

The Native Lawyer

Rudolfo Anaya

After many years of not seeing each other, two friends met at a village fiesta. Manuel invited Rufo to come to his home for breakfast the following morning.

—I will come if you let me buy the eggs, said Rufo. He insisted and gave Manuel twenty-five pesos to buy a dozen eggs.

Manuel bought the eggs, and the next morning his wife boiled them for breakfast. They waited a long time for Rufo to arrive, and finally decided he wasn't coming, so they ate the eggs.

Manuel didn't feel right about eating the eggs his friend had paid for, so he went out and bought a dozen eggs.

—Put these eggs under one of our hens, he told his wife. When the chicks are born we won't sell them, and when they are chickens and lay eggs we will raise more chicks. Half of everything that is produced from this dozen eggs, I will give to my friend Rufo.

A dozen chicks were born and when they were grown they began to lay eggs. Manuel sold some of the eggs and set the money aside. The rest of the eggs he allowed to hatch. Soon he had the most thriving business in the country. And always, he put aside half of his earnings to give to Rufo.

With the money he made from the egg business he bought many ranches, cows, and sheep. He became the richest man in the entire Rio Arriba region of the Rio Grande valley. He told everyone that all his riches had come from the eggs Rufo had given him, and when he saw his friend again he would give him half of everything he had earned.

Finally the news reached Rufo that Manuel had grown exceedingly rich, and that everything he had earned came from the eggs he had bought for breakfast long ago. He saddled his horse and rode off to visit Manuel.

—I am glad to see you, said Manuel. Do you remember the twenty-five pesos you gave me to buy eggs? I bought them and boiled them, but since you didn't show up for breakfast my wife and I ate them.

—How did you become so rich? asked Rufo.

—I bought another dozen eggs, and from those I made a fortune. I made a promise that I would give you half of anything I earned.

Rufo shook his head.

—If all this wealth came from the money I gave you, then everything belongs to me.

Manuel was surprised.

—That's not fair, he replied. I've worked hard to accumulate this wealth. I'll give you half and that way both of us profit.

—No, said an angry Rufo, it all belongs to me! And if you don't sign it over to me I'll take you to court!

Rufo went off in search of a lawyer. He found two who said they would represent him in a suit if he gave them half of all he was awarded by a judge. Rufo agreed and the two attorneys brought a suit against Manuel.

Soon the entire region was talking about the case. Everyone thought Rufo would win. Manuel tried to find a lawyer who would represent him, but none were willing.

One day as he sat contemplating his fate, Salvador, an Indian neighbor who lived in a nearby pueblo, walked by.

—How are you, *vecino*? asked Salvador. You look very sad. Tell me, what's the matter.

—There's too much to tell, replied Manuel, and nothing you can do to help.

—I'm your neighbor, maybe I can help.

—What I need is a good lawyer, but I can't find one. Tomorrow I have to appear in court. I'm afraid I'm going to lose everything I own.

—How did this happen? asked Salvador, and Manuel told him the entire story.

—Oh, compadre, I think I can persuade the judge to rule in your favor. How much will you pay me?

Manuel was surprised. How could an uneducated Indian win his case?

—I would pay you fifty pesos.

—No, that's too much. Give me a bushel of corn.

—If you win you deserve more, said Manuel. Thank you, neighbor.

—Oh, and bring a pot of cooked *habas*, those beans I like so much.

Manuel thought that Salvador wanted the beans for lunch, so the following morning he was ready. When Salvador arrived he wrapped the pot of fresh baked beans in a serape and off they went.

The courthouse was packed with people. Everyone wanted to know if Manuel had found a lawyer to represent him, but they saw him arrive with only Salvador at his side.

—Is he your attorney? a man asked.

—Yes, answered Manuel.

Everyone laughed, thinking the Indian could never beat Rufo's two educated lawyers.

When the judge entered he looked at Salvador and shook his head. He asked Manuel if he had a lawyer.

—Yes, replied Manuel, Salvador is my attorney.

Laughter broke out again. Salvador had lifted the lid from the pot and was eating beans. An illiterate Indian eating beans could hardly be a good attorney.

The judge banged his gavel and called for the first of Rufo's lawyers to present his case, which he did very eloquently. Then the second lawyer rose and finished by saying if all of Manuel's fortune came from the eggs purchased by Rufo's twenty-five pesos then the fortune belonged to Rufo. When he had presented the argument he sat down.

All the time Salvador was dipping into the pot and eating beans.

—It is your turn, don Salvador, said the judge sarcastically.

—Father Judge, said Salvador, I ask the court to lend me a piece of land so I can plant a crop.

—Is that all you have to say? asked the exasperated judge.

—Oh, I have to ask Manuel what he did with the eggs he bought with the twenty-five pesos?

Manuel rose and said,

—My wife boiled the eggs and we ate them.

Then Salvador asked Rufo if he had told Manuel to prepare the eggs for breakfast.

—Yes, replied Rufo. I told him to cook the eggs for breakfast.

Salvador turned to the judge. I ask your honor to lend me a piece of land to farm.

—The court is not in the business of lending farmland! exclaimed the judge. I'm tired of you asking the silly question. Is that the only defense you have?

—Yes, your honor. I can only ask the court to lend me a piece of land to farm.

By this time the judge had decided the Indian was crazy, and so it would be best to humor him.

—And what would you plant on the land? he asked.

Salvador reached into the pot and pulled out a handful of beans.

—I would plant these beans, he said.

—You are crazy! replied the judge. Those beans won't grow! They've been cooked.

—Yes, said Salvador, just as the dozen eggs Manuel bought with the money were boiled. Nothing could come from those eggs.

The surprised judge nodded. Salvador had made his point.

—What you say is true. No further product could have come from the boiled eggs, and so I must rule that Manuel keeps his property. The court is adjourned.

Manuel went home that night with his good neighbor Salvador, leaving everyone in awe of the native lawyer. His common sense had beaten the educated lawyers.