

TRANQUILINA'S PARADISE



THE DRAWINGS BY
THOMAS HANDFORTH

THE TEXT BY
SUSAN SMITH



ANGELITO PLACIDO

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Chivo, the little deer in the garden of the house at the corner of the Second Street of the Delights, watched the animals going down the cobbled road below the garden wall to the benediction. Once a year, on the seventeenth of January, everyone in the village who owned animals painted them with bright colored stripes and circles and put flowers and ribbons round their necks and led or carried them to the church of the Vera Cruz to be blessed by the priest.

Ramiro the parrot, swinging himself up to the top of a banana palm by the garden wall, watched the procession coming down the



mountain side, too. He could see the priest in the door of the church below, sprinkling holy water over the animals gathered outside. There was a great noise of braying and barking and lowing and neighing. Many doves wheeled over the church towers to see what was going on.



“I hate crowds,” said Chivo to Ramiro, “but I would rather like to be sprinkled with holy water and be sure of going to paradise.”

Ramiro scratched his head with one gray foot.

“Being blessed makes one very smug,” he answered, in his old man’s voice. “Look at the cat next door. She has been so self-satisfied

since she went to the benediction last year that it annoys me even to see her wash her face. I think we must just behave as well as we know how and perhaps we will get to heaven, too.”

Chivo sighed and began eating the hearts out of the lettuces in the garden. He felt rather doubtful. But Ramiro turned his back on the benediction and arranged all his feathers nicely with his yellow bill.

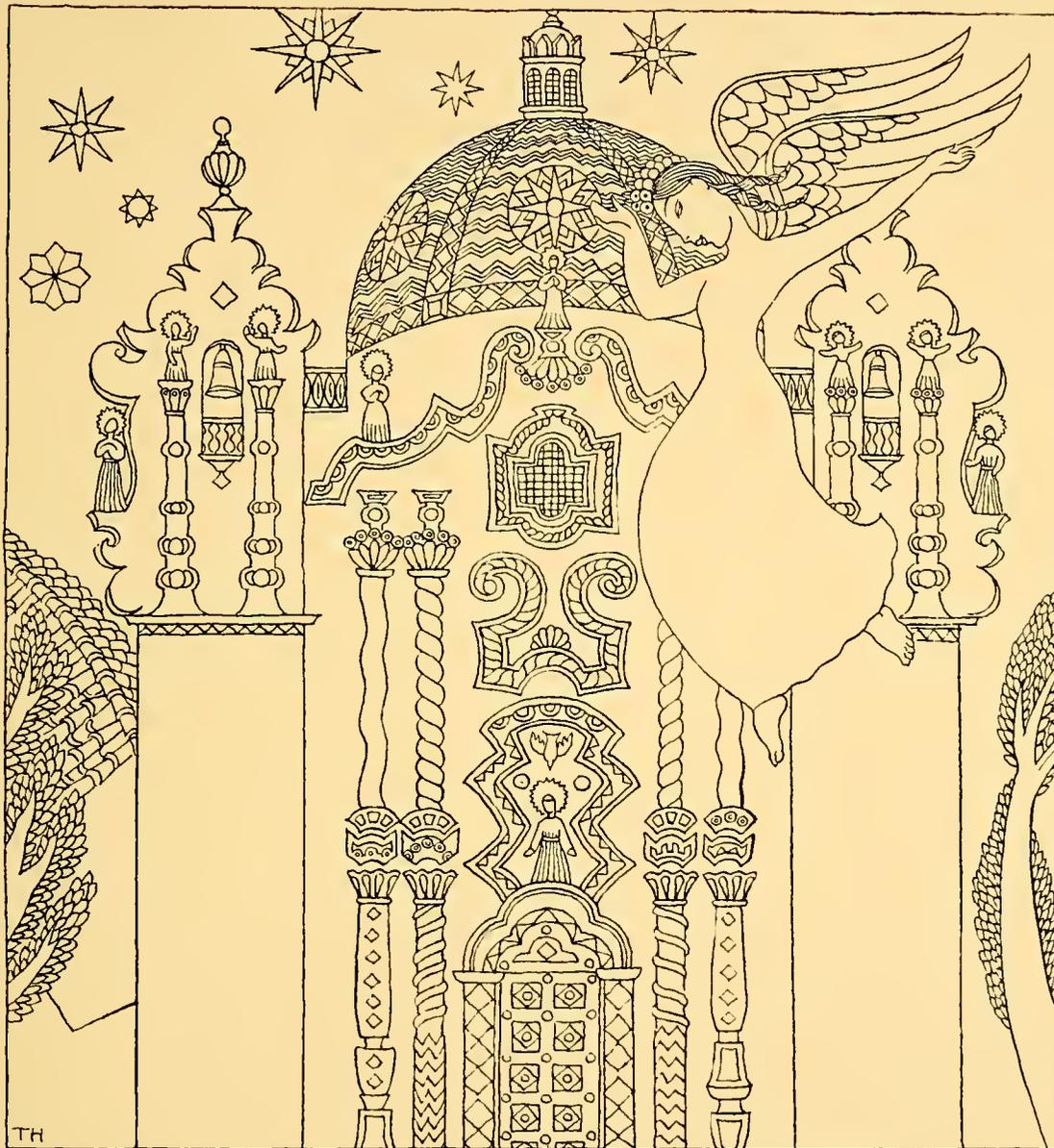


That night it was full moon. Such an enormous silver moon came up over the mountains that the sky was a pale blue and the stars like tiny spangles. Everywhere in the streets it was black and white—white moonlight and black shadows. In the big plaza in front of the cathedral the cobbled street was white, and under the laurel trees in the center it was very dark. In the blackest shadow, on a *petate* at the foot of the trees, slept old Don Pancho, the toy maker, wrapped in his *sarape*. Beside him were the toys he had brought to sell in the market—a shiny black bull with a gold chain and a wreath of red roses, and a large, round, shiny, smooth,



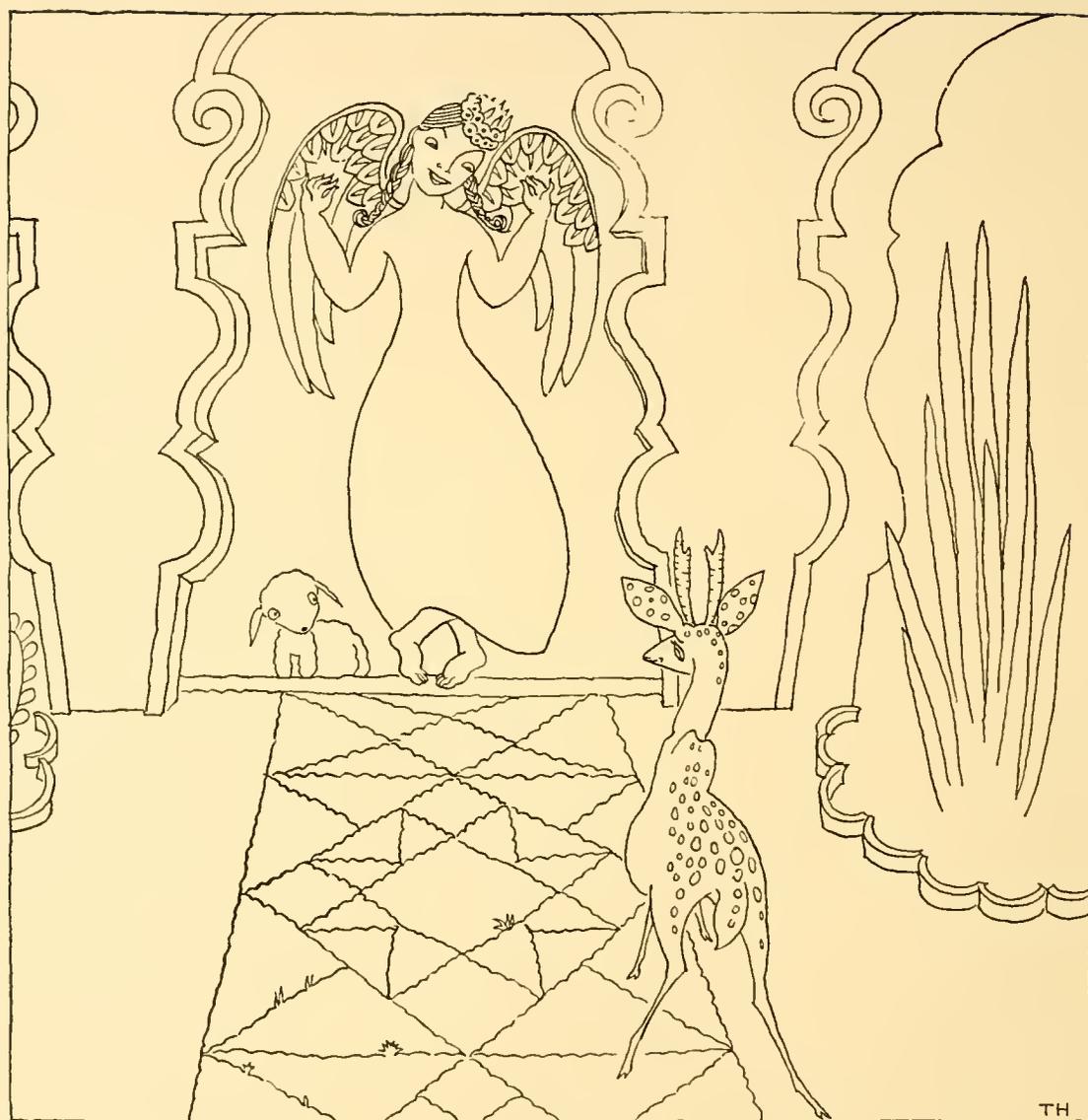


pink pig. Pink, pink, pink like the dawn. There were also some cats and hens and goats and an orange tiger with black polka dots, and a fat horse with a gold saddle on his back and red roses round his neck. And a brown angel with magenta robes and a wreath of gold roses on her dark hair. The angel's name was Tranquilina.



At midnight, when the old bells in the cathedral tower struck the hour, Tranquilina stirred her gold wings and turned her beautiful black eyes toward the mountains.

“Little brothers and sisters,” she said, “you stood here patiently while the other animals were blessed. But now I will take



you to a paradise on earth, if you don't mind a steep path first."

"The path to paradise is always steep," said the pink pig, politely.

So they all set off and just where the cobbled road turned off into a dirt path they came to the corner of the Second Street of the Delights. From the garden of the house where Chivo and Ramiro lived came the delicious sound of running water.



"I'm thirsty," said Tranquilina. "Let's ask for a drink of water."
She knocked at the garden door, and Chivo came and pushed
and pushed it open with his hard little black hooves
"A very good evening to you," said Tranquilina.
"And to you," said Chivo. "*Que vaya bien* (May you go well)."
"*Muchissimas gracias* (A thousand thanks)," answered Tran-

quilina. "And may I have a drink of water, since we are going to paradise and the way is steep?"

Chivo led them to the dark pool in the garden where the water was falling in a little silver stream. The moon was reflected in the pool, wavering like a white balloon.

"What is paradise like?" asked Chivo, as Tranquilina raised her face from drinking.

"It is very much like this garden," said Tranquilina, arranging her wreath of gold roses. "Only one is sure of staying there. Why don't you come with us? Or were you blessed this afternoon?"

"No, I wasn't," said Chivo. "My friend wasn't either. Our master went to Acapulco fishing, and there was no one to take us. I think we would both love to come with you."

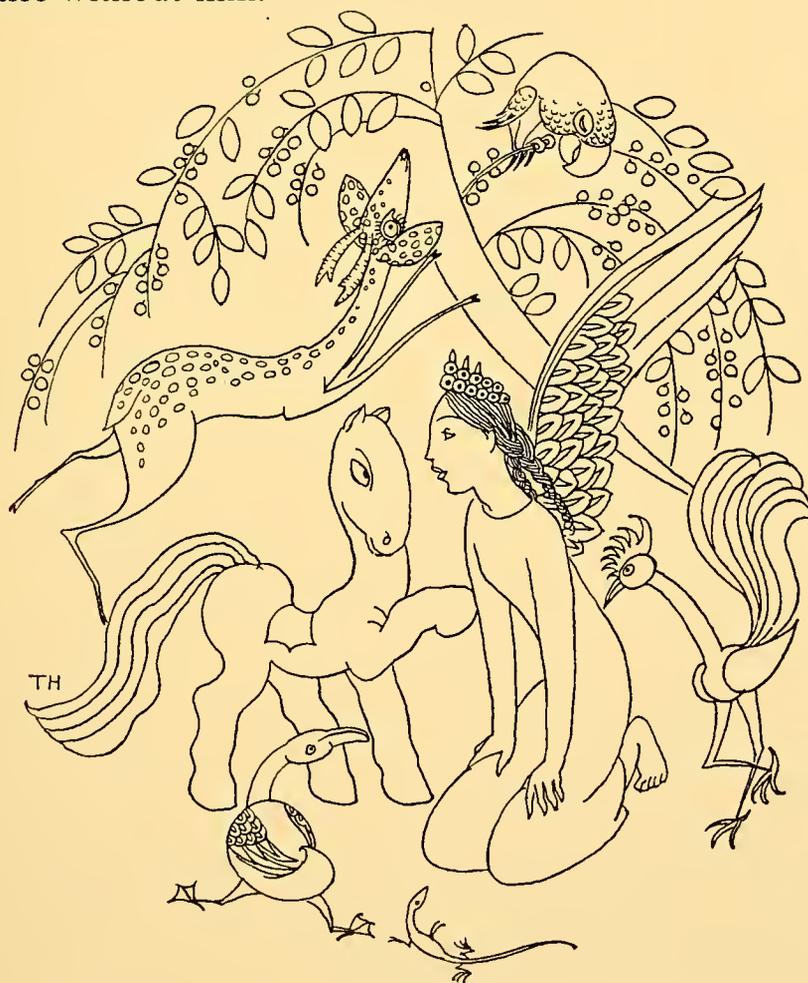


He shook the coffee bush by the pool and there was a sleepy squawk from the branches. But try as they might, they could not waken Ramiro.

“Why don’t we go on and leave him?” asked the fat horse, shaking his gold saddle rather pompously.

Chivo’s large brown eyes looked even more worried and anxious than usual at this suggestion.

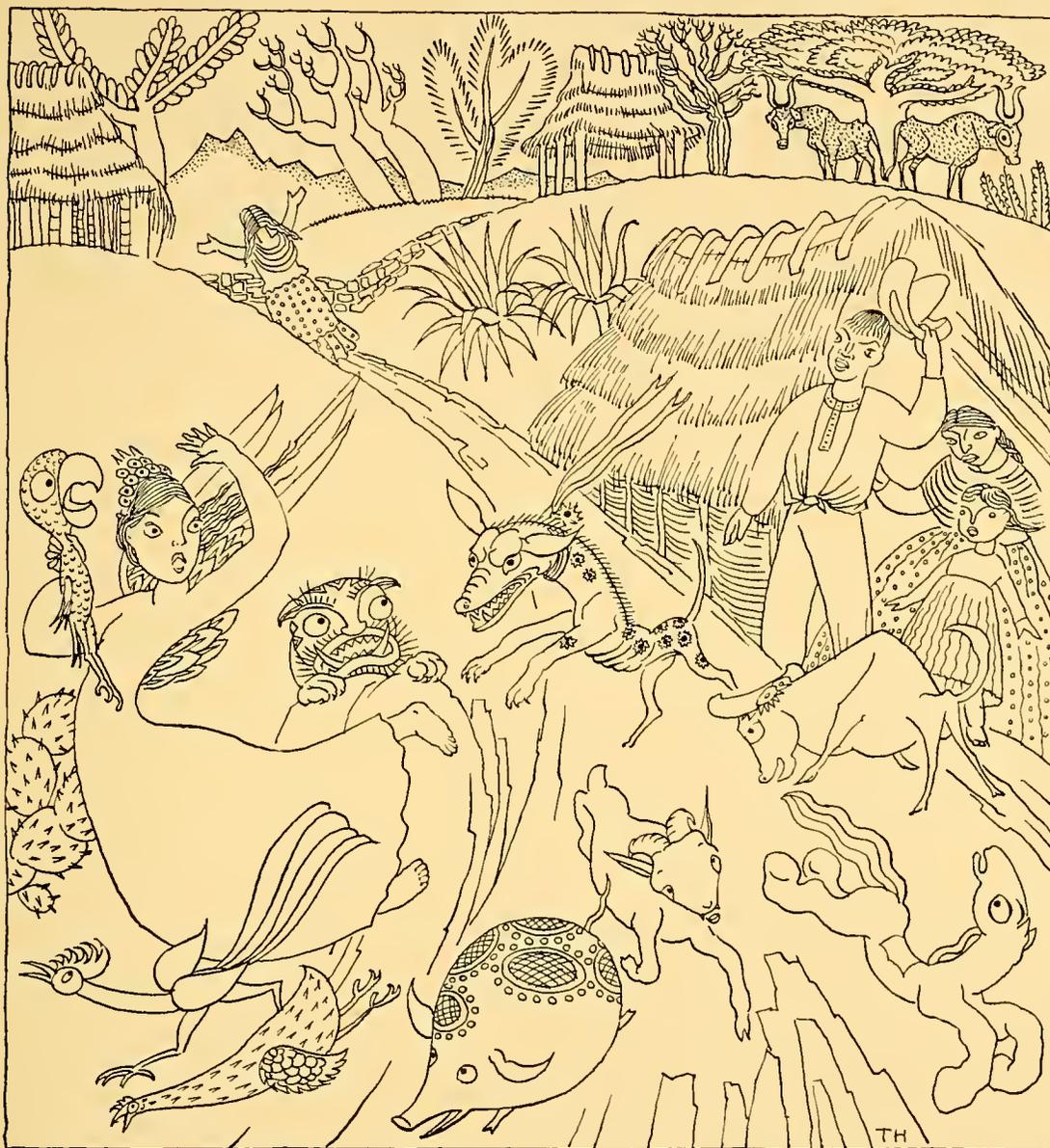
“Well, of course,” he said, “Ramiro was very scornful about the benediction this morning. But I really couldn’t enjoy myself in paradise without him.”





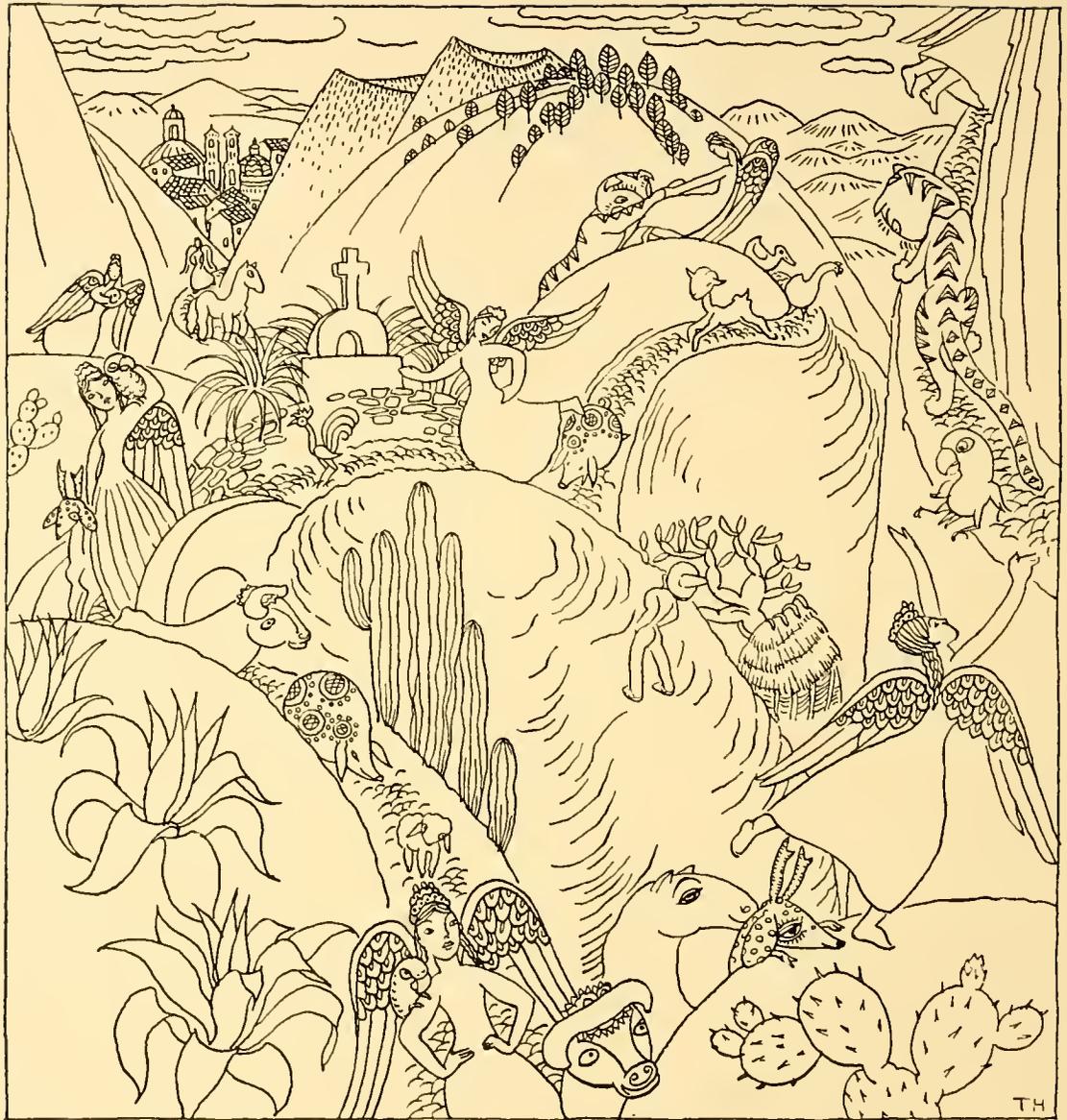
He shook the bush again and Ramiro tumbled down into the path, squawking like an angry hen, but still fast asleep.

“Let’s not waste any more time,” said Tranquilina, a little impatiently. She picked up Ramiro and tucked him in her *reboso*, and they all started out again, Chivo and Tranquilina leading the way.



All went well until they reached a charcoal seller's house, where a very large, fierce dog rushed out and barked at them.

"Only this afternoon," said Tranquilina, "he was blessed. And now he barks at a few pilgrims on their way to paradise! I am afraid the holy water missed him."



At these words the dog looked hard at Tranquilina a moment and then turned and hurried back to the house. They could hear him making a few woofs as he lay down under a maguery.

“Paradise indeed!” he was saying to himself.

They walked on for some hours and the path grew steeper, but at



last they were at the ridge of the mountain. The path turned down on the other side.

The band of pilgrims saw at the bottom of the valley a silver pool in the rocks. Bananas and coffee and papayas grew all around it, and at one side was an orchard of fruit trees in blossom.

Beside that there were great trees with pink blossoms like tassels made of feathers, and there were trees with the white blossoms that the deer come down from the mountains to eat. Close beside the pool hung a great branch of white florefundio flowers, and when their long white bells stirred in the breeze they shook out the true perfume of paradise.

“Well, it’s worth all the climbing, isn’t it?” said Tranquilina as she lay down under the fragrant bush and set Ramiro down beside her. He had grown rather heavy the last mile or so.



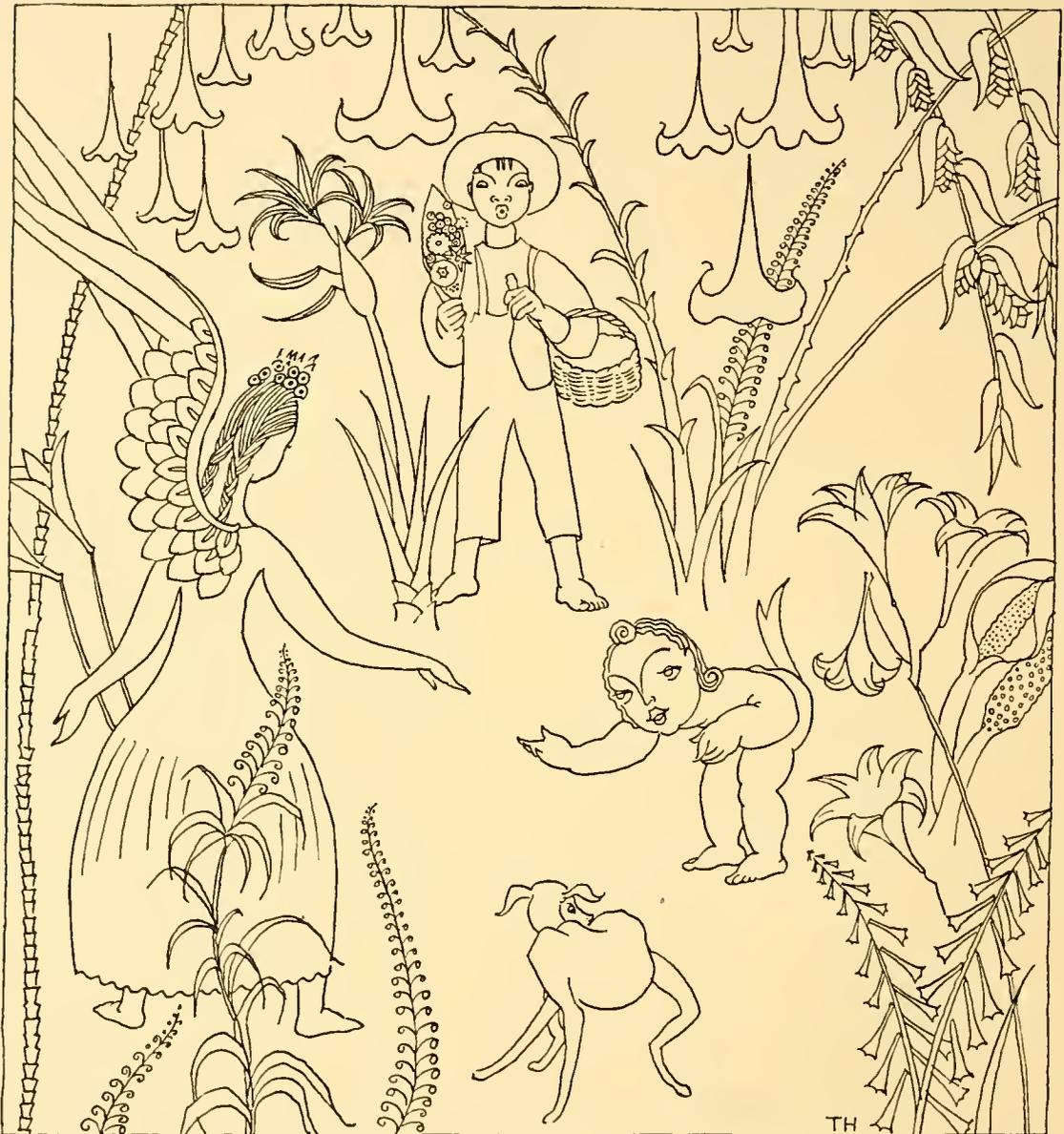
"It couldn't be better," said the pink pig. "Only one thing worries me. What will Don Pancho do for money to buy *tortillas*, now that he no longer has us to sell?"

"Dear me," said Tranquilina, "I never thought of that. I am glad you spoke of it. What shall we do?"

Just then they heard a little cough behind them, and a charming pink cherub with a gold sash glided down from the top of a palm tree.

"Could I be of any service to you?" he said to Tranquilina.





“It seemed too beautiful a night to sleep, so I was just flying from star to star, thinking I might find some one to talk to.”

“*Como se llama Usted, chiquito* (What’s your name, little one)?” asked Tranquilina.

“*Placido el Bonito, a sus ordenes* (Pretty Placido, at your service),” replied the cherub, bowing from his sash.



“Well then, listen, Placido,” said Tranquilina. “*Hace me el favor* (Do me the favor). Do you see that tiny star up there beside the moon that hardly shows at all? Do me the favor to go and ask in heaven if you may give it to Don Pancho to buy *tortillas*. With all the silver that makes a star he could have *tortillas* and *frijoles* for a year.”

The cherub flew away into the blue mist of heaven, but soon they saw him coming back again, flying toward the moon. He took the tiny star and waved it in his hand to show Tranquilina that he had been given permission.

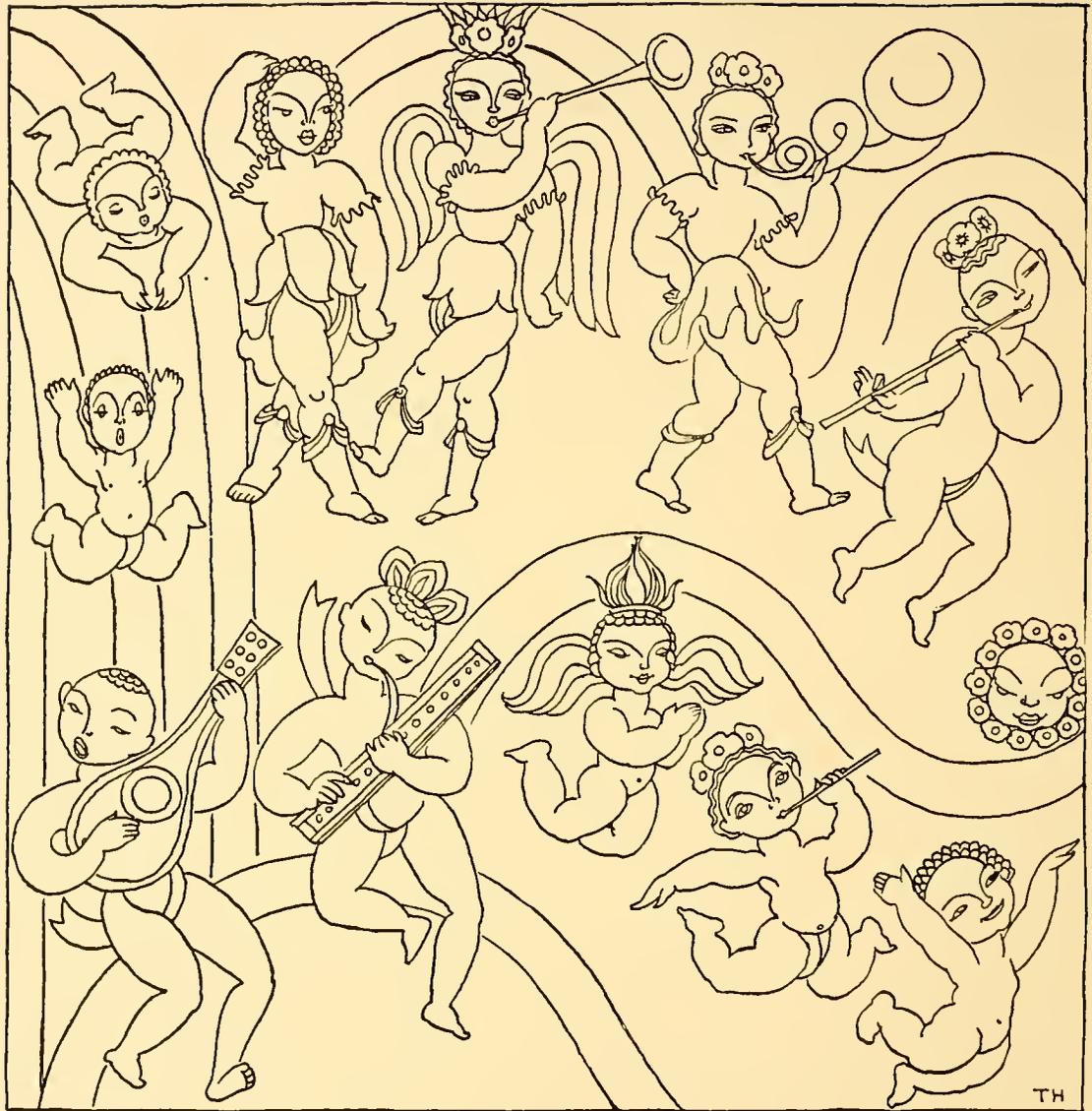
“You had better tie it in his red handkerchief, so it won’t get lost,” Tranquilina called to him as he came nearer.

“You may have all confidence in me,” the cherub answered over his shoulder as he disappeared behind the mountain top in the direction of the plaza.



Suddenly a strange and beautiful light came in the sky—more beautiful than the sunrise or the sunset. And at the zenith of the heavens, bending down and looking into Tranquilina's paradise, stood Our Lady of Guadalupe in her blue robes with seven golden stars in her crown and a star in the palm of each outstretched hand. Under her feet were red roses. And all around her shone the light.





On the top of every mountain that looked down into the valley stood an angel with a silver trumpet or a golden harp. On the smaller hilltops lay fat pink cherubs leaning their chins on their hands and playing on flutes. And at the side of every angel and cherub there sprang up all the most beautiful flowers of Mexico.



Tranquilina fell on her knees and could not speak, and all the animals huddled close to her.

But Our Lady, bending down and smiling, said, "I came to tell you, Tranquilina, that in heaven we are pleased when people can find paradise."



Tranquilina raised her head, but the light was already fading, and where Our Lady had stood there remained only the dawn star.

But in Tranquilina's paradise the trees were loaded now with all the fruits that you could ever see on the greatest market day of the year—pomegranates and mammeys and chicozapotes and papayas,



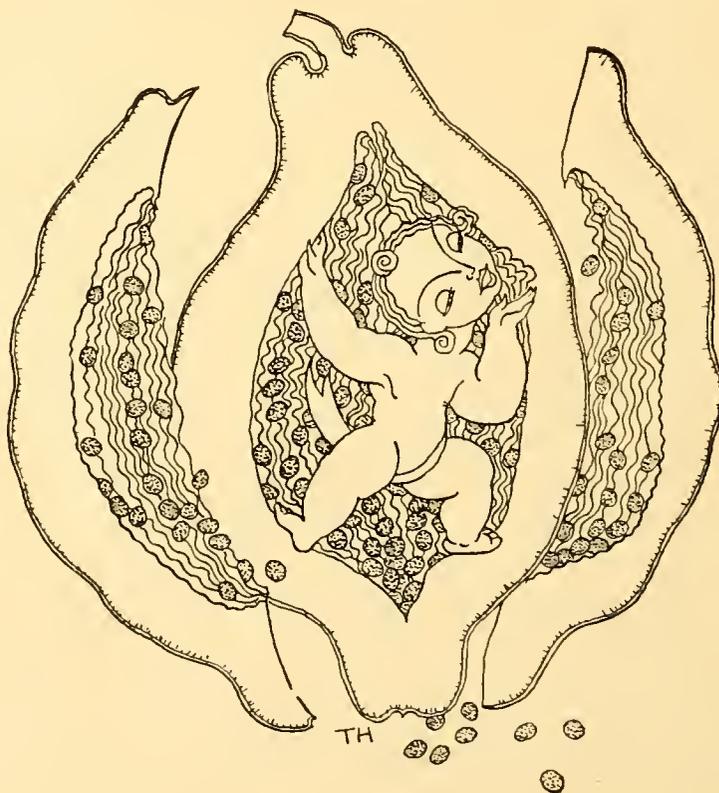
which are all even more beautiful inside than they are outside, with delicious colors and smooth seeds arranged in patterns. There were melons, too, and tomatoes like red lacquer, and avocates like beautiful wet black stones. And for Ramiro there had sprung up a great row of sunflowers, some of them with ripe seeds that he immediately began to crack with his yellow bill.

While they were all eating breakfast, the little cherub arrived from the plaza.

“*’Sta bueno* (It’s all right),” he said. “I tied it up carefully, just as you said. He was still sleeping, so I did not disturb him.”

“*Muchissimas gracias* (A thousand thanks),” said Tranquilina.

“*Por nada* (For nothing),” answered Placido. “*Para servir la* (I am glad to have been of service to you). Please cut me a big slice of watermelon. One gets thirsty doing errands.”











ANGELITO PLACIDO

