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"The Grasshopper that Sleeps in the Road"

A story which is
taught to Chatino Indian children

This story is Type 2031 "The frost-bitten feet"
in Aarne-Thompson, Types of the Folktale. The
formula is almost exactly the same. —WLW.

Ruth Whitford

December 1942

Introduction

"The Grasshopper that Sleeps in the Road" is a story taken in Chatino from Anacleta Laguna, a Chatino Indian girl, of about 25 years of age. She said the story was taught to her by her grandfather who made her repeat it many times until she knew it thoroughly by heart.

The Chatino Indians live in the southwestern part of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, in the district known as Juquila. The census of 1930 numbers them about 12,000 with about 8,000 of them mono-linguals.

The next few pages include, first, an English translation of the entire story, and then, a few paragraphs of the text in Chatino with the necessary vocabulary to finish the story. On reading the translation it will be understood why the entire story in Chatino is not quoted.

Chatino seems to be a tonal language but further investigation is necessary to determine whether the tonal system consists of three or four registers. Therefore, in the text tone has been omitted.

The Grasshopper that Sleeps in the Road

"Why are you so mean, frost? Why do you dry up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean. Meaner is the sun that dries up me."

"Why are you so mean, sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the sun, "Meaner is the cloud that hides me!"

"Why are you so mean, clouds that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps on the road?"

"I am not mean," say the clouds. "Meaner is the air that carries me away."

"Why are you so mean, air that carries away the clouds that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the air. "Meaner are the walls that cleave me."

"Why are you so mean, walls that cleave the air that carries away the clouds that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," say the walls. "Meaner is the rat burrows through me."

"Why are you so mean, rat that burrows through the walls that cleave the air that carries away the clouds that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the rat. "Meaner is the cat that eats me."

"Why are you so mean, cat that eats the rat that burrows through the walls that cleave the air that carries away the clouds that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the cat, "Meaner is the stick that beats my ribs."

"Why are you so mean, stick that beats the ribs of the cat that eats the rat that burrows through the walls that cleave the air that carries away the clouds that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the stick. "Meaner is the fire that burns me."

"Why are you so mean, fire that burns the stick that beats the ribs of the cat that eats the rat that burrows through

the walls that cleave the air that carries away the clouds
that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the
feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the fire. "Meaner is the
water that puts me out."

"Why are you so mean, water that puts out the fire
that burns the stick that beats the ribs of the cat that eats
the rat that burrows through the walls that cleave the air
that carries away the clouds that hide the sun that dries up
the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps
in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the water. "Meaner is the
bull that drinks me up."

"Why are you so mean, bull that drinks the water that
puts out the fire that burns the stick that beats the ribs of
the cat that eats the rat that burrows through the walls that
cleave the air that carries away the clouds that hide the sun
that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper
that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the bull. "Meaner is the
sword that pricks my neck."

"Why are you so mean, sword that pricks the neck of
the bull that drinks the water that puts out the fire that
burns the stick that beats the ribs of the cat that eats the

"rat that burrows through the walls that cleave the air that carries away the clouds that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the sword. "Meaner is the swordsmith that makes me."

"Why are you so mean, swordsmith that makes the sword that pricks the neck of the bull that drinks the water that puts out the fire that burns the stick that beats the ribs of the cat that eats the rat that burrows through the walls that cleave the air that carries away the clouds that hide the sun that dries up the frost that dries up the feet of the grasshopper that sleeps in the road?"

"I am not mean," says the swordsmith. "Meaner is death that carries me off."

Chatino Text

huke? niča? ki?iu sa?a nu?uj niče? ntypči kiya? sku?
 frost why man(mean) very you why dry up feet grasshopper
 ntia? tu? a ki?iukona? ki?iu lake kwče ntypči ina?
 sleep road not mean am I mean more sun dry up me
 niča? ki?iua nu?uj kwča ntypči huke? ntypči kiya? sku?
 why so mean you sun dry up frost dry up feet grasshopper
 ntia? tu? a ki?iukona? ntkwi kwča ki?iu lake laga-la
 sleep road not mean am I says sun mean more clouds
 ntky ina? nica? ki?iua nu?uj laga-la ntky kwče ntypči
 hide me why so mean you clouds hide sun dry up
 huke? ntypči kiya? sku? ntia? tu?
 frost dry up feet grasshopper sleep road etc.

Remainder of vocabulary in story -

kw?e ndla?a lagaala	kii? ntki jkatkwa
air carry away clouds	fire burns stick
dya ndaha tu? sa?e sakw?e	ti?e nsu?ai? kii?
wall cleave road goes air	water puts out fire
tñ? ntiju dya	pta nái?io ti?a
rat burrows wall	bull drinks water
misty? ntygu tñ?	šlyu ntyka ini pta
cat eats rat	sword cracks neck bull
jka tkwe gi?ni si? mistyu	ktyitykw? ño šlyu
wood piece beats ribs cat	swordsmith makes sword
	lemaante nti?ia ina?
	death carries off me