



# Clara and the Armadillo

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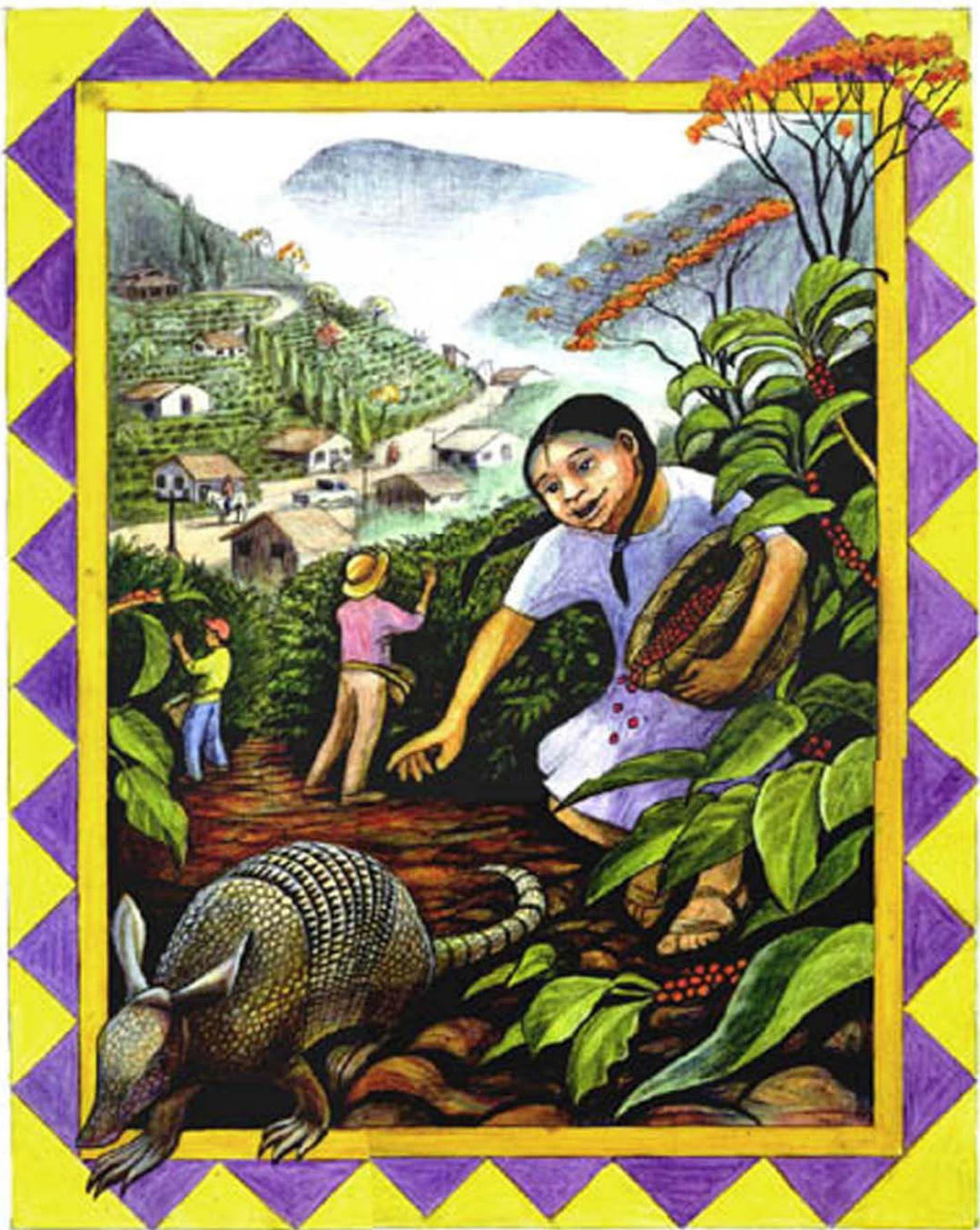
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Clara lives in Rio Negro, in the mountains of Colombia. She works on her family's coffee farm and goes to school. Her favorite part of school is when Carolina and Hilma, from Fundación Natura, teach her class about plants and animals. Clara loves animals.

Once, while picking coffee, Clara noticed an armadillo sniffing around the ground. She walked up to it, but the armadillo didn't notice her till it bumped into her foot.

"Yikes!" It leapt and ran away.

"Don't worry, I won't hurt you!" she called out. She ran after the armadillo, but it disappeared into a hole near the creek.



The next afternoon, she went to the creek to watch the armadillo. It looked funny sniffing the ground with his pointy nose. As she watched it dig up roots and grubs to eat, she pretended it was her pet. Carolina's book about animals said the scientific name for armadillos was *Dasypus*. *Dasypus* was too hard to say so Clara decided to call her armadillo Daisy. She moved slowly closer, till she could almost touch it.

"Yikes!" the armadillo shouted, and began to run.

"Don't run, Daisy! I just want to pet you," Clara called, chasing after it.

The armadillo ran till it reached a rock so big it couldn't climb over. "Please don't eat me!" it shouted, and curled up into a ball of armor.

"Silly armadillo. I don't want to eat you. I want to be your friend." Clara squatted over the armored ball. "It isn't nice to always run away, Daisy."

*"Mhim hmm hhmt mimhmm,"* mumbled the ball.

"What?" asked Clara, leaning closer.

*"Mhim hmm hhmt mimhmm!"*

"I can't hear you," said Clara. "Unball yourself!"

The armadillo stuck out its pointy face. "I said, 'My name's not Daisy!'"

"Oh," said Clara. "What's your name then?"

"Arturo Antonio Armadillo," he declared.

"Hmmm," sighed Clara, "I think Daisy is a much nicer name."

"Why do you keep scaring me?" the armadillo asked.

"I didn't mean to scare you. I want to be your friend."



"If you want to be my friend, leave me alone. I'm a busy armadillo." He began sniffing the ground again. "I have grubs to discover; roots to dig up."

"Well that's no way to treat someone," complained Clara, kicking a rock over. Under it was a fat, squirmy worm.

"Good work!" Arturo yelled, and he gobbled up the worm: "*Snorfle, shnobble, gobble.*"

"Yuck!" said Clara.

Clara though worms were icky, but the next day she found one under a rock and gave it to Arturo. He was happy, and let her pet him while he ate it. Every day she returned to help him find bugs and mushrooms and other things to eat. She didn't tell anyone about him, though, because some of her neighbors like to eat armadillos. She kept him a secret, but one day her little brother Santiago followed her. He ran up to them.

"Somebody's coming," Arturo cried, and rolled himself into a ball.

"What are you doing?" Santiago asked Clara.

"Nothing," she said.

Santiago saw the rolled up armadillo. "A soccer ball!" he cried, and ran to kick it.

"Stop!" Clara shouted, grabbing her brother. "It's not a ball!"

Arturo unrolled himself.

"Wow!" said Santiago.

"You almost kicked Daisy," Clara scolded. "Say you're sorry."

"I'm sorry, Daisy," Santiago said.

"My name's not Daisy," Arturo complained.



Santiago promised not to tell anyone, but Clara began to worry. She was especially afraid of Señor Matanzas. He was always going off to hunt with his dogs. If he discovered Daisy, he'd want to make armadillo stew.

Arturo once told her how dangerous his life could be: "Sometimes it's horrible. Dogs chase me. Boys throw rocks at me. One man tried to shoot me. You're the only nice person in the world."

"I don't know about that," said Clara. "Hilma and Carolina from Fundación Natura are nice. They help to keep Cachalú, the big park up the mountain, safe for all the animals. They always tell us that we need to protect animals. And Santiago didn't kick you."

"That was nice," Arturo said.

Suddenly Clara heard something behind her. She turned to see a dog running toward them. "Shoo!" she said.

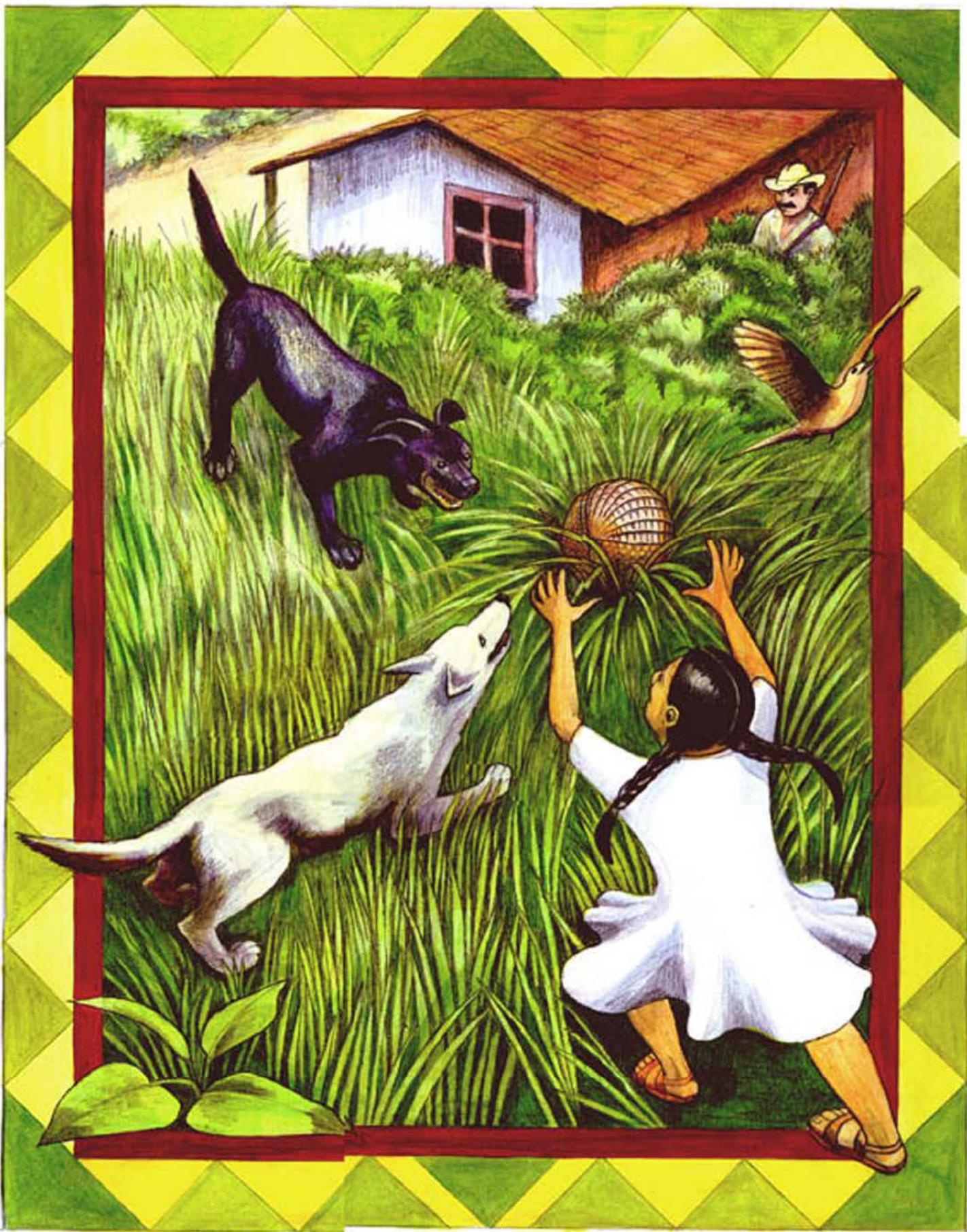
"Horrible, horrible," said Arturo as he rolled into a ball. The dog ran up to him and began barking.

"Go away!" Clara said. Then she recognized the dog. It belonged to Señor Matanzas! Clara heard more barks behind her. Through the trees she could see Señor Matanzas walking toward them.

"Oh no!" she cried. "You have to run away, Daisy!"

Arturo didn't move. "*Mhim hmm hhmt mimhmm,*" he mumbled.

Clara glanced behind her. Señor Matanzas was getting closer. His other dog came running up. "Run for your life!" she yelled, but the armored ball didn't budge. Both dogs were barking now. What could she do?!



Kneeling down, Clara rolled Arturo into the front of her dress and lifted him up. She began to run, but the dogs followed her, barking. Clara threw rocks to chase them away, then kept running.

Arturo the armadillo was heavy, so she couldn't run far, but she kept moving. She walked for hours through the farms and pastures. She climbed under fences. She crossed rivers stepping from rock to rock. She hiked until she reached Cachalú Biological Reserve.

Stepping into the forest, Clara put Arturo onto the ground. "This is your new home, Daisy," she said. "No one can hurt you here."

Arturo unrolled himself and looked around. There were plants all over and birds singing high above them. He sniffed a nearby mushroom, and then took a big bite out of it. "Lovely, lovely," he chewed.

Clara leaned over to pet him. "I'm going to miss you, Daisy."

"I'll miss you too," said Arturo. "You're the best person in the world. Even if you do call me Daisy."

Clara smiled. "You're the best armadillo in the world."

She turned and hiked back down the trail—through pastures, over streams, under fences. She was tired and hungry when she finally got home. Luckily her mother had made Clara's favorite soup, *ajjaco*, for dinner.

"You're the best mom in the world," Clara said. She gave her mother a great big hug.

