

"I'll explain," he said, "if you promise to keep this quiet." When the story had been told, the two made plans to meet the following morning. "Wait for me at the edge of the woods," said the prince, "then take me to the charcoal woman's hut. But don't tell a soul, do you hear?"

"I hear," said the old retainer.

The next morning, when the charcoal woman saw the two men approaching, she went up to them warily and asked, "What do you want?" The prince said, "Madam, remember the little son, who was taken from you at birth? I am that son." The poor woman couldn't speak. She threw her arms around the prince. "But don't tell a soul," he said. "Wait here until I send for you."

The prince returned to the castle to ask the noblewoman for her daughter's hand in marriage. The answer was an immediate yes. It had been her ladyship's dream for her daughter to marry the royal heir and become his princess.

On the day of the wedding a mysterious guest arrived, heavily veiled. When the ceremony was over, the prince said, "Madam, remove your veil." And there she stood, the charcoal woman, face to face with her son's new mother-in-law. "And this," said the charcoal woman, "is the son you tore from my arms. God saved him from death."

Her ladyship, hearing the truth, choked on her own rage and fell over dead. The princess at first was sad, for this was her mother. But she dried her tears, and she and the prince, together with the king and the queen—and the charcoal woman—lived happily from that day on.

Cuba

51. The Enchanted Cow

If you learn it you'll know it, so listen and learn how to tell it; now, don't pick the fig until it's big; if you want a pear you'll need a ladder; and if you'd like a melon, marry a man with a big nose.

There was a woman called Dolores who had two children, a boy, twelve, whose name was Joaquín, and a baby girl, Chabelita. Dolores had had a husband, but not now.

And such a good-looking, hardworking, honorable husband! But one day, not long before Chabelita was born, this husband went off to the fair in Chillán to sell a fatted cow and never came back. The cow showed up the following day with a rope caught in its horns and its hide all wet. The husband, they thought, must have drowned crossing the river, and the cow somehow got away. But when they looked for the body, they found nothing.

A few days later some workmen mentioned they'd seen the husband and a woman who lived near the river, riding off together on a horse. This woman was the one they called the Lost Soul, because she had commerce with the Devil, it was said, and at night you could hear singing and carrying on at her ranch.

In spite of it, Dolores could not believe that her Pancho, for that was his name, would leave his family and run off with another woman. But how could she argue? Her husband was gone without a trace. Originally she'd come from a small village near Constitución, so she decided to go back there with her son and her newborn baby. She sold off what little land she had, and the few animals, keeping only the cow that had come home that day from the river. She loved this cow. When it looked her in the eye, it seemed human. Besides, it gave plenty of rich milk, and she was using it to feed Chabelita.

With the money she'd gotten from the sale, she bought a little farm not far from her old home village, close to the sea. She could gather shellfish to make ends meet, and with the milk from the cow there would be cheese. Joaquín helped, too, watching after his little sister.

One day while his mother was in the village, Joaquín decided to take the baby for a bath in the ocean. He picked her up in his arms and waded in. In a flash a giant wave pulled him head over heels, and what happened to the baby he had no idea. When he could breathe again, he let out with a scream, then plunged into the water. But there was no sign of his baby sister. Wild with grief, he fell down on the beach and sobbed.

Suddenly he heard his name called. He raised his head, and there was the cow, speaking to him with a human voice. It said, "I knew this

was going to happen. It was the same with your father. He tried to cross the river and that woman came after him. She's a witch, you know, and the water spirits are her in-laws. She used her wicked arts against him and doomed him. Now she's got the baby. You'll be next, unless you do what I'm about to tell you."

"And what would that be?"

"You must take your knife and kill me, then skin me immediately. Spread the hide on the water, and it will take you over the waves. Be sure to hang on to the tail. If you find yourself in danger, pluck one of my tail hairs and it will be your salvation. And don't forget: take out my eyes and put them in your pocket. They're powerful. They'll let you see through water and earth, even mountains and stone walls."

The boy followed these instructions, and before he knew it he was gliding over the waves. When he was far from shore, hundreds of fish started snapping at the hooves of the cowhide, threatening to drag it to the bottom of the sea. But he remembered what the cow had told him, plucked a hair from the tail, and when it turned into a hefty oar he clouted the fish until they were all floating bottom side up.

Night came fast, dark and gloomy. But he took one of the cow's eyes out of his pocket and gazed into the water. Far below he could see rocks, fish, monsters of the deep, and old shipwrecks. There was not a thing in his way, however, and with the eyeball close at hand he sailed on through the night.

When morning came, a flock of black birds larger than condors came swooping down to land on the cowhide. Before they could sink it, he pulled another hair from the tail, and when he looked at it a second time it was a loaded blunderbuss. He pulled the trigger, and some of the birds flew off screaming. Others dropped to the water, and their blood turned the ocean red.

Another couple of hours and icebergs came into view. In what seemed no more than a few moments they were on top of him. In his haste to pluck a hair he yanked nearly the whole tuft from the end of the tail. As he threw the tuft at the icebergs, the hairs burst into flames. The ice melted, and the cowhide sped on its way.

Finally, with one of the eyeballs as his telescope he spotted an island on the horizon. In the middle of the island was a castle surrounded by

walls as high as mountains. He thought, "My little sister's there." And as the cowhide landed, he adjusted the eyeball and looked through the castle walls. There was an enormous room with a column of black marble in the center. Chained to the column was a man; and close by, a pan of live coals. Bending over the coals was that woman they said had stolen his father. She clutched a baby in one hand and a butcher knife in the other, ready to skin the baby. She seemed to be talking to the man, who turned his face away as if he didn't want to see what she would do.

Without wasting a second, Joaquín snatched the remaining hairs from the cow's tail and put them in his pocket. He laid one of them against the wall, and it became a ladder. Up he climbed, until he reached a window. With a single bound he jumped through the window, landing next to the woman. Then he tore the knife from her hand and gave her a whack that sent her rolling across the floor.

He picked up the baby and untied the prisoner, who was none other than his own father, so thin and pale he seemed more like a skeleton than a live man. Then with one of the cow's eyes Joaquín peered into the black marble column. He saw a staircase leading downward. He found the door, opened it, and descended into a treasure cave. He and his father filled their pockets with gold and precious stones, then followed the winding passageway out to the sea. They jumped onto the cowhide and were pushed home in no time by the hands of invisible beings.

Dolores was on the beach waiting for them. She'd picked up a scent in the wind. And when she saw her lost husband and her two children, she threw her arms around them and cried for joy. Her husband explained how the Lost Soul had carried him off by speaking a few magic words and how she had tied him up in her castle when he refused to marry her.

While his father was telling the story, Joaquín was running back and forth on the beach, gathering up the cowhide and the cow's bones. He bundled them all together and put the eyes back in the sockets. Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out one last hair from the cow's tail. He struck a match to burn the hair but burned his fingers instead and dropped the match. It fell on the hide, and the cow stood up. It was as plump and healthy as ever and started ambling home.

With a portion of the gold and jewels they'd stuffed in their pockets, Joaquín's father bought a ranch, lots of animals, and everything else you'd need to be rich. They all lived happily till the day they died—and here we are, still waiting for our luck to change.

My tale is done, and the wind blows it off. When the wind brings it back, I'll tell it again.

Chile | Magdalena Muñoz

52. Judas's Ear

There was a young wife who had a son. When her husband died she left the boy with his grandmother and went off to see the world. Arriving at the edge of a forest, she changed into men's clothing and fell in with a couple of hunters who had a camp. They invited her to join them. "Come work with us," they said. They had no idea she was a woman.

One day when it was the young widow's turn to stay back and prepare the meal, they warned her, "There's someone who keeps coming here spilling the food while we're off hunting. We don't know who it is."

"I'll keep an eye out," said the widow. When the men had gone, an old woman came into the camp and began knocking over bowls, spilling food left and right. The young widow picked up a club and chased her off. When the two hunters returned, the widow said, "It was an old woman. Just look at the mess she left! When I tried to catch her, she ran down a hole."

"We'll have to pull her out, but how?" said one of the men.

"We'll cut a hide into strips, make a towline," said the other, "and go down hand over hand."

But the one who tried it first got cold feet as soon as he reached the bottom of the hole, and he came shinnying back up the rope as fast as his hands and knees would take him. The same thing happened to the second man.

"What did you see down there?" asked the widow.

"A little white light," said the man. "It scared me out of my wits."

The widow picked up her club and shinnied down the rope. There was the light. She waited a moment. Nothing happened. She moved forward slowly. What should she find but three shining maidens! As she approached, the maidens drew back in fear. One of them cried out, "Stay where you are! Can't you see we're under a spell? We're prisoners of Judas himself, and his old wife looks after us and brings us food."

"Stop worrying," said the widow. "I'll get you out of here if it costs me my life."

"And how will you do it, sir? We were kidnapped by Judas, who is king of the underworld, and even though our father is king of the country above, he hasn't been able to set us free."

"Come with me," said the widow. She led the princesses to the towline, and all three of them shinnied to the top. When the two hunters saw the shining princesses, they were smitten. "Who gets which one?" "We'll decide that later!" And they yanked the rope out of the hole before the princesses' rescuer could even think of climbing back up.

Down below the widow turned around and saw the old woman coming after her. "Stop, thief! You've stolen our princesses!" In reply the widow lifted her club and with one blow reduced the old crone to a pool of blood.

Judas appeared in an instant, snorting and bellowing. "I smell blood! Hand me my meal, or I'll eat you alive!" The widow brought down her club a second time. Judas dodged, and the blow knocked off one ear. She pulled out her rosary and threw it around his neck. He fell backwards, and the rosary pinned him to the ground.

"Set me free immediately!"

"I'm not the one who's holding you down," she replied. "But I can help you if you'll get me out of here."

"It's a promise. King's honor."

She took back her rosary, stood on his shoulders, and was just tall enough to crawl out of the hole.

"Now give me back my ear!"

"Not a chance! I'll keep *that* for good luck." And she headed straight for the city, still in men's clothes. Her son, who was living in town with his grandmother, had no idea his mother had arrived. As for the two self-

Meanwhile the chicks were refusing to be still. So he caught them and hung them upside down from a stick. When Mama came home from Mass, she asked, "Juan Bobo, where's the pig?"

He answered her a little worried, "You mean you didn't see it at Mass? I dressed it up and sent it. It was crying to go with you. And the chicks were about to get out of the yard, so I hung them upside down from a stick. Look. They're all perfectly quiet now." And when he said, "Just wait, the pig will be back before you know it," she whacked him until he was quiet himself.

Puerto Rico

84. The Parrot Prince

If I tell it to know it you'll know how to tell it and put it in ships for John, Rock, and Rick with dust and sawdust, ginger paste, and marzipan, triki-triki triki-tran.

It's about a rich widower and his daughter, Mariquita, who was the apple of his eye. He doted on her without even thinking and gave in to her every whim. But she was all by herself when her father went out on business, and she began wishing she had sisters to keep her company.

Well then, in the house next door was a widow who had three daughters. Every time the widow saw Mariquita she gave her a little gift or something special to eat, while the daughters showered her with attention. They would say, "Tell your papa to marry our mama, then we'll be together all day long."

They kept at it until Mariquita imagined the world would be perfect if only this marriage could be brought about. She pestered her father to take the neighbor woman as his wife, pleading with him morning, noon, and night. Finally the father, for no other reason than to satisfy his daughter, said yes, and they had a wedding.

After that, things changed. Instead of gifts and tidbits, Mariquita's

stepmother and stepsisters gave her dark looks and scoldings and whacked her with the backs of their hands.

Knowing she had brought it all on herself, she couldn't say a word to her father and had to suffer in silence. She would have gone on like this until who knows when, except that one day the whole thing boiled over. The sisters yanked her hair, and when she complained, the stepmother picked up a piece of stove wood and pummeled her with it. "Complain, will you? You had it coming! My daughters know you better than you know yourself!"

What they did know was that Mariquita was set to inherit her father's fortune, and because of it they couldn't stand the sight of her.

When the father came home that night, Mariquita told him the truth for a change. She refused to blame him, though. All she wanted was to live by herself in a certain little cottage her mother had left her, and the father at last agreed, since he could think of no other way to keep peace in the family.

Then one evening when Mariquita was sweeping her little dooryard, she heard a voice: "Mariquita, I'll help you sweep." Startled, she looked around but saw no one. The voice came again: "Look up in the *peumo* tree!" She looked, and there was a parrot. "Shall I come down?"

"Please! And be my friend, I'm so lonely. What can I get you? Nuts? Chocolate? Wine sops?"

"Not until after dark," he said. "Put a basin of water on your windowsill, a comb, a mirror, and a hand towel, and you'll see me later."

At midnight there was a whirring of wings. The parrot dipped himself in the basin, dried off, combed his feathers, and looked in the mirror. Then, as he bounded into the room, he became the most handsome prince you ever dreamed of.

I'll tell nothing at all of what they said to each other, except that when morning came the prince promised to be back that night and every night, and before he flew off he left a heavy bag. It was full of money. From then on Mariquita knew only happiness, and she began to wear silk and put on earrings and bracelets.

One of the stepsisters passed by the cottage one day and caught a glimpse of Mariquita through the open window. She ran back to her mother and sisters and told them she'd seen silk and jewels.

"Somebody's giving her money," said the mother. Then she instructed her eldest daughter, "Go pay a visit to little Mariquita. Spend the night and keep your ears open. Come back in the morning and tell us everything."

The next day the girl showed up at Mariquita's door with a hundred lies: "We can hardly stand it that you went away," "All the little gifts we gave you!" "What thanks did we get?" "How it hurts!" "We're dying to see you again."

Then she added, "I've come to spend the day with you. And the night!"

Nothing if not good-hearted, Mariquita said, "Thanks." But not wanting her stepsister to hear the prince arrive, she served her wine at dinner and kept refilling the glass until, when the stepsister stood up to go to bed, her head was spinning. By the time she lay down, a carriage could have rolled over her and she wouldn't have felt a thing.

She went home the next day with tales of fine furnishings, perfect housekeeping, and rare foods and wines, which made the mother and the sisters more jealous than they'd been before. Worse, she had seen nothing of what she had been told to watch for. The mother took hold of her middle daughter. "Go now, and see if you can do better. I'm warning you, don't sleep a wink!"

The girl set off, but she drank her dinner, just as her sister had done, and when she got back the following morning she couldn't say any more than she could have said before she went.

The youngest daughter, who was the most jealous of all, said, "Mother, I'm going right now! Trust me, I'll find out what we need to know!"

Off she ran. And when dinner was served, she only pretended to drink. She slept not a wink, her eye at the keyhole all night long. At midnight the parrot arrived at the windowsill, dipped in the basin, and became a prince. He sat close to Mariquita, caressing her, murmuring tenderly. By morning the stepsister's jealousy had nearly eaten her alive, yet there she was, still hunched over the keyhole. She saw the prince jump to the windowsill, bathe himself, and fly away. And not without leaving a sackful of money.

Moments later she was out the door. As soon as she could no longer be seen from the cottage she started to run. She couldn't wait to tell

her mother. "Mama!" she announced. "Those ninnies fell asleep, but I stayed awake and saw it all, all, all!"

"We've got them now!" cried the mother. "That sow and her famous prince won't be whispering tonight!"

Then shortly before midnight she slipped up to the cottage window and without the slightest noise laid three sharpened knives on the windowsill. When the parrot landed, the knives cut into his flesh and he let out with a shriek. "Mariquita, my love, you've betrayed me! Today was the last day of my enchantment. I would have been free, and now I am lost. May you repent! When you do, come after me. You must put on a pair of iron shoes, and not until the soles are worn through will you find me." With that, he vanished.

Mariquita fell to weeping, then caught herself. "Why weep," she thought, "when I could be looking for my husband?" She ran to the cobbler and ordered iron shoes. The moment they were ready she pulled them on. She bundled up a change of clothes, a pair of scissors, and a little flask, and off she went.

She climbed mountains and crossed prairies, never stopping to rest. Aches and pains couldn't hold her back, not even exhaustion, though she felt it sorely. One day, when her strength had nearly ebbed away, she lay down in a thicket at the edge of a lake. She stretched out her legs and, oh bliss! the tips of her toes popped out. When she turned her shoes over she saw that the soles were completely worn through. "I've almost arrived," she thought. "I'll be with him soon."

Night was coming, but there was a rustling nearby and she couldn't sleep. Three duck women had landed at the edge of the lake:

"What kept you, comadre? And you, my goddaughter, what took so long?"

"Well, finally, comadre! That stupid husband of mine and my two older daughters, the good-for-nothings! I thought they'd never get to sleep. But here I am with my youngest, your goddaughter, comadre. She's a witch after our own hearts. But tell us the latest. What's happening with the parrot prince? Is he dead yet?"

"They say it'll be only three more days. His wounds won't heal. Those knives you laid on the windowsill were just the thing, comadre. His doctors will never guess the cure."

"And what's the cure?"

"Hush! Don't you know the walls have ears and the bushes have eyes?"

"Go on, tell us. There's nobody here but us three."

"Well, who'd ever guess that the prince would be cured if they just took a feather from the right wing of each of us and waved it over the prince's wounds after dipping it in our blood? Of course they'd have to kill us first."

"But how would they ever guess? The Devil wouldn't allow it."

When their meeting was over, the three waddled into the reeds at the waterside and settled down for the night.

Mariquita waited until she was certain the ducks had fallen asleep. Then she went up to the closest of the three, which was none other than her own stepmother, and sliced off its head with one clip of her scissors. She took a feather from its right wing and poured a few drops of its blood into her flask. The next duck she came to was her stepsister, and she did the same; and the same again with the stepsister's godmother. After that she changed into men's clothing and hurried toward the city.

Running into the palace she yelled out to the king, "I'm a doctor!" She gave her orders: "I must be left alone with the prince." When she reached his room, his eyes were already closed. She dipped one of the feathers into the flask and waved it gently over his wounds.

The next morning the king came in and asked, "How is my son?"

"See for yourself, sire. The worms have left, and the wounds are starting to close." When the king had gone, Mariquita took the second feather, dipped it into the witches' blood, and as she waved it in the air the prince opened his eyes.

The day after that she soaked up the rest of the blood with the third feather, passed it back and forth over the prince's body, and he sat up and was well. Then she told him everything that had happened.

When the king came in, his joy was so great I haven't the words to describe it. He gave his consent to the marriage, and they celebrated with much rejoicing throughout the kingdom.

And I can tell you it's true, since they had me to the wedding banquet and fed me until I nearly burst.

With that my tale is done, and the wind blows it into the sea.

Chile

Chain Riddles

I.

"Where's the corn?"

"Under a metate."

"Where's the metate?"

"In a gopher hole."

"Where the hole?"

"Covered by a crab."

"Where's the crab?"

"Eaten by a heron."

"Where's the heron?"

"Perched in a tree."

"Where's the tree?"

"Fell in the water."

"Where's the water?"

"A deer drank it up."

"Where's the deer?"

"Scared off by a fire."

"Where's the fire?"

"Put out by the rain."

"Where's the rain?"

"Carried off by the wind."

"Where's the wind?"

"It blew away behind the mountain."

Mexico (Mixe)

II.

Comadre frog, where's your husband?

"Coming, madam."

"What's he wearing?"

"His little suit."