

The Story of Durito and Neoliberalism



Responding to a letter from ten-year-old Mariana Moguel, Subcomandante Marcos shares the story of his first conversation with Durito, thus marking the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between them. During the period in which this communiqué appeared, the fighting of January 1994 had given way to negotiations and the Zapatistas had returned to their base communities to discuss a set of peace proposals offered by the government.

April 10, 1994
To: Mariana Moguel
From: Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

Subcomandanta Mariana Moguel,

I greet you with respect and congratulate you for the new rank you acquired with your drawing. Permit me to tell you a story that, perhaps, you will understand someday. It is the story of . . .

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DURITO

The story I am going to tell you 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 my smoking tobacco and I couldn't find it. 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 little desk, reading some papers and smoking a tiny pipe.

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

Then I said, "Listen, that tobacco is mine." The beetle took off his glasses, looked me up and down, and told me angrily, "Please, Captain, I beseech you. Do not interrupt me. Do you not realize that I am studying?"

I was a bit surprised and was going to give him a good 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 the desk, and, chewing on his pipe, said to me, "Well, now, what can I do for you, Captain?"

"My tobacco," I replied.

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

I started to get pissed off, but the little beetle passed me the bag of tobacco with his little foot and added, "Don't be angry, Captain. Please understand that you can't get tobacco around here and I had to take some of yours."

I calmed down. The beetle was growing on me and I told him, "Don't worry about it. I've got more around somewhere."

"Hmmm," he answered.

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

"Nebuchadnezzar," he said, and continued, "but my friends call me Durito.¹ You can call me Durito, Captain."

I thanked him for the courtesy 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.

And he replied, very annoyed, "What *good* is it?! I have to know how long your struggle is going to last, and whether or not you are going to win. Besides, 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. "But, why do you want to know how long our struggle will last and whether or not we are going to win?"

¹ Nebuchadnezzar, the second king of the Chaldean dynasty of Babylonia (605–562 BC), was known as a skilled field commander who conquered Jerusalem in 597 BC. During his reign, he built the "hanging gardens" of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. He is referenced in the Bible in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, where he is characterized as a champion warrior—king divinely chosen by God. Durito literally means "little hard one."

“Well, you haven’t understood a thing,” he told me, putting on his glasses and lighting his pipe. After letting out a puff of smoke, he continued, “To know how long we beetles are going to have to take care that you do not squash us with your big boots.”

“Ah!” I said.

“Hmmm,” 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. “Hmmm . . . hmmm,” he said every so often as he reviewed them. After having finished, he looked me in the eye and said, “You are going to win.”

“I already knew that,” I told him. I added, “But how long will it take?”

“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. Many things have to be taken into account: the objective conditions, the ripeness of the subjective conditions, the correlation of forces, the crisis of imperialism, the crisis of socialism, etcetera, etcetera.”

“Hmmm,” I said.

“What are you thinking about, Captain?”

“Nothing,” I answered. “Well, Mr. Durito, I have to go. It was a pleasure to have met you. Know that you may take all the tobacco you want, whenever you like.”

“Thank you, Captain. You can be informal with me if you like.”²

“Thank you, Durito. Now I’m 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 very useful to us.”

“But regardless, be very careful, because my *compañeros* are very distracted, and they don’t always watch where they’re going.”

“I’ll do that, Captain.”

“See you later.”

“See you later. Come whenever you like, and we’ll talk.”

“I’ll do that,” I told him, and went back to headquarters.

That’s all Mariana. I hope to know you personally someday and be able to trade ski masks and drawings.

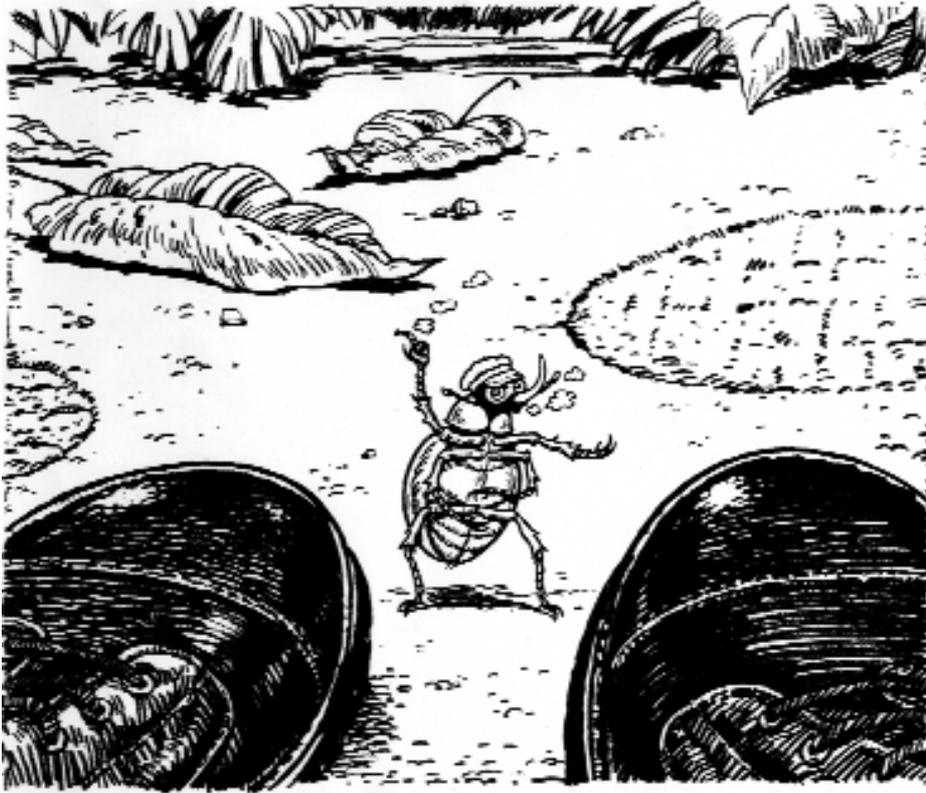
Vale. Salud, and more colored markers, because the ones you used surely must have run out of ink.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

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2 In Spanish, “puedes tutearme” (you can be informal with me) is an invitation to use the familiar form of address, “tú,” instead of the formal “usted.”

Durito II: Neoliberalism Seen From La Lacandona



Almost a year after their first encounter, Marcos once again meets Durito. Some weeks earlier, the Zedillo government had launched a two-pronged attack on the Zapatista communities. While press agents claimed to have discovered Marcos' "true identity," tanks rolled into Chiapas. Faced with an attack by some 60,000 soldiers, the EZLN and over 26,000 people from Zapatista communities retreated into the mountains. The conversation in this new encounter dwelt particularly on the inhabitants of Prado Pacayal who, after enduring great hardship in the mountains, returned to find their possessions, provisions, and houses destroyed by the Army. Following this vivid account of the havoc wrought by the army, Durito and Marcos examine the neoliberal policies behind the army offensive. Here Durito puts forth his critical "metatheoretical" observation that neoliberalism is a social crisis made theory and doctrine, and is thus "pure theoretical shit."

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To *Proceso*, *El Financiero*, *La Jornada*, *Tiempo*
To the National and International Press
March 11, 1995

Sirs:

Here is a message demonstrating that man is the only animal that risks falling into the same trap twice. Indeed, it would be good if you would send a copy of the much-mentioned law to the federal troops.¹ They don't seem to have been informed, because they keep advancing. If we keep withdrawing we're going to run into a sign saying: "Welcome to the Ecuador-Peru border." It's not that we wouldn't enjoy the trip to South America, but being in the middle of three fires like that must not be very pleasant.²

We are well. Here in the jungle one can appreciate, in all its rawness, the transformation of man into monkey (anthropologists, abstain).

Vale. Salud, and one of those crystals that lets you see the present and the future.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Insurgente Subcomandante Marcos

P.S. that asks just out of curiosity: What is the name of the general of the Federal Army who, before retreating from the *ejido* Prado, ordered the destruction of everything useful in the houses of the indigenous people and the burning of several huts?³ In Prado they earn, on average, 200 new pesos a month per family; how much does the general earn for such a "brilliant" military action? Will they promote him in rank for "meritorious service"? Did the general know that one of the houses he ordered destroyed was Toñita's house? Will this general tell his children and grandchildren about this "shining entry" in his record of service?

What is the name of the officer who, days after having invaded and destroyed houses in the *ejido* Champa San Agustín, came back with candy and had himself photographed as he gave it to the children?

1 The "Law for Dialogue, Reconciliation and Dignified Peace in Chiapas," approved by the Mexican Congress on March 11, 1995 and accepted by the EZLN on March 16, 1995, protected the EZLN against arrest and harassment during the peace process.

2 A long-standing border dispute between Ecuador and Peru flared into armed conflict in 1995.

3 *Ejido* refers to communally held land recognized in Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution. The film *Prado Pacayal* chronicles the return of people to the destroyed village (see Bibliography).

What is the name of the officer, who, emulating the protagonist of Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *Pantaleón y las visitadoras*, brought dozens of prostitutes to "attend" to the garrison that occupies Guadalupe Tepeyac?⁴ How much do the prostitutes charge? How much does the general in charge of such a "risky" military operation earn? How much commission does the Mexican "*Pantaleón*" get? Are the prostitutes the same for the officers and the troops? Does this "service" exist in all the garrisons of the campaign "in defense of the national sovereignty"?⁵

If the Mexican Federal Army exists to guarantee national sovereignty, shouldn't they have accompanied Ortiz to Washington, instead of persecuting Mexican indigenous dignity in Chiapas?⁶

P.S. that armor-plates its heart again to tell what follows. . . . The 8th of March, the inhabitants of Prado finish coming down from the mountains. Toñita's family was part of the last contingent. When they come to what was left of their little house, each Prado family's scene is repeated in Toñita's family: the men, impotent and enraged, look over the little that is left standing; the women cry and tear their hair, praying and repeating: "Oh my God, oh my God," while they pick up the torn clothes, the few broken pieces of furniture, the food, spilled and contaminated with excrement, the broken images of the Virgin of Guadalupe, their crucifixes trashed alongside "fast food" wrappers from the U.S. Army. This scene is now almost a ceremony among the inhabitants of Prado. They have repeated it 108 times in the last few days, once for each family. 108 times the impotence, the rage, the tears, the cries, the "Oh my God, oh my God . . ."

However, this time there is something different. There is a tiny little woman who doesn't cry. Toñita didn't say anything, she didn't cry, she didn't yell. She walked over the rubbish and went directly to a corner of the house, as if looking for something. There, in a forgotten corner, was a little teacup, broken, thrown away like a worn-out hope. That little cup was a gift someone had sent her so that someday Toñita-Alice could drink tea with the Mad Hatter and the March Hare. But this time it isn't a hare that Toñita finds in March. It is her house,

4 *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1973), a novel by Mario Vargas Llosa, examines the conflicts and contradictions that result from the enthusiasm of a junior officer dedicated to following orders in the Amazon jungle. It was published in English as *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

5 The hospital in Guadalupe Tepeyac, originally funded by President Carlos Salinas de Gotari through the structural adjustment program *Solidaridad*, was turned into a brothel during the 1995 military offensive.

6 Guillermo Ortiz Martínez replaced Jaime Serra Puche as Mexico's Minister of Finance following the peso crisis and Serra's subsequent resignation in December 1994. Ortiz immediately traveled to the U.S. to reassure foreign investors and begin negotiating a bailout package for investors in the Mexican capital market.

destroyed on the orders of the one who claims to defend sovereignty and legality. Toñita doesn't cry, she doesn't shout, she doesn't say anything. She picks up the pieces of the little teacup and the little saucer that served as its base. Toñita leaves, walks again through the torn and dirty clothes on the ground, through the corn and beans strewn about the destruction, she passes by her mother, her aunts, and her sisters who weep, and cry out, and repeat "Oh my God, oh my God." Outside, near a guava tree, Toñita sits down on the ground and, with mud and a little saliva, starts to stick the pieces of the teacup together again. Toñita doesn't cry, but there is a cold and hard glimmer in her eyes.

Brutally, as has been the case for indigenous women for the last 500 years, Toñita is no longer a girl and becomes a woman. It is the 8th of March of 1995, International Women's Day, and Toñita is five years old, going on six. The cold and piercing glimmer in her eyes rescues, from the broken little teacup, sparkles that wound. Anyone would say that it is the sun that sharpens the rancor that betrayal has sown in these lands. . . . As if mending a broken heart, Toñita reconstructs, with mud and saliva, her broken little teacup. Someone, far off, forgets for the moment that he is a man. The salty drops that fall from his face don't manage to rust his leaden heart. . . .

P.S. that risks "the most valuable thing I own" (the account in dollars?): I read that now there is a "Subcomandante Elisa," a "Subcomandante Germán," a "Subcomandante Daniel," and a "Subcomandante Eduardo," so I have decided to make the following resolution: I'm warning the PGR that if they keep coming out with more "Subs," I will go on a total fast.⁷ Furthermore, I demand that the PGR declare that there is only one "Sub" (fortunately, says My Other Self when he reads these lines), and that they clear me of all blame for the dollar's weakness against the Japanese yen and the German MARKS (note the narcissistic repetition).⁸ (And don't send me to Warman—please!)⁹

7 Prior to President Zedillo's military offensive, the PGR Office of the Attorney General, claimed to have discovered the identities of several Zapatista leaders in cities throughout Mexico. The "total fast" is undoubtedly a reference to Carlos Salinas' one-day hunger strike on the previous March 3. He protested allegations that he was involved in a cover-up of the assassinations of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio and PRI party official José Francisco Ruiz Massieu. Salinas also demanded exoneration from responsibility for the December 1994 peso crash, despite having repeatedly ignored his own economists' advice.

8 The government tried to blame the EZLN for the peso devaluation of 1994. In Spanish German Marks are "Marcos."

9 Once a left-leaning intellectual specializing in indigenous social movements, Arturo Warman was one of the architects of the revision of Article 27, allowing for the privatization of *ejidos* or communal lands. In 1995 he served the Zedillo administration as *Secretaría de Agricultura Ganadería y Desarrollo Rural* (Secretary of Agriculture).

P.S. that acknowledges receipt of promises attached to a sonnet and returns with . . .

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.
—William Shakespeare, Sonnet XXIX

P.S. that tells about what happened February 17 and 18 of 1995, the eighth and ninth days of the withdrawal. We were following the double point of a lunatic arrow. “Waxing quarter, horns to the East,” I remembered, and repeated to myself as we came out into some pastures. We had to wait. Above, a military airplane rained down its purr of death. My Other Self starts to sing softly:

And we heard it strike ten and eleven,
twelve, one, two and three.
And hidden at dawn,
we were soaked by rain . . .

I give him a threatening sign to shut up. He defends himself: “My life is a song by Joaquín Sabina.”¹⁰

“It sure must not be a love song,” I tell him, forgetting my own prohibition on talking.

Camilo reports that the plane is gone. We go out into the pasture and keep walking in the middle of a field still damp from the rain. I move forward, looking upward, seeking on its dark side some answer to old questions.

“Watch out for the bull,” I managed to hear Camilo warn me. But it was too late—lowering my gaze after a trip through the Milky Way, I met the eyes of a steer that, I think, was as frightened as I was because he ran just like me, but in the opposite direction. When I got to the fence, I managed to throw my pack over the barbed wire.

10 Joaquín Sabina is a Spanish singer and political activist.

I stretched out to drag myself under the fence. I did it with such good luck, that what I thought was mud was cow shit. Camilo was roaring with laughter. My Other Self even got the hiccups. The two, sitting there, and me, signaling them to shut up.

“Ssshhh, the soldiers are going to hear us!” But no, they keep laughing. I cut a bunch of star-grass to clean the shit off my shirt and pants as best I can. I put on my pack and go on walking. Camilo and My Other Self followed behind me. They weren’t laughing anymore. When they got up, they realized that they had been sitting in shit. Attracting cows with such a seductive odor, we finished crossing the wide pasture that had a stream running through it. When we got to the wooded zone I looked at my watch. 0200. “Southeastern time,” Tacho would say. With luck and without rain, we would arrive at the foot of the mountain before dawn. So it was. We went in by an old trail between big and well-spaced trees that announced the closeness of the jungle. The real jungle, where only wild animals, the dead and guerrillas live. There wasn’t much need for a light; the moon still tore through the branches, like a white streamer, and the crickets hushed with each step on the dry leaves. We came to the great ceiba tree that marked the gate of entry; we rested a while and, now with the morning light, advanced for a couple hours more up the mountain.

The trail was lost at times, but despite the years gone by, I remembered the general direction. “Towards the east, ‘til you hit a wall,” we said eleven? years ago. We rested beside a little creek that surely wouldn’t last in the dry season. We rested awhile. I was awakened by a cry from My Other Self. I took the safety off my weapon and aimed where the groan came from. Yes, it was My Other Self, grabbing his foot and complaining. I came near. He had tried to take off his sock without thinking and had pulled off a piece of skin.

“What an idiot,” I told him, “you have to soak it first.”

It was the ninth day with our boots on. Fabric and skin combine with dampness and mud, become one, and taking off your sock is like skinning yourself. I showed him how to do it. We stuck our feet in the water, and little by little, pulled back the fabric. Our feet smelled like dead dogs and the skin was a deformed and pale white mass. The disadvantages of sleeping with your boots on.

“You scared me. When I saw you grabbing your foot, I thought a snake had bitten you,” I reproached him.

My Other Self paid no attention to me; he kept on soaking his feet with his eyes closed. As if he were invoking something. Camilo began to hit the ground with a stake.

“Now what?” I asked him.

“Snake,” said Camilo while he threw stones, sticks, boots and everything he found at hand. At last, a heavy stick lands a blow to the head.

We approached fearfully.

“*Mococh*,” says Camilo.

“*Nauyaca*,” I say.

Limping, My Other Self comes close. He puts on a knowing look when he says, “It’s the famous *Bac Ne’* or Four Noses.”

“Its bite is fatal and its venom very poisonous,” he adds, imitating the tone of a barker at a town fair. We skin it. Skinning the snake is like taking off its shirt. The belly is opened like a long *cierre relámpago*, or zipper, the guts are emptied and the skin comes off in one piece.¹¹ The meat is left, white and cartilaginous. It’s pierced with a thin stick and put on the fire. It tastes like grilled fish, like *macabil*, like we used to catch in the *Sin Nombre* river, eleven? years ago.¹² We ate that and a little *pinole* with sugar that we had been given.¹³ After a little rest, we wiped out our tracks and continued the march. Just like eleven? years ago, the jungle welcomed us as usual: raining. The rain in the jungle is something else. It starts to rain but the trees act as a big umbrella, few are the drops that escape from between the branches and leaves. Afterwards, the green roof begins to drip, and then, yes, you get wet. Like a big watering can, it keeps dripping, raining inside, although above it has stopped raining. The same thing happens with rain in the jungle as with war: you know when it starts, but not when it ends. I went along the way recognizing old friends: the *huapac’* with its modest coat of green moss; the capricious and hard rectitude of the *cante*; the limp horse, the mahogany, the cedar; the sharp and poisonous defense of the *chapaya*, the fan of the *watapil*; the disproportionate gigantism of the leaves of the *pij’* that look like green elephants’ ears; the vertical rise to the sky of the *canolte’*, the hard heart of the *canolte’*; the threat of the *cheche’m* or “evil woman,” that, as its name indicates, causes a very high fever, delirium, and severe pain. Trees and more trees. Nothing but brown and green filling the eyes, the hands, the steps, the soul anew . . .

Like eleven? years ago, when I arrived here the first time. And then I was climbing this damned hill and thinking that each step I took was the last one, and saying to myself, “one more step and I die,” and I took a step and then another and I didn’t die and I kept walking and it felt like the load weighed 100 kilos, and what a lie since I knew that I was carrying only 15 kilos and “it’s just that you’re a rookie,” said the *compas*¹⁴ who went to get me and they laughed with complicity, and I kept repeating to myself that now for real the next step would be the last and I cursed the hour when it occurred to me to become a guerrilla, and I had been doing so well as an organic intellectual, and the revolution has many tasks and all are important, and why did I have to get involved with this one, and for sure at the next rest I’ll tell them here and no farther, and it would be better for me to help them there in the city, and I kept walking and kept falling and the next rest came and I didn’t say a thing, partly out of shame and partly because I

11 *Cierre relámpago* is literally a “lightning-bolt closure.”

12 *Sin Nombre* translates as “Without a Name.”

13 *Pinole* is a toasted corn flour beverage.

14 *Compas* is the diminutive of *compadres*, which translates roughly as friends or comrades.

couldn't even speak, and gasping for air like a fish in a puddle that's too small, and I said to myself, all right, at the next rest I'll tell them, really, and the same thing happened and that's how I got through the 10 hours of that first trip on the trail in the jungle, and late in the afternoon, they said, we're going to stay here, and I let myself fall right there, and I said to myself, "I made it," and I repeated, "I made it," and we put up the hammocks and then they made a fire and then they made rice with sugar and we ate and ate and they asked me what I thought of the hill and how did I feel and if I was tired and I only repeated, "I made it," and they looked at each other and said, "He's only been here one day and he's already gone crazy."

The next day I found out that the trail I'd covered in 10 hours with a 15-kilo load, they could do in four hours and with 20 kilos. I didn't say anything. "Let's go," they said. I followed them, and with each step I took I asked myself, "Did I make it?"

Today, eleven? years later, history, tired of walking, repeats itself. We made it. Did we? The afternoon was a relief; a light, like that wheat that relieved me many early mornings, bathed the spot where we had decided to camp. We ate after Camilo ran across some (*cara de viejo* or *cabeza blanca*).¹⁵ It turns out that there were seven. I told Camilo not to shoot; maybe they were some running deer and I thought that we'd come across them. Nothing, neither *Sac Jol* nor deer. We put up the tarps and the hammocks. After awhile, at night now, the *martruchas* came to bark at us, and afterward, the *woyo* or night monkey. I couldn't sleep. Everything hurt, even hope . . .

P.S. self-critique that shamefully disguises itself as a story for women who, at times, are girls, and for girls who, at times, are women. And, as history repeats itself once as comedy and again as tragedy, the story is called . . .

Durito II: Neoliberalism as seen from La Lacandona

It was the tenth day, with less pressure now. I distanced myself a little to put up my tarp and move in. I was going along, looking up, searching for a good pair of trees that didn't have a dead hanging branch above. So I was surprised when I heard, at my feet, a voice that shouted,

"Hey, watch out!"

I didn't see anything at first, but I stopped and waited. Almost immediately a little leaf began to move and, from under it, a beetle came out and began to protest:

"Why don't you watch where you put your big boots? You were about to squash me!" he yelled.

That protest seemed familiar to me.

"Durito?" I ventured.

15 *Cara de viejo* or *cabeza blanca* translates as "old man's face" or "white head."

"Nebuchadnezzar to you! Don't be an upstart, know your place!" answered the little beetle indignantly.

Now I had no room for doubt.

"Durito! Don't you remember me?"

Durito, I mean Nebuchadnezzar, just kept looking thoughtfully at me. He took out a little pipe from between his wings, filled it with tobacco, lit it, and after a big puff that brought on a cough that wasn't at all healthy, he said, "Hmmm, hmmm."

And then he repeated, "Hmmm, hmmm."

I knew that this was going to take awhile, so I sat down. After several more occasions of "hmmm, hmmm," Nebuchadnezzar, or Durito, exclaimed,

"Captain?"

"The same!" I said, satisfied to see myself recognized.

Durito (I believe that after being recognized, I could call him that again) began a series of movements of feet and wings that, in the body language of beetles, is a kind of dance of joy and to me has always seemed like an epileptic seizure. After repeating several times, with different emphases, "Captain!" Durito finally stopped and fired the question I so feared:

"Got any tobacco?"

"Well, I . . ." I drew out the answer to give myself time to calculate my reserves.

Just then, Camilo arrived and asked me,

"Did you call me, Sup?"

"No, it's nothing . . . I was singing and . . . and don't worry, you can go," I responded nervously.

"Oh, good," Camilo said and walked away.

"Sup?" asked Durito, surprised.¹⁶

"Yes," I told him, "now I'm a Subcomandante."

"And is that better or worse than Captain?" Durito asked insistently.

"Worse," I told him and myself.

I changed the subject quickly and held the bag of tobacco out to him saying, "Here, I have a little."

To receive the tobacco, Durito performed his dance again, now repeating "Thank you!" over and over.

The tobacco euphoria over, we started the complicated ceremony of lighting our pipes. I leaned back on my pack and just looked at Durito.

"You look the same as ever," I told him.

"You, on the other hand, look pretty beat up," he responded.

"It's life," I said, playing it down.

Durito started with his "Hmmm, hmmm." After a while he said to me, "And what brings you here after so many years?"

"Well, I was thinking and since I had nothing better to do, I said to myself, why not take a stroll around the old haunts and say hello to old friends," I responded.

"Even old mountains still turn green!" Durito protested indignantly.

16 El Sup is a nickname for Subcomandante Marcos.

After that followed a long while of “hmmm, hmmm” and his inquisitive looks. I couldn’t take it any longer and confessed to him,
“The truth is that we are withdrawing because the government launched an offensive against us . . .”

“You ran!” said Durito.

I tried to explain to him what a strategic withdrawal is, a tactical retreat, and whatever occurred to me in that moment.

“You ran,” said Durito, this time with a sigh.

“Well, yes, I ran and so what?” I said, annoyed, more with myself than with him.

Durito didn’t press. He stayed quiet a good while. Only the smoke of the two pipes formed a bridge between us. Minutes later he said,

“It seems like there’s something more that’s bothering you, not just the ‘strategic retreat.’”

“‘Withdrawal,’ ‘strategic withdrawal,’” I corrected him. Durito waited for me to go on:

“The truth is that it bothers me that we weren’t prepared. And it was my fault we weren’t prepared. I believed the government did want dialogue and so I gave the order that the consultations with the delegates should begin. When they attacked us we were discussing the conditions of the dialogue. They surprised us. They surprised me . . .” I said with shame and anger.

Durito went on smoking, and waited for me to finish telling him everything that had happened in the last ten days. When I finished, Durito said,

“Wait here.”

And he went under a little leaf. After a while he came out pushing his little desk. After that he went for a little chair, sat down, took out some papers, and began to look through them with a worried air.

“Hmmm, hmmm,” he said with every few pages that he read. After a time he exclaimed,

“Here it is!”

“Here’s what?” I asked, intrigued.

“Don’t interrupt me!” Durito said seriously and solemnly. And added, “Pay attention. You have the same problem as many others. It refers to the economic and social doctrine known as ‘neoliberalism’ . . .”

“Just what I needed now . . . classes in political economy,” I thought. It seems like Durito heard what I was thinking because he scolded me:

“Sssh! This isn’t just any class! This is a treatise of the highest order.”

That bit about “a treatise of the highest order” seemed exaggerated to me, but I got ready to listen to it. Durito continued after some “hmmm, hmmm.”

“It is a metatheoretical problem! Yes, you start from the idea that ‘neoliberalism’ is a doctrine. And by ‘you,’ I am referring to those who insist on frameworks that are rigid and square like your head. You think that ‘neoliberalism’ is a capitalist doctrine to confront the economic crises that capitalism itself attributes to ‘populism.’ Right?”

Durito doesn't let me answer.

"Of course right! Well, it turns out that 'neoliberalism' is not a theory to confront or explain the crisis. It is the crisis itself made theory and economic doctrine! That is, 'neoliberalism' hasn't the least coherence; it has no plans or historic perspective. In the end, pure theoretical shit."

"How strange . . . I've never heard or read that interpretation," I said with surprise.

"Of course! How could you, if it just occurred to me in this moment!" says Durito with pride.

"And what has that got to do with our running away, excuse me, with our withdrawal?" I asked, doubting such a novel theory.

"Ah! Ah! Elementary, my dear Watson Sup! There are no plans; there are no perspectives, only i-m-p-r-o-v-i-s-a-t-i-o-n. The government has no consistency: one day we're rich, another day we're poor, one day they want peace, another day they want war, one day fasting, another day stuffed, and so on. Do I make myself clear?" Durito inquires.

"Almost . . ." I hesitate and scratch my head.

"And so?" I ask, seeing that Durito isn't continuing with his discourse.

"It's going to explode. Boom! Like a balloon blown up too much. It has no future. We're going to win," says Durito as he puts his papers away.

"We?" I ask maliciously.

"Of course, 'we!' It's clear that you won't be able to without my help. No, don't try to raise objections. You need a super-advisor. I'm already learning French, for continuity's sake."

I stayed quiet. I don't know what is worse: discovering that we're governed by improvisation, or imagining Durito as a super-secretary in the cabinet of an improbable transitional government.

Durito attacks:

"I surprised you, eh? Well, don't feel bad. As long as you don't squash me with your big boots I will always be able to clarify for you the road to follow in the course of history, which, despite its ups and downs, will raise this country up, because united . . . because united . . . Now that I think of it, I haven't written to my old lady," Durito cracks up laughing.

"I thought you were serious!" I pretend to be annoyed and throw a little branch at him. Durito dodges it and keeps laughing.

Once calmed down, I ask him, "And where did you get those conclusions that neoliberalism is crisis made economic doctrine?"

"Ah! From this book that explains the 1988-1994 economic project of Carlos Salinas de Gortari," he answers and shows me a little book with the Solidarity logo.¹⁷

17 Begun in 1988, the National Solidarity Program, or PRONASOL (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*), was part of the economic reform strategy of President Salinas. It allowed the executive branch, through a network of "solidarity committees," to use social spending in urban and rural areas to strengthen its political power.

"But Salinas isn't president anymore . . . it seems," I say with a doubt that shakes me.

"I know that, but look who drew up the plan," says Durito and points out a name. I read,

"Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León," I say surprised and add, "So there isn't any break in the chain?"

"What there is . . . is a den of thieves," says Durito, implacable.

"And so?" I ask with real interest.

"Nothing, just that the Mexican political system is like that dead tree branch hanging over your head," says Durito, and I jump and look up and see that, sure enough, there is a dead branch that is hanging threateningly over my hammock. I change places while Durito keeps talking:

"The Mexican political system is just barely attached to reality with pieces of very fragile branches. It will only take one good wind for it to come down. Of course, when it falls, it's going to take other branches with it, and watch out, anyone who's under its shade when it collapses!"

"And if there is no wind?" I ask, while I check whether the hammock is well tied.

"There will be . . . there will be," says Durito and looks thoughtful, as if he were looking at the future.

We both remained pensive. We lit our pipes again. The day began to get underway. Durito kept looking at my boots. Fearful, he asked,

"And how many are with you?"

"Two more, so don't worry about being stomped," I said to calm him. Durito practices methodical doubt as a discipline, so he continued with his "hmmm, hmmm," until he let out,

"But those coming after you, how many are they?"

"Ah! Those? Like about sixty . . ."

Durito didn't let me finish:

"Sixty! Sixty pairs of big boots on top of my head! 120 *Sedena* boots trying to crush me!"¹⁸ He yelled hysterically.

"Wait, you didn't let me finish. They aren't sixty," I said. Durito interrupted again: "Ah! I knew so much misfortune wasn't possible. How many are they, then?"

Laconically, I answered, "Sixty thousand."

"Sixty thousand!" Durito managed to say before choking on his pipe smoke.

"Sixty thousand!" he repeated several times, wringing his little hands and feet together with anguish.

"Sixty thousand!" he said to himself with desperation.

I tried to console him. I told him that they weren't all coming together, that it was an offensive in stages, that they were coming from different directions, that they hadn't found us, that we had rubbed out our tracks so that they wouldn't follow us. In short, I told him everything that occurred to me.

After a while, Durito calmed down and started again with his "hmmm, hmmm." He

18 *Sedena* is the acronym for the *Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional* (Secretary for National Defense.)

took out some little papers that, I started to realize, looked like maps, and began questioning me about the location of enemy troops. I answered as best I could. With each answer, Durito made marks and notes on his little maps. He went on a good while after the interrogation, saying “hmmm, hmmm.” A few minutes passed, and after complicated calculations (I say this as he used all his little hands and feet to do the figuring) he sighs, “What this means is that they’re using ‘the anvil and hammer,’ ‘the slipknot,’ ‘the rabbit hunt,’ and the vertical maneuver. Elementary, it comes from the Ranger’s Manual of the School of the Americas,” he says to himself and to me.¹⁹ And adds,

“But we have one chance to come out well from this.”

“Ah, yes? And how?” I ask with skepticism.

“With a miracle,” says Durito as he puts his papers away and lies back down.

The silence settled down between us, and we let the afternoon arrive between the branches and vines. Later, when night had finished detaching itself from the trees, and flying, covered the sky, Durito asked me: “Captain . . . Captain . . . Psst! Are you asleep?”

“No. . . . What is it?” I answered.

Durito asks with pity, as if afraid to hurt me,

“And what do you intend to do?”

I keep smoking; I look at the silver curls of the moon hung from the branches. I let out a spiral of smoke and I answer him and answer myself:

“Win.”

P.S. that tunes in to nostalgia in the quadrant.

On the little radio, someone lets loose in a blues rhythm, that song that goes, “All’s gonna be right with a little help from my friends . . .” [sic]²⁰

P.S. that now, really, says goodbye, waving a heart like a handkerchief.

So much rain

and not even a drop

to sate the yearning . . .

Vale again. *Salud*, and be careful with that dry branch that hangs over your heads and that pretends, ingenuously, to shelter you with its shade.

El Sup, smoking . . . and waiting.

19 The U.S. Army Rangers are elite combat units that can be rapidly deployed for infantry assaults and special operations. The U.S. Military School of the Americas (SOA) in Ft. Benning, Georgia trains Latin American military personnel in counterinsurgency, intelligence and anti-narcotic operations. Graduates of the SOA have been responsible for many of the most notorious human rights violations within Mexico and Latin America. Ft. Benning has been the target of massive civil disobedience organized by School of the Americas Watch, a coalition of clergy and laypersons founded in 1990 to work toward closing the school. On January 17, 2001 the U.S. Congress renamed the SOA The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC), a change both critics and supporters recognize to be purely cosmetic.

20 This passage appears in English in the original Spanish text. The [sic] is Marcos’ notation.