

# CHIQUITA THE FEATHERLESS CHICK

By

Felix Mayerhofer

Miguel, who lived in a rural area of Mexico, was skipping stones across a bubbling brook, while his dog Palo chased butterflies. Just as Miguel was about to throw another stone, a small red fox came charging through the brush, startling both Miguel and Palo! The fox was just as surprised which caused him to drop the object he was carrying in his mouth. Palo had taken off after the intruder, but stopped short when he saw the fox had left his catch behind.

Gently picking up the fox's prey, Palo carried it to Miguel and dropped it at his feet. Miguel couldn't believe his eyes! There lying in front of him was a sad looking baby chick with absolutely no feathers, not even one!

"What are we going to do with you?" Miguel said, as he picked up the shivering chick, and placed it inside his white cotton shirt to keep it warm. "We'll take it to Mama, she'll know what to do!" He hurried to his families white adobe hut, surrounded by colorful flowers and a small vegetable garden.

Mama Gomez was walking in from the garden as Miguel arrived home, and was speechless when he handed her the chick. He explained how Palo had rescued it from a fox. She lovingly cradled the chick against her chest. "Poor little baby," she said, placing it in a flat box under the wood-burning stove to get warm.

"I think I'm going to call it Chiquita," said Miguel.

"That's a good name for the little one," his mother answered.

After getting nice and toasty, Chiquita waddled out from under the stove, making herself at home. She instantly fell in love with Mama Gomez and cheeped, cheep-cheep-cheep, following the warm-hearted mother everywhere.

As the day came to an end, Mama Gomez said, "You're making me work too hard," Chiquita? "I can't have you soiling the house." Finding an old piece of red cloth she'd saved, she decided to make little diapers, knowing there would be many changes during the course of a day. Chiquita loved the diapers because they warmed her tummy. She cheeped, cheep-cheep-cheep happily all day long.

Chiquita liked the little tidbits of food Mama Gomez gave her as she prepared dinner, and soon felt like one of the family. The contented chick would hop on Miguel's lap, cheep cheeping away until he placed chopped up corn kernels into her wide-open beak. "Chiquita!" said Miguel, "you're going to get fat and spoiled if you keep eating like this!"

Palo didn't like it when Chiquita drank from his dog dish. He'd bark, give her a nudge with his nose, shoving her all around the room. She thought this was a wonderful game

As time passed Chiquita grew and beautiful feathers began to unfold. Instead of the cheep-cheep-cheep, she was beginning to get the cluck-cluck-cluck of a chicken.

"We're going to have to do something before she grows any larger," said Papa Gomez. The next day he and Miguel built a new chicken coop. After completing the job, they left for town and returned with a large cage holding three hens and a rooster. They released the chickens into the new coop.

With tears in her eyes, Mama Gomez removed Chiquita's diaper for the last time. "I think Chiquita will enjoy her new friends," said Papa Gomez, as Mama Gomez led the lovely bird to her new home. At the sight of the other chickens she ruffled her new feathers and walked cheerfully into the coop!

Chiquita clucked happily as she settled into her new nest. The day was near when she would repay *Mama Gomez* and her family for their love and care, with a big supply of large fresh eggs.