

NOTE TO READERS AND STORYTELLERS

These stories are all adaptations of traditional folktales from New Mexico. They are re-tellings for modern readers and listeners, and although I tend to stay closer to the original tale than many writers, I've added to and subtracted from the tradition in creating my version of each tale. I began telling all these stories in the mid-1970s when I discovered the work of the pioneer students of New Mexican folk narrative: Aurelio M. Espinosa, Juan B. Rael and J. Manuel Espinosa. These folklorists recorded the old tales during the first third of the twentieth century, before modernization began to erase the stories from the collective memory of the people. Serious readers should consult *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo México* by Juan B. Rael and *Spanish Folk-Tales from New Mexico* by J. Manuel Espinosa. To see how the New Mexican tales derive from the stories of Spain, read *Cuentos populares españoles* by Aurelio M. Espinosa. These books are out of print, but can be found in university libraries or obtained through inter-library loan. A more accessible, bilingual edition of J. Manuel Espinosa's work is *Cuentos de cuanto hay, Tales from Spanish New Mexico* which is edited and translated by me, published by the University of New Mexico Press and available from Cinco Puntos Press.

1. THE DAY IT SNOWED TORTILLAS

This is almost a signature story for me. People associate me with this tale more than with any other, and it's the one story I've developed that is most borrowed by other storytellers. I first heard the outlines of the story from a girl in the fourth grade. Her family came from Mexico, and she told me that her mother told her a story about the day it rained buñuelos. Because many of my listeners wouldn't be familiar with buñuelos, I decided to turn them into tortillas, which are much better known in the United States. A version occurs in *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo México* and I have run across the story from many other Latin American sources—always with buñuelos, as my young friend told it. Which spouse is clever and which foolish and talkative changes frequently, probably in response to the attitude of the teller. A similar tale is told in many countries around the world. It seems especially popular in Russia and Eastern Europe. In the Aarne-Thompson Index of Tale Types it is number 1381.

2. PEDRO AND DIABLO

I once told this story to a group of international students who were participating in an intensive English class at the University of New Mexico. Afterward, a young woman in the class said, "They tell that story in my village in Italy. They say it happened at the little cemetery just outside the town." Stories of a person in the graveyard being mistaken for a ghost or the devil turn up in many cultural contexts. A listener once showed me an issue of the Reader's Digest in which a brief version of this story appeared. The names of the two rascals—Pedro and Diablo—are my addition. Without them, some listeners didn't see any logic in the mistaken identities of the thieves. I picked up the story from a variety of people around New Mexico. It can also be found in most collections of tales made in the state. Rael has a related story in *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo México*. It is type 1791 in the Aarne-Thompson index.

3. GOOD ADVICE

The tale of a rather simple young man who squanders his wages on three pieces of advice which turn out to be perfectly suited to situations he encounters shortly thereafter (Aarne-Thompson type 910B) is extremely popular in Spanish-speaking lands. New Mexico is no exception. It appears in all the collections made in the state. A major portion of the book *Entre brujas, pícaros y consejos* by Cuban folklorist María del Carmen Victori Ramos is devoted to versions occurring on the island. In my telling, I retain the archaic verb forms (fueres and vieres) in the first piece of advice because that appears to be the way every traditional teller in New Mexico said it.

4. THE CRICKET

Tales of a false seer who is able to maintain the deception by lucky coincidence are popular in many cultures (Aarne-Thompson type 1641). Of the tales in this book, this is one most often requested by children. The type can be found in the Grimms' tales and in collections of African-American tales, but this version has some specifically Hispano qualities. In Mexico and the Southwest tales of *los dos compadres*—one poor and the other rich—are very popular. Several versions of this tale can be found in *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo México*, and my telling borrows heavily from that source. In Spanish language versions of the story the trickster's nickname always seems to be *el grillo*. There is always some powerful person who is deceived by the false seer's good fortune, but identifying him as the governor of New Mexico is my addition.

5. THE LITTLE ANT

This is a classic example of a cumulative tales (Aarne-Thompson type 2030). Whether I tell the story in English or Spanish, I always do the cumulative "run" in Spanish because it's so much more rhythmic than English. I speak the last line tugging at one hand while holding it in place with the other, to the delight of young listeners. The idea that the flea is the ant's cousin is my invention. It's always seemed appropriate because the relationship among cousins is of such importance in Hispanic culture. Among other places, this story appears in Rael's collection and in *Mexican Folktales* by Américo Paredes. In the Aarne-Thompson index cumulative tales are type 2030.

6. THE BEST THIEF

This is one of the first New Mexican tales I ever told—long before I declared myself a storyteller. It first caught my imagination in J. Manuel Espinosa's *Spanish Folk-Tales from New Mexico*. The type (Aarne-Thompson 1525) is common (well known as a Jack tale in Appalachia, for example) and other researchers in New Mexico include it in their collections. I've always been enchanted by the cleverness of the young "thief" and the distinctively New Mexican blend of Old and New World elements—a king and Native American warriors in the same tale.

7. LITTLE GOLD STAR

This tale was extremely popular in traditional New Mexican Hispanic culture. Rael collected a dozen variants and Espinosa found several as well. The story is also found in Literary Folklore of the Hispanic Southwest by Aurora White Lea, which is where I first encountered it. When natives of the mountain communities reminisce to me about hearing stories from their grandparents, they always mention Estrellita de oro or Granita de oro. The story combines the “Cindarella” narrative with the motif of kindness rewarded and ill humor punished. It is type 510 in the Aarne-Thompson index.

8. LA LLORONA

This story differs from the other others in this collection in that many people believe it to be true, which makes it a legend rather than a folktale. It will probably come as a surprise to most native New Mexicans readers to learn that this story is probably the least traditionally New Mexican one in this collection. The story, or at least the character of La Llorona, is firmly rooted and almost universally known in the state today, but the tale does not seem to have been known in the 1930s and 40s when the major folktale collections were made. My version is largely based on things I heard about La Llorona when I was a boy in Arizona. References to her fell into three categories: 1) vague warnings that she might be about; 2) legendary tales that explained the origin of the crying ghost; and 3) anecdotes of encounters with her. I incorporated all three types in my story. The second section of the story, which tells of a boy who was nearly caught by La Llorona, is an original invention of mine, but I’ve been telling it for so long that it’s been borrowed by other storytellers and many people swear they’ve heard it as a traditional tale.

9. JUAN CAMISÓN

The story of the valiant little tailor who killed seven with one blow was a favorite of mine when I was a boy. I enjoy how the tale of Juan Camisón resembles and differs from the well-known Grimms’ story. I also enjoy the epic laziness of Juan. The examples of how Juan checks to see if the fire is burning by touching the cat’s fur and whether it had rained by petting the dog are stock elements and turn up in several tales collected from traditional tellers in the early days. Spanish- speaking children especially enjoy the taunt, “Juan Camisón, te falta pantaloón,” which is something I added, but is very much in keeping with traditional storytelling style. Brave tailor stories are classified as number 1640 in the Aarne-Thompson index.

10. THE PRINCE

I enjoy the simple structure of this story. It’s one of the many, many tales of fantastic helpers (Aarne-Thompson type 513), and the remarkable ability of each helper always determines the challenges the hero will face as the story unfolds. Most children have been introduced to stories of this type—often as The Five Chinese Brothers—and I encourage them to invent a new set of helpers and make up their own story based on tasks suited to them. When you tell this story, you’ll have fun by saying the names of the helpers in rapid succession. It’s also fun to watch the listeners’ reaction to the long hair coming out of the princess’ belly. Some listeners have seen cultural significance in the final scene in which the king only yields up his daughter when faced with the alternative of sacrificing his crown, but

THE DAY IT SNOWED TORTILLAS / EL DÍA QUE NEVARON TORTILLAS



I have to confess that's entirely my invention. For the most part, however, I used a combination of New Mexican tales from Rael and Espinosa to develop my version.

THE TRIALS OF A TITLE

It may be that when you read the Spanish title of this book, you thought, Shouldn't it be "El día que nevó tortillas?" If so, you're not the only one who has wondered that. The first time I translated the story (for inclusion in the book *Watch Out for Clever Women! / ¡Cuidado con las mujeres astutas!*) I used the verb form *nevó*, but by the time the book was published I decided that the better form was *nevaron*, and that's how the title appeared in the first edition. However, an editor who read the book, a native speaker of Spanish who had been educated in Latin America, insisted that I had committed an error and that the verb should be changed to *nevó*. It was changed in the second edition, and that was how the title stood until I began preparing the manuscript for the present book. When the publisher showed the advance publicity to a variety of Spanish editors, all of them native speakers from Spain and Latin America, a disagreement emerged. Some were certain that I should say *nevaron tortillas*; others were equally convinced the correct expression was *nevó tortillas*. Still others said that both were correct and that I should just do as I pleased. Finally, an editor carried the question to the highest court of arbitration: La Real Academia de la Lengua Española (The Royal Academy of the Spanish Language). We received our answer: La frase que usted propone se redactaría del siguiente modo: El día que nevaron tortillas. From their data bank, the Academy sent examples of analogous expressions in contemporary writing. And so the book has the title which you see. When you tell the story, however, if it feels better to say *el día que nevó tortillas*, feel perfectly free to do it!