

CHRISTINE VON HAGEN

CHICO

OF THE ANDES


The Good and the Beautiful
CURRICULUM

For use with the Level 5 Language Arts course

CONTENTS

Chico	1
Without a Name.....	14
Search through the Past	27
Search.....	46
A Discovery.....	51
Return	58
The Fine Straw Hat.....	67
How Panama Hats Came to Cuenca	80
In the Potato Field.....	87
Chico Goes to Cuenca.....	97
Cuenca.....	105
In the Night	118
The Panama Hat Fair	122
In the Cathedral	131
The Fiesta	142
The Discovery	154
Chico Decides	164
Return to the Paramos.....	172

One

CHICO

“Old Man! Old Man, here he comes! He is here!” a boyish voice shouted.

A young boy with a round, brown-skinned face and short, stocky body jumped up from the doorsill of a small stone house. His brown, almost black, eyes sparkled as he leaned inside the door and shouted. Without waiting for an answer, he started to run down the narrow trail toward the distant sound.

An old man, his faded red *poncho* pushed back over one shoulder, came to the door and peered out of smoke-filled eyes across the empty, treeless moors.

“Who is coming? What are you talking about?” he called after the flying figure in the white trousers and tattered *poncho*.

Then, as he listened, there came through the sunlit silence of the Paramos the sharp “clink” of a hoof

striking stone. The old man smiled, and his face crinkled into a thousand tiny lines.

“Don Ernesto!” he exclaimed to himself. By this time, the boy was far away.

A line of mules climbed up over the hill. One after another they came into sight, each loaded with two big sacks. Behind the last one walked a strong, sturdy man, dressed in white trousers, a *poncho*, and a straw hat. In his hand he carried a stick, which he shook at the animals as he shouted, “*Anda, mulas—get on.*”

When he saw the boy waiting for him on the rocky trail, the *arriero* waved his stick in greeting. A broad smile spread over his square, weather-beaten face, and he called, “*Hola—hola*, Chico. How are you? And how is the old man?”

“Well, Don Ernesto. We are both well,” the boy answered, dancing up and down happily.

With encouraging shouts, Chico helped the muleteer drive his animals on up the trail. At the grass-thatched stone hut, the mules stopped and waited patiently to be unloaded, their tired heads drooping almost to the ground. The old man and the muleteer embraced each other.

“Well, and how are you, Don Ernesto?” asked the old man. “We had given you up this year. Is it not so, Chico?”

“*Sí, sí*,” the boy laughed. “We thought you were not

coming at all, Don Ernesto.”

“You cannot be rid of an old mountain *arriero* so easily, Don Fernando,” exclaimed Ernesto loudly. “No, things did not go well with my mules. Their hooves broke off from so much rain, and I had to wait until they grew back again. But I have a fine cargo here for the mines at Zaruma, so I have lost nothing,” he said, slapping the bulging sacks of corn.

The man blew out his breath in a whistle and wiped his face with his sleeve. Then he turned toward the boy and looked at him carefully: first the tough, bare feet and sturdy legs, then the strong little body and the brown face and merry dark eyes. He saw the deep cleft in the firm chin and the straight black hair, which kept falling over his eyes. As usual, when he was excited, Chico was tugging at his stained trousers as though he thought they would fall off. The *arriero*’s eyes twinkled.

“Well, Chico, you are still small, eh? You never grow, it seems.” He winked at the old man.

Chico laughed. This was an old joke between them. Because his name meant *little*, Don Ernesto pretended that he never grew. But Grandfather was always complaining that he grew so fast that he could not keep him in trousers.

Just then, Chan, Chico’s pet bear, wandered out of the house. He stopped to stretch his short legs and

yawned until they could see down into his pink throat. Then he turned his head to one side and stared out of his fur-encircled eyes. The dark fur made him look as if he had spectacles on, and his name, most appropriately, meant "spectacled bear."

"*Caramba!* What is that?" Don Ernesto jumped back as though he were afraid of the little animal.

"This is Chan," Chico answered proudly. He stooped down and picked up the little bear. Chan stuck out a rough pink tongue and licked the boy's cheek.

"Where did you get him?" The *arriero* touched the bear with one finger as though he expected him to bite.

"I found him on the Paramos," Chico said excitedly. "One day, when I was out there, I heard a crying noise behind a rock. When I looked, there was Chan. Oh, he was wild then." The boy held up one arm and showed a red scar. "When I tried to pick him up, he scratched me and bit my hand. But I wrapped my *poncho* around him and carried him home. He is tame now and follows me everywhere. Does he not, Grandfather?"

"*Sí, sí.* He is not a bad little fellow," the old man answered. The *arriero* resumed his conversation with the old man. He was eager to tell him of his hard trip up the mountain.

"*Ai-ya.* What a trip! Never have I seen such trails.

The mud came to here.” He measured half up his leg. “And the rain, I thought it would never end.”

“It was that way here for a while. But now the weather is fine.” The old man waved toward the sky that looked like a blue bowl turned upside down on the towering crags of the Andes. “The trail on the other side of the mountains will be fine,” he added.

Chico was as polite as Grandfather had taught him to be. While the men talked, he stood by quietly. Still, he could not help glancing out of the corner of his eye at the saddlebags, stuffed with packages, that hung over the cargo of the last mule. Usually, Don Ernesto brought him a present from Cuenca.

At last, Chico could stand his curiosity no longer. He slipped to the saddlebag and prodded it. He could feel something hard and something soft.

“Chico.” Don Ernesto’s voice boomed over the quiet Paramos.

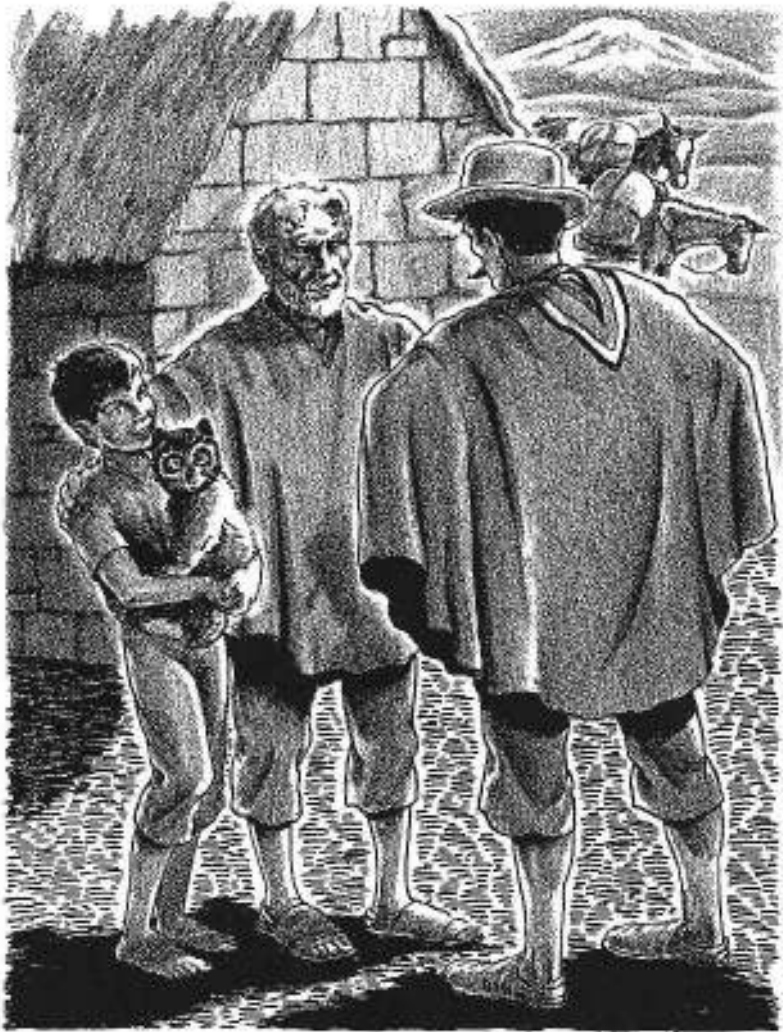
Chico jumped guiltily.

The two men laughed.

“Do me the favor of bringing that bag here, Chico,” called the muleteer.

Chico stood on tiptoe to pull down the double bags, woven of white cotton and decorated with little colored figures of animals. He carried them to the house.

Don Ernesto made a great fuss over the packages. He knew how lonesome it must be for these two who



"Ai-ya. What a trip! Never have I seen such trails."

lived high in the Andes, far from any town. He always looked forward to staying the night with them and taking a present, especially for Chico.

First, he pulled out some round brown cakes of sugar wrapped in dry corn husks. He handed these to the old man and said, "Here is something to sweeten your coffee, old man."

Then he pulled out a long bundle and gave it to Chico. His eyes twinkled as he said, "Some fine new straw to weave your hats, Chico. Plenty of it."

Chico made a face, and Don Ernesto laughed. But Grandfather frowned. He did not like it that the boy should take no interest in hat weaving. True, the boy worked at it, but his thoughts were always somewhere else.

Don Ernesto pulled out a pair of *alpargatas*, white cotton sandals with rope soles. Chico smiled. That was a real present. His old ones had fallen apart months ago.

Then there was a small book with colored pictures in it. Chico took it eagerly. Grandfather would teach him to read it.

When he saw the paper package of hard pink candy, he exclaimed, "*Gracias*, Don Ernesto. *Muchas gracias*."

Chico never had enough sweet things to eat.

When they had their presents, Grandfather turned

toward the house. He paused to pick up the half-woven hat on which Chico had been working when Don Ernesto arrived. Then he went inside to make coffee for his tired friend.

Chico helped to unload the mules and pile the sacks and saddles under the long thatch of the roof. When the mules were free, they wriggled their skin back and forth and then lay down to roll on the hard earth.

Grandfather called from the house, "The coffee is ready, *amigo*. Chico, take the mules out and hobble them before it gets dark."

Chico nodded and picked up the rope on the lead mule. He started back down the trail that led across the Paramos. Halfway down it, he turned up the hill and away from the trail and led them toward the place where the ichu grass grew longest.

On the hillside, Chico looked back at the little house crouched close to the gray-green earth. Behind it was a small potato field, the green leaves and purple flowers waving in the afternoon wind. All around the lonely house rose the high rocky mountain peaks, which cut jaggedly into the blue sky. Below them, spread out like a fan, was the treeless, barren Paramos.

The little figure of Chan trotted down the trail. Chico waved the end of the rope at him.

"Go home, Chan. Go home," he called.

But Chan paid no attention. Keeping out of reach of the rope, he circled the boy and ran after the mules. In a few seconds, he had them scattered all over the hillside.

Chico made angry sounds at the bear as he ran after the animals. Just when he wanted to get through quickly and go back to listen to the men talking, Chan had to be a bother!

As soon as Chico caught a mule, he tied its lead rope between its legs to hobble it. Not that it would make much difference, for before morning the mules would have hobbled far away.

Chan lost interest in the mules and went off to explore the long ichu grass. Suddenly he began to whine and bark as he did when he was excited. Chico looked toward him.

“What is it, Chan?”

The bear often found something. Sometimes, however, he just barked to make his master pay more attention to him.

Chico walked toward him. When he reached the tall clump of grass, there was a sudden whirl of wings. A little bird, no larger than Chico’s smallest finger, fluttered out of the grass. Although it was tiny, it was covered with golden-green feathers that made it gleam like a jewel in the sunlight. A long tail, five times as long as its body, streamed behind.

“*Qué linda!*” the boy exclaimed.

Chico watched the little hummingbird, its tiny wings beating the air. He thought of how Grandfather had told him that once, many hundreds of years ago, the rulers of the ancient people of the Andes had made long cloaks from the tiny feathers of the hummingbird. It made him feel sad to think of so many little birds killed just to make a cloak.

But still, the bird fluttered close by. Chico hurried toward the grass and parted it. Just as he had thought! A tiny, tiny nest hung near the top of the coarse grass. Two little eggs were in it.

Chan had been whining excitedly. Now he ran up and began to scratch at the grass.

“For shame, Chan,” Chico scolded him. “Do you want to tear up the nest?”

That was just what the little bear wanted to do.

Chico caught hold of his pet. How could he keep him away until he had finished hobbling the mules? The piece of rope he held in his hand gave him an idea. He tied the rope around the bear’s neck. Then, walking a good distance away so that the mother bird would not be frightened, he fastened the bear to a clump of grass.

“Ha ha,” he laughed down at the disappointed Chan, “that will keep you from hurting the poor little bird.”

CHICO

OF THE ANDES

High in the rugged Andes of Ecuador, ten-year-old Chico works hard and lives happily with his grandfather and his pet bear, Chan. By firelight, Grandfather tells Chico amazing stories about the Inca and the other ancient people who once inhabited their land. Chico has always felt a close connection to the mountains, his *tierra*—that is, until he discovers he is an orphan, found out on the moors, and that his grandfather is merely a kind stranger who took Chico in as a baby. Shocked and confused, Chico determines to travel to the city, leaving behind his beloved mountains, to track down his lost family and discover who he truly is.

