

The Other Stories/ Los Otros Cuentos

by Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas

Index:

1. Old Antonio Dreams
 2. The Story of the Others
 3. Durito's Presentation
 4. The Story of the Lion and the Mirror
 5. The Story of the Noise and the Silence
 6. Always and Never Against Sometimes
 7. The Story of Looks
 8. The Lion Kills with a Look
 9. The Story of the Air of the Night
 10. The Story of the Tiny Mouse and the Tiny Cat
 11. The Story of the Sword, the Tree, the Stone and the Water
 12. Those Who Came Later Did Understand
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1. OLD ANTONIO DREAMS

Antonio dreams of owning the land he works on,
he dreams that his sweat is paid for with justice and truth,
he dreams that there is a school to cure ignorance and medicine to scare away death,
he dreams of having electricity in his home and that his table is full,
he dreams that his land is free and that this is the result of its people governing themselves,
he dreams that he is at peace with himself and with the world.
He dreams that he must fight to obtain this dream,
he dreams that there must be death in order to gain life.

Antonio dreams and then he awakens...

Now he knows what to do and he sees his wife crouching by the fire, hears his son crying. He looks at the sun rising in the East, and, smiling, grabs his machete.

The wind picks up, he rises and walks to meet others. Something has told him that his dream is that of many and he goes to find them.

The viceroy dreams that his land is agitated by a terrible wind that rouses everything, he dreams that all he has stolen is taken from him, that his house is destroyed, and that his reign is brought down. He dreams and he doesn't sleep.

The viceroy goes to the feudal lords and they tell him that they have been having the same dream.

The viceroy cannot rest. So he goes to his doctor and together they decide that it is some sort of Indian witchcraft and that they will only be freed from this dream with blood. The viceroy orders killings and kidnappings and he builds more jails and Army barracks. But the dream continues and keeps him tossing and turning and unable to sleep.

Everyone is dreaming in this country. Now it is time to wake up...

2. THE STORY OF THE OTHERS

"The oldest of the elders who settled in these lands told, that the greatest gods, those who gave birth to the world, did not all think the same way.

That is to say, they did not all have the same thoughts, but each one of them "felt" his own thoughts and, among themselves, they listened to each other, and respected each other.

The oldest among the old say that that's the way it was, because if it hadn't been so, the world would never have been born, because the first gods would have spent all their time fighting, since the thoughts they felt were different.

The oldest of the old say that that's why the world came out with many shapes and colors, as many as the thoughts the greatest gods, and the first among them had.

Seven were the greatest gods, and seven were the thoughts each one of them had, and seven times seven are the shapes and colors with which they dressed the world. Old Antonio tells me that he asked the oldest of the old how the first gods were able to come to an agreement and talk to each other since the thoughts they felt were so different.

The oldest of the old responded to him, Old Antonio tells me, that there was a meeting of the seven gods together with the seven different thoughts each one had, and that at that assembly they came to an agreement.

Old Antonio says that the oldest of the old said that that assembly of the first gods, those who gave birth to the world, was a long time before yesterday, that it was precisely during the time when there wasn't yet time. And they said that during that assembly each one of the first gods said his peace and they all said: "My thought that I feel is different from that of the others."

And then the gods kept quiet, because they realized that when each one of them said "the others", they were talking about "others" different. After they remained quiet for a while, the first gods realized that they already had a first agreement and that was that there were "others" and that those "others" were different from the one who was. So that the first agreement the very first gods had was to recognize the difference and accept the existence of the other. And what else could they do anyway since they were all gods, all first, and they had to accept this because there wasn't one who was more or less than the others, except that they were different, and that is how they had to walk.

After this first agreement came the discussion, because it is one thing to recognize that there are others who are different and a very different thing is to respect them. So that they spent quite a while talking and discussing as to how one was different from the others, and they didn't mind spending a lot of time in that discussion because there was no time yet.

Afterwards they all kept quiet, and each one of them spoke about his difference and every other of the gods who were listening realized that by listening and learning about the difference of the other, he could understand better what in him was different. Then they became very happy and started to dance and they danced a long time but they didn't care because at that time time did not exist. After the dance the gods came out with the agreement that it is a good thing that there exist others who are different,

and that one must listen to them in order to know oneself.

And after that agreement they went to sleep because they were very tired after having danced so much. They were not tired of talking because these first gods, those who gave birth to the world, happened to be very good at talking, and they were only beginning to learn how to listen.

I didn't notice at what time Old Antonio left. The sea is already asleep, and there only remains a shapeless wax spot of the little candle stump. Above, the sky is beginning to dilute its blackness into the morning light...

3. DURITO'S PRESENTATION

I am going to tell you a story that came to me the other day. It is the story of a small beetle who wears glasses and smokes a pipe. I met him one day as I was looking for tobacco to smoke, and could not find any. Suddenly, on one side of my hammock, I saw that a bit of tobacco had fallen and formed a small trail. I followed it to see where my tobacco was, and to see who the hell had taken it and was spilling it. A few meters away, behind a rock, I found a beetle sitting at a small typewriter, reading some papers and smoking a diminutive pipe.

"Ahem, ahem," I said, so that the beetle would notice my presence, but he paid me no heed.

Then I said:

"Listen, that tobacco is mine."

The beetle took off his glasses, looked me up and down, and told me, quite irritatedly:

"Please, captain, I beg you not to interrupt me. Don't you realize that I am studying?"

I was a bit surprised and was going to give him a kick, but I calmed myself and sat down to one side to wait for him to finish studying. In a little while, he gathered up his papers, put them away in desk, and, chewing his pipe, said to me:

"Well, now, what can I do for you, captain?"

"My tobacco," I responded.

"Your tobacco?" he said to me. "You want me to give you a little?"

I started to get pissed off, but the little beetle handed me the bag of tobacco with its little foot, and added:

"Don't be angry, captain. Please understand that tobacco cannot be found here, and I had to take some of yours."

I calmed myself. I liked the beetle, and I said to him, "Don't worry about it. I have some more over there."

"Hmm," he answered.

"And you, what is your name?" I asked him.

"Nebuchanedzar," he said, and continued, "but my friends call me Durito. You can call me Durito, captain."

I thanked him and asked him what it was that he was studying.

"I'm studying neoliberalism and its strategy of domination for Latin America," he told me.

"And what good is that to a beetle? I asked him.

He replied, very annoyed: "What good is it? I have to know how long your struggle is going to last, and whether you are going to win. In addition, a beetle should care enough to study the situation of the world in which it lives, don't you think, captain?"

"I don't know," I said. "Why do you want to know how long our struggle will last and whether we are going to win?"

"Well, nothing has been understood," he told me, putting on his glasses and lighting his pipe. After exhaling a mouthful of smoke, he continued: "To know how long we beetles are going to have to take care that you do not smash us with your boots."

"Ah!" I said.

"Hmm," he said.

"And to what conclusion have you come in your study?" I asked him.

He took out the papers from the desk and began to leaf through them. "Hmm...hmm," he said every so often as he looked through them. After having finished, he looked at my eyes and said, "You are going to win."

"I already knew that," I told him. I added, "But how long will it last?"

"A long time," he said, sighing with resignation.

"I already knew that, too....Don't you know exactly how long?" I asked.

"It cannot be known exactly. We have to take into account many things: the objective conditions, the ripeness of the subjective conditions, the correlation of forces, the crisis of imperialism, the crisis of socialism, etcetera, etcetera."

"Hmm," I said.

"What are you thinking about, captain?"

"Nothing," I answered. "Well, Mr. Durito, I have to go. It was my pleasure to have met you. You may take all of the tobacco that you want, whenever you like."

"Thank you, captain. You can be informal with me if you like."

"Thank you, Durito. I am now going to give orders to my compañeros that it is prohibited to step on beetles. I hope that helps."

"Thank you, captain. Your order will be of much use to us."

"Whatever happens, take much care, because my young men are very distracted, and they do not always look where they are putting their feet."

"I will do so, captain."

"See you later."

"See you later. Come whenever you like, and we will talk."

"I will," I told him, and went back to the headquarters.

4. THE STORY OF THE LION AND THE MIRROR

The lion first skins its victim, afterwards he drinks the blood, eating the heart, and leaves the rest for the vultures. There is nothing that can go against the strength of the lion. There is not an animal which can confront him, nor a man who does not run away from him. Only a force which is equally brutal, bloodthirsty and powerful can defeat the lion. Only a lion itself can defeat a lion.

When we understand that only the lion can defeat the lion we begin to think how to make the lion confront himself. The oldest of the old of the community said that you have to know the lion and name a boy in order to know him.

They took the boy up to the top of a ceiba tree¹ and at the foot of it they left a tied-up calf. They went away. The boy was supposed to watch what the lion did with the calf, to wait for him to go away and then to return to his community and tell them what he had seen. And so he did, the lion arrived and killed and skinned the calf, and afterwards he drank his blood, eating his heart and he left when the buzzards were circling waiting for their turn.

The boy went to his community and told what he had seen, the oldest of the old thought for a while and said: "Let the death which the matador gives be his death," and they gave the boy a mirror, some nails to shoe with and a calf.

"Tomorrow is the night of justice," said the old ones and they returned to their thoughts.

The boy did not understand. He went to his hut and he stayed there for a good while watching the game. There he was and his father arrived and he asked him what was happening; the boy told him everything. The boy's father stayed silently next to him and, after a while, he spoke. The boy smiled while he listened to his father.

The next day, when the afternoon had already made the gold, and the grey of the night had let itself fall over the treetops, the boy left the community and walked on foot to the ceiba tree carrying the calf. When he arrived at the foot of the mother tree, he killed the calf and took out its heart. Then he broke the mirror into many little pieces and stuck them into the heart with the same blood, then he opened the heart and put the nails inside. He put the heart back in the calf's chest and with stakes made a frame to keep it standing on its feet. As if it were alive. The boy went up to the top of the tree and waited there. Above, while the night let itself fall from the trees to the ground, he remembered his father's words: "The same death with which the matador will die.

Now the night was below all the time when the lion arrived. The animal came close and, with one leap, attacked the calf and skinned it. When he licked the heart, the lion became suspicious because the blood was dry, but the broken mirror hurt his tongue and made it bleed. And so the lion thought that the blood from his mouth was from the calf's heart and, excited, he chewed up the entire heart. The nails made it bleed more, but the lion continued to think that the blood he had in his mouth was the calf's. Chewing and chewing, the lion wounded himself more and more and bled more and chewed more and more.

The lion was like that until it bled to death.

The boy returned with the lion's claws as a collar and he showed it to the oldest of the old of the community.

They smiled and told him: "It is not the claws that you should keep as a trophy of the victory, but the mirror."

1 A sacred tree for the Maya, very tall and straight.

5. THE STORY OF THE NOISE AND THE SILENCE

Once there was a moment in time, when time did not measure itself. In that time, the greatest gods, the ones who birthed the world, were walking as gods do, dancing of course. There was much noise at that time, from every direction came voices and yells. There was much noise, and none could be understood. And it was that the noise there was, was not for understanding anything, but for NOT understanding anything. At first, the first gods believed that the noise was music and dance and quickly they chose a partner and began to dance like that - and Old Antonio stood up and tried a dance step which consisted of standing on one foot and then the other.

But it seems as though the noise was not music or dance it was only noise, and so one could not be dancing and be happy. Then the great gods stopped to listen attentively because they wanted to know what it was the noise was saying, but they couldn't because it was only noise.

And since one cannot dance to noise, the first gods, the ones who birthed the world could no longer walk because they could only do so by dancing so they were saddened by having to stop because the first gods were fervent walkers, the first ones.

And one of the gods tried to walk or to dance himself with the noise but could not because the step would be lost and on the path one would run into the other, trip and fall with rocks and trees and hurt themselves.

Then the gods searched for silence in order to re-orient themselves, but they could not find it anywhere, they did not know where it had gone. And the gods became desperate because they could not find the silence which held the path and so in an assembly of gods they came to an agreement which was very difficult because of all the noise. They finally agreed that each should seek a silence in order to find themselves and they began to look to the sides and could find nothing above and there was nothing below and since there was no other place to find the silence, they looked inside themselves and there they sought silence and found it there and found one another and found their path once again, those great gods who birthed the world, the first ones.

Old Antonio was silent, the rain was silent as well. The silence was short. Quickly the crickets came to tear apart the past pieces of that night of ten years ago. The mountain had dawned when Old Man Antonio said good bye with a "I arrived." And I stayed smoking the little pieces of silence which the dawn had forgotten on the mountains of the Mexican southeast.

6. ALWAYS AND NEVER AGAINST SOMETIMES

Once upon a time there were two times. One was called One Time and the other was called Another Time.

One Time and Another Time made up the family By Times, who lived and ate from time to time. The dominant empires were Always and Never which, as is clear, hated unto death the family By Times.

Neither Always nor Never could tolerate the existence of By Times. They would never allow One Time to live in their kingdom because Always would then cease to be so, because if there is One Time now, then there is not Always. Nor could they permit Another Time to appear once more in their kingdom because Never cannot live with One Time, and even less if that One Time is Another Time. But One Time and Another Time were time and again bothering Always and Never. And so it went until they were always left in peace so that Always and Never never again bothered them. And One Time and Another Time were playing time and again. "Do you see me?" One Time asked, and Another Time answered: "Don't you see?"

And so they were very happy from time to time, you see. And they were always One Time and Another Time and they never stopped being By Times. Tan, tan.

Moral 1: By times it is very hard to distinguish between one time and another.

Moral 2: Never say always (well, sometimes, yes)

Moral 3: The "always" and the "nevers" are imposed from above, but below are "the nuisances" time and again which, by times, is another way of saying "the different ones," or, from time to time, "the rebels."

Moral 4: I am never going to write a story like this again, and I always do what I say (well, sometimes, no).

7. THE STORY OF LOOKS

Look, Captain (I should clarify that, at the time I met Old Antonio, I held the rank of Second Captain of Insurgent Infantry, which has ever after been a typical sarcastic zapatista remark, because there were only 4 of us - ever since then, Old Antonio has called me "Captain"), look Captain, there was a time, a long time ago, in which no one looked.

It is not that the men and women that walked these lands did not have eyes.

They had them by nature, but they did not look. The greatest gods, those who gave birth to the world, the very first, had indeed created many things without making the what or the why quite clear, or the reason or the work that each thing should do or should try to do. Because each thing had its why, most certainly, since the gods that gave birth to the world, the very first, were indeed the most great, and well did they know the why or the what of all things, as they were gods.

But it turned out that these first gods were not very concerned about what they were doing, they did everything as a fiesta, as a game, as a dance. Indeed, the oldest of the old do recount that, when the first gods gathered together, there would have to be a marimba, because at the end of their assemblies their singing and dancing would most certainly come. And more, they say that, if the marimba were not close at hand, then there would simply be no assembly, and so there were the gods, perched on their backsides, telling jokes and making mischief.

Good, the fact is that the first gods, the most great, gave birth to the world, but they did not make the why or the what of all things clear. And one of those things were eyes.

Could the gods perhaps have said that eyes were for looking? Well, no.

And so the first men and women who walked there went about with great difficulty, striking each other and falling down, crashing into each other and grabbing things they did not want, and not taking the things that they did want. And so, indeed, are many people today, who take what they do not want and which do them harm, and not reaching for what they need and what makes them better, who stumble about, bumping into one another.

Or, rather, that the very first men and women did have eyes, yes, but then they did not look. And the very first men and women had many and various kinds of eyes. They had all colors and all sizes, they had different shapes. There were round eyes, almond ones, oval, small, large, medium-size, black, blue, yellow, green, brown, red and white. Yes, many eyes, two for each of the first men and women, but nothing that they looked at.

And so it would all have continued until our times if something did not once to come to pass. It happened that those first gods, those who gave birth to the world, the most great, were making their dance, because August was, then, the month of memory and of morning, when some men and women who were not looking happened to be where the gods were at their fiesta, and there they just crashed into the gods, and some happened to run up against the marimba and knocked it over, and then the fiesta became pure bedlam and the music stopped and the singing stopped and then the dancing halted as well and it was utter chaos and the first gods looking from one side to the other trying to see why the fiesta had stopped and the men and women who did not look continued stumbling and bumping into each other and into to the gods. And so it passed for some time, with clashes, falls, insults and curses.

Then, finally, shortly thereafter, the most great gods realized that the entire mess had taken place when those men and women had arrived. And then they came together and spoke with each other and asked each other if perhaps they were not looking where they were going. And then the first men and women did not look at each other because they did not look at all, but they asked what is this "looking" thing. And then the gods that birthed the world realized they had not made it clear to them what their eyes were for, or, what their *raison d'être* was, the why and what of eyes. And then the greatest of gods explained to the men and women what this "looking" thing was, and they taught them to look.

And so these men and women learned that one can look at the other, know who one is and who the other is, and so not bump into him, or hit him, or pass him by or run into him.

They also learned that one can look inside the other and see what his heart is feeling. Because the heart not always speaks with words that issue from the lips. Often the heart speaks with the skin, with the look or it speaks with steps.

They also learned to look at the one who is looking at them look at them, that they are those who seek themselves in the looks of others.

And they learned to look at the others looking at them look.

And the first men and women learned of all the looks. And the most important that they learned is the look that looks at itself and knows oneself and learns of oneself, the look that looks at itself looking and looking at itself, that looks at paths and looks at mornings that have still not yet been born, paths still to be taken and dawns to be birthed.

8. THE LION KILLS WITH A LOOK

Old Antonio hunted a mountain lion (which is very similar to the American puma) with his old gun (a flintlock shotgun). I had made fun of his firearm a few days earlier:

“They were using these arms when Hernan Cortes conquered Mexico,” I told him.

He defended himself: “Yes, but now look at whose hands it’s in.”

Now he was removing the last bits of flesh from the hide in order to cure it. He proudly shows me the hide. It doesn’t have any holes.

“Right in the eye,” he boasts. “It’s the only way so that the hide doesn’t show signs of poor treatment,” he adds.

“And what are you going to do with the hide?” I ask.

Old Antonio doesn’t answer me, he continues scraping the lion’s skin with his machete, silently. I sit down at his side and, after filling my pipe, I try to prepare a cornhusk cigarette for him. I hand it to him wordlessly, he examines it and undoes it.

“You didn’t get it right,” he tells me while he rolls it again.

We sit down to participate together in that smoking ceremony. Between puffs, Old Antonio spins the tale:

The lion is strong because the other animals are weak. The lion eats the flesh of others because the others let themselves be eaten. The lion doesn’t kill with his claws or with his fangs.

The lion kills by looking. First, it approaches slowly ... silently, because it has clouds on its paws and these kill noise. Afterwards, it jumps and tumbles its victim, a swipe that throws, more by surprise than by force.

Then it continues watching it. It looks at its prey. Like this ... (and Old Antonio frowns and fixes his black eyes on me). The poor little animal that is going to die just watches, it looks at the lion looking at him. The little animal doesn’t see himself any more, he looks at what the lion’s looking at, he looks at the image of the little animal in the look of the lion. He sees, in his looking of the lion, that he’s small and weak.

The little animal didn’t really think of himself as being small and weak, he was a little animal after all, neither big nor small, nor strong nor weak. But now, looking at himself through the lion’s looking at him, he looks at fear. And in looking at what he looks at, the little animal convinces himself, himself alone, that he is small and weak. And, in the fear that looks at what the lion is looking at, he’s afraid. And then the little animal doesn’t look at anything any more, its bones go numb just like when the mountain water catches us, at night, in the cold. And then the little animal yields, it lets itself go, and the lion hits it painlessly.

That’s how the lion kills. He kills by looking. But there is a little animal that doesn’t do that. When the lion stops it, it doesn’t pay him any attention and continues on as before. And if the lion grabs it, he answers with a swipe from his little hands, which are really tiny, but the blood that they draw does hurt. And this little animal doesn’t yield to the lion because he doesn’t look at what they’re looking at... he’s blind. They call those animals “moles.”

It seemed like Old Antonio finished speaking.

I venture a “yes, but...”. Old Antonio doesn’t let me go on, he continues telling the story while rolling another cigarette. He does it slowly, turning to see me every little while to see if I’m paying attention.

The mole ended up blind because, instead of looking out, he began to look into his heart; he got stuck on looking inside. And nobody knows why it occurred to the mole to look inside himself. And there's that mole intent on looking into his heart and then he doesn't worry about being strong or weak, about being big or little, because the heart is the heart and one doesn't measure oneself the same way one measures things and animals. And only the gods could do that about looking inside oneself, so the gods punished the mole and they don't let him look outside any more. And besides that, they condemned him to live and walk underground. And that's why the mole lives underground, because the gods punished him. And the mole wasn't upset at all because he just kept looking inside himself. And that's why the mole isn't afraid of the lion.

And also why the man who knows how to look at his own heart doesn't fear the lion either. Because the man who knows how to look at his own heart doesn't see the strength of the lion, he sees the strength of his heart. And then he looks at the lion, and the lion looks at what the man's looking at, and the lion looks, and in the looking of the man he's only a lion and the lion sees himself how others see him, and he is frightened and runs away.

"And you looked at your heart in order to kill this lion?" I interrupt.

He answers. "Me? No way, I lined up the sight of the shotgun with the eye of the lion and I just fired... I didn't remember my heart."

I scratch my head as, according to what I learned, one does here when one doesn't understand something. Old Antonio stands up slowly, he takes the hide and examines it slowly. Then he rolls it up and hands it to me.

"Take it," he tells me. "I'm giving it to you so that you never forget that one kills the lion and fear by knowing where to look ..." Old Antonio takes half a turn and goes into his hut. In the words of Old Antonio that means, "I'm done. Good-bye."

I put the lion's hide in a nylon bag and I left ...

9. THE STORY OF THE AIR OF THE NIGHT

When the greatest gods, those who birthed the world, the very first ones, thought about how and why they were going to do what they were going to do, they made an assembly where each one took out his word in order to know it and so that the others would know of it. Each one of the very first gods would take out a word and throw it into the center of the assembly, and there it bounced and reached other gods who grabbed it and threw it again, and so like a ball the word would go from one side to the other until everyone finally understood it. And then they made their agreement, the greatest gods who were those that birthed all things we call worlds.

One of the agreements they found when they took out their words was that each path has its traveler and each traveler his path. And then they went about making things complete, or rather, each one with a partner.

That is how the air and the birds were born. There was not air first and then birds to travel it; nor were birds made first, and then air so that they could fly in it. They did the same with water and the fish that swim in it, the land and animals who walk it, the path and the feet that travel it.

But speaking of birds, there was one that protested much against the air.

This bird said that it would fly better and more quickly if the air did not oppose it. It grumbled because,

even though its flight was agile and swift, it always wanted to be more and better, and, if it could not be so, it said it was because the air became an obstacle. The gods became annoyed at how much he would fuss, this bird who flew in the air and complained of it. And so, as punishment, the first gods took away its feathers and the light from its eyes. Naked, they sent him out into the cold of the night to fly blindly. Then his flight, once graceful and light, became disordered and clumsy.

But after many blows and mishaps, this bird managed to see with its ears. By speaking to things, this bird, or the bat, guides its path and knows the world that answers him in a language only he knows how to listen to. Without feathers to dress him, blind, and with a nervous and hurried flight, the bat rules the mountain night and no animal travels the dark air better than he.

From this bird, the tzotz, the bat, true men and women learned to grant great and powerful value to the spoken word, to the sound of thought.

They also learned that night contains many worlds and one must know how to listen to them in order for them to come forth and flourish. The worlds of the night are born with words. Through sounds, they are made light, and there are so many they do not fit on the land, and many end up adapting themselves to the sky. That is why they say stars are born on the ground.

The greatest gods also bore men and women, not so that one would be the path of the other, but so that they would be, at the same time, the other's path and traveler. They were made different in order to be together. The greatest gods made men and women so that they would love each other. That is why the night air is the best for flying, for thinking, for speaking and for loving.

10. THE STORY OF THE TINY MOUSE AND THE TINY CAT

There once was a tiny mouse who was very hungry and wanted to eat a tiny bit of cheese, which was in the tiny kitchen of a tiny house. Very decidedly, the tiny mouse went to the tiny kitchen to grab the tiny bit of cheese. But, it so happened that a tiny cat crossed his path, and the tiny mouse became very frightened and ran away and was not able to get the tiny bit of cheese from the tiny kitchen. Then the tiny mouse was thinking of what to do to get the tiny bit of cheese from the tiny kitchen and he thought and he said:

"I know. I am going to put out a small plate with a little milk and the tiny cat is going to start drinking the milk because tiny cats like very much a little milk. And then, when the tiny cat is drinking the little milk and is not paying attention, I am going to the tiny kitchen to grab the tiny bit of cheese and I am going to eat it. That's a veery good idea," said the tiny mouse to himself.

And then he went to look for the milk, but it turns out that the milk was in the tiny kitchen, and when the tiny mouse wanted to go to the tiny kitchen, the tiny cat crossed his path and the tiny mouse was very frightened and ran and could not get the milk. Then the tiny mouse was thinking of what to do to get the milk in the tiny kitchen and he thought and he said:

"I know. I am going to toss a tiny fish very far away and then the tiny cat is going to run to go eat the tiny fish, because tiny cats very much like tiny fish. And then, when the tiny cat is eating the tiny fish and is not paying attention, I am going to go to the tiny kitchen to grab the tiny bit of cheese and I am going to eat it. That's a veery good idea," said the tiny mouse.

Then he went to look for the tiny fish, but it happened that the tiny fish was in the tiny kitchen, and when the tiny mouse wanted to go to the tiny kitchen, the tiny cat crossed his path and the tiny mouse became very frightened and ran away and could not go to get the tiny fish.

And then the tiny mouse saw that the tiny bit of cheese, the milk, and the tiny fish, everything that he wanted, was in the tiny kitchen, and he could not get there because the tiny cat would not allow it. And then the tiny mouse said; “Enough!” and he grabbed a machine gun and shot the tiny cat, and he went to the tiny kitchen and he saw that the tiny fish, the milk, and the tiny bit of cheese had gone bad and could not be eaten. So he returned to where the tiny cat was, cut it in pieces, and made a great roast. Then, he invited all his friends, and they partied and ate the roasted tiny cat, and they sang and danced and lived very happily.

This is the end of the story and the end of this letter. I remind you that the divisions between countries only serve to define the crime of "smuggling" and to make sense of war.

Clearly, there are at least two things that are beyond borders: one is the crime, disguised as modernity, of global misery; the other is the hope that shame only exists when one makes a wrong step while dancing and not every time one looks in a mirror. To finish the first and to allow the second to flourish, it only takes struggle and to be better. The rest is left aside and is what usually fills libraries and museums.

There is no need to conquer the world, just to make it anew ... Cheers, and know that, for love, a bed is only a pretext; to dance, a tune is just a decoration; and to struggle, nationality is only a circumstantial accident.

11. THE STORY OF THE SWORD, THE TREE, THE STONE AND THE WATER

Old Antonio is chewing on his pipe. He’s chewing at his words too, giving them form and meaning. Old Antonio speaks. The rain stops to listen, and the water and the darkness take a rest.

“Our grandparents from a long time ago had to confront the foreigner that came to conquer these lands. “The stranger came to impose a different way of life upon us—a different way of talking, a different faith, different gods and different justice. It was only his justice that mattered to him and so he stripped us of ours. His god was gold.

His faith was his superiority. His words were lies. His way of life was cruelty. Our heroes, the greatest warriors, confronted him. there were great battles between the peoples of these lands to defend the land against the hand of the stranger. But great also was the strength of the stranger’s hand. Great and excellent warriors fell fighting and they died. The battles continued. Few were the warriors now, and so the women and the children took up the weapons of those that fell.

The wisest of the grandfathers came together then and they told each other the story of the sword, the tree, the stone and the water. They told each other how in the oldest of times and there in the mountains men banded together to work and defend themselves.

The gods were hanging around as was their usual habit. Or it could be they were sleeping, because they

were really loafers, these gods, not like the greatest of gods, the ones that birthed the world, the first gods. In a small corner of the dawn, the man and the woman were exhausting each other's body and growing in their hearts. The night was being silence. It was quiet because it knew that only a little of itself remained. Then the sword spoke.

“A sword like this one”—Old Antonio interrupts himself and grabs a large double-edged machete in his fist. Sparks from the fire flicker a brief moment, then shadow.

Old Antonio continues:

“Then the sword spoke and said, 'I am the strongest of all and I can destroy all of you. My blade cuts and I give power to those who hold me and death to those who confront me.’

'That's a lie!' said the tree. 'I am the strongest. I have resisted the wind and the fiercest storm.’

The sword and the tree fought each other. The tree made itself strong and hard and fought against the sword. The sword slashed and slashed at the trunk until it toppled the tree.

“I am the strongest,” the sword said again.

““That's a lie!” said the stone. ‘I am the strongest because I am hard and ancient. I am heavy and solid.’

And so the sword and the stone fought. The stone made itself hard and dense and fought against the sword. The sword slashed and slashed and could not destroy the stone, but it broke the stone into many pieces. The sword lost its sharpness, and the stone was scattered in pieces.

‘It's a draw!’ said the sword and the stone, and they wept together about how futile their battle had been.

Meanwhile the water in the stream was watching the fight and saying nothing. The sword looked at the water and said: ‘You are the weakest of all! You can't do nothing to anybody. I am stronger than you!’

And the sword slashed against the water of the arroyo with great force. The sword made a great big fuss and a lot of noise. The fish got scared, and the water did not resist the sword's blow.

Little by little, without saying anything, the water took its shape again, wrapping itself around the sword. Then it went on its way to the river that would take it to the big water which the gods had made to cure themselves of thirst.

Time passed, and the sword in the water began to grow old and rusty. It lost its edge. The fish would approach it without fear and would mock it. Embarrassed, the sword retreated from the water of the arroyo.

Without sharpness and defeated, it complained: ‘I am stronger than the water, but I cannot harm her. And the water, without fighting, has conquered me.’

The dawn passed and the sun came to wake up the man and the woman who had tired each other to make themselves new. The man and the woman found the stone in a dark corner, the stone broken into pieces, the tree toppled over, and the water of the arroyo singing...

Our grandfathers finished telling each other the story of the sword, the tree, the stone and the water by saying:

‘There are times when we must fight as if we are a sword confronted by a wild animal. There are times when we must fight like a tree in the midst of the storm. There are times when we must fight like a stone confronting the elements. But there are times when we must fight like the water fought against

the sword.

Now is the hour of turning ourselves into water so we can continue on our way toward the river that carries us to the big water where the gods cure their thirst, the gods that birthed the world, the first gods.'

This is what our grandfathers did, says Old Antonio.

They resisted like the water resists the most savage of blows.

The foreigner came here with his power and scared the weak. he thought he had won, but with time he became full of old rust. The stranger ended up in a corner full of shame and without understanding why, if he had won, he ended up lost.

Old Antonio once more lights his pipe with his wood of the campfire.

And he adds:

"So this was how our greatest and wisest grandfathers won the great war against the foreigner. The stranger left. We are here, and like the water of the arroyo we continue traveling to the river that will take us to the great water where the oldest of gods cure their thirst, those gods that birthed the world, the first ones...."

The dawn left, and with it, Old Antonio. I followed the sun's path to the west, bordering an arroyo that went snaking along to the river. In front of the mirror, between the morning sun and the afternoon sun, is the tender caress of the midnight sun. A relief that is a wound. A water that is thirst. An encounter that continues to be a search

Like the sword in the tale told by Old Antonio, the government offensive in February entered into Zapatista territory without much difficulty. Powerful and dazzling, the sword of Power with a beautiful hilt, penetrated Zapatista territory.

Like the sword in the tale of Old Antonio, it made a great noise and scandal, and similarly, it frightened some fish. And like in the story of Old Antonio, the sword was big, strong ... and useless.

Like the sword in the tale of Old Antonio, it stayed in the water, rusting and aging. And the water? It stayed on course, enveloping the sword until it reached the river that would take it to the great waters that quench the thirst of the greatest gods, those who gave birth to the world, the original ones ...

12. THOSE WHO CAME LATER DID UNDERSTAND

The history is told that, in a certain town, men and women toiled at work in order to survive. Everyday the men and women went out to their respective jobs: the men to the fields and the bean crops; the women to the firewood and the carrying of water. At times there was work that brought them together as equals. For example, men and women would join together for the cutting of coffee, when its time had come. And so it passed. But there was a man who did not do that. He did work though, but not in the fields or bean crops, nor did he go to the coffee plantations when the beans reddened among the branches. No, this man worked planting trees in the mountain.

The trees this man planted did not grow rapidly, all of them took entire decades to grow and to

make all their branches and leaves. The other men laughed at and criticized this man quite a bit.

"Why do you work at things that you are never going to see completed? Better to work in the fields, which will give you fruit in months, and not in the planting of trees that will be large when you have already died."

"You are a fool or crazy, because you work fruitlessly."

The man defended himself and said: "Yes, it is true, I am not going to see these trees full grown, full of branches, leaves and birds, nor will my eyes see children playing under their shade. But, if all of us work just for the present and for just the following day: who will plant the trees that our descendents are going to need, in order to have shelter, consolation and joy?"

No one understood him. The crazy or foolish man continued planting trees that he would not see, and sensible men and women continued planting and working for their present. Time passed, and all of them died, their children continued in their work, and those were followed by the children of their children. One morning, a group of boys and girls went out for a walk and found a place filled with great trees, a thousand birds living in them and their great branches giving relief from the heat and protection from the rain. Yes, an entire mountainside was found filled with trees. The boys and girls returned to their town and spoke of this marvelous place. The men and women gathered together and they went to the place in great surprise.

"Who planted this?" they asked.

No one knew. They went to speak with their elders and they did not know either. Only an old one, the oldest of the community, could give them the information and he told them the history of the crazy and foolish man.

The men and women met in assembly and had a discussion. They saw and understood the man whom their ancestors had dealt with and they admired that man very much and they were fond of him.

They knew that memory can travel very far and arrive where no one can think or imagine, the men and women of that today in the place of the great trees.

They surrounded one that was in the center, and, out of colored letters, they made a sign. They had a fiesta afterwards, and dawn was already approaching when the last dancers were leaving to go to sleep. The great forest was left alone and in silence. It rained and it ceased to rain. The Moon came out and the Milky Way molded its convoluted body once again. Suddenly a ray of moonlight insinuated itself among the great branches and leaves of the tree in the center, and, by its small light, the sign of colors that had been left there could be read:

"To the first ones:

Those who came later did understand.

Good Health"

Los Otros Cuentos/ The Other Stories