow, with my right hind leg. We’ll see if you don’t let me go. I’m going to give you a kick so hard that you’ll let go of me.”

He let it fly. He kicked the wax doll with his hind leg, his right hind leg. But it got stuck too. Now Uncle Rabbit only had one hind leg left.

“Now I’ve only got my left hind leg free. You’ll see now, you little devil, if you don’t think I’m going to hit you so hard that you let me go. OK, so you’ve grabbed my two front legs and one hind leg. But here goes my left hind leg. It’s really powerful.”

So he unleashed his left leg. But it also got stuck. Now Uncle Rabbit was just hanging there. And he still hadn’t managed to eat anything all day.

Mm, with the sun about to set he thought, “And now what am I going to do? The day’s over and I haven’t had a bite to eat. And now this man has me trapped. I’m just hanging here.”

<sup>40</sup> They say that he was just staring out beyond the edge of the garden, beyond the wax doll that he had attacked. And then he saw Uncle Coyote coming down the trail. He shouted out, “Hey, buddy! Uncle Coyote!” Uncle Coyote stopped in his tracks. “Who’s calling me? I don’t see anyone.”

Mm. So he gave him another shout. “Buddy! Uncle Coyote!”

“Who could it be? I don’t see where he could be.”

Then Uncle Coyote moved closer to the fence. When he was close, Uncle Rabbit shouted once again, “Hey! Hey buddy! Uncle Coyote!”

“Is that you, buddy? Uncle Rabbit?”

<sup>45</sup> “Yeah, it’s me. I just want to tell you something, buddy. You should know that the farmers, well, they left me behind here. They told me that early in the morning they’re going to come back and bring me one whole chicken. But, you know, I don’t eat chickens. So here I am, thinking that, you know, maybe you’d be more cut out for this. Chicken is your favorite dish. I know that you’ve eaten a lot of chickens.”

“What? You’re kidding. Is what you say really true?”

“It sure is. That’s what they told me before they took off, that tomorrow at the break of dawn the farmer will come back with my chicken. I should just hang out here and wait. I should just bide my time. But maybe, if you want, don’t you think it would be better for you to wait here? Tomorrow he’ll come and find you here. Mm, you’d finish the whole chicken with no problem. But me? How could I eat it all? I’m too small. But you, you’d finish it for sure.”

“You’re right, I’d finish it. I could even eat two!”

“OK then, let’s get started,” Uncle Rabbit said. “Free my arms and legs!”

<sup>50</sup> Uncle Coyote started to pull Uncle Rabbit's arms and legs free. Mm. He pulled him out. And when he had freed all four legs, well, Uncle Rabbit was in high spirits. "Ay, I've been set free. Now it's your turn. Let's see if this will work. Stick your arms and legs in right where mine were."

"OK, sure."

Uncle Coyote was more than happy to do this. Why not? After all, he was going to get to eat a chicken. So he said, "And now, is this OK?"

Now remember that Uncle Rabbit was small and he had just hung there. But Uncle Coyote, well he was big and heavy and he reached all the way to the ground. So he was just sort of lying there on his back.

That's how he was when dawn broke. The sky was just turning light when the farmer showed up. He was looking up ahead since he knew exactly where he had left the wax doll. He caught a glimpse of it in the distance. "Well, well, well, who could that be? It looks like Uncle Coyote. If he's hungry I'll sure give him something to eat!"

<sup>55</sup> So they say that the farmer reached for his machete and went right over to a small stream that flowed into his garden. He cut down some rods, a dozen in all. He went to cut them down. Then he came towards Uncle Coyote, talking to him as he came along, carrying those rods over his shoulder.

So Uncle Coyote's thinking, "Well now, I'm supposed to get a chicken to eat. But what's with those rods? What could they be for? Whatever could they be for?"

Well, he soon found out. The farmer started to thrash Uncle Rabbit—I mean Uncle Coyote. He gave him such a beating that he wound up killing him. "What's the deal?" Before he was killed, Uncle Coyote was really mad. He was raging mad. "If this farmer would just let me go, I'd eat that rabbit. He'd find out what I'd do to him."

But why would the farmer stop? He was furious that the tips of his sweet potato vines had been all chewed up. So he killed Uncle Coyote. And now what?

Well, Uncle Rabbit had gone down to the river to get a drink. And there waiting for him was Crocodile. He also wanted to eat the rabbit, because he had tricked him. The deal was that he would get to gobble him up after he took him across the river. But Uncle Rabbit had run off and then got his friend, Uncle Coyote, killed. They killed Uncle Coyote just for wanting to eat a chicken. But where was the chicken? Instead of that he got a furious farmer.

<sup>60</sup> So, now it was late afternoon and Uncle Rabbit saw Crocodile stretched out near the river.

"Eh, now I'll get to eat him," Old Man Crocodile was thinking. "I won't move an inch and he'll think that I'm dead."

Well, Uncle Rabbit knows what he sees. "Eh, Old Man Crocodile, he's just lying there waiting. And I'm supposed to think he's dead? He's alive for sure, he's just faking it. If he were covered with ants, well

then I would believe he's dead. But as it is, there's no way I am going down there for a drink of water. I'll find somewhere else to go down to the river for a drink."

So he went off. Sometimes he might just get a drink near where he was living. Or perhaps he'd go a day without a drink, he wouldn't go down . . . he wouldn't go down to the river. But whenever he saw that Old Man Crocodile wasn't there waiting, he would dart down to the river to steal himself a quick drink. And then he'd try the same thing the following day.

"So," thought Crocodile, "how am I going to eat him now? I guess I'll just do it this way. I'll ask some of my ant friends to come and swarm all over me."

<sup>65</sup> So he shouted out, "Little ants. Let me tell you, Uncle Rabbit really infuriates me. He said he won't believe I am dead until he sees me covered with ants. So I'm just asking you to come and help me when he comes back. And when he has finished drinking you all will just get off me so that none of you get hurt or killed. I'll smash him with my tail and then we can eat him up. You all will get some of him, and he says he's really tasty."

Ah, but do you think Uncle Rabbit is stupid? He saw it all, how the ants were swarming all over Old Man Crocodile. Do you think he got close? No, he just took in the whole scene from afar.

"What am I supposed to think? That he's really dead? Sure, the ants are all over him. But it's not true that he's dead. He's just trying to trick me. He just wants me to go down there. No way! I'm not going. Forget it."

So again he went away somewhere else.

"Eh," thought Old Man Crocodile, "and now what am I going to do? It looks like I won't be eating that rabbit anytime soon."

<sup>70</sup> "Mm," said Uncle Rabbit, "I'm really supposed to believe that Crocodile died. Sure, he's being swarmed by ants. But I won't believe he's dead until his bones are scattered, till his bones are scattered far and wide. That's when I'll know for sure that he's dead. When there's nothing but bones. But he's still all in one piece. No way that he's dead."

Uncle Rabbit just said that aloud and then left. It was getting to be evening and he went off to eat. The farmer was now once again beside himself in anger. Coyote had crushed the wax doll and the farmer hadn't made another. And Uncle Rabbit, he just kept on eating, he kept on eating every afternoon. And every day when it dawned, something else had been chewed up.

And Old Man Crocodile, he was cooking up another plan. "I'll lie in wait where Rabbit sleeps." He had already seen that Rabbit had a little hole in the ground. He wouldn't be able to save himself this time. "He sleeps here," thought Old Man Crocodile, "he'll come in to sleep. I'll just dig out the hole a little so that I fit inside."

Well, Old Man Crocodile wasn't tiny, he was big and he was long. So he went around digging and digging and digging out the hole. He was trying to fit himself in it. He didn't dig around the entranceway in front, but rather dug out a hole from the back, towards the center of the hole. Finally he fit himself inside. He just waited there inside with his mouth wide open. "This is right where Rabbit will come in and that's when I'll eat him right up. I'm sure to get him now!"

<sup>75</sup> But Uncle Rabbit was there in the distance just watching what Old Man Crocodile was doing. Do you think Rabbit was foolish enough to enter his house?

They say that Rabbit went to get a drink while Crocodile was there inside the little hollow where Rabbit sleeps. But Rabbit is a smart one, so he shouted out, "My little house, my little house!" "Mm," he thought, "my little house is not answering. Whenever I come, my house answers me right away." So again he cried out, "I've come home, little house! Well, I should get an answer. Someone must be waiting in my house and that's why I'm not getting an answer! It would be better for me to just not go in there. Someone's in my house. I'll just go sleep somewhere else."

So he went away. Now Crocodile was furious. There he was with his mouth wide open, waiting inside the embankment.

Meanwhile, Rabbit was having the meal of his life. And when he was done, he started making another house. But he didn't go in it. Rabbit just stayed outside at a distance, looking it over. And once again Crocodile started to dig out the hole where Rabbit was going to go to sleep.

Again, Crocodile fit himself inside. "Now, this time I'll speak to him. I'll speak up right away. I'll make some sounds once he has arrived. He said that his house answers him right away."

<sup>80</sup> So, Rabbit again walked along shouting out. "My little house!" He had gone to eat in the garden patch. Now he was on his way back. He stopped for a drink along the way and now he wanted to go to sleep. "My little house!"

Well, this time someone shouted—it was like the house was answering. It said, "Ooooooh! Je!"

"What's that? Where's that coming from? Who's making sounds? It couldn't be my house—it can't speak! It's just a hole in the ground. Ah, someone must be inside. No way I'm going in. Better for me to go somewhere else."

That's the story then. Rabbit never got eaten. And now he just moves around, sleeping in different places. He goes from one place to another.

It's over. That's all that happened. He ate and ate. Two winters and Rabbit just stayed where he lived. No one ever brought him back over to this side of the river.

<sup>85</sup> That's it. That's it, it's just a short little story. Not very long. That's the end of the story.