

the Half ROO STER

An Albanian Folk Tale
rewritten and illustrated by
Phillip Martin



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Children's Books by Phillip Martin

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The Half Rooster
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The Frog Princess
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A Show of Hands
A Pack of Lies
Once Upon East Africa
The Kitty Cat Cried
The Paramount Chief and One Wise Woman

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Dedicated to
vita, HAXHI, juliana
and taulant

I first arrived in Albania shortly after it opened up to the West. In those days there were no travel books or Internet searches. The border crossing was just that. A crossing. No signs of civilization, no restaurants, and no hotels welcomed me at the border. There were few cars back then. The main form of transportation was by donkey cart. And, I arrived at night with no idea where to go.

I was told the closest hotel was in Gjirokaster, 20 miles away. A taxi driver had a hotel business card that said, "We speak English." It was good enough for me. That was how I met the Kotonis family. Their home was a two hundred-year-old Ottoman building that over-looked the old town. The family exuded so much Albanian hospitality and warmth that I decided to stay an extra day in Gjirokaster.

During my stay, I signed their guestbook. However, I didn't just sign it. I drew the skyline of the old city as seen from their front porch. Nobody ever did that before, and I wasn't forgotten.

Fourteen years later . . .

Taulant, the family son, found my website. Now living in the USA (and certainly no longer eight), he said his parents still thought fondly of me and showed off my drawing to any and all guests who came to their now expanded guest house. I decided it was time to go back to Albania and make another drawing in their guestbook.

As it turns out, I've visited the Kotonis four times -- two of them were muraling adventures. Every time I return, it is like coming home to family. I look forward to the day when I can go back to Albania for my fifth family reunion.

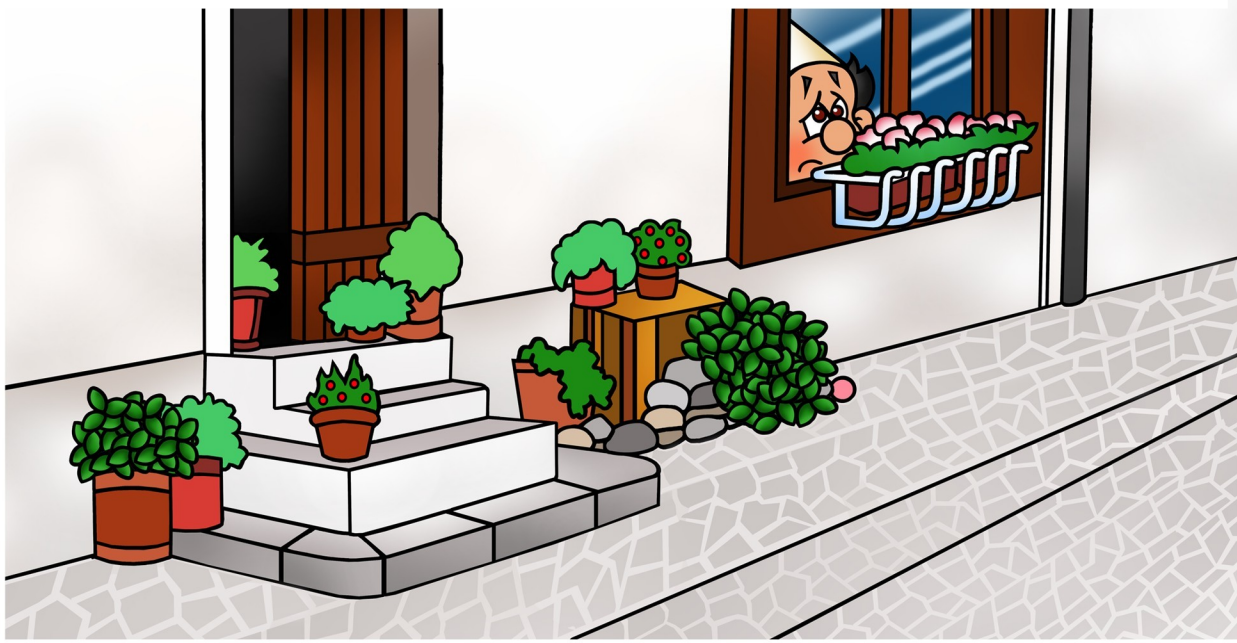
Faleminderit, Kotonis.

"You lazy, old man!" cried the old woman. "If you weren't so lazy, maybe, just maybe, we'd live in a nice home and have plenty to eat. I'm so tired of being poor and so tired of you!"

The old man was tired of being called lazy. In fact, he was just tired of the sound of his wife's voice. "If you're that unhappy, why don't you just take your half of everything and go?"

"What a wonderful idea!" snapped the old woman. "That's the best thing you've said to me in years!"

Of course, it wasn't hard for the old couple to divide their possessions. They only owned a cat and a rooster. The old woman grabbed the cat and stormed out the door and away from her husband. "At least with the cat," she thought, "he'll catch me some birds, and I'll have something to cook. That old rooster won't catch anything and certainly can't lay any eggs."







The old woman was right about that, too. Her poor, old husband had nothing to eat. So, of course, he grew hungry. Finally, he said to his rooster, "I'm sorry, my friend, but I don't have a lot of choices right now. That means I'm going to have to eat you."

"Awkkkk!" cried the rooster. "No! You can't be serious!"

"Oh, but I am," replied the old man as he sharpened his axe. "I really don't have a choice."

The rooster lowered his head and said, "I understand, but I don't like it one little bit."



The axe was really sharp, so the old man easily sliced the rooster right down the middle. He cooked one half of the bird, but the other half he decided to keep as a pet. From that day on, everyone called him "Half Rooster".

It wasn't too hard for Half Rooster to hop around on one leg. However, he knew that if he stayed with his poor master, the old man would someday get hungry again. "I don't want to be here the next time that man wants a meal. I better go seek my fortune out in the world. After I earn enough gold, then I can safely come back home."

The first place he hopped to was the edge of the pond. When Half Rooster saw his friend the frog on the lily pad, he crowed, "I'm off for my fortune. I'm off for fame. And since you're my friend, why don't you do the same?"

Frog didn't need to be asked twice. "Let's both see the world. Let's both have some fun. A journey with two friends is better than one." And so, the frog jumped off his lily pad and swam over to his friend. He snuggled up in a comfortable place, just under Half Rooster's wing and on top of his belly.

Half Rooster continued on his walk, or hop, until he came upon Fox. Even from his seat up on the rocks, he saw a green foot sticking out from under Half Rooster's wing. "Is that Frog who I see under your wing?" asked the fox. "Whatever are you up to?"

