

# The Story of the Hot Foot and the Cold Foot



During a Zapatista Red Alert issued in the wake of the government's arrest of Fernando Yáñez Muñoz on October 21 and in response to conflicts between the EZLN and the PRD over elections, Durito tells Marcos a story about how those who fight each other may be defeated by a common enemy. Then, in response to a newspaper article complaining about his frequent appearance in Marcos' communiqués, Durito furiously demands a National, International and Interplanetary plebiscite on his popularity. As it happened, on the day this letter was written, the government dropped charges against Yáñez and the day it was published the EZLN called off the Red Alert.

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To the National and International Press

Sirs,

Here goes a communiqué. We're not going to run anymore. It's our custom to flee only once a year and for 1995 we did that in February. With regards to the judicial police, they deserve the national agronomy prize for their ability to "plant" evidence. Whatever the case, the key question is: Who gave the orders for the arrest? And this question begs others, for example: Who benefits from the failure of the dialogue process in Chiapas? Send the answers (if anybody has them) to the Secretary of State, where they are already known . . . they just need confirmation. Anyway, they've already ruined the World Series for me, although in baseball (as in politics) the best does not always win. If you don't believe me, ask Castillo Peraza. No, better not ask him anything. He's liable to think you're flirting with him. That's what illiteracy gets you!<sup>1</sup>

*Vale. Salud*, and may you always walk with a notary public at your side to certify that you're not carrying more arms than God gave you.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast  
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos  
Mexico, October 1995

P.S. that accepts all scoldings that don't come from the mediocre arrogance that reigns in certain political parties.

The dawn is just beginning to appear. Cold and darkness blanket the watch of a gallant knight-errant and the sorrow of his wretched squire. There is no one to greet the moon and a bolt of lightning is followed by thunder. Mud is renewed with rain and wheat with a kiss. Durito reviews the newspaper, chews on his pipe, and directs a look of reproach my way.

"So thou hast provoked a scandal of historical proportions!" he says, putting down the newspaper.

"Me?" I say, pretending that I am veery busy with my torn boot.

"Surely! Who else? You have demonstrated once more that your speech has the same quality as a stampede of elephants inside a china shop. And not only

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1 After the PAN won the mayoralty of Tuxtla Gutierrez, the capital of Chiapas, Marcos took an indirect shot at the PRD, commenting in a press conference that, "The PAN is Power's only real option to offer an alternative to the PRI in this country," and, "This is not desirable, I repeat, but it is the only organized force of opposition that can succeed to power and it's Power's only alternative, but not the nation's." PAN leader Carlos Castillo Peraza responded that Marcos' comments were in recognition of the serious political work of the PANistas, but that he wouldn't accept flattery from someone who was so fickle in their compliments. See Guadalupe Irizar, "PAN, Only Option to Power," *Reforma* (October 18, 1995), 1.

that, your clumsiness has allowed an avalanche of mediocre people to declare one-and-a-half stupidities about the half-stupidity that you said . . .”

“I . . . I was misunderstood! I did not want to say what I said, but to say what I did not say, and that is why I did not say what I wanted to say and said what I did not want to say . . .” I defend myself while hiding my shame in the hole in my boot, the left one of course.

“Nonsense! This reasoning has the same logic as that of a PRI representative explaining his vote against the reduction of sales tax.”<sup>2</sup>

I remain quiet and start to draw spirals and little circles on the ground with a short stick. Durito feels sorry for me and pats my shoulder. To do this, Durito must climb on my arm and loosen his chinstrap. He sits next to my shirt collar, and says,

“Oh my dear and clumsy squire, speaking is slippery and problematic. In reality, it’s only worth the trouble to speak to a woman—the only being with whom it is gratifying to be slippery and get into trouble. And to speak to a woman one must whisper in her ear. That way, what matters is not so much what one says, but the warmth of coming close to her neck. In politics, words hold a thousand traps and tangles, and not only those that are spoken to us, but also the ones that we speak. And now that we are speaking of politics, I’m reminded of a story that might be good for that book you are preparing, which is entitled, if I remember correctly, *Stories for a Suffocating Night*.

I sigh, resigned to tolerating another of Durito’s stories, but he thinks that it’s because of the shame of my declarations against Don Porfirio, so he continues.<sup>3</sup> He clears his throat and orders me to take paper and pencil, and I write while he dictates the story that is called . . .

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2 The Mexican national sales tax was raised from 10% to 15% during March 1995, as part of the national recovery program PARAUSEE (Program to Strengthen the Unity Agreement to Overcome the Economic Emergency). The program also included the removal of price controls and subsidies for basic foodstuffs such as milk, tortillas, and beans, as well as gradual price hikes on energy (natural gas, oil, etc.). In the December 1997 budget debates, the PRD proposed returning the tax to 10%, arguing that the measure was intended to be temporary and that a tax on consumption is fundamentally regressive, but the PAN sided with the PRI and killed the proposal.

3 PRD leader Porfirio Muñoz Ledo criticized the Zapatista call to abstain from the elections. He claimed that this move hurt the PRD more than any other party and that as many as 20 municipalities may have been lost because of it. In response, Marcos stated that “the difficult conditions of militarization, harassment and persecution in the state forced our organization not to participate or to call on people to participate in this process . . . Muñoz Ledo also forgets that the EZLN did not take up arms so that the PRD could assume power . . . I remind him and the rest of the country that our arms are not in the service of any political party. He’s making a fool of himself treating us as if we were the armed faction of the PRD, as if we had an obligation that we have never had.” See Guadalupe Irizar, “Marcos Lashes out at Muñoz Leda” *Reforma* (October 18, 1995), 1.

## The Story of the Cold Foot and the Hot Foot

“There once were two feet together. They were together, but not united. One foot was cold and the other was hot. And then the cold foot said to the hot foot, ‘You are very hot.’ And the hot foot said to the cold foot, ‘You are very cold.’ And that’s what they were doing, that is, fighting each other, when Hernán Cortés arrived and burned them both.”<sup>4</sup>

“Is it over?” I ask, incredulously.

“Of course! It’s a story—not one of your press conferences,” he answers.

I just look at him with reproach. He says, “Okay, okay, you’re right. Let me think . . . Hmmm, Hmmm, I know! Below that write: And Hernán Cortés lived happily ever after. And that’s the end—except this story’s not over.”

“No?” I ask while I put the paper in my pocket.

“Of course not! There are still many cold and hot feet, so Hernán Cortés could end up having a veery disagreeable surprise.”

“Speaking of disagreeable things,” I interrupt, “they’re complaining about you in some newspaper.”

“About me? Who dares complain about the knight-errant longed for by countless damsels of all ages, dreamt of by children big and small, and respected and admired by all the noble men that have ever lived?”

“Well, they don’t exactly complain about you. All they say is enough already with Durito. Durito over here, Durito over there. Anyway, they suggest that I leave you out of my letters and that . . .” Durito does not allow me to continue and shouts in my ear:

“Shut up insolent rogue! It could only occur to a good-for-nothing like you that respectable people would not enjoy and find relaxing solace and noble lessons in stories of my great feats, my undeniable charm, and the profound wisdom that is abundant in my discourse.”

“But Durito! It is not I who has thought of such absurdity! Consider that there could exist—it’s just a hypothesis—someone in whom you don’t generate the same enthusiasm as . . .”

Durito interrupts again, “Well, I concede that it is possible that some being exists that may not be interested in me or my marvels. So we should do something to determine the rating that you have, insolent yokel, and the one that I have, a high knight-errant.

“I agree with the ‘errant,’ but allow me to doubt the ‘high.’”

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<sup>4</sup> The conquistador Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico in 1519. By 1521, he was able to form alliances with indigenous groups, primarily the Tlaxcaltecs, to capture the imperial city of Tenochtitlan. Cuauhtémoc, nephew of Moctezuma and a successor to the throne, was captured and tortured in order to reveal the whereabouts of Moctezuma’s treasure. When he refused to submit, Cortez applied boiling oil to his feet.

“I’m referring to the height of my ideals, cretin.”

“Well, what do you propose?”

“A plebiscite.”

“A plebiscite? But Durito . . . they’re going to say it’s a joke . . .”

“Not another word! A plebiscite it will be. National, International and Interplanetary. And these will be the questions: First: should El Sup eliminate Durito’s stories from his letters? Second: should the despicable being who dared to demand the disappearance of Durito’s stories die in the flames of an inferno that would make Dante’s look like an icebox? These two questions are to be answered: ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ or ‘I don’t know.’”

“And where should the ones who want to respond send their answers?” I ask skeptically.

“To my office: ‘Don Durito de la Lacandona, Little Huapac Hole Number 69. Mountains of the Mexican Southeast, Chiapas, Mexico.’”

I see that Durito is very determined, so I suggest that he clarify some matters.

“And what are the minimum and maximum age limits for participating in this ‘consultation’?”

“The minimum is six months old. The maximum is a minute before taking your last breath.”

“But Durito, do you think that at six months somebody could answer these questions?”

“Of course! At six months I was already composing some of those sonnets that make a moist and feminine womb provoke tempests and—paradoxically—offer tranquility.”

“But you are a beetle!”

“Even more in my favor! No more discussion! Elaborate the convocation and add that all females may adorn their ballot with their best sigh . . . Although, on second thought . . . no—better not mention sighs . . . because surely so many would arrive that they’d turn into a hurricane that would leave Roxanne in the category of ‘inopportune breezes.’<sup>5</sup> Better for them to send red carnations. Maybe we can start a business exporting them . . . Well, what do you think?”

“I think you’re delirious; that you’ve gone mad,” I tell him.

“My dear and scraggly squire! It takes a certain dose of delirium and madness for the dawn to break,” Durito says while he returns to his place and covers himself again with his little huapac leaf, but not before drawing a huge “69” on top of it.

“Let me know when the answers start arriving. Hell! I won’t even be able to sleep because of the sweet anticipation . . .” Durito says seconds before starting to snore as if he were a chainsaw with no muffler.

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5 Tropical Storm Roxanne struck southeastern Mexico for two weeks in mid-October. With winds up to 115 mph, the storm reached hurricane levels twice, killing fourteen and leaving as many as 300,000 people displaced.

I remain quiet. I light my pipe and slowly inhale a memory. Above, dawn dissolves its last gloomy grays, far away day takes a bite of the horizon and the cold turns tepid here . . . in the mountains of the Mexican Southeast . . .

*Vale* again. *Salud*, and may the madness and the delirium multiply.

El Sup yearning for the flower with which October decorated the ceiba.

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