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### THE FLAMINGOS' STOCKINGS

Horacio Quiroga

Imprimir

A Uruguayan writer, Horacio Quiroga was born in Salto, Uruguay, in 1878 and died in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1937. Though born and raised in Uruguay, he spent most of his life in Argentina. His short stories are ranked among the best in Latin America.



Once upon a time, the **snakes** decided to offer a great party. They invited the **toads**, the **frogs**, the **flamingos**, the **alligators** and the **fish**. All the guests tried to look their best for the occasion: the alligators wore banana **necklaces** and smoked Paraguayan cigars; the toads had fish **scales** all over their bodies and the frogs smelled of perfume and **hung** a firefly from their neck.

But the most beautiful of them all were undoubtedly the snakes, each one of them wore a skirt matching her own color. They were dressed in red, green, yellow and grey.

Only the flamingos, who at that time had white legs, did not look happy. Since they had little intelligence, they **did not fancy** what to wear to look their best. They **envied** everybody else's **attire**, specially that of the coral snakes. They turned green with envy every time one the snakes walked in front of them, swinging their gauze veils.

One of the flamingos then said:

– I know what we're going to do. We are going to put on red, white and black **stockings**, and then the snakes will fall in love with us.

So they all flew across the river and tried asking in different stores, but the answer was always the same:

– Are you out of your mind? There are no stockings in those colors. We haven't got any such stockings.

They knocked at every door of every store they **found** unsuccessfully, until the "tatú", a bird from the surroundings who happened to be drinking water from the river, decided to play a trick on them.

After a very polite greeting, he said to the flamingos:

– Good evening, sirs. I know exactly what you're **looking for**. You won't be able to find such stockings in any store over here. Maybe you might find them in Buenos Aires, but you'll have to order them by mail and it will take a long time... My sister-in-law, the **owl**, has got them and I'm sure she will be **willing** to give you those red, white and black stockings.

So the flamingos thanked him and flew to the owl's cave. They told her:

– Good evening, Mrs Owl. We've come to ask you for the red, white and black stockings. Today is the snakes' **ball** and we're sure if we wear those stockings, the snakes will fall in love with us.

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- With pleasure! -answered the owl---I'll be right back.

And she flew away and returned after a while carrying the stockings, which were not really stockings but the skin of some snakes she had just hunted.

- Here you are -she said to them. - Just one thing... you should never **stop dancing**, dance the way you want, the way you can, but never stop dancing, for if you do, you'll be crying instead of dancing.

Being so silly, the flamingos failed to see the danger they were in; they fit in their stockings and flew to the dance happily.

Once they arrived, the rest of the company looked at them in envy. They looked so beautiful that the snakes wanted to dance only with them.

But after a while, the snakes became suspicious. They didn't take their eyes off those stockings. But the flamingos danced on and on although they were dead tired.

The snakes noticed this and asked the frogs for their fireflies to use them as torches and waited for the flamingos to drop off from exhaustion.

A minute later, one of the flamingos **tripped on** an alligator and fell down. The snakes ran to him and lighted his feet with a firefly. She then shouted out so loudy that her voice could be heard all along the Parana River:

- These are not stockings! - We've been cheated! The flamingos have killed our sisters and have used their skin as stockings! Their stockings are nothing but snakes' skin!

On hearing this, the flamingos tried to fly away since they were terribly **scared**, but they were so exhausted that they could not even move. It was then that the snakes got them and began **biting** their legs, tearing off the skins, crawling around their feet.

The flamingos were so much in pain that they jumped off from one side to the other, but the snakes didn't leave them alone till they saw not one bit of the stockings had been left.

Besides, since most of the snakes were poisonous, they thought the flamingos would die from the bites.

But they did not. Only their legs, which had been white before, have remained red from the poison ever since.

This happed a long long time ago but still today, the flamingos must keep their legs in the water all day, for if they walk away, the pain from the **venom** returns and it is so strong that it forces them back into the water. All the fish know about this and they mock the flamingos who take revenge on them by eating every single fish who swims too close to them.

This is the story of how the flamingos, who used to have white legs, now have red ones, and of the price they paid for their foolishness.

**Original title: *Las medias de los flamencos*; Book: *Cuentos de la selva*.**

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**OM PERSONAL thanks Mrs. Rabinovich for her contribution.**

## GLOSSARY

**snake:** limbless reptile (*víbora*)  
**toad:** batrachian, tailless amphibian with long hind limbs for leaping (*sapo*)  
**frog:** tailless amphibian (*rana*)  
**flamingo:** large pink to scarlet bird (*flamenco*)  
**alligator:** amphibious reptile related to crocodiles (*yacaré, caimán*)  
**fish:** irregular plural (*pez / peces*)  
**necklace:** jewelry cord or chain worn about the neck as an ornament (*collar*)  
**scale:** a flattened rigid plate forming part of the body of many animals (*escama*)  
**to hang:** to pend (*colgar*)  
**to hang / hung / hung** (things) (*colgar*)  
**to hang / hanged / hanged** (people) (*ahorcar*)  
**did not fancy:** did not imagine (*no imaginaban, no se les ocurría*)

**envied:** to envy / envied / envied (*envidiaban*)  
**attire:** clothes (*atuendo*)  
**stockings:** cloth coverings the feet and legs (*medias*)  
**found:** to find / found / found (*encontraron*)  
**looking for:** searching; trying to locate or discover (*buscando*)  
**owl:** nocturnal bird of prey (*lechuza*)  
**willing:** disposed or inclined to (*deseosa*)  
**ball:** important dance (*baile*)  
**stop + ing** (*dejar de*)  
**tripped on:** missed a step and fell down (*tropezó con*)  
**scared:** afraid (*asustados*)  
**bite / bit / bitten / biting** (*morder*)  
**poison:** toxin secreted by animals (*veneno*)

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