



Felipe's Queer Adventure

By Antonio C. Muñoz



FELIPE was only twelve years old but his unusual strength was admitted by all the boys in his neighborhood. When a quarrel arose among his playmates, it was always Felipe who settled it. They all loved him but at the same time they feared him. It would not take him long to bring a stubborn or wayward playmate to submission. He was honest and trustworthy in that he never touched things which did not belong to him without the owner's permission. He was kind to animals, particularly the smaller ones like the frogs and the lizards.

He lived with his foster parents in a hut. On one side of his home was the sea, and on the opposite side at a distance of about five kilometers was a dense forest inhabited by wild animals.

Felipe had an extraordinary appetite. The biggest problem of the poor couple from day to day was how to secure enough food for their adopted son who cared for nothing else but a good meal. Although they kept domestic animals and a poultry in their home, both of the foster parents devoted much of their time to fishing. Their catch, however, would not meet the food expense of the family due to the excessive meals of Felipe. At last to help solve all these difficulties, they began to sell their cows and chickens. This went on from year to year and when Felipe was sixteen years old, they had practically nothing left. The only things left in the home were the fish net and the hook and line with which the father would not part.

It was at this time that the foster father and mother thought of a plan. After a long conference, they decided to get rid of their adopted son who had caused them misery and brought them to that pitiable

condition. They decided to kill him in the forest by having a tree fall on him.

On the day fixed for the death of Felipe, the fisherman and his wife called their adopted son.

"Felipe," the fisherman said, "you are old enough to help us. You are strong and healthy. Let us go to the forest today and cut trees for the posts of a new house that I shall build. You see this hut will soon fall. Will you go with us, Felipe?"

"I will, father," the boy answered. "Are we ready to go?"

"Yes," said the fisherman, "we are."

So off to the forest they went. Their chance to kill Felipe did not come until they came to a big tree.

"Felipe," called the fisherman, "stand on that side while I cut the trunk of this tree. Catch the middle part when it falls so that it will not break. It is heavy, perhaps, but you are strong. I am sure it will not hurt you."

Felipe understood the purpose of his foster father but feeling confident of himself, he made no objection. He walked



directly to the spot indicated. The father cut the trunk and when it began to fall, he closed his eyes. After the crash, he opened his eyes only to find Felipe smiling with the upper part of the trunk resting on his shoulder.

"I knew your purpose, father," he said, "and I also knew why you wanted to kill me. You are tired of feeding me but I never thought that you would get rid of me in this way. I pity you and I pardon you for what you have done. Now let me ask you a favor. Give me leave to go out and see the world. Some day, if luck comes to me, I shall make you and mother happy till the end."

The fisherman could not answer at once. He was ashamed of what he had done. He embraced him and finally he said, "Go, my son, and may God be with you. We've done you wrong, and once again we ask you to pardon us."

"I pardon you," repeated Felipe, "and now good-bye."

The couple went home sad. Felipe took the opposite direction and soon disappeared in the thick forest.

Night came. Felipe sat down under a tree to rest. Soon he heard the piercing shriek of a frog. Up he jumped and was just on time to save a little frog which was starting on its journey into the stomach of a snake.

"Thank you, Felipe," said the frog. "You have done well for saving my life. Take this little stone with you for you will need it in time of trouble and difficulty. If you put it in your mouth, you will become invisible."

Before Felipe recovered from his surprise at hearing a frog talk, the latter had already disappeared. He sat down again and examined the stone. It was round and smooth. He put it in his pocket and climbed the tree close by. There on the flat surface of the first and biggest branch he slept soundly.

At dawn, after he had eaten a part of his provision, he resumed his journey. Late in the afternoon of that day he came to a city. He begged for lodging from an elderly woman who gladly received him. From her Felipe learned of the queer customs of their ruler whom they called the Count, and of the beauty of his only daughter whose name was Menia. The woman also told him that the Count was a sickly old man and that he had made up his mind to marry his daughter to the man who would pass certain tests.

"These tests are not made known to the public," said the woman. "Anyone who tries must either pass all of them or forfeit his life."

"And has no one risked his life for such a beautiful girl?" asked Felipe.

"Oh, son," the woman sighed, "many have tried but they have all failed. Not one of them has come out of that castle again."

"Tomorrow," Felipe exclaimed, "I shall present myself at the palace and I assure you, my good woman, that I shall succeed."

The woman said, "I like you, son, for you look honest, and honesty is something very rare in this place. I hate to see you doomed like the rest but there is something in you which makes me feel assured of

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your success. Go, my son, and may God bless you."

The following morning Felipe was at the castle. A queer-looking person took him to the Count.

"I understand you have come to take the tests," said the Count. "Tomorrow at this time you will either live or die."

"Now, Cosco," he continued addressing the queer-looking person, "take him to his quarters."

Felipe was conducted to a well-furnished room. As soon as he had sat down in a comfortable chair, the servant withdrew closing and locking the door behind him. Felipe found himself alone in the room. As there was nothing to do, he lay down on the couch nearby. When his back touched the cushion, the light in the room became dim. The things around him took on weird outlines. The doors and window shutters creaked on their hinges. Felipe was not afraid. Soon he heard groans. At last one of the pillars swayed and fell towards him. It was very heavy and would have crushed him to death had it not been for his superhuman strength. He caught it and it remained suspended in the air for a short time. Then again it slowly descended. Felipe used all his strength to check its downward progress. Now it went up as Felipe pushed it. Then it went down again as Felipe's muscles relaxed. At last with all the strength left in him, he gave the pillar a push and it fell to his side crushing the table nearby.

Felipe quickly jumped up and immediately the room was flooded with light. Everything was in its proper place just as if nothing had happened.

"Well done, my friend!" a mocking voice was heard.

Felipe turned around and there stood before him the queer-looking person.

"That's fine work," continued the man. "I'll leave now for I have duties to perform. So long."

Felipe was again alone in the room but he noticed that all the doors and windows were open. He looked out of the window. The streets and garden were deserted. Not a soul was in sight. He went to the door. Nobody was there except a coach and two white horses all ready for anyone who would want to make a trip to a place far away. Felipe went back to his room. On the table he saw bags of gold coins. In a box he saw a collection of precious stones. There were diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and many others. Anyone could have gotten away with all those valuable things but the idea never came to Felipe's mind.

He sat down and busied himself looking at the pictures in the room.

"You are wonderful!" again Felipe heard the same mocking voice.

He looked in the direction from which the voice came, and there again stood the same queer-looking person.

"Tonight," the man told him, "my master will come to visit you. He will give you the last test."

Thereupon the man disappeared behind the curtain.

Early that evening, the Count came to Felipe's room.

"Good evening, sir," Felipe greeted him.

"Good evening," returned the Count. "I see that you have proven yourself to be a man of extraordinary ability and I am beginning to like you. Are you ready for the last test?"

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"I am," replied Felipe.

"Do you see that castle at the end of the garden?" the Count asked him.

"Yes," answered Felipe.

"In that castle lives Menia, my daughter. I want you to go there and get the ring which my daughter keeps in a tiny box. You will find the box on the table in her room. As soon as you come to me in my room with the ring, I shall call all my people and before them my daughter and you will be united in marriage."

When the Count was gone, Felipe started for Menia's castle. At the door of his room he heard one of the guards say, "Here he comes. Be sure that you get him."

"Don't worry," said another, "for as long as I have this spear in my hand, that fellow will never cross the line."

Felipe saw that the space between the two castles was well guarded. It was impossible for him to reach the castle of Menia. He went back to his room and sat down. He was discouraged.

"I'll give it up," he sighed at last.

"No!" cried someone behind him.

Felipe turned around. There stood a frog smiling at him. "The stone, the stone! Felipe, have you forgotten the stone?" asked the frog.

Immediately the frog disappeared. Felipe was alone in the room. He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out the small stone which the frog gave him. Then he put it in his mouth. When it touched his tongue, his hands, feet, and even his clothes disappeared. He knew he was there but could not see himself. He went to the mirror but there was no reflection there.