

## **THE TRICKSY DESERT MOUNTAIN ELVES/Readers Theater/ Intermediate Version**

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The **San Bernardino Mountains** are a short transverse mountain range northeast of Los Angeles in southern California in the United States. The mountains run for approximately 60 mi (100 km) east west on the southern edge of the Mojave Desert in southwestern San Bernardino County north of the city of San Bernardino. The range is separated from the San Gabriel Mountains to the west by Cajon Pass, and from the San Jacinto Mountains to the south/southeast by Banning Pass. The southern extent of the range is bounded by the San Andreas Fault.

The highest peaks in the range include San Bernardino Mountain (elevation 10,864 ft/3,311 m) and Mount San Geronimo (elevation 11,490 ft/3,502 m), the highest peak in southern California. The shorter Little San Bernardino Mountains extend southeast from the range along the eastern side of the Coachella Valley.

### **Brittlebush**

The brittlebush is a common plant of the Mojave and Sonoran deserts. It is a small deciduous shrub that grows as a low, roundish mound 2 to 5 feet high. Brittle branches sprout from a woody trunk. The leaves have serrated edges, and are broader at the base than at the tip. They are about 1 to 4 inches long. The leaves are covered with a thick mat of short hairs giving a gray-green appearance. Many desert plants have this kind of hairy leaf. The hairs form a blanket over the leaves and act as an insulating layer against the heat and cold. They also trap any moisture that is in the air, and reduce the amount of water lost to dry air.

### **Duendes**

The primary definition of duende refers to a fairy- or goblin-like mythological character. While its nature varies throughout Spain and Latin America, in many cases its closest equivalents known in the Anglophone world are the Irish leprechaun and the Scottish brownie. As Federico García Lorca uses the term, it seems closer to fairy as a realm of being. Duendes may also have some traits similar to goblins and kobolds.

### **Tamales**

A **tamale** or **tamal** (from Nahuatl tamalli) is a traditional Latin American food consisting of a corn meal dough filled with meats, cheese (post-colonial), and sliced chiles or any preparation according to taste. The tamal is generally wrapped in a corn husk before cooking.

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Tamales are an ancient American food, made throughout the continent for over 5000 years. Their essence is the corn meal dough (called masa), or a masa mix such as Maseca, usually filled with a sweet or savory filling, wrapped in plant leaves or corn husks, and cooked, usually by steaming, until firm. Tamales were developed as a portable ration for use by war parties in the ancient Americas, and were as ubiquitous and varied as the sandwich is today.

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**READER NOTES:**

**CAST OF 6 READERS:**

4 NARRATORS

1 WIFE

1 HUSBAND

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- READER 1:** In the Colorado desert there once lived a young husband and wife. The happy couple owned and operated a small cosy inn that was nestled in the Coachella Valley near the Santa Rosa, San Jacinto, and San Bernardino mountains.
- READER 2:** The inn was well known for its comfortable rooms and delicious food, for the young wife was an excellent housekeeper and accomplished cook.
- READER 3:** Many guests visited the inn, especially during the winter months when, generally, the sky was blue, the sun warm, and the gentle desert breezes blew. The guests slept contentedly on soft downy pillows, ate large satisfying servings of tasty home-cooked meals, and went away to tell their friends everything! I suppose that is how the Tricky Desert Mountain Elves first heard about the place, but none of us humans will ever know for sure.
- READER 4:** One day a plump, jolly woman with eyes the size of saucers walked into the inn and registered as a guest. The woman wore a long dusty green coat. As she signed the guest book, the woman questioned the young wife about food and serving sizes.
- WIFE:** "Oh, please don't worry about food,"

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**READER 1:** laughed the young wife.

**WIFE:** "I've more groceries in the kitchen than there are creosote bushes in the desert. Our inn is well known for its generous servings. You'll be well fed here, and that's a promise!"

**READER 2:** Upon hearing this, the woman's saucer-like eyes seemed to twirl in their sockets. She smiled, and shouted,

**READER 3:** "Then this is certainly the inn of my dreams!"

**READER 4:** The woman turned upon the spot where she stood, and immediately disappeared.

**READER 1:** The young wife looked high and low, but the strange woman in the coat as dusty green as a brittle bush, had vanished. Then the sound of a thousand tiny footsteps filled the inn. There was

**ALL:** RUNNING, RUSHING, RUSHING, RUNNING –  
EVERYWHERE!

**READER 2:** The young wife knew exactly what had happened, for her own mother, a desert woman and a retired innkeeper herself, had spoken of just such an occurrence.

**WIFE:** "Husband, come quickly. We said it could never happen here, but the duendes are upon us! Yes, the Tricky Desert Mountain Elves have invaded our inn.

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And I registered them! Oh, what have I done? What have I done?"

**READER 3:** The young husband, who had been out tending his cactus garden, ran to his wife's side just in time to hear a loud thump-thump-thumpity sound above his head. Then he heard

**ALL:** RUNNING, RUSHING, RUSHING, RUNNING –  
EVERYWHERE!

**HUSBAND:** "It's the Tricky Desert Mountain Elves all right,"

**READER 4:** shouted the unhappy husband.

**HUSBAND:** "They are dancing on our soft clean rugs because their fairy rings in the high mountains are covered with snow. They are running helter-skelter looking for food because the desert critters have nibbled all the tender leaves for miles around. Why they'll eat us out of house and home. We're in for nothing but trouble!"

**READER 1:** The young wife regained her composure.

**WIFE:** "Wait a minute. My mother said there are two things to remember about Tricky Desert Mountain Elves. One is: Tricky Desert Mountain Elves never ever eat breakfast! The second is: Tricky Desert Mountain Elves love to eat tamales!"

**HUSBAND:** "Well now we know exactly what to do!" said the husband.

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- READER 2:** And they did.
- READER 3:** The young couple got very little sleep that night. It was just too noisy! The inn was filled with thump-thump-thump sounds and
- ALL:** RUNNING, RUSHING, RUSHING, RUNNING – EVERYWHERE!
- READER 4:** The next morning all their exhausted paying guests checked out, and the husband hung a sign on the inn door that read
- READER 1:** CLOSED FOR REPAIRS.
- READER 2:** The young couple sat down to a sumptuous breakfast of country-fried eggs, mounds of crisp bacon, just-baked sweet rolls, a bowl of fruit medley, and fresh brewed coffee. There were no sounds from the non-paying guests, probably because Tricksy Desert Mountain Elves
- READER 3:** never eat breakfast.
- HUSBAND:** "Ah! I'm stuffed. That breakfast will keep me going all day."
- READER 4:** And it did.
- READER 1:** The couple set about their daily tasks, cleaning and planning, fixing and organizing. They worked right through the lunch hour and never noticed it.

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**READER 2:** When suppertime rolled around, the husband, who had been outside sweeping the patio, came back in. He stomped sand from his boots and called out,

**HUSBAND:** "What's for supper?"

**WIFE:** "Your favorite, dear. Home baked cheese pie! Why I've made enough to feed the entire population of the Coachella valley."

**READER 3:** The inn was suddenly filled with thump-thump-thumpity sounds and

**ALL:** RUNNING, RUSHING, RUSHING, RUNNING -- EVERYWHERE!

**READER 4:** The husband sat down at the dining-room table and, there in front of him, was the smallest cheese pie ever baked in an oven.

**READER 1:** It had been baked in the lid of a peanut butter jar!

**HUSBAND:** "I thought you were joking, but you have baked enough to feed the valley! My dear, you must cut down on your baking. We have very few guests left in the inn. Who will eat all this food? Well, pass me the knife, please. I'll do my best to help out.

**READER 2:** The husband cut the tiny pie in half and shared it with his wife until every last crumb was gone. Then they went to bed.

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**READER 3:** All through the night there were thump-thump-thumpity sounds and

**ALL:** RUNNING, RUSHING, RUSHING, RUNNING –  
EVERYWHERE!

**READER 4:** The Tricky Desert Mountain Elves were hungry, confused, and angry. They invaded the kitchen. They emptied flour sacks all over the floor.

**READER 1:** They licked clean the honey pots.

**READER 2:** They put salt in the sugar containers and sprinkled baking powder in the jam.

**READER 3:** They bit holes in the biscuits, and spread maple syrup on the chairs.

**READER 4:** But when morning came, the husband and wife ignored the mess. They wiped the chairs clean and sat down to a mammoth breakfast of tender pancakes, plates of spicy sausage, freshly squeezed orange juice and strong tea.

**HUSBAND:** "Ah! I'm stuffed. That breakfast will keep me going all day."

**READER 2:** The couple cleaned the kitchen, set about their daily tasks, and worked right through lunch. At suppertime the husband came in from trimming the palm trees. He stomped the sand from his boots and called out,

**HUSBAND:** "What's for supper?"