

Macario



I am sitting by the sewer waiting for the frogs to come out. While we were having supper last night they started making a great racket and they didn't stop singing till dawn. Godmother says so too—the cries of the frogs scared her sleep away. And now she would really like to sleep. That's why she ordered me to sit here, by the sewer, with a board in my hand to whack to smithereens every frog that may come hopping out—Frogs are green all over except on the belly. Toads are black. Godmother's eyes are also black. Frogs make good eating. Toads don't. People just don't eat toads. People don't, but I do, and they taste just like frogs. Felipa is the one who says it's bad to eat toads. Felipa has green eyes like a cat's eyes. She feeds me in the kitchen whenever I get to eat. She doesn't want me to hurt frogs. But then Godmother is the one who orders me to do things— I love Felipa more than Godmother. But Godmother is the one who

takes money out of her purse so Felipa can buy all the food. Felipa stays alone in the kitchen cooking food for the three of us. Since I've known her, that's all she does. Washing the dishes is up to me. Carrying in wood for the stove is my job too. Then Godmother is the one who dishes out food to us. After she has eaten, she makes two little piles with her hands, one for Felipa, the other for me. But sometimes Felipa doesn't feel like eating and then the two little piles are for me. That's why I love Felipa, because I'm always hungry and I never get filled up—never, not even when I eat up her food. They say a person does get filled up eating, but I know very well that I don't even though I eat all they give me. And Felipa knows it too— They say in the street that I'm crazy because I never stop being hungry. Godmother has heard them say that. I haven't. Godmother won't let me go out alone on the street. When she takes me out, it's to go to church to hear Mass. There she sets me down next to her and ties my hands with the fringe of her shawl. I don't know why she ties my hands, but she says it's because they say I do crazy things. One day they found me hanging somebody; I was hanging a lady just to be doing it. I don't remember. But then Godmother is the one who says what I do and she never goes about telling lies. When she calls me to eat, it's to give me my part of the food. She's not like other people who invite me to eat with them and then when I get close throw rocks at me until I run away without eating anything. No, Godmother is good to me. That's why I'm content in her house. Besides, Felipa lives here. Felipa is very good to me. That's why I love her— Felipa's milk is as sweet as hibiscus flowers. I've drunk goat's milk and also the milk of a sow that had recently had pigs. But no, it isn't as good as Felipa's milk— Now it's been a long time since she has let me nurse the breasts that

she has where we just have ribs, and where there comes out, if you know how to get it, a better milk than the one Godmother gives us for lunch on Sundays— Felipa used to come every night to the room where I sleep, and snuggle up to me, leaning over me or a little to one side. Then she would fix her breasts so that I could suck the sweet, hot milk that came out in streams on my tongue— Many times I've eaten hibiscus flowers to try to forget my hunger. And Felipa's milk had the same flavor, except that I liked it better because, at the same time that she let me nurse, Felipa would tickle me all over. Then almost always she would stay there sleeping by me until dawn. And that was very good for me, because I didn't worry about the cold and I wasn't afraid of being damned to hell if I died there alone some night— Sometimes I'm not so afraid of hell. But sometimes I am. And then I like to scare myself about going to hell any day now, because my head is so hard and I like to bang it against the first thing I come across. But Felipa comes and scares away my fears. She tickles me with her hands like she knows how to do and she stops that fear of mine that I have of dying. And for a little while I even forget it— Felipa says, when she feels like being with me, that she will tell the Lord all my sins. She will go to heaven very soon and will talk with Him, asking Him to pardon me for all the great wickedness that fills my body from head to toe. She will tell Him to pardon me so I won't worry about it any more. That's why she goes to confession every day. Not because she's bad, but because I'm full of devils inside, and she has to drive them out of my body by confessing for me. Every single day. Every single afternoon of every single day. She will do that favor for me her whole life. That's what Felipa says. That's why I love her so much— Still, having a head so hard is the great thing. I bang it against the

pillars of the corridor hours on end and nothing happens to it. It stands banging and doesn't crack. I bang it against the floor—first slowly, then harder—and that sounds like a drum. Just like the drum that goes with the wood flute when I hear them through the window of the church, tied to Godmother, and hearing outside the boom boom of the drum— And Godmother says that if there are chinchas and cockroaches and scorpions in my room it's because I'm going to burn in hell if I keep on with this business of banging my head on the floor. But what I like is to hear the drum. She should know that. Even when I'm in church, waiting to go out soon into the street to see why the drum is heard from so far away, deep inside the church and above the damning of the priest— “The road of good things is filled with light. The road of bad things is dark.” That's what the priest says— I get up and go out of my room while it's still dark. I sweep the street and I go back in my room before daylight grabs me. On the street things happen. There are lots of people who will hit me on the head with rocks as soon as they see me. Big sharp rocks rain from every side. And then my shirt has to be mended and I have to wait many days for the scabs on my face or knees to heal. And go through having my hands tied again, because if I don't they'll hurry to scratch off the scabs and a stream of blood will come out again. Blood has a good flavor too, although it isn't really like the flavor of Felipa's milk— That's why I always live shut up in my house—so they won't throw rocks at me. As soon as they feed me I lock myself in my room and bar the door so my sins won't find me out, because it's dark. And I don't even light the torch to see where the cockroaches are climbing on me. Now I keep quiet. I go to bed on my sacks, and as soon as I feel a cockroach walking along my neck with its scratchy feet I give it a slap with

my hand and squash it. But I don't light the torch. I'm not going to let my sins catch me off guard with my torch lit looking for cockroaches under my blanket— Cockroaches pop like firecrackers when you mash them. I don't know whether crickets pop. I never kill crickets. Felipa says that crickets always make noise so you can't hear the cries of souls suffering in purgatory. The day there are no more crickets the world will be filled with the screams of holy souls and we'll all start running scared out of our wits. Besides, I like very much to prick my ears up and listen to the noise of the crickets. There are lots of them in my room. Maybe there are more crickets than cockroaches among the folds of the sacks where I sleep. There are scorpions too. Every once in a while they fall from the ceiling and I have to hold my breath until they've made their way across me to reach the floor. Because if an arm moves or one of my bones begins to tremble, I feel the burn of the sting right away. That hurts. Once Felipa got stung on the behind by one of them. She started moaning and making soft little cries to the Holy Virgin that her behind wouldn't be ruined. I rubbed spit on her. All night I spent rubbing spit on her and praying with her, and after a while, when I saw that my spit wasn't making her any better, I also helped her to cry with my eyes all that I could— Anyway, I like it better in my room than out on the street, attracting the attention of those who love to throw rocks at people. Here nobody does anything to me. Godmother doesn't even scold me when she sees me eating up her hibiscus flowers, or her myrtles, or her pomegranates. She knows how awfully hungry I am all the time. She knows that I'm always hungry. She knows that no meal is enough to fill up my insides, even though I go about snitching things to eat here and there all the time. She knows that I gobble up the chick-pea slop I give to

the fat pigs and the dry-corn slop I give to the skinny pigs. So she knows how hungry I go around from the time I get up until the time I go to bed. And as long as I find something to eat here in this house I'll stay here. Because I think that the day I quit eating I'm going to die, and then I'll surely go straight to hell. And nobody will get me out of there, not even Felipa, who is so good to me, or the scapular that Godmother gave to me and that I wear hung around my neck— Now I'm by the sewer waiting for the frogs to come out. And not one has come out all this while I've been talking. If they take much longer to come out I may go to sleep and then there won't be any way to kill them and Godmother won't be able to sleep at all if she hears them singing and she'll get very angry. And then she'll ask one of that string of saints she has in her room to send the devils after me, to take me off to eternal damnation, right now, without even passing through purgatory, and then I won't be able to see my papa or mamma, because that's where they are— So I just better keep on talking— What I would really like to do is take a few swallows of Felipa's milk, that good milk as sweet as honey that comes from under the hibiscus flowers—

They gave
us the
land



After walking so many hours without coming across even the shadow of a tree, or a seedling of a tree, or any kind of root, we hear dogs barking.

At times, along this road with no edges, it seemed like there'd be nothing afterward, that nothing could be found on the other side, at the end of this plain split with cracks and dry arroyos. But there is something. There's a town. You can hear the dogs barking and smell the smoke in the air, and you relish that smell of people as if it was a hope.

But the town is still far off. It's the wind that brings it close.

We've been walking since dawn. Now it's something like four in the afternoon. Somebody looks up at the sky, strains his eyes to where the sun hangs, and says, "It's about four o'clock."

That was Melitón. Faustino, Esteban, and I are with him. There are four of us. I count them: two in front, and two behind. I look