

## The Cave of Desire



During the period of flight from the government's February 1995 military offensive, while avoiding guns, bombs, and in Durito's case, sixty thousand pairs of large boots, Marcos tells Durito the story of an ugly man and the Cave of Desire. During those weeks of withdrawal, huge widespread protests in Mexico opposed the Zedillo offensive. In massive demonstrations in Chiapas and Mexico City, hundreds of thousands marched with banners, costumes, and masks. The crowds chanted slogans against the military attacks and in support of the Zapatistas. Such public actions in Mexico inspired demonstrations in over forty countries, often at Mexican embassies or consulates. As a result, an embarrassed Mexican government halted its offensive and returned to a new round of peace talks in San Andrés. Fully aware of these important solidarity actions, Marcos includes this story within a letter of thanks to international supporters.

To the national weekly *Proceso*

To the national newspaper *El Financiero*

To the national newspaper *La Jornada*

To the local newspaper of San Cristóbal de las Casas, *Tiempo*

March 17, 1995\*

Ladies and Gentlemen:

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Another thank-you letter going out, this time for those abroad. Let's see if Gurría manages to read it, since he's sending out nothing but lies all over Europe.<sup>1</sup> We aren't hiding from soldiers anymore, but now we're fleeing legislators. There's a helluva lot of them and they turn up where no one expects them. It looks like they took that part about "verification" seriously.<sup>2</sup> That might not be bad; it may be the first committee that does more than buy crafts in San Cristóbal. How are we doing in the Panamerican games? Too bad I couldn't attend. I'm sure I would have done very well in the "cross-country race." If only you could see how much training they've put me through since February 10th!

*Vale. Salud*, and may the spring in your blood be destined for someone.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast  
Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos

P.S. That, in mourning, cries. I was listening on the little tape-player to that tune by Stephen Stills, from the album *Four Way Street*, that goes, "Find the cost of freedom, buried in the ground. Mother Earth will swallow you, lay your body down..."<sup>3</sup> when my Other Self comes running and tells me, "It looks like you got what was coming to you..."

"Don't tell me the PRI has already fallen?" I ask with hope.

"No man!... They killed you!" says my Other Self.

"Me! When? Where?" I ask as I go through all my memories of where I've been and what I've done.

"Today, in a confrontation... but they don't say exactly where," he responds.

"Oh, good!... And did I end up badly hurt or really dead?" I insist.

"Really, really dead... that's what it says in the news," says my Other Self and leaves.

A narcissistic sob competes with the crickets.

"Why are you crying?" asks Durito while he lights his pipe.

"Because I can't attend my burial. I, who loved me so much..."

P.S.: That tells what happened to El Sup and Durito during the twelfth day of the withdrawal, of the mysteries of the Cave of Desire, and of other unfortunate events that today make us laugh, but at that time took away even our hunger.

"And if they bomb us?" asked Durito in the early morning on the twelfth day of the withdrawal. ("That was no withdrawal! It was pure flight!" says Durito.) It's cold and a grey wind licks with its icy tongue the darkness of trees and earth.

I'm not sleeping; in solitude the cold hurts twice as much. Nevertheless I keep quiet. Durito comes out from under the leaf he's been using as a blanket and climbs up on top of mine. To

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<sup>1</sup> José Angel Gurría Treviño was Secretary of Foreign Affairs from December 2, 1994 to January 5, 1998 when a cabinet shake-up precipitated by the Acteal Massacre of December 1997 resulted in his transfer to Secretary of Housing and Public Finance.

<sup>2</sup> As part of the Law of Reconciliation and Dialogue (see also note 8 in Durito II), a "Verification and Peace Commission" composed of Federal Legislators was created to mediate the peace talks in San Andrés. In a communiqué dated March 2, 1995 and published in *La Jornada* on March 6, 1995, the EZLN strongly voiced its opposition to the Commission because it put the Legislative powers in a position of mediating the conflict, stacking the balance of power in the dialogues with six Federal Government representatives to only two from the EZLN.

<sup>3</sup> "Find the Cost of Freedom," *Four Way Street*, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. Atlantic Records, 1971.

wake me up, he starts tickling my nose. I sneeze with such emphasis that Durito ends up, tumbling over himself onto my boots. He recovers and makes his way back to my face.

"What's happened?" I ask him before he tickles me again.

"And if they bomb us?" he insists.

"Yes... well... well... we'll look for a cave or something like that to hide ourselves in... or we'll climb in a little hole... or we'll see what to do," I say with annoyance, and look at my watch to insinuate that it isn't the hour to be worrying about bombings.

"I won't have any problems. I can fit anywhere. But you, with those big boots and that nose... I doubt that you'll find a safe place," says Durito as he covers himself again with a little huapac leaf.

"The psychology of terror," I think, with respect to the apparent indifference of Durito regarding our fate...

"Our fate? He's right! He won't have problems, but me...," I think. I get up and speak to Durito,

"Psst... Psst... Durito!"

"I'm sleeping," he says from under his leaf.

I ignore his sleep and begin talking to him: "Yesterday I heard Camilo and my Other Self saying that there are a lot of caves around here. Camilo says he knows most of them. There are small ones, where an armadillo would barely fit. And there are some as big as churches. But he says there is one that no one dares to enter. He says there is an ugly story about that cave. The Cave of Desire, he says they call it."

Durito seems to get interested, his passion for detective novels is his ruin.

"And what is the story of that cave?"

"Well... It's a very long story. I've heard it myself, but that was years ago now... I don't remember it well," I said, making it interesting.

"Fine, go on, tell it," says Durito, more and more interested.

I light my pipe. From amid the aromatic smoke comes the memory, and with it...

## **The Cave of Desire**

**"It happened many years ago. It is a story of a love that was not, that was left just like that. It is a sad story... and terrible," says El Sup sitting on one side, with his pipe in his lips. He lights it, and looking at the mountain, continues, "A man came from far away. He came, or he already was there. No one knows. It was back in other times long past and however that may be, in these lands people lived and died just the same, without hope and forgotten. No one knows if he was young or old, that man. Few are those who saw him at first. They say that was because this man was extremely ugly. Just to see him produced dread in men and revulsion in women. What was it that made him so unpleasant? I don't know, the concepts of beauty and ugliness change so much from one age to another and from one culture to another. In this case, the people native to these lands avoided him, as did the foreigners who were the owners of land, men, and destinies. The indigenous people called him the Jolmash or Monkey-face; the foreigners called him the Animal.**

**"The man went into the mountains, far from the gaze of all, and set to work there. He made himself a little house, next to one of the many caves that were found there. He made the land produce, planted corn and wheat, and hunting animals in the forest gave him enough to get by. Every so often he went down to a stream near the settlements. There he had arranged, with one of the older members of the community, to get salt, sugar, or whatever else he, the Jolmash, couldn't obtain in the mountains. The Jolmash exchanged corn and animal skins for what he needed. The Jolmash would arrive at the stream at the time when evening began to darken and the shadows of the trees brought forth night onto the earth. The old man had a problem with his**

eyes and couldn't see well, so that, with the dusk and his illness, he couldn't make out the face of the man who caused so much revulsion in the clear light.

"One evening the old man didn't arrive. The Jolmash thought that maybe he had mistaken the hour and arrived when the old man had already gone home. To make no mistake, the next time he made sure to arrive earlier. The sun still had some fingers to go before it wrapped itself in the mountains, when the Jolmash came near the stream. A murmur of laughter and voices grew as he approached. The Jolmash slowed his steps and came silently nearer. Among the branches and vines he made out the pool formed by the waters of the stream. A group of women were bathing and washing clothes. They were laughing. The Jolmash watched and stayed quiet. His heart became his only gaze, his eyes his voice. It was a while since the women had gone and the Jolmash stayed on, watching... The stars were already raining down on the fields when he returned to the mountains.

"I don't know if it came from what he saw, or from what he thought he saw, whether the image that was engraved on his retina corresponded to reality or if it existed only in his desire, but the Jolmash fell in love or thought that he had fallen in love. And his love was not something idealized or platonic, it was quite earthy, and the call of the feelings that he bore was like a war drum, like lightning that becomes fierce rain. Passion took his hand and the Jolmash began to write letters, love letters, lettered delirium that filled his hands.

"And he wrote, for example, 'Oh, lady of the wet glimmer! Desire becomes a haughty colt. Sword of a thousand mirrors is the yearning of my appetites for thy body, and in vain its double edge rips the thousand gasps that fly on the wind. One grace, long sleeplessness! One grace I ask thee, lady, failed repose of my grey existence! Let me come to thy neck.

'Allow that to thy ear climbs my clumsy longing. Let my desire tell thee, softly, very softly, that which my breast silences. Do not look, lady-so-far-from-mine, at the pitiful sight which adorns my face! Let thy ears become thy gaze; give up thine eyes to see the murmurs that walk within me, longing for thy within. Yes, I wish to enter. To walk thee, with sighs, the path that hands and lips and sex desire. Thy wet mouth, and I, thirsting, to enter with a kiss. On the double hill of thy breast to softly brush lips and fingers, to awaken the cluster of moans that hide within. To march southward and to take prisoner thy waist in warm embrace, burning now the skin of the belly, brilliant sun announcing the night that below is born. To evade, diligently and skillfully, the shears on which thy grace goes and whose vertex promises and denies. To give thee a tremor of cold heat and arrive, whole, to the moist stirring of desire. To secure the warmth of my palms in the double warmth of flesh and movement. One slow first step, a light trot next. Then the runaway gallop of bodies and desire. To reach the sky, and then collapse.

'One grace, promised weariness! One grace I ask thee, lady of the soft sigh!

'Let me come to thy neck! In it I am saved, far off I die.'

"One stormy night, like the passion burning his hands, a bolt of lightning burnt down the little house of the Jolmash. Wet and shivering, he took refuge in the neighboring cave. With a torch he lit his way in and found there little figures of couples giving and receiving, the pleasure worked in stone and clay. There was a spring, and little boxes that when opened, spoke of terrors and marvels that had passed and would come to be. The Jolmash now could not or would not leave the cave. There, he felt the desire fill his hands once more and wrote, weaving bridges to nowhere...

'A pirate am I now, lady of the longed-for port. Tomorrow, a soldier at war. Today, a pirate lost in trees and lands. The ship of desire unfolds its sails. A continual moaning, all tremor and wanting, leads the ship between monsters and storms. Lightning illuminates the flickering sea of desperation. A salty dampness takes the command and the helm. Pure wind, word alone, I navigate seeking thee, amidst gasps and sighs, seeking the precise place the body sends thee. Desire, lady of storms to come, is a knot hidden somewhere by thy skin. Find it I must, and muttering spells, untie it. Free then shall be thy longings, feminine swayings, and they will fill thy eyes and mouth, thy womb and innards. Free one moment only, as my hands already come to make them prisoners, to lead them out to sea in my embrace and with my body. A ship shall I be and restless sea, so that in thy body I enter. And there shall be no rest in so much storm, the bodies moved by so many capricious waves. One last and ferocious slap of salty desire hurls us to a beach where sleep arrives. A pirate am I now, lady of tender storm. Don't await my assault,

come to it! Let the sea, the wind, and this stone-become-ship be witnesses! The Cave of Desire! The horizon clouds over with black wine, now we are arriving, now we go..."

"So it happened, they say. And they say that the Jolmash never again left the cave. No one knows whether the woman to whom he wrote the letters existed in truth or was a product of the cave, the Cave of Desire. What they say is that the Jolmash still lives in it, and whoever comes close becomes sick with the same, with desire..."

Durito has followed the whole story attentively. When he sees I have finished, he says,

"We have to go."

"Go?" I ask, surprised

"Of course!" says Durito, "I need literary advice to write to my old lady..."

"You're crazy!" I protest.

"Are you afraid?" asks Durito ironically.

I waver.

"Well... afraid, really afraid... no... but it's very cold... and it looks like it's going to rain... and... yes, I'm afraid."

"Bah! Don't worry. I'll go with you and I'll be telling you where. I think I know where the Cave of Desire is," says Durito with certainty.

"All right," I say, giving in. "You'll be in charge of the expedition."

"Great! My first order is that you march in the vanguard, in the center nobody, to disconcert the enemy, and I will go in the extreme rearguard," indicates Durito.

"I? In the vanguard? I protest!"

"Protest denied!" says Durito with firmness.

"O.K., soldier to the end, I'll go along."

"Good, that's what I like. Attention! This is the plan of attack: First: If there are many, we run. Second: If there are a few, we hide. Third: If there isn't anyone, forward, for we were born to die!" dictates Durito while he prepares his little pack.

For a war plan it seemed too cautious for me, but Durito was the chief now, and given the circumstances, I had no reason to object to prudence marching in the vanguard.

Above, the stars were beginning to blur.

"It looks like it's going to rain," I say to Durito –excuse me– to the chief.

"Silence! Nothing will detain us!" shouts Durito with the voice of the sergeant in that Oliver Stone film *Platoon*.<sup>4</sup>

A gust of freezing wind and the first drops...

"Haaalt!" orders Durito.

The drops of rain start to multiply...

"I forgot to mention the fourth point of the plan of attack..." says Durito with doubt.

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<sup>4</sup> *Platoon*, (Orion Pictures, 1986; Oliver Stone, Dir.) a film about the horrors of war, is set in the jungles of Viet Nam. On March 3, 1995, a letter from Stone was published in *La Jornada* in support of filmmakers Javier Elorriaga and Maria "Gloria" Benavides, who were among those arrested and accused of being Zapatista leaders. One year later, Stone was part of a human rights delegation that visited the Zapatistas just prior to the First Continental Encounter. At their meeting Marcos noted that Stone had skipped the Academy Awards, where his film *Nixon* (**film company, year**) received several nominations. Handing him an old pipe with a broken stem and saying, Marcos says, "I'm afraid we can't give you an Oscar here, but I would like to give you this. Maybe you can get it fixed somewhere." ("Stone Meets with Mexico Rebels"; Associated Press: March 25, 1996). The visit was quite controversial, Stone criticized the government's "regime of terror," and it was reported that the Interior Ministry of Chiapas seized television reporters' video footage of Stone in Chiapas and that *Nixon* was abruptly pulled from Mexican film theatres ("Oliver Stone film pulled in Mexico after visit"; Reuters, March 30, 1996).

"Oh yeah? And what is it?" I ask insidiously.

"If it starts to rain... strategic withdrawal!" The last words are said by Durito now in an all out run back to camp.

I ran behind him. It was useless. We got soaked, and shivering, we reached the little plastic roof. It rained as if desire had, at last, been unleashed...

*Vale* again. *Salud*, and that the hunger for tomorrow be a desire to struggle... today.  
El Sup, within, deep within, the Cave of Desire.

It's March, it's early morning, and for being a dead man, I feel veery well.

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