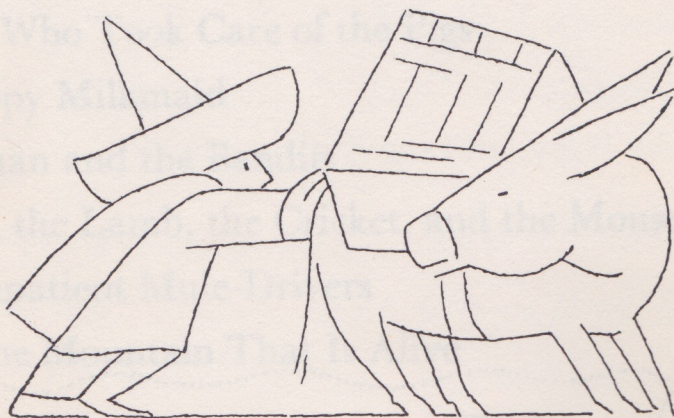


THE BOY WHO COULD DO ANYTHING & Other Mexican Folk Tales

Retold by Anita Brenner



Illustrated by Jean Charlot

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STORY-TELLING IN MILPA ALTA

would like to have a little boy. Even if I could not keep him here with me. I think I will go down to earth and see about it.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” said the other god.

But the unhappy god slid down the mountain and started walking around on the earth. Of course, nobody knew who he was. He was dressed just like anybody else. One day he stopped at a spring to get a drink of water. While he was there a beautiful girl came to fill her pitcher at the spring. He fell in love with her and she fell in love with him, so they went away together and after a while they had a little boy. The god was very happy. At last his wish had come true.

But he was very sad also because he couldn't stay down on earth any longer. He had to go back to the mountain and help regulate the rain and look after the crops. If he didn't do it the people on earth would not have enough to eat. And even his own little boy would go hungry. So he said good-bye and disappeared. When the girl looked at the place where he had been standing, she saw a small green stone, as green as a growing plant. It was round and smooth. She made a hole in it and hung it around the baby's neck.

That baby was Tepozton. She took him home but her father and mother were angry. They wanted to kill him. They said, “Where is his father? A child without a father has no business being born at all!”

What could she say? She said, “He is a beautiful baby.”

“It doesn't matter how beautiful he is. He has to die. We don't understand why, nobody does. That's just the way things are.”

So she went far out in the fields but she couldn't bear to hurt the baby. She walked and walked and it grew dark and still she did not know what to do. At last she put him down very gently in the center

of a big plant, a maguey plant, which has big broad leaves growing around it. She put the baby down and ran away crying.

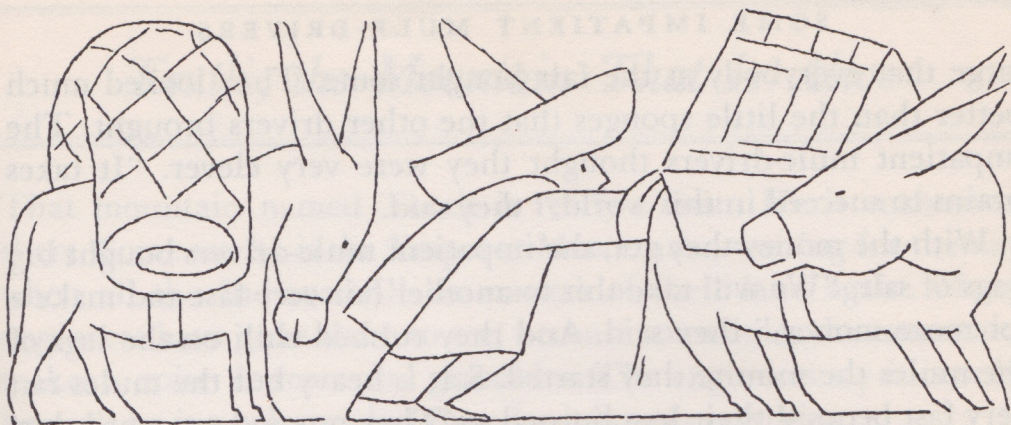
Then she went home and told her father and mother what she had done. "That's right," they said. "The baby will die of hunger and cold." But the girl cried and cried.

The next day she slipped out and went to see what had happened to the baby. She saw the plant all curled up, the nice broad leaves were over the baby to keep him warm. He was fast asleep and rosy. There was a little hole in one of the leaves and something like milk was dripping out of it and falling into the baby's mouth. The girl tasted it. It was warm and sweet.

She played with her baby for a while, but then it grew late and she knew she had to do something, or her father and mother would be very angry. So she laid the baby down in the middle of an ant-hill. "Oh dear, oh dear, now he will surely die, the ants will kill him," and she went home crying.

But the next day when she came back she saw the baby all covered up with pink rose petals and he was kicking and gurgling. The ants were bringing more and more petals, and other ants were bringing honey and putting it down carefully on the baby's lips. So the girl was frightened. "If my father and mother find out the baby is still alive, they will punish me terribly," she said. So she put the baby in a wooden box, and nailed the cover down tightly, and put it in the river. And the river carried the box away.

Now, down near the mouth of the river there lived an old fisherman and his wife. They were very happy but they wanted children to play with. When the old fisherman saw the box bobbing up and down in the water he waded in after it quickly, and then ran home to his wife saying, "Look what I found!"



Some Impatient Mule-Drivers

Once some mule-drivers were on their way to a fair with sponges and hot chili peppers, which they were going to sell. The mules that carried sponges went much faster because sponges are light. "That's fine," said their drivers. "We will get in first and sell everything quickly. Hurry up, hurry up!"

The mules that were carrying chili didn't go so fast. "Mules are stubborn," said one driver, "but I have an idea." He took some chili and rubbed it on the legs of the slow mules. It burned their legs and they began to run. They ran so fast that they left all the other animals behind.

"You certainly are clever," said the other mule-drivers. "You will be famous some day." So the impatient mule-drivers rubbed chili on all the mules. Off they went. The drivers couldn't keep up with them. The mules ran into a river and splashed in and came whiffing out on the other side.

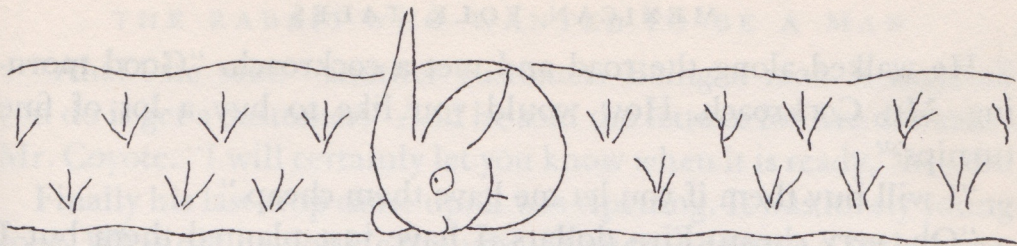
Now their legs didn't burn any more. The water had washed all the chili off. The drivers found them standing on the riverbank resting, but the water had swelled the sponges. They were so

large that everybody at the fair bought some. They looked much better than the little sponges that the other drivers brought. The impatient mule-drivers thought they were very clever. "It takes brains to succeed in this world," they said.

With the money they got, the impatient mule-drivers bought big bags of salt. "We will take this to another fair very fast and make a lot more money," they said. And they rubbed chili on the legs of the mules the minute they started. Salt is heavy but the mules ran very fast because their legs burned so. They ran and ran until they came to a deep river and then they stampeded in so fast that their feet hardly touched the bottom. They snorted and snuffled and plunged around in the water until all the chili was washed off. But when they came out the other side, they had no packs left. For the water had washed away all the salt. It was gone.

The mules felt so light and cool that when the drivers found them, they couldn't catch them. They ran and ran, but the animals just pranced around. From time to time they tossed their heads and brayed cheerfully. "Awh-eee-awh!" Then they galloped away, but far off they could be heard, "Awh-eee-awh-eee-awh!"

The mule-drivers sat on the ground and cried. They had lost their salt, their money, and their mules. Which just shows that people who think they are clever are sometimes mistaken.



The Rabbit Who Wanted to Be a Man

Once there was a happy rabbit. All he did was nibble daisies and clover, and once in a while he stole a carrot from a farmer's field. He was so happy that his tail turned up and his nose wiggled.

But one day the happy rabbit said, "I would like to be a man. Men have everything. They have fields and fields of carrots and turnips and lettuce, and what do I have? All I have is a little hole in the ground."

"The first thing," he said, "is to find a good farm." He did that. "Second, I hire some helpers to do the work." He did that. "Third, I get some seed." He did that. He stole some seed out of a farmer's barn.

Then when the seeds were planted he walked around and said, "Ho! I am just as good as a man."

The turnips grew. They looked wonderful. They looked so good that the rabbit said, "I think I will taste them." Tasting and tasting, he ate them all up. "And now, what will I pay those helpers with?"

When they came, he had nothing. "If you do not pay us we will stop working. We will strike," said the helpers.

"Oh, I will pay you, don't worry. Just wait till I go to the bank," said the rabbit.

He walked along the road and met a cockroach. "Good morning, Mr. Cockroach. How would you like to buy a lot of fine turnips?"

"I will buy them if you let me have them cheap."

"Oh, very cheap. Five dollars. I have just planted them but I need the money to pay my helpers. I will let you know when they are ready."

"All right," said the cockroach, and he gave the rabbit five dollars. They shook hands and the rabbit scampered home to pay his helpers.

Then the tomatoes were almost ready. The rabbit just had to have a little taste, and another little taste, and another, and soon, what do you think? He ate them all up. Now he had to get some money somewhere to pay his helpers. He had no turnips to pay them with, and no tomatoes. So he went along the road and met a rooster.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Rooster. Would you like to buy a nice crop of tomatoes for five dollars?"

"Five dollars is a lot of money," said the rooster. "Make it four-fifty."

"Five dollars is my price. The tomatoes are almost ripe, you see, and you will make a good profit on it." So the rooster gave him five dollars. "Let me know when they are ready," he said.

The rabbit paid his helpers and then went out to look at his lettuce. By this time he was getting tired of having a farm. He had to watch everything to keep other rabbits from stealing his crops. And then he had to pay his helpers, and he didn't like that. The lettuce looked so crisp and green and nice, he said, "I just must have some to keep the other rabbits from eating it first." And he ate up all the lettuce. This time when he went along the road he met a coyote.

“Aha!” he said, “another customer. Being a man is easy, all you do is get a customer.” And he sold the lettuce for five dollars to Mr. Coyote. “I will certainly let you know when it is ready,” he said.

Finally his last crop came up, it was ripening. It was lovely young corn. What did he do? He thought, “I guess I deserve a little something for all my trouble,” and he tasted the corn all up. Then he went out to make arrangements for money again. This time it was a hunter. “How would you like a nice crop of corn very cheap, Mr. Hunter?” he asked.

“Where is it?”

“Oh, it isn’t ready yet, but times are so bad I am a little short of money so I have to sell it. I will let you have it for five dollars.”

The hunter paid him five dollars and said, “But remember, now, you must let me know when it is ready.”

The rabbit paid his helpers and said, “Now there is no more work to do. Good-by.” And he spent the summer very happily, saying, “All my worries are over.” He slept in the clover and skipped up and down the road wiggling his nose.

But what about the cockroach, the rooster, the coyote, and the hunter? Oh, they were waiting politely for the rabbit to say, “Come and get your crops. They are ready.”

One morning the rabbit was skipping along the road and he met the cockroach. “Good morning, Mr. Rabbit,” said the cockroach. “You must have a fine crop of turnips by now. When could I come and get them?”

“Oh, good morning, Mr. Cockroach. How are you? How is Mrs. Cockroach? How is little Johnny Cockroach? Nice weather we’re having.”

“But when can I come for my turnips, Mr. Rabbit?”

“Oh, come tomorrow. I was just coming to let you know.” Then

he went to see the rooster and the coyote and the hunter and he said to all of them, "Come tomorrow for your crops."

The cockroach arrived first. "Good morning, Mr. Rabbit," he said. "Could I have my turnips now?"

"Why, of course, come right in," said the rabbit. "How are you? How is Mrs. Cockroach and how is little Johnny Cockroach?"

"Just fine, but could I have my turnips please?"

"Oh yes. But wait a minute—doesn't Mr. Rooster happen to be an enemy of yours?"

"I should say so! If he sees me, he eats me," said the Cockroach.

"Well, there he is coming up the road. You'd better hide. Hide under that old kettle."

Up comes the rooster. "Good morning, Mr. Rabbit. I came for my tomatoes."

"Oh yes, come right in, but listen, shsh . . . how would you like a nice bit of cockroach?" the rabbit whispered.

"Oh, I would like that fine, where is it?"

"Right under the kettle." And the rooster went peck, peck, peck, and that was the end of poor Mr. Cockroach.

"Now could I have my tomatoes?" said the rooster.

"Oh yes, but listen, doesn't Mr. Coyote happen to be an enemy of yours? Because there he is coming up the road."

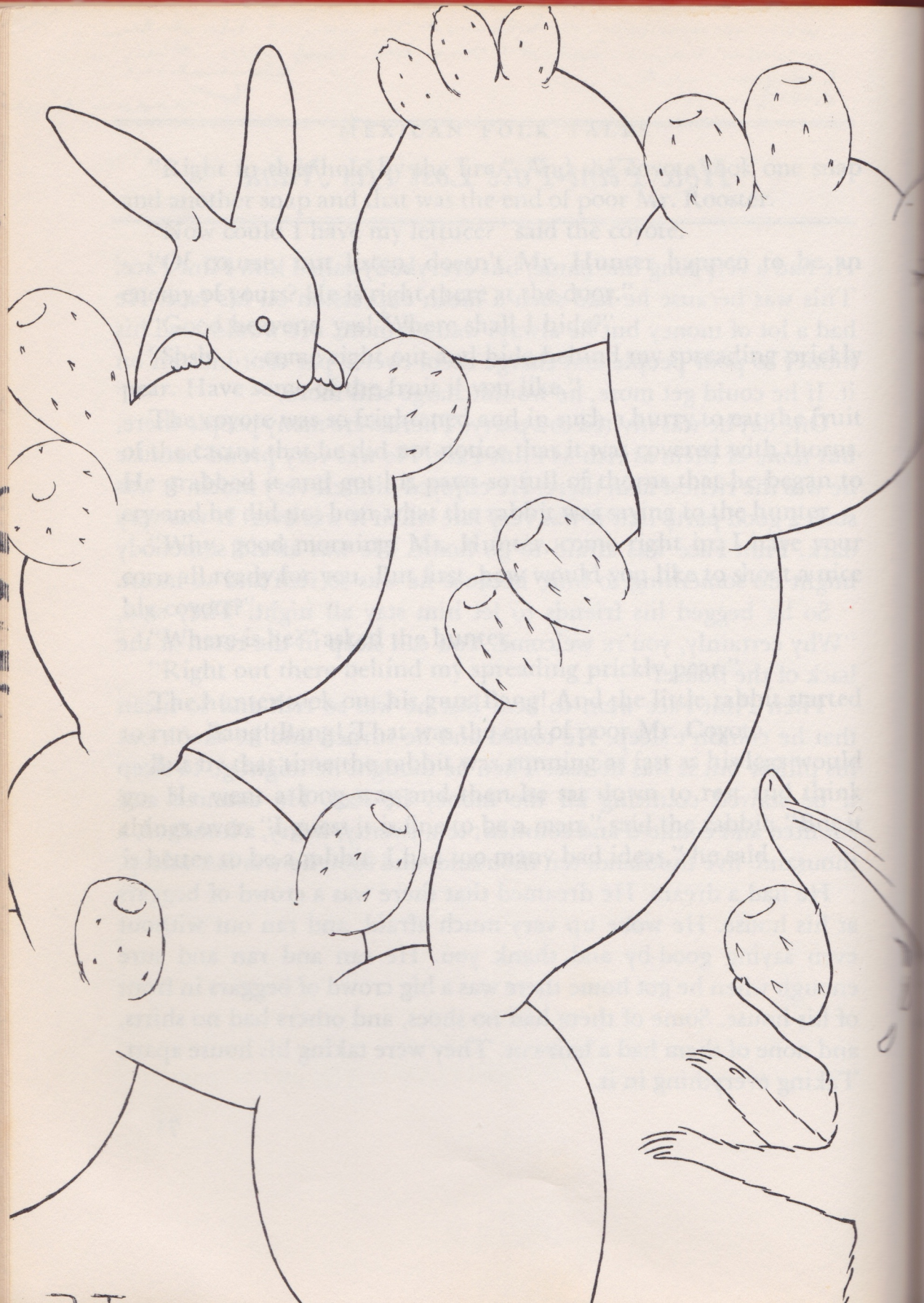
"If he sees me he eats me! Quick, where shall I hide?"

"Oh, in that hole over there by the fire."

Now came the coyote. "Good morning Mr. Rabbit. I came for my lettuce," he said. "I shall take it to market tomorrow and make a good profit on it."

"Oh yes," said the rabbit. "Yes indeed. But would you like a nice meal of rooster first?"

"Why, I would love it. Where is it?"



“Right in that hole by the fire.” And the coyote took one snap and another snap and that was the end of poor Mr. Rooster.

“Now could I have my lettuce?” said the coyote.

“Of course, but listen, doesn’t Mr. Hunter happen to be an enemy of yours? He is right there at the door.”

“Good heavens, yes! Where shall I hide?”

“Shsh . . . come right out and hide behind my spreading prickly pear. Have some of the fruit if you like.”

The coyote was so frightened and in such a hurry to eat the fruit of the cactus that he did not notice that it was covered with thorns. He grabbed it and got his paws so full of thorns that he began to cry and he did not hear what the rabbit was saying to the hunter.

“Why, good morning, Mr. Hunter, come right in. I have your corn all ready for you. But first, how would you like to shoot a nice big coyote?”

“Where is he?” asked the hunter.

“Right out there behind my spreading prickly pear.”

The hunter took out his gun. Bang! And the little rabbit started to run. Bang! Bang! That was the end of poor Mr. Coyote.

But by that time the rabbit was running as fast as his legs would go. He went a long way and then he sat down to rest and think things over. “I guess it is fine to be a man,” said the rabbit. “But it is better to be a rabbit. I had too many bad ideas,” he said.