HALF – CHICKEN

 by ALMA FLOR ADA

 *Have you ever seen a weather vane? Do you know why there is a little rooster on one end, spinning around to let us know which way the wind is blowing?*

 *Well, I’ll tell you. It’s an old, old story that my grandmother once told me. And before that, her grandmother told it to her. It goes like this . .*

 A long, long time ago, on a Mexican ranch, a mother hen was sitting on her eggs. One by one, the baby chicks began to hatch, leaving their empty shells behind. One, two, three, four . . . twelve chicks had hatched, but the last egg still had not cracked open.

 The hen did not know what to do. The chicks were running here and there, and she could not chase after them because she was still sitting on the last egg.

 Finally there was a tiny sound. The baby chick was pecking at its egg from the inside. The hen quickly helped it break open the shell, and at last the thirteenth chick came out into the world.

 Yet this was no ordinary chick. He had only one wing, only one leg, only one eye, and only half as many feathers as the other chicks.

 It was not long before everyone at the ranch knew that a very special chick had been born.

 The ducks told the turkeys. The turkeys told the pigeons. The pigeons told the swallows. And the swallows flew over the fields, spreading the news to the cows grazing peacefully with their calves, the fierce bulls, and the swift horses.

 Soon the hen was surrounded by animals who wanted to see the strange chick.

 0ne of the ducks said, “But he only has one wing!”

 And one of the turkeys added, “Why, he’s only a . . . half-chicken!”

 From then on, everyone called him Half-Chicken. And Half-Chicken, finding himself at the center of all this attention, became very vain and thought he was very special.

 One day he overheard the swallows, who traveled a great deal, talking about him: “Not even at the court of the viceroy in Mexico City is there anyone so unique.”

 Then Half-Chicken decided that it was time for him to leave the ranch. Early one morning he said his farewells, announcing:

 “Good-bye, good-bye! I’m off to Mexico City to see the court of the viceroy!”

 And hip hop hip hop, off he went, hippety-hopping along on his only foot.

 Half-Chicken had not walked very far when he found a stream whose waters were blocked by some branches.

 “Good morning, Half-Chicken. Would you please move the branches that are blocking my way?” asked the stream.

 Half-Chicken moved the branches aside. But when the stream suggested that he stay awhile and take a swim, he answered:

 “I have no time to lose,

 I’m off to Mexico City

 To see the court of the viceroy!”

 And hip hop, hip hop, off he went, hippety-hopping along on his only foot.

 A little while later, Half-Chicken found a small fire burning between some rocks. The fire was almost out.

 “Good morning, Half-chicken. Please, fan me a little with your wing, for I am about to go out,” asked the fire.

 Half-Chicken fanned the fire with his wing, and it blazed up again. But when the fire suggested that he stay awhile and warm up, he answered:

 “I have no time to lose,

 I’m off to Mexico City

 To see the court of the viceroy!”

 And hip hop, hip hop, off he went, hippety-hopping along on his only foot.

 After he had walked a little farther, Half-Chicken found the wind tangled in some bushes.

 “Good morning, Half-Chicken. Would you please untangle me, so that I an go on my way?” asked the wind.

 Half-Chicken untangled the branches. But when the wind suggested that he stay and play, and offered to help him fly here and there like a dry leaf, he answered:

 “I have no time to lose,

 I’m off to Mexico City

 To see the court of the viceroy!”

 And hip hop, hip hop, off he went, hippety-hopping along on his only foot. At last he reached Mexico City.

 Half-Chicken crossed the enormous Great Plaza. He passed the stalls laden with meat, fish, vegetables, fruit, cheese, and honey. He passed the market where all kinds of beautiful things were sold. Finally, he reached the gate of the viceroy’s palace.

 “Good afternoon,” said Half-Chicken to the guards in fancy uniforms who stood in front of the palace. “I’ve come to see the viceroy.”

 One of the guards began to laugh. The other one said, “You’d better go in around the back and through the kitchen.”

 So Half-Chicken went, hip hop hip hop, around the palace and to the kitchen door.

 The cook who saw him said, “What luck! This chicken is just what I need to make soup for the vicereine.” And the cook threw Half-Chicken into a kettle of water that was sitting on the fire.

 When Half-Chicken felt how hot the water was, he said, “Oh, fire, help me! Please don’t burn me.”

 The fire answered, “You helped me when I needed help. Now it’s my turn to help you. Ask the water to jump on me and put me out.”

 Then Half-Chicken asked the water, “Oh, water, help me! Please jump on the fire and put him out, so he won’t burn me.”

 The water answered, “You helped me when I needed help. Now it’s my turn to help you.” And he jumped on the fire and put him out.

 When the cook returned, he saw that the water had spilled and the fire was out.

 “This chicken has been more trouble than he’s worth!” exclaimed the cook. “Besides, one of the ladies-in-waiting just told me that the vicereine doesn’t want any soup. She wants to eat nothing but salad.”

 And he picked Half-Chicken up by his only leg and flung him out the window.

 When Half-Chicken was tumbling through the air, he called out: “Oh wind, help me please.”

 The wind answered, “You helped me when I needed help. Now it’s my turn to help you.”

 And the wind blew fiercely. He lifted Half-Chicken higher and higher, until the little rooster landed on one of the towers of the palace.

 “From there you can see everything you want, Half-Chicken, with no danger of ending up in the cooking pot.”

 And from that day on, weathercocks have stood on their only leg, seeing everything that happens below, and pointing whichever way their friend the wind blows.