ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Love and Roast Chicken: A Trickster Tale from the Andes Mountains
Barbara Knutson
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The Native Americans have the wily coyote. African tales feature Anansi the spider. There are Irish stories about mischievous leprechauns. And apparently, high in the Andes Mountains, there is a guinea pig that can outwit a fox.

From the first page, Cuy the Guinea Pig is faced with danger. Tío Antonio the Fox has him cornered. But this quick-thinking South American trickster convinces the fox that the sky is falling. When the sky doesn't fall, the fox is determined to get little Cuy, but this unusual critter stays one step ahead of his opponent.

Cuy, being a clever guinea pig, has big plans. He puts on a hat and poncho and volunteers to help a farmer with his alfalfa fields. Cuy works hard all day but then eats all night until the farmer catches him. He ties him to a tree, planning to eat him for dinner the next day. It looks like the end for Cuy, but when the fox comes along, Cuy thinks fast once again. He tells the fox that he has a big problem—the farmer's daughter wants to marry him but she eats roast chicken every day, an idea that repulses Cuy. As he expected, the idea entices the hungry fox. Tío Antonio, drooling over "love and roast chicken," falls for Cuy's trap. Unlike most of the guinea pigs in the Andes who do get eaten for dinner, Cuy goes free.

Trickster tales are loved worldwide. They all feature an underdog type who uses brains to compete against bigger, stronger enemies. It's heartening to see the smaller person win, especially for children who often feel like the little guy.

As both author and illustrator, Knutson knows just what details are needed in her dynamic woodcut-like illustrations. She keeps the look simple, but it's highly effective. Bold black lines, mixed with strong watercolors, create a perfect high mountain landscape. She makes Cuy a playful character, especially when he's dressed in his poncho.

The author's specialty is writing multi-cultural folktales. Among her previous books are *How the Guinea Fowl Got Her Spots: A Swahili Tale of Friendship*, and *Sungura and Leopard: A Swahili Trickster Tale*, which won the Picture Book of Distinction Award from *Hungry Mind Review*.

It's clear that Knutson takes her work seriously in this well-researched story, complete with author's notes and a list of Spanish words. She also understands how important these kinds of tales are for all children to read. They provide a deeper understanding of other parts of the world, along with a delightful sharing of familiar characters. Teachers and children will treasure this book, not only for its inviting illustrations but also for its universal theme.

Anna Stewart