

Media
Cricket[®]



Don't Count Your Chickens

by Diana C. Conway • Illustrated by Cindy Revell



ONCE UPON A Not-so-long-ago time, three brothers lived on a Caribbean island in a small house with a leaky palm-frond roof. Their father had drowned at sea, and their mother had died of cholera, leaving the two older ones to



HI! I'M CRICKET, AND
THIS IS MY NOT-SO OLD
TEACHER OLD CRICKET.



OBLIGED.

care for Juancho, the youngest. Or was it the other way around?

One day Fulano, the oldest, came home from the town of Dos Palmas leading a skinny black calf.

“¡Ay, hermano!” said Juancho. “Where did you get that sorry little vaquita?”

Fulano twisted a strand of his uncombed hair. “I won her in a domino game,” he said. “I’ll fatten her up and take her to the fair, and with my prize money I’ll buy a German motorcycle.”

Juancho ran his fingers along the animal’s xylophone ribs, shook his head, and answered with one of his grandmother’s proverbs—Del dicho al hecho hay un buen trecho, which means, “From the boast to the act there’s a mighty long track.”

“Fool!” said Fulano. He scooped a clod of dirt from the yard and tossed it over Juancho’s head. Then he ordered his little brother to clean out a stall in the old barn for the scrawny calf.

Juancho not only installed the vaquita in her new home but also brushed, fed, and watered her. And not only that first day, but for every day thereafter. For the sad fact is,



YOU CAN LEARN
A LOT FROM WISE
OLD SAYINGS.

I CAN?





Fulano and Mengano spent most of their time resting in rocking chairs on the front porch, sipping coffee with many spoonfuls of sugar, and talking about the girls in the village. Meanwhile, eleven-year-old Juancho swept the floor of their wood shack, washed and mended their faded trousers, and cooked pots of beans and rice for supper every night.

TWO WEEKS LATER, Mengano, the second brother, returned from the town of Dos Palmas with a bedraggled rooster slung over his shoulder.

“¡Ay, hermano!” exclaimed Juancho. “Is that gallo for our dinner?”

Mengano stroked his sharp, thin mustache. “Certainly not,” he said. “I won him at the cockfight. When his feathers grow back and his wounds heal, I’ll take him to the fair, and with my prize money I’ll buy a Japanese radio/CD/tape player.”

Juancho gently folded the fighting cock’s broken wing against its body, shook his head, and answered with another of his grandmother’s proverbs—Del plato a la boca se enfría la sopa, that is, “To your mouth from the bowl the soup gets cold.”

“Fool!” said Mengano. He scooped a broken coconut shell from the ground and whizzed it past Juancho’s head. Then he ordered his little brother to clean out an old chicken coop for the damaged fighting cock.

AND SO the weeks passed. While Fulano and Mengano dozed in the sun on the porch, or went to town for the cockfights and domino games, Juancho cared for their animals. The skinny vaquita grew into a feisty round cow. The injured gallo no longer looked like a chicken plucked



SO—JUANCHO IS GOING
TO PUT THE ROOSTER
INTO HIS SOUP?



NOT QUITE...
KEEP THINKING.

for the pot. He strutted around the yard like a king's jewel come to life.

“Didn’t we tell you?” said the two older brothers. “We’ll make our fortunes at the fair.”

Juancho just shook his head and mumbled still another of his grandmother’s proverbs—No venda la piel del oso antes de haberlo cazado, or “Don’t sell the bearskin before the hunter brings it in.”

Fulano and Mengano had just sliced open a juicy watermelon from their latest trip to Dos Palmas. They puckered up their lips and shot a volley of seeds at Juancho, who ducked and turned away. The two big brothers laughed and slurped up the whole melon, without offering Juancho a single slice. But one of the spit seeds landed in the pile of cow manure that Juancho had piled up outside the barn—a lovely, warm place for a seed to sprout and grow.

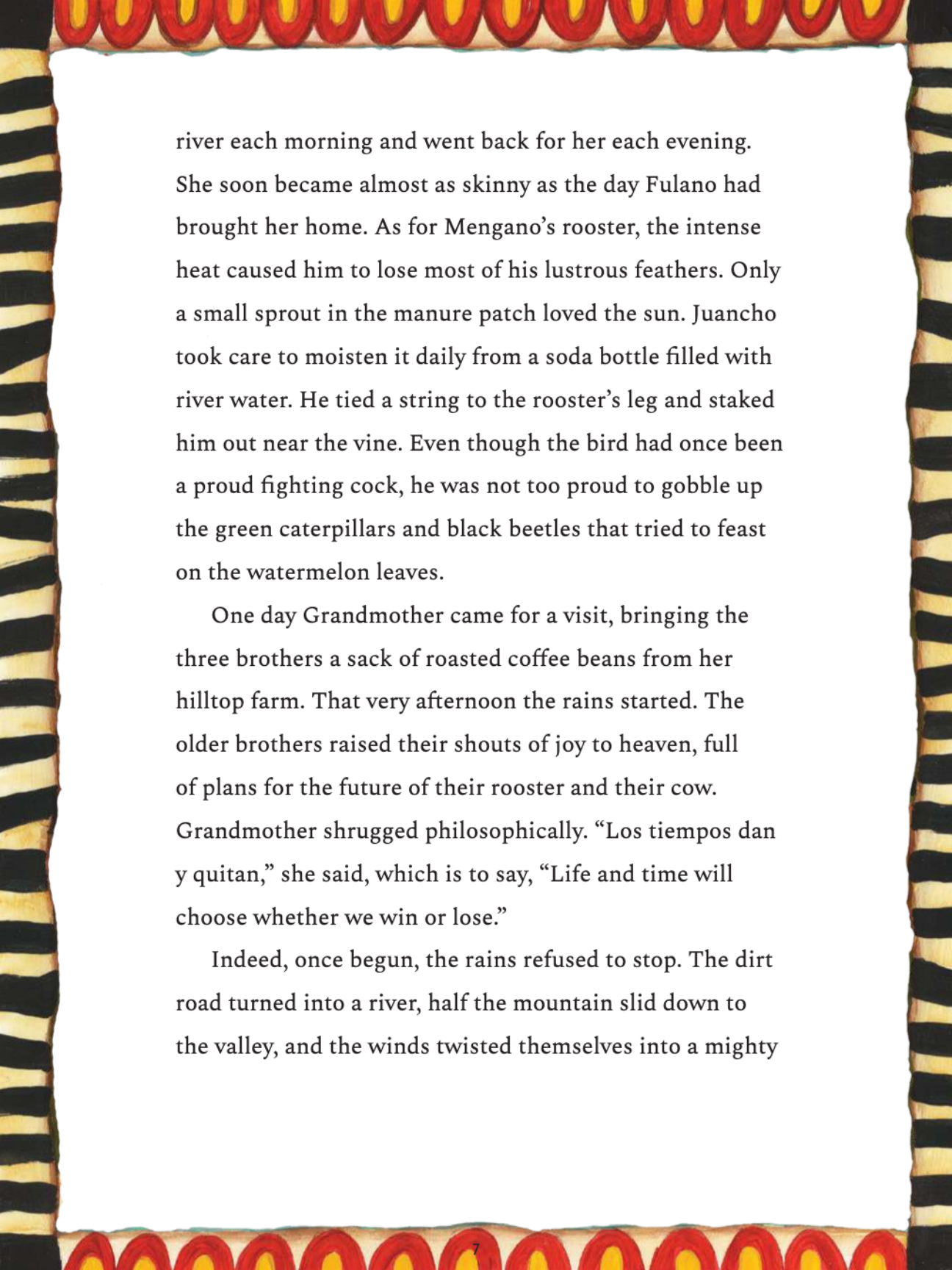
AFTER THE DAY of the watermelon, the three brothers’ luck changed for the worse. First came a drought that dried up the alfalfa on the little farm. To find green grass and water, Juancho walked the cow three kilometers to the



AND HE WANTS A
BEARSKIN TO KEEP THE
SOUP FROM GETTING COLD?



AY,
CARAMBA!



river each morning and went back for her each evening. She soon became almost as skinny as the day Fulano had brought her home. As for Mengano's rooster, the intense heat caused him to lose most of his lustrous feathers. Only a small sprout in the manure patch loved the sun. Juancho took care to moisten it daily from a soda bottle filled with river water. He tied a string to the rooster's leg and staked him out near the vine. Even though the bird had once been a proud fighting cock, he was not too proud to gobble up the green caterpillars and black beetles that tried to feast on the watermelon leaves.

One day Grandmother came for a visit, bringing the three brothers a sack of roasted coffee beans from her hilltop farm. That very afternoon the rains started. The older brothers raised their shouts of joy to heaven, full of plans for the future of their rooster and their cow. Grandmother shrugged philosophically. "Los tiempos dan y quitan," she said, which is to say, "Life and time will choose whether we win or lose."

Indeed, once begun, the rains refused to stop. The dirt road turned into a river, half the mountain slid down to the valley, and the winds twisted themselves into a mighty

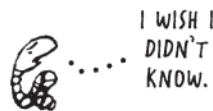
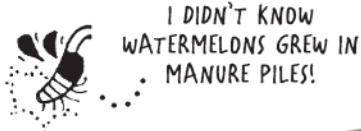
tropical storm. Streams of water poured through the palm-frond roof of the worn wood shack. Mengano's rooster blew away in the night, leaving behind his last green tail feather. Fulano's cow caught a cold and coughed herself to death. But the watermelon plant in the pile of manure thrived. It sponged up the rain and put out twisty tendrils, which opened into leaves and flowers, which grew into miniature green melons—all unnoticed by the two older brothers.

At last the sun came out again, the muddy roads dried up, and things went on much as before. Fulano and Mengano wasted their time in Dos Palmas, while Juancho kept things going at home. Nobody talked of making his fortune at the fair.

One morning Juancho accidentally spilled the very last pot of coffee made from their grandmother's beans. Fulano grabbed his straw hat from his head and began to whack his little brother with it. Just then, Mengano, who was headed out back to pick a banana, called out, "¡Ay, hermanos! Look at that!" He pointed to the manure pile.


Fulano twisted a strand of his uncombed hair. "Is it a sea turtle lost on land?"

Mengano stroked his sharp, thin mustache. "Is it a



satellite, fallen from the sky?”

They ran over to measure the striped watermelon with their arms. Although not quite as big as a sea turtle or a satellite, it was now rounder and greener than any they had ever seen at the fair, which is just where they decided to take it.

TODAY THE THREE brothers still live together under one roof—a new waterproof tin roof paid for with prize money from the fair. Fulano and Mengano never tire of telling their friends about the fabulous watermelon they grew. Grandmother, who knows the truth, just winks at Juancho and says, “El hablar no cuesta nada,” which translates, “You never get pay for talking all day.” 



WAIT, WAIT! I THINK I GET THIS ONE. WHERE ARE YOU GOING?



TO WORK, OF COURSE.
“YOU DON’T GET PAID
FOR TALKING ALL DAY...”



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