

New Mexico Quarterly

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 16

1936

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Recommended Citation

Huning, Dolores and Irene Fisher. "Three Spanish Folk Tales." *New Mexico Quarterly* 6, 1 (1936). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol6/iss1/16>

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Three Spanish Folk Tales

By DOLORES HUNING *and* IRENE FISHER

THE LITTLE NAPKIN AND THE LITTLE STICK

ONCE upon a time there were two little old people who were very poor. They lived in a little adobe house at the edge of the village. When Christmas day was near, the old man said to the old woman, "I am going to make a tall ladder and see if I can reach the sky to ask Our Lord for a Christmas gift."

He worked hard and made his ladder. On Christmas day he put it up and it reached the sky. He climbed up and knocked at the door. Our Lord came out and asked him what he wanted.

The old man told him that he had come for his Christmas gift. Our Lord gave him a little napkin. The old man climbed down the long ladder and when he reached home, he said to his wife, "Set the table."

The old woman said, "What is it you intend to eat? There is no food." But she set the table for him as he asked. Then the old man took out his little napkin and said to it, "Fix yourself, little napkin."

Suddenly the table was filled with all kinds of foods. They sat down and rejoiced to have enough food for once. The little napkin gave them food for several days. Then one day they wished to take a journey to a neighboring village. The old woman said, "I am going to leave the little napkin at the house of our neighbor." The old man agreed. She took it and said to the neighbor, "I would like to leave this little napkin here until we return. Only one thing I ask, do not tell it to fix itself."

The neighbor agreed and the old woman left the napkin, and went away. The neighbor, of course, said, "Fix yourself," to the napkin and was astounded when food appeared on her table.

When the old man and the old woman returned from their journey the next day and came for the little napkin, the woman gave them another.

The old woman, after they went home, said to the napkin, "Fix yourself, little napkin," and no food appeared on the table.

The old people knew then what the neighbor had done, and they did not know how to get the napkin back.

New Year's was approaching, and the old woman said, "It is my turn to go get the New Year's gift." She went up the ladder which the old man had not taken down, and knocked at the door.

Our Lord came out and asked her what she wanted. She replied that she had come for her New Year's gift. He gave her a little stick and said to her, "When you arrive at home, say to the little stick, 'Fix yourself.'"

The old woman went down the ladder and no sooner had she reached home than she said, "Fix yourself, little stick."

Well, it did fix itself, and suddenly it began to beat the old couple and gave them both a good beating. When it finally stopped, the old man said, "Tomorrow we shall take another journey, and we will give the neighbor the little stick to keep for us. And you tell her not to say 'Fix yourself.'"

The next day, when they got ready to go on their journey, the old woman went and left the stick with the neighbor, telling her not to say to the stick, "Fix yourself."

The neighbor said all right. And no sooner had the old woman left than the neighbor said, "Fix yourself."

The stick did fix itself and gave her such a beating that it put her in bed. When the old people returned and asked for the stick, she gave them both the little napkin and the little stick and told them they were two deceitful old people.

They left, taking the little napkin and the little stick with them. When they reached home they told the napkin to fix itself and they sat down to a big supper. After they had their supper, they went to sleep and God knows about them.

THE CLEVER THIEF

AN OLD woman, who had a very lazy son named Juan, told him when he was sixteen he would have to find some occupation.

"The only thing I wish to become is a thief," said the boy.

"Heaven help me," said his mother, "I do not wish you to become a thief."

The old woman went to church every day to pray to her patron saint, San Geronimo, in order that Juan would overcome his desire to become a thief. One day the boy was lying by the fireplace about to go to sleep when he saw his mother leave the house. He decided to follow her. He saw that she went into the church. He went through the sacristy and hid behind the altar. He heard his mother pray.

"San Geronimo, turn my boy's thoughts away from being a thief."

"Juan should become a thief," said a voice from behind the altar.

"San Geronimo, please not that," prayed the poor mother.

A deep voice said again, "Juan should become a thief."

The woman sadly left the church and went home. In the meantime, Juan also quickly left and ran home. He was lying by the fireplace when his mother came in.

"Well, did the saint answer your prayer?" he asked.

"San Geronimo says you should become a thief," replied the mother sadly.

"You see," said Juan, "that is the only occupation for me. Even the saints say so. I shall start in tonight."

That night the largest bank in the nearby city was robbed. Juan brought all the money home to his mother. In the city there lived a king who had an older brother who was a priest. When they heard of this robber, the king sent

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out criers who announced that he wished the robber to come to him. Juan appeared before the king.

"Buenas dias, Your Majesty."

"Buenas dias, hombre, I hear you are a very clever thief."

"Yes, Your Majesty, I am."

"I shall see how smart you are. Tonight I want you to steal the bread from a certain oven and if you are not successful you will suffer the death penalty."

"Very well," said Juan, "but you must not bake the bread until it is hard. My mother cannot eat hard bread."

The king consented, and showed Juan the oven where the bread was to be baked. That night after it was baked, the door of the oven was plastered up and the king's guards were placed on watch.

Juan bought a bottle of opium, a prayer book, and a lantern. He walked toward the oven with his lantern lit, reading the prayerbook by its light. The guards whispered to one another,

"Here comes the thief."

"No, it is the priest."

"Whoever heard of a thief with a lantern? Thieves do not take a light with them."

As Juan approached them he said, "Good evening, my good men." What are you doing here?"

"We are guarding the king's bread. There is a very clever thief who is going to try to steal this bread."

"Yes, I've heard of him," said Juan, "but does not the king give you a little drink to keep you warm? I always carry my bottle with me and when I'm up late I take a swallow to warm me."

"I wish we had a drink," said one of the guards.

"Here, my good men," said Juan, taking out his bottle. I'll give you one."

They each took a swallow and immediately fell into a stupor. Juan broke open the oven and took out the bread.

came and asked the guards if the thief had come. They replied that no one had been there but the priest. Just then Juan sauntered by with a loaf of bread which he was eating. He asked the king if it had been baked in his oven. The king looked at it and said that it had. He then examined the oven and found the bread gone. The guards were thrown into prison.

"Now I wish to see if you can steal my beautiful horse," said the king.

"But, Your Majesty," said Juan. "I told you I could steal money easier than these other things."

"That is true," said the king. "I will give you a chance to steal some money, and if you can steal it, it is yours. I will guard it myself. I will put it in a chest in my bedroom and lie on the bed next to it."

"Be careful," said Juan, "that you do not fall asleep."

Juan went to a carpenter and had him make a wooden figure to resemble him, with springs in the knees so it could walk and run like a real person. When anything struck the figure it would fall down and then would get up and run faster than ever. That night about twelve o'clock the king heard someone walking along the porch, then he saw a figure at the door.

"There he comes," thought the king, and he jumped up with his pistol and fired a shot. The figure fell but got up quickly and started to run. The king ran after it and every time he shot, it would fall and then get up and run on. Finally the king gave up and returned to his room. In the meantime Juan had come in and taken the chest of money. When the king saw the money was gone he was angry.

The next day the king told his brother, the priest, what had happened about the bread and the money. The priest sympathized with the king and said,

"Now we will tell him that he must steal me. That will be impossible. Then you can have him executed and be rid of him."

"Very well," said the king, "and I will even tell him that he can have my daughter's hand in marriage if he succeeds."

"And I," said the priest, "will offer to marry them free."

They sent for Juan and told him what he was to do. He was willing and when he left them, he went to a tailor and had him make him an angel's suit with large wings.

That night as the priest was sitting at dinner he heard the churchbell ringing. He called to the cook and told her to go out to see what was happening. She had been gone only a few minutes when she returned, badly frightened.

"What I saw is not of this world. There is an angel in the belfry."

The priest went out to see. When he saw the angel he fell on his knees and said, "In God's name, tell me who you are?"

The angel did not answer.

Then the priest asked, "Have you come for me?"

"Yes," said the angel. "I want you to go back to your house and make your will leaving everything to the poor. Then bring all your gold and silver and place it in the sacristy."

The priest went back and did as he was told.

"Now," said the angel, "I want to hear your confession."

The priest confessed until he couldn't think of any more sins.

"Take hold of the rope and I will pull you up to Heaven," said the angel.

The priest took hold of the rope and Juan started to pull.

"No," said the angel, "you are too heavy. You still have some sins to confess."

He let the priest down and heard him confess some more. Finally Juan got tired of hearing him and told him

to take hold of the rope again. When he got the priest half-way up to the belfry, he dropped him and the priest fell unconscious. Juan climbed down and took the priest to the barnyard. There he propped him against the wall with his prayerbook in his lap.

The next morning the king came to see his brother but he could not find him. The cook told him about the angel and the king thought Juan had killed his brother. Then he noticed the chickens had not been let out. He went to the barnyard with the cook, to let them out. There he found the priest kneeling at the gate, praying, "St Peter, let me in! St. Peter, let me in!"

The king assured his brother he was still on earth. Then the priest realized what had happened. They sent for Juan, and the priest said to him, "You have won the wager and the hand of the princess. I do not mind the wealth you took, nor the discomfort you caused me, but I do mind having confessed to you. I'm too humiliated to marry you today. You must wait until tomorrow."

TIO ANSELMO AND CHACOLI-CHACOLA

TIO ANSELMO was very much bored because the day had gone badly for him. No one paid him what they owed him; he had made a mistake in his accounts; and in order that everything might turn out wrong, a tooth, even, fell out of his mouth.

He went to the edge of the ocean with the desire to kill himself by drinking salt water, and he was just about to throw himself into the sea when an idea occurred to him which he held happily.

Ambitious for honors and pleasures, he called the devil three times, and the third time the earth opened and through the gap there came out, amid flames of sulphur, a strange figure with fiery-red horns and a bull's tail of poisonous weeds.

"So this is the devil," thought Tio Anselmo, "the same demon, who, according to popular saying, has a pig's face."

A costume that, because of its shabbiness and ugliness, looked as if it had come from a bargain sale, and a dirty sombrero, completed the outfit of the poor devil, who, making a draught by swishing the end of his tail, advanced smiling toward Tio Anselmo.

Although Tio Anselmo was frightened, his hair did not stand on end because, among other reasons, he had no hair; he was as bald as a billiard ball. Señor Satan asked Tio Anselmo how he could serve him, and Tio Anselmo, recovered a little from his fright, told him he wanted the gift of being able to make himself invisible whenever he desired.

The devil listened to Tio Anselmo with great attention and when he had finished asking, Satan opened his mouth like a mailbox and said, "I can easily grant you what you ask, amigo, but it will cost you your soul. Give me your signature to this contract and then you may have what you desire."

Although Tio Anselmo was confused, he was not stupid and looking at the devil with distrust, he said, "Show me this contract and we will see about your terms."

The devil gave him the document and Tio Anselmo read that after one year his soul would be turned over to the devil.

"It seems a little strong," he said. "Why, you have only given me 365 days to live in return for my soul forever. Before I sign this contract I demand for my part a special condition that when I become invisible no one is to see me, absolutely no one."

"Not even I?" asked the devil.

"Not even you."

"Granted. It is a childish whim, but anyway it shall be as you wish."

Tio Anselmo signed with the point of a pin wet with his blood. The devil signed with the end of his tail and sealed the contract with bad-smelling sealing wax.

"When you wish to make yourself invisible, say 'Chacoli' and when you wish to be seen again say 'Chacola'" said the devil.

Handing Tio Anselmo a ring, he stamped on the ground and disappeared into the earth in a cloud of smoke.

Tio Anselmo started to walk to the nearby village. Wishing to test the mysterious diabolical ring, he turned it on his finger and said "Chacoli." Soon he saw on the road an old friend walking toward him. It is absolutely true that Tio Mendrugos passed close to Tio Anselmo without giving any sign that he saw him. And you may be sure this was difficult, because Anselmo owed Mendrugos some money and he started to run away, fearing Mendrugos would see him. When he saw he was escaping the glances of his creditor, he considered himself the most invisible man on earth.

When he reached home his family was waiting impatiently for him. He was still invisible and heard disagreeable comments about his absence.

"He has been taken ill," said his wife.

"Don't worry about him," said his mother-in-law, "He is such a drunkard he is probably sleeping off his drunk. You will see he will have to be brought home."

"Or he may have killed himself, he is such an unbeliever. By this time the fishes are no doubt eating him," she continued.

Tio Anselmo felt like bursting in upon the old scoundrel and frightening her, but he restrained himself, and as he did not like what they were saying about him, he decided to go on without greeting his affectionate family. Taking the road, he went to the nearest inn, and called with a clap of his hands. He saw that all the servants put themselves in motion, looking everywhere, but without serving him. Tio

Anselmo was greatly put out and exclaimed, "Come now, service! I have been waiting a half-hour for service!"

Upon hearing these words and seeing no one, the servants were amazed. One had his hair standing on end like wires; another had his nose turn black with fright.

Anselmo then remembered he was invisible, and because his hunger was pressing, he said, "Chacola." The servants quickly served him and he ate the meal. But when the critical hour arrived and he had to pay, Tio Anselmo, who had never shone as one who would willingly give people that which was theirs, said "Chacoli" and walked out of the inn without paying for his breakfast. On the road a distance he said "Chacola" and again became visible.

After a while his steps led him by the mint. He went in and gathered a large handful of new-minted gold coins and was just going to put them into his pocket when he felt a hard blow on his shoulder.

"What are you doing?" said a strong voice. Tio Anselmo remembered he was visible. Turning to the employe, he quickly said "Chacoli" and quietly went out the way he had come, with the man searching everywhere for him.

He traveled in the train in a first-class carriage and to the great astonishment of his companions, everytime the conductor showed his nose the passengers would see Anselmo disappear as if he were inlaid in the wood of the coach. The magic "Chacoli-Chacola" did it all. Every time he reappeared there was a crash and the passengers believed they were traveling with the devil himself. They made such a commotion that Tio Anselmo finally got off at a station along the road. He was by that time a little bored with the mysterious power the devil had given him.

However, he went through various pueblos giving the people terrible scares with his "Chacoli-Chacola" and finally, after nearly twelve months, he remembered his fatal date with the enemy of man. He thought then of his family and decided to bid them farewell. He filled his pockets with

money and went to his pueblo. He did not wish to be seen so he said "Chacoli" before he entered the village. At his home his wife and son were praying in a private chapel for his soul as if he were dead. Tio Anselmo left the money on the dresser and left, weeping.

He arrived at the edge of the ocean at the end of the year when his contract with Satan ended. Anselmo went toward the spot where the demon had first appeared. On exactly the hour a little smoke came up from the ground, a gap opened and through it, Lucifer looked out.

"Come on, boy, hurry. I am very busy and the Parrot Boatman is waiting for us."

"You may be in a hurry, but I am not," said Anselmo.

"Aren't you going to fulfill your part of the contract?"

"Yes, but I want to see it, because there is a clause I added, and I want to be sure it is fulfilled."

"You did not add anything," said Satan.

"I'll bet you I did," replied Anselmo.

"Come on, my man, look at it, and you will plainly see everything has been fulfilled as agreed upon," and the devil handed Anselmo the paper.

Anselmo quickly tore the contract to bits, and he said to the demon, who was too astonished at the revolt to act, "I have been bad and I repent. God will protect me."

Lucifer was trembling with rage and threw himself toward Anselmo, but the latter said "Chacoli" and became invisible, so that not even the devil could see him.

Anselmo took a branch of a tree and beat the devil so fast and furiously that he disappeared into the earth. He broke one horn and had bruises the size of a fist.

Tio Anselmo returned to his village, and from that time on was a model Christian. He died piously, surrounded by his family.