

COSTA RICA



Tales of Change



COSTA RICA



Tales of Change

INDEX

Introduction **6**

Preface **11**

TALES

THE PRUNER

Daniel Quirós **14**

FIRE ECOLOGY

David Ulloa **28**

TOMORROW FOR ME

Catalina Murillo **40**

COOL

Olivia Fernández **54**

A CAS TREE

Luis Chaves **72**





IT'S ALL STILL HAPPENING, GRANDPA

Santiago Porras **92**

THE MAGIC GARDEN

Shirley Campbell Barr **106**

THE DEAD FISH MUSEUM

José Pablo León **122**

SEEING YOURSELF IN OTHERS

Camila Schumacher **134**

CORN FLOWER

Leonardo Porras **148**

AN EARTHLY ISSUE

Emilia Macaya T. **164**

REST EASY EDITH

Ana Luisa Mora Fernández **178**

Authors' biographies **196**

Introduction

Major changes demand exertions of the imagination. Costa Rica poses significant challenges in its Nationally Determined Contribution presented in 2020 (NDC 2020), the National Decarbonization Plan, and the National Adaptation Policy; meeting them requires work, commitment, and creative work that enables us to visualize it. These stories offer us a glimpse into the future we aspire to and the future we fear, a glimpse of what is coming and what could come.

In the foreword to NDC 2020, we accept as a country that the transformation required to avoid the worst consequences of climate change will be complex but necessary and possible. This anthology shows us that such a transformation can also be desirable. The narratives compile 12 stories of Costa Ricans living in a different future; in some of these futures, the climate actions we dream of in our public policy are underway; in others, the very things our plans seek to avoid have happened.



Climate action exists to improve people's lives. We want to have adequate cities to live in them, resilient crops to have food security, and adapted housing to sleep peacefully. Public policy instruments do not capture these benefits; situations and moments reflect them: in everyday interactions, our aspirations and dreams, and the pursuit of a happy life with those around us. These stories help us understand the impact of change, its positive ramifications, and the risks we run if we do not take up this historic challenge.

As Olivia Fernández writes, “things got better, and then worse, which is common.” Over the next three decades, our past and present actions will lead to a new reality in which improvements and setbacks will probably alternate. As she writes, with luck and energy, we will make decisions that prevent the worst from happening.

The road will be winding. As Ana Luisa Mora explores, we may think of futures where we make the right decisions and build safer communities and families, but we cannot solve everything. We might even have scenarios that Costa Rica actively seeks to avoid, such as Luis Chaves recounts, with a distorted carbon capture program that does not put people at the center of the climate conversation. The struggle must be intergenerational, as Santiago Porras, Catalina Murillo, Camila Schumacher, or Emilia Macaya relate; we must have these discussions together to evaluate what we want and what we want to avoid.

Costa Rica has the economic and technological conditions for transformation. Having the necessary conversations to promote it is still pending, conversations in which citizens feel involved. With this in mind, we propose these stories as a way to start the discussion and invite us to contemplate what could come and what we could do to build a better future.

This anthology would not be in your hands without the support that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has provided year after year in the processes of climate action in Costa Rica. The Costa Rican projects and programs that have received support from the IDB are numerous and of great benefit; there is not enough space to name them all and the people who made them possible. Yet, I am grateful that they have ventured to support this book to bring decarbonization and resilience development to the general public. Only together will we succeed in finding the way forward.

Andrea Meza Murillo

Minister of Environment and Energy





Preface

There are at least two ways of reading the title *Costa Rica 2050: Narratives of the Change*. On the one hand, the phrase refers to a group of stories that deal with climate change narratives in the future. On the other hand, it points out that it is necessary to change some of our most ingrained habits to avoid the undesirable aspects of that future. Both interpretations are correct and complementary. One materializes through the other: one is the map of the proposed territory to be explored. The other is the interplay of possibilities unfolding in that territory.

In the introduction to this anthology, the Minister of Environment and Energy, Andrea Meza, comments: “These stories help us understand the impact of change, in its positive ramifications and also in the risks we run if we do not take on this historic challenge,” Further on, she points out: “Major changes demand exertions of the imagination.”

Change and imagination constitute a meaningful combination in this project. Imagination is a tool that allows us to identify some of the changes that are urgent and necessary for us today. Conveniently enough, imagination is the vehicle that transports us to a future cleaved between two paths: the desirable and the dreaded. Furthermore, it opens the door to dialogue about what could happen if we do not take sufficient action to combat climate change.

The comment on imagination in the anthology's foreword points out, on the other hand, that the project has been undertaken to offer a literary publication rather than a didactic or informative one. Thus, storytelling has been favored over moral overtones. Broad and moldable forms leave room for intuition instead of a text closed in its ideas.

This feature should be emphasized as a visionary decision by the Climate Change Directorate.

In *New Theses on Short Stories* (1999), Argentine Ricardo Piglia states: "the art of narrating is the art of confusion and distortion (...) The art of sensing the unexpected; of knowing how to wait for what is coming, clear, invisible, like the silhouette of a butterfly against an empty canvas". To summarize, this anthology aims to portray the ongoing climate crisis from uniqueness and

unpredictability. It also represents it from the sensitivity and uncertainty of twelve writers from different generations who offer a broad spectrum in their motivations and interests.

These diverse approaches find their center of gravity in Elizabeth Argüello's illustrations, which offer the reader a favorable space to imagine, feel, and sense. That is the core idea behind *Costa Rica 2050: Narratives of the Change*. Those privileged to have participated in its development hope it will serve as a road map and guide the steps we must take in the coming decades. Have a good trip.

Editorial Committee



The pruner

♦ *Daniel Quirós* ♦

As every day, Ernesto woke up tired and sore. Mornings were not his finest hour—Ernesto had few finest hours— so he did not worry much when he found a stem growing on the foot that had been left outside the blankets.

I wonder if I am still asleep, he thought, or half-awake, like that time he thought he had seen his late grandmother in the room - a misplaced sweater- or a furry dog where only an equally shaggy rug was. Also, C sometimes gave him a kind of weird hangover, a brain hangover, so to speak, like fog or something in the head that was similar to thick, opaque smoke.





So he got up, stretched out a little and yawned like in movies, and sat on the edge of the bed, his feet on the wooden floor. Ernesto looked at his feet, hoping to see what he had always seen, but instead, he saw what he never had, and had instead become an insistent vision: a stalk on his foot.

It was a nice very green stem on his right foot. It was either being born, growing, or something Ernesto could not figure out very well from the general territory under his thumb and index finger. It made Ernesto think of those first experiments that children did at school—that he had done at school—: growing the bean seed. To think that after all those years, that simple experiment persisted at schools: his parents, his grandparents, and his great-grandparents had done it. He remembered himself

as a child watching the stem grow, fragile and translucent, against the morning light. But most of all, he remembered the feeling of wonder and joy, the fascination and the sense that he alone was witnessing some sort of secret miracle; that flowering which was like a miniature world being born before his curiosity.

And now that he thought about it, that exact feeling might have been what led him to enroll in the Pruning Academy. It was, after all, the same

At the Academy, he learned why his bean plant had grown more and stronger than his parents ‘ and grandparents ‘. To think that decarbonization had happened only with his generation and that, at some point, the country and the world argued about its effects.

wonder, the same eyes of a child turned into an adult who wanted to keep taking care of that plant and watch it grow.

At the Academy, he learned why his bean plant had grown more and stronger than his parents ‘ and grandparents ‘. To think that decarbonization had happened only with his generation and that, at some point, the country and the world argued about its effects. Some even argued

—hard to believe now— that more CO₂ in the atmosphere could lead to accelerated growth of plants and trees. It had been the Jasper Ridge project at Stanford University— he would never forget that from his history exams— in the early 2010s that had proven this was only partially true. In isolation, more CO₂ in the atmosphere could lead to accelerated growth of the plant kingdom; however, not in the real world, where

***Ernesto had never cared about those discussions.
In the Academy classes, he had devoted
himself to studying the growth of flowers and
trees, the taxonomy of seeds and roots.***

it combined with other factors: temperature, precipitation, wind, sun, earth. In the end, it had not been CO₂, but nitrogen. Nitrogen, which no one knew why or how increased in soils when CO₂ levels lowered, acted as a natural fertilizer. When Costa Rica reached decarbonization in 2050, nitrogen increased and increased in the lands; some said it was because of the influence of volcanoes. Scientists were confused, but they had always been confused.

THE PRUNER



Ernesto had never cared about those discussions. In the Academy classes, he had devoted himself to studying the growth of flowers and trees, the taxonomy of seeds and roots. Why they were there or how they had grown so fast had never interested him as much as sinking his hands

into the earth and seeing everything grow and grow, serving that growth somehow.

After all, he had been part of the generation that saw the city flood with vines and branches; palm trees that had spread over electric towers, which led them to be replaced by underground cables and electric trains running through jungle and flower tunnels.

But at some point, those flowers began to flood the streets at different times of the year, like colored ash. The trails of the interurban biological corridors grew excessively; so did the bromeliads that began to hang from apartment balconies. Suddenly, electric buses needed constant repairs because seeds and leaves filled their engines. Moss of dif-



THE PRUNER

ferent colors covered roofs and rooftops, like carpets installed in a city becoming a single room.

That's why the National Flora Monitoring Committee was created as part of the Ministry of Environment and Energy, and then the Pruning Academy, as a type of gardener elite; suddenly one of the most critical jobs in the new green economy.

Ernesto's years at the Academy had been rigorous: his specialization in pollinating a new and little-known orchid, his years of fieldwork, and his internship. He eventually became the main pruner in the Western Area pruning brigade, shortly after it replaced the old cities of Escazú, Santa Ana, and Ciudad Colón. He went out with the brigade to prune branches and vines that had taken over buildings and streets and to cover holes in old trees —macaws made their nests there, which became a problem for neighbors—. He also collected wheelbarrows full of flowers or changed the nets that trapped pollen to counteract the new allergy epidemics.

Ernesto began to feel tired. He pruned a vine that was causing cracks in walls somewhere, and soon after, he had to do the same thing all over. He pulled out the roots that grew inside water tanks and sewers, and then he had to pull them out again, like stubborn octopuses clinging to the depths. Besides that, the bastards at Fauna began to indirectly pass



on responsibilities to them, like with the herds of coatís converging on shopping centers—they said it was due to a type of fruit that they liked to eat and, therefore, Flora’s responsibility— or the jaguarundís attacking pets in houses—supposedly because tree branches were too long—. On top of it all, there was the weed problem. Weed that was growing and growing with no apparent end. Ernesto needed almost a quarter of his brigade to fight it every day. It was too much, and frankly, they couldn’t cope.

Besides fatigue, Ernesto had also begun to suffer bodily aches and pains and injuries from several falls when pruning that pooped out his back and had been the reason for two operations. He had started on C to relieve constant pain, but now he had an addiction. At first, he took it just to sleep. Then, it was an excuse for enduring overtime hours or more extended workdays until he found himself taking it every day, especially

as he woke up when exhaustion and pain overwhelmed him. He couldn't get through the day without C, and besides that, it was getting expensive because the hybrids —C mixed with oil of hallucinogenic mushrooms, queen of the night, or even yagé— were more expensive and more potent. There were cheaper ones, but those were synthetic and synthetic ones lit up regions of his brain that didn't help him. Natural is better.

The pathetic attempts of his brigade and the multiple divisions, with their hundreds of clippers, were part of a struggle they could not win. That struggle also corresponded to a concept of imbalance, order, and disorder, which no longer existed.

But he had to pay for it and break the bank on jars of other people's urine —also natural or synthetic— bought in the black market to pass the dope tests.

Ernesto also needed C to ease that growing feeling that all that work was useless. More than that, it was unnecessary. The pathetic attempts

of his brigade and the multiple divisions, with their hundreds of clippers, were part of a struggle they could not win. That struggle also corresponded to a concept of imbalance, order, and disorder, which no longer existed. Pruning is not natural, the new environmental groups had begun to say, and Ernesto realized —secretly, of course— that he was more and more in agreement.

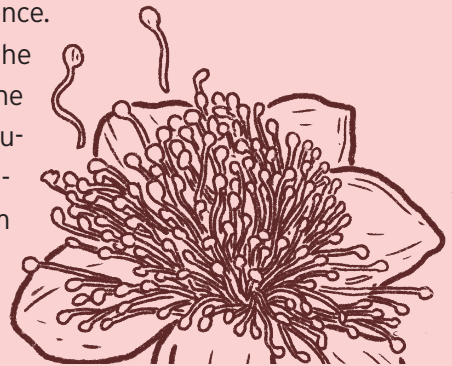
When he got up and saw the stem on his foot, he thought of that place for some reason. Maybe it was the dream he still had on him or the effect of the C.

At the same time, he had begun dreaming—he did not know if it was an effect of the C or the C that spoke to him— of a city covered with jungle and vines. He saw buildings stained with brightly colored lichens in his dreams, like living algae on the wind. The strange thing was that he didn't see people in those dreams, and he wasn't sure what people in that place would be like. He sensed that they were there, but they were like shadows, or when you believe you see shadows in the corners of mirrors. What did he see under all that greenery? Was it ruins or a live throbbing city?

THE PRUNER

When he got up and saw the stem on his foot, he thought of that place for some reason. Maybe it was the dream he still had on him or the effect of the C. He thought the stem had probably gotten in his socks during the pruning —sometimes he undressed at night and found leaves or branches; pieces of some nest that had had to be moved— but when he pulled, it was glued to his skin. He pulled it out like a misplaced hair. Then he held it in front of his face and examined it.

It really looked like beanstalks —he thought— a sticky green like live blood. He threw it away without thinking about it, then walked to the bathroom and instructed Alexa to make breakfast. On the way to work, he sat down with his coffee thermos on one of the electric train seats. He had been lucky because there were hardly ever spaces available, especially like this one, with no pregnant women at sight or anything else to strike his conscience. He drank coffee and sat down to watch the city pass by. At that time in the morning, the vegetation was always full of mist and humidity. They passed a group of hummingbirds hovering in front of some geranium pots on the balcony of a house. In the distance, a flock of macaws flew from the



Colón Temple.

Ernesto began to feel better, more alert, and with less pain: the C started to take effect. He drank coffee, and as he lowered his arm, he saw that it had another stem. It was the same as the first: green, trans-

It can't be, he thought, as the train entered a jungle tunnel. In the glass reflection, he looked at himself on the black and white of speed and felt displaced

lucent, on the center of his forearm.

It can't be, he thought, as the train entered a jungle tunnel. In the glass reflection, he looked at himself on the black and white of speed and felt displaced, somewhere else, as if returning to the feeling of his dream or the place he had seen in it. They came out of the tunnel, and the stem was still there, green among the black hairs. Ernesto thought it might be the C; some said prolonged use could cause hallucinations-others called them visions. He pulled the stem to make sure it was there, felt a pinch, and saw his skin stretch. Am I going crazy? - he thought- or is this job somehow getting to me?

He touched the stem again and decided he wouldn't touch it anymore

THE PRUNER

to see what happened or if anything happened. He let it grow. By midday, when he was having lunch with the brigade on a hill of weeds they had to cut, it had grown a little—a couple of centimeters, perhaps—. After a few beers at the bar in the evening with a colleague whom he would love to make his girlfriend, it had grown another two.

That night, Ernesto went to sleep and dreamed long and deep, but he did not remember what he had dreamed when he woke up. He did not feel tired or in pain. He sat on the edge of the bed, as every morning, and saw that he had more stems: on his toes, on one leg, and also on his chin, as if they had grown out of his beard. He also had several more on his forearm. They were all green and translucent, and a flower had been born in the center of them.

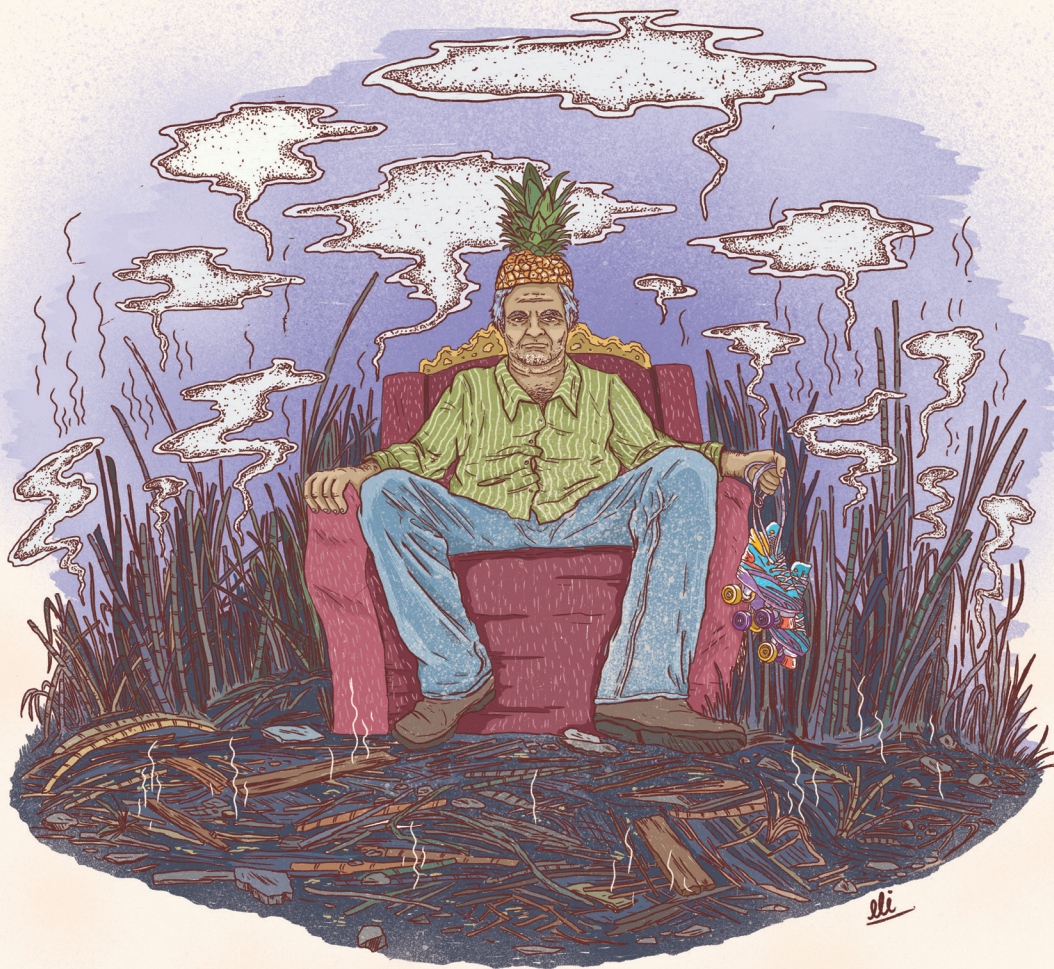


Fire ecology

♦ David Ulloa ♦

*If that water-eyed boy
could have told you the truth
I know you would have held him in your arms
your arms always so strong
so strong even before they broke
so strong even before they crumbled to dust.*

Óscar Espirita





Ientered the house, as usual, hoping that he was waiting for me. That he would pronounce my name with a new tone. This time I strived not to drag my feet, not to walk delicately. So, I marched. I marched into the living room because I knew I'd find him arguing with the TV, raging at the leaders of the new world. There he is, slumped in his armchair, increasingly aged and stooped, my poor old man. Without saying anything, I stand next to him and let the smell of mud and gasoline wake him up. Let me be the first thing he sees when he opens his eyes and let him find me glistening with sweat, my skin a fiery red, standing firmly, his soldier.

“What did you do?” he’ll ask, surprised with that crooked face he makes when he’s forced to look at me from head to toe. I first saw that grimace when I was six years old, and I rolled out of the room on a pair of roller skates with neon wheels.

My mother, just now, I remember her. She was always doing her best to reconcile us, for him and me to love each other better. But she was so quiet, so minimal compared to the older man’s fists.

“Skates, then—” he muttered in front of me with his fists at his waist. He turned his twisted face towards my mother, who was watching us from the kitchen. - Why not a bike first? This country only wants men on bikes anyway. “Fewer and fewer cars, fewer trucks, fewer men,” he said to himself as he walked past me toward a frightened woman waiting for him.

My mother, just now, I remember her. She was always doing her best to reconcile us, for him and me to love each other better. But she was so quiet, so minimal compared to the older man’s fists. How else could she



defend me? She only had sweet and sparse phrases in her arsenal: “He’ll grow out of it”, “It’s because he’s still attached to me, you’ll see how he becomes like you”, “I’m sure it’s my fault, forgive me”. He never believed those phrases, but enunciated by that sweet and trembling voice, at least, they appeased him.

I can still hear her begging him not to take me to spray¹ pineapples. — I’ve heard that it’s not even legal, and if you kill him, what am I going to do,” she repeated with sobs. From that day on, a group of peasants would get on his truck every morning. They all had a handkerchief over their mouths, and he would take them to the fields. When those men stopped coming, he took their children. But never me. I longed for him

¹ *Translator’s note:* To spray pineapples refers to applying pesticides.

to cover my face and take me. I imagined myself on his shoulders roaming the fields, landing on the grass and sharing pieces of freshly cut pineapple as we admired the clouds. The old man's sweet pineapple.

One thing is sure: despite everything, he misses her and suffers from her absence, even if he never talks about her. Such is King Pineapple: rough on the outside, armoring a heart that scratches and that has always restricted my words.

How naive! Just like Mom. She thought we were safe from that poison, but the fields went dry, and she was left dry on her deathbed. He killed her, or was it the water? One thing is sure: despite everything, he misses her and suffers from her absence, even if he never talks about her. Such is King Pineapple: rough on the outside, armoring a heart that scratches and that has always restricted my words. That's why I also miss the ones she said to him, especially since the transition began here in the canton. Oh, old man, you scared the shit out of me that day! You hollowed out walls and even wielded the sharpest machete used by the peons to open

paths through the undergrowth. Those two government gentlemen didn't even know where to run. And there she was, as always behind you, trying to numb you with her little voice, with her prayers and pleas.

—Listen to them for a moment and see what needs to be done, don't get all worked up," she meowed.

DON'T BUTT IN, NEITHER THESE SONS-OF-BITCHES NOR ANYONE ELSE BOSSES ME AROUND OR MY LAND- you roared. I think that day she began to die. Neither your wife nor your land could keep up with you.

And your fellow farmers also abandoned you, the backstabbers. You asked them to join the crusade, to close ranks for the values of peasant Costa Rica those that your father raised you with, and those you grew your pineapples with. But there was no use. The Montero's cattle ranch was transformed before our eyes, from pasture to fodder. The Soley's sugarcane hectares began to thicken differently, becoming progressively greener. All of them were talking about new ways that you no longer understood. New tillage here, good fertilization there, all were playing in this new world where you ended up losing. You with me. The losers.



But how can you be the loser if you're King Pineapple?? huh?! No, sir. Wake up and look at me, old man, I avenged you. The little faggot took on all the Soley's cane by himself. There was nothing left. Just ashes! It's all ashes Daddy and I did it, I did it for you. Daddy wake up! What, are you not going to say anything to me? Look how I ended up, say something to me. Let's celebrate! Hug me, Daddy. Hey, don't you see the way I look, huh? Dad! LOOK AT ME, YOU OLD SON OF A BITCH!

POUND! POUND! POUND! He was awakened by some banging at the door. —This degenerate is locked out again. He's going to hear me this time," he said to himself as he got up from the couch.

- Good evening, sir. Excuse the inconvenience. Are you Carlos Cordero?
- Mr. Carlos Cordero. And you're not excused, can't you see what time it is?
- Mr. Cordero, I apologize again, but it is an urgent matter.
- If it's so urgent, talk faster.
- I'm Officer Monge from Cutris² ' police department.
- What are you here for today, you cat's-paw? Now, what?
- No, sir, it's not what you imagine.

2 *Translator's note:* Cutris is a canton in the Northern region of Alajuela, one of Costa Rica's seven provinces.

- what then?
- Your son Charlie, do you know where he is?
- Carlos! I baptized him Carlos and his name is Carlos. I have no son called Charlie, understood?
- Sure, excuse me. I am told that this is how he is known in the area.
- If anyone knows him it's me, I'm his pops.
- Yes, sir, of course. Do you know where Carlos is? Have you seen him today?
- CARLOS! CAARLOOS! CARLOS, FUCK!
- Mr. Cordero...
- Well, it looks like he's not here. Good night.
- No, Mr. Cordero, excuse me, give me a moment. Could you tell me when the last time you saw your son was?
Yesterday, the day before, an hour ago...
Mr. Cordero, I need you to be accurate, there was an accident and...
- Look, Mora is it? If he got caught at the hot springs again, take him. What's more, grab all the motherfuckers that get into those mountains and see if they learn their lesson, see if they mend their ways.
- No, Mr. Cordero, that's not it. The thing is, there was a fire on the Soley farm.
- Aha, Braulio's little cane got burned.

- Almost five hectares.
- Because he's chickenshit.
- Excuse me?
- Look, this is an area of docile people. He was one of those who said yes to everything. Soley's fainthearted. And look at the consequences. I mean, why was it necessary to change what was working? Do you understand?
- Mr. Cordero, let me explain further, the problem is that it appears that the fire was arson.

Soley's fainthearted. And look at the consequences. I mean, why was it necessary to change what was working?

- Of course, they don't know what they're doing.
- Arson means that it was vandalism, and that is why I am here, Mr. Cordero. We have reasons to believe it was your son.
- My son Carlos? Burning something down? Look, boy, don't make me laugh because it gives me a cough.

- Mr. Cordero, we're not sure, but...
- Look, you can be sure that jerk won't even kill a fly. He'd first pee, you know, he'd shit his pants before he does that. If he could only...
- Be a criminal?
- Be a man!
- Look, Mr. Cordero, calm down and pay attention. When it all started to burn, one of the farmhands said he saw a man in there throwing gasoline and that he looked like Charlie, excuse me, Carlos. He's not sure because he couldn't get too close because of the fire, and well then...
- Did he get away from you? You can't even do that.
- The man was trapped. The fire surrounded him and he had no way out.
- You better make sure it wasn't Soley to collect some insurance, brazen old man.
- Of course not, Mr. Cordero. Mr. Soley is significantly affected by what happened.
- So what? Do you want a hug? what's with the whining?
Let's see, the subject died asphyxiated by smoke. Firefighters managed to get him out, but he was severely burned from the chest down; he wouldn't have survived anyway. And, Mr. Cordero, I'm terribly sorry, but I need you to come with me to identify the body.
- You want me to identify it? That's not my son, seriously, I'm telling you.



- Mr. Cordero, I know it's difficult, but you're Carlos ' only close relative. And although there are several witnesses who confirm that it is him because of the long hair and earrings, we need you...
- Look, Mora, that's enough. I'm going to play along so I can see your face when I tell you that it's not Carlos. Come on now, walk.
- Thanks, Mr. Cordero let's go. Hey, excuse me, are you gonna leave your door open?
- Yeah, Charlie must be coming soon. He almost always forgets his keys or loses them, and I have to get up and open for him. Let's leave it like this, he'll be here anytime now.



Tomorrow for me

♦ *Catalina Murillo* ♦

If you are —if I am?— reading this letter, I got my way! I made it. We did it. Today the year 2020 ends. I am eighty years old, and I feel the end of this life of mine, where I go by Tulita, is near. I'm sending this letter to myself out there in the future. What year will it be when I find it? What year is it? I ask you. And I greet you —myself?—, here from the past, your past, my present.

Tulita's rough and freckled hand wrote on the top of the paper: Foot-hills of Irazú¹, December 31, 2020. It was almost midnight. Typically, the

¹ *Translator's note:* Irazú is an active volcano located in Cartago, one of Costa Rica's seven provinces.



frenzy of fireworks in the background, down there in Cartago², should be heard, but not one went off that New Year's Eve.

With the turn of the year, an unfounded optimism that manages to sweep you along is aroused, thought Tulita, and she sat down that last night of the pandemic year to write a letter to herself. Yes, to write, to herself. And after writing down the date and place, she looked out the window again to remember, like in old movies.

A young forest is what could be seen, and in the forest, the past. Marga, disappointed, was saying to her, “ You’re insane.” Poor Marga, Tulita smiled as she smiled then with her friend’s desperation, so much for believing in the law of attraction.

A young forest is what could be seen, and in the forest, the past. Marga, disappointed, was saying to her, “ You’re insane.” Poor Marga, Tulita smiled as she smiled then with her friend’s desperation, so much for believing in the law of attraction. Tulita, who neither sought it nor

² *Translator’s note:* Cartago, here, refers to the capital city of the province mentioned above. It’s East of San José and one of the most important cities in Costa Rica.

even wanted it, struck it rich. In town, a book of Christmas lottery tickets had been raffled to help a neighborhood that floods had destroyed. Tulita won the book and forgot about it until she was told she had won the jackpot. Millions, millions, millions, that she had neither sought, nor needed, nor wanted.

That had been back in 1999. Tulita was 59 years old. Marga swore that her friend would now invite her on a cruise or something. But what Tulita did disappointed Marga and impressed everyone else. She bought the bare paddocks and vacant plots around town, not for real estate development, but to reforest them and create a nature reserve with slow-growing trees.

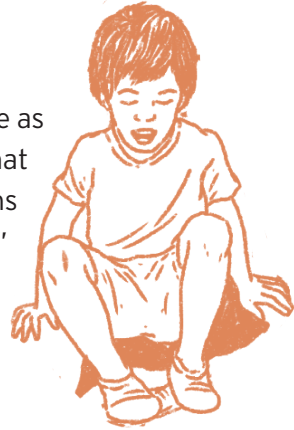


"Forgive me, but at our age, not even the wood for our coffins will come out of that forest." "I hope so," Tulita reaffirmed. Marga was in dire need of an explanation for such extravagance. Tulita stared at her assessing whether to tell her the truth to its utmost extreme. "I do it for myself," she finally confessed. "I am sure that reincarnation exists." People say we have to take care of the planet for the creatures that come in the future, but we ourselves are the ones that come in the future! "Not

There will be no one left in the cities," concluded Tulita. "Oh, well, then I ask to reincarnate as a cockroach —said Marga nonchalantly—;

that I believe in karma, it's that it jumps out at us, in the slightest of actions," said Tulita. "Talk about Karma," sighed Marga, "my best friend wins the lottery, and she doesn't even take me shopping to Miami." "Marga, in the year 2100 —or even sooner!—, we will be wandering around like Biblical characters, crossing deserts, looking for something to eat. And we will suffer, in another skin, but it will be us. We will suffer the horror we are spawning now. There will be no one left in the cities," con-

cluded Tulita. “Oh, well, then I ask to reincarnate as a cockroach —said Marga nonchalantly—; that doesn’t sound bad to me, splashing in the drains and making a feast out of every garbage can.” Tulita thought of a couple of sharp phrases that could behead Marga, but she dreaded karma and instead kept quiet. If she was going to lecture anyone, she might as well lecture herself.



That’s what she’s doing twenty years later, pen in hand, looking out the window at the trees that have grown six meters in twenty years.

Dear...(because of karma, I think I will be a man): karma exists, but it is not what people believe, bent on seeing things in terms of punishments and rewards. Karma is more subtle than that. Karma is the paradoxical consequence of what we do and which takes longer to manifest. We’ll be the children of our great-great-grandchildren. We will be the harvest of our own sowing. We are our own ancestors. So I believe and hope to believe when I read this letter, who knows when.

The eyes of an eleven—year—old boy run through the first lines of the sheet of paper. The letter is too long, and the penmanship is not

easy to read. He's very young. In his hands, he has a handwritten letter from the woman who, half a century ago, started the Iztarú Nature Reserve. No, he cannot understand the magnitude of what is happening at that moment. He would understand it thirty years later, in 2080, watching the air bottlers from his window. Then, like a whiplash, he'd remember that morning:

No one sees the extent of the climate tragedy that is looming. I imagine that in a few decades, life will look more like my ancestors' than mine. With the ecological disaster we have created, getting water, air, and food from the earth will be our biggest challenge, and what will occupy our lives.

This one, when his little hands hold the letter written by those hands that, according to the letter, were his own hands. A few hours earlier, at dawn, a quetzal came uncharacteristically close to his window. He left the house and followed the bird as it jumped from tree to tree until, at a certain point, it disappeared. He sat on a large root in which he discov-

ered a strange glow. The root was holding —literally, like a skinny multi-fingered hand—a glass bottle. And there was the letter, rolled up inside the bottle.



No one sees the extent of the climate tragedy that is looming. I imagine that in a few decades, life will look more like my ancestors' than mine. With the ecological disaster we have created, getting water, air, and food from the earth will be our biggest challenge, and what will occupy our lives. To live will be to survive. If I am reborn in that future, I hope it will be by the Iztarú Reserve, and I will lead a life similar to that of my grandfather, who used to get lost in the wilderness and was summoned with calls.



"Trucutruuuu," a voice summons him, calling him, at that very moment! Trucutrú is not his official name. Clarification seems idle, but after the pandemic of 2040, people gave strange names to children. That wasn't his case. Trucutrú was the first word he said and, realizing how funny it was to his elders, he repeated it often, until they ended up calling him that.



Trucutrú tucks the bottle with the letter in his shirt and goes home for lunch. An instinct tells him not to show anyone his finding. The letter is long, which makes him lazy to read it. He hides it among his childhood treasures and forgets it, the letter and his childhood. He will soon cease to be Trucutrú. At puberty, he went by the name Truk, and it stuck.

Where do things that no one sees, that no one ever knew about go? What happens with what happens without anyone knowing it happens? God will be that. God, chi, or divinity will be that absolute consciousness, for which everything makes sense. That which weaves its web underneath. Like this:

During the 2020 pandemic, a quetzal began to appear at the boundaries of Tulita's newborn forest. With her heart in her boots, she watched it, knowing that if the bird made it that far, it was because it could no longer find food or water anywhere. Tulita wanted to ask for forgiveness, forgiveness for what we have done with the planet, home to all of us, forgiveness for the suffering we have caused. She gave the quetzal a name, and the glowing bird seemed to understand it. Until one day, it stopped coming. For some time, Tulita kept calling him: "Trucutruuuu."

No one ever knew this. No one was able to get excited or even surprised. And that which no one knows is as if it never happened. Chance becomes fate when that heavenly eye sees it. True history is contrived somewhere else, outside of time, and that's where it finds meaning.

No one ever knew this. No one was able to get excited or even surprised. And that which no one knows is as if it never happened. Chance becomes fate when that heavenly eye sees it.

2080. Truk is an exhausted man. It's been too many years of struggling. From the window, he sees the cyborgs of an international consortium bottle air from the Iztarú Reserve to take it to the floating mini-polis in the Pacific Ocean, the places where the owners of the world live. Truk has lost the battle. The inhabitants of Iztarú have approved selling air.

Then, in desperation, Truk has something he doesn't know if it's a memory or a delusion. Just as some people who have almost died have seen their life in an instant, Truk sees, compressed into a fragment of a second, the birth of the forest, the small saplings with their roots already

three times as big as they are, and hands planting them. Truk knows that he saw the birth of that forest. He even seems to see it, from a window, one night... and a paper... that some hands put in a bottle.



The bottle... the bottle! It is as if a time warp is triggered, and Truk hears “Trucutruuuu” in the background. He runs to get his keepsake box, pulls out the letter and reads it for the first time. Everything is written in it, everything, up to that very moment. Rather than from the past, the letter seems to come from the future. Is time circular? Past, present, and future are a loop. And they’re already written.

Costa Rica will cease to be a developing country, and that will be its misfortune. As long as it had no gold or oil, it was spared from depredation. But the times are coming when water and air will be the greatest treasures. Each community must defend itself. Both rich and poor will live encapsulated, fighting for their plots.

Privileged will be those people who can fill their lungs with fresh air when they wake up, drink fresh water and reach up to pick fruit from a tree. But they won’t even realize it when they lose it.

Truk felt a pain that broke him from within. The letter described the current situation with photographic precision. It had waited years in a bottle and had reached his hands, but he had forgotten it. He had failed Tulita, which was to fail himself. And humanity.

Reincarnation is once again a widespread belief. Nobody wants to extend their life but to live it with intensity until their guts burst. There will be more lives, they say, and then it's back to square one.

Although ... what would have been different, he wondered, had he read the letter earlier. Hadn't he been defending that forest all his life? Besides, wasn't that karma, as the letter itself said? One person gives up money to plant a forest, and others later give it up in exchange for cash.

The gnarled and freckled hand of old Truk writes on the top of the paper: Iztaru Reserve, December 31, 2133. He is 83 years old, like hardly anyone else in those days. Going over sixty is a rarity that people do not aspire to. Reincarnation is once again a widespread belief. Nobody wants

to extend their life but to live it with intensity until their guts burst. There will be more lives, they say, and then it's back to square one.

Old Truk has led a simple and frugal existence in his ranger capsule at the entrance of the Iztarú Reserve. He has not had any offspring in this life either. He feels calm but tired. Living on Earth is becoming more and more infamous; he would like not ever to be born again, but he does not know how to achieve that. Just in case, he has arranged to be buried there. That last night of the year, he sits down -again, like so many other years in so many different pasts- to write a letter to himself.

Today the year 2133 ends. I'm going to tell you — I going to say to myself?— everything I know. I've been sending an SOS in a bottle for several lifetimes....

TOMORROW FOR ME

Just like ninety-three years ago, it is a silent night. Gunpowder is no longer used. Truk changes his mind. He's not going to write a letter; he's going to write a story. He writes Tomorrow for me at the top of the page and then goes blank, remembering his future lives.



Cool

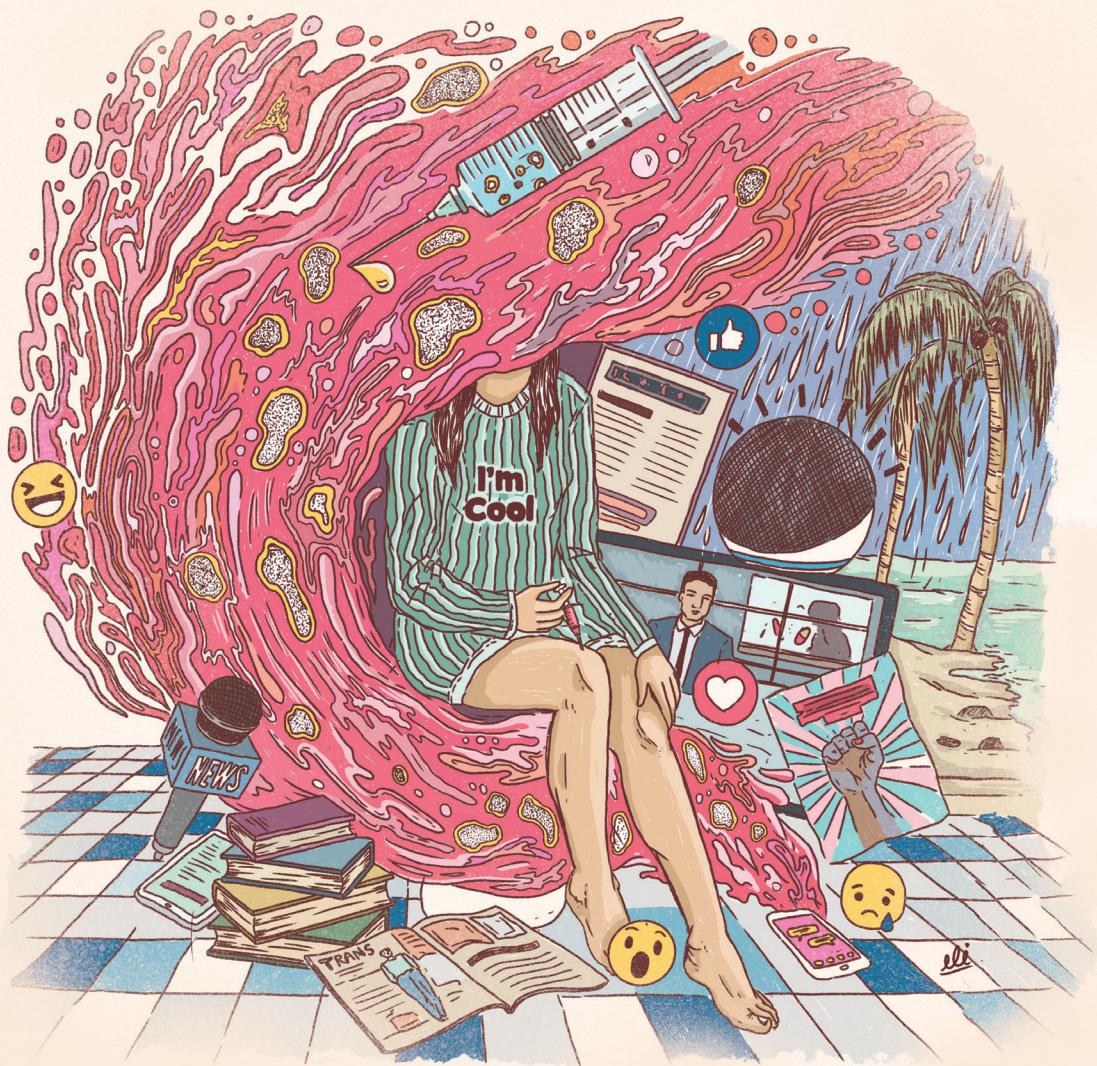
♦ *Olivia Fernández* ♦

The bathroom tiles feel cold under her feet. Seated on the edge of the toilet with her leg extended and immersed in the Sunday morning silence, she lifts the syringe to ensure the air bubbles inside have come out entirely. : thirty years of breaking, every two weeks, the lid of the small blister of estrogen and introducing that viscous oil into the thigh.

♦

The first was a few days after visiting the endocrinologist's office at Los Yoses¹. That time, as she moved the needle close and then away from

¹ *Translator's note:* Los Yoses is a wealthy neighborhood in Eastern San José, dating from the mid 20th century.





her skin, thousands of thoughts about what she was on the verge of doing ran through her head.

Once the liquid was within her muscles, she felt there would be a point of no return. The person she was would change radically and could never again pretend that she might be confused, that it was not so big a deal, that she would get over it.

That night, she was unsure about the lightheadedness she was experiencing. It might have resulted from the timid release of estrogen into

her blood via an oil reservoir or only the effect of adrenaline. Then, as she drifted in and out of sleep, she had the clear and frightening notion that she was likely to have only a few years left.

The thing is, at the time she was finally able to say, “I am a trans woman, “ her life expectancy was of around thirty-five years. That was what statistics about Latin American countries had to offer. Institutional and personal violence were likely to conspire to make her a victim of a hate attack.

The thing is, at the time she was finally able to say, “I am a trans woman, “ her life expectancy was of around thirty-five years. That was what statistics about Latin American countries had to offer.

Besides, she realized she was not the only one who had a grim future. Even if she managed to beat those numbers, which nowadays determine our fate as oracles once did.

Human society also had an expiration date.

It was increasingly noticeable on the news; every week, new records were broken for the hottest day ever on “X,” and “ex” was anywhere on Earth.

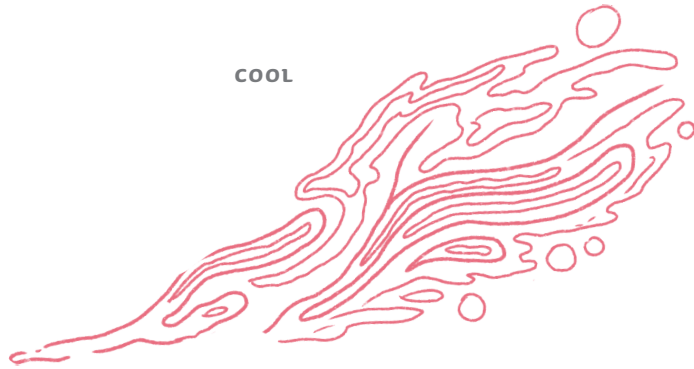
Both she and life on the planet had about twenty years before they began defying the odds with each day they managed to survive into the night.

Paloma was the name she had chosen. While most people are named, she had played with words, sounds, and meanings until one felt familiar and comfortable.



Paloma was the name she had chosen. While most people are named, she had played with words, sounds, and meanings until one felt familiar and comfortable.

COOL



She had a hard time remembering the one she had been given at birth. However, she could clearly remember what it felt like to use it. It was like one of those uncomfortable garments that are tight under the shoulder and itch perpetually. The ones that cut off your breath when you are sitting and leave a mark for hours after you take them off when you arrive home.

She did not hate it; she even cherished it some. It was not a bad name, and it had been enunciated with love and welfare wishes. Still, it was not her own, and to find one whose sound -which she said timidly at first- felt like a dress made to measure, fresh, and with the familiar smell of one's own body, had been one of the greatest joys in her life.



During the first years of hormonal therapy, she saw her breasts transform. Where there was nothing before, little balls emerged under the nipples. She felt them hard every morning. They began to take root; she felt a fibrous tissue around them. Thinking of them as seeds made her feel calmer; it was an analogy that brought her closer to the natural world.

Despite this early excitement, she stopped paying attention to them. On an occasional morning, after months of forgetting their existence, she looked in the mirror and realized how much they had grown.

Paloma touched them, skeptical and curious, feeling the accumulation of fat, soft to the touch. She saw them grow and turn into small mountains rising on her chest, while, outside, she saw the Earth sink.



One day her family decided to return to the beach where they had spent the holidays when she and her sister were children. It was an important trip because it was the first time she had worn a bathing suit since the changes in her body began to occur. She had bought a lilac



bikini. During the trip, she oscillated between euphoria and terror from being so exposed, her skin softened by estrogen receiving sunlight.

She was surprised when she realized that the edge separating the street from the beach had advanced significantly. Many of the palm trees were submerged in sand, with their sad plumes hanging dry.

During those years, being trans was still something that happened in the shadows, in the privacy of home, within families, and in silence.

The tide was rising, and she felt it was somehow an ominous occurrence. The world in which she had grown up was no longer the same, both inside and out.



During those years, being trans was still something that happened in the shadows, in the privacy of home, within families, and in silence.

For some, that silence was -with any luck- the uncomfortable kind, the one that makes things go unspoken. They stopped going to Christmas, Mother's Day, grandma's birthday, and the family no longer vocalized their names for the sake of avoiding that topic. They did not altogether cease to exist, but they did not genuinely exist either.

For others, the silence was much more terrifying. It might have been the one of a room alone at the Chapuí². The one at a two-thousand-pesos³ a night love hotel near the Coca-Cola⁴. The silence of the streets at 11:37 PM while carrying a bag with the few things they owned after their parents accused them of killing their son.



2 *Translator's note:* Chapuí refers to Costa Rica's National Psychiatric hospital, called Manuel Antonio Chapuí y Torres, dating from the end of the 20th century.

3 *Translator's note:* Even though Costa Rican currency is colones, it is called "pesos" colloquially. Two thousand colones is a little over \$3.

4 *Translator's note:* "The Coca-Cola" refers to a rough neighborhood in downtown San José known for having many bus stations. It was named after the Coca-Cola factory that was once there.

Little by little, as is often the case, resistance, stereotypes, and ignorance gave way. The glimpse of a possibility of another world in which being transgender was not a conviction began to emerge.

It first happened in the clinical setting. The statistical accumulation of patients made it clear that support and access to means that affirm a transition were best. This ended the idea that these people were deluded, confused, crazy, or sick.

From that point on, and by pointing out these facts, activism progressed in the legal sphere: the right to a name and access to medical services, and to have documents reflect their gender -not the one a doctor had assigned with haste when bringing them into the world-.

Paloma started seeing people like her on TV. Well, not really, because no one on TV is an ordinary human being. Even those trans people emanated some *glamour*.

But, finally, trans women were no longer the caricatures she grew up watching, which had taught her to be disgusted with herself: to see a





monster, a deformed, sick, deceitful, and perverse being in the mirror's reflection.

One day, at a senior school party, a girl she didn't know came up to her and said, "Hey, you're trans, awesome."

Paloma sat confused next to a table full of empty beer bottles, cigarette butts, and a cell phone that someone had left behind. To be who she was had never before amounted to any *status of coolness*. Still, at the same time, it was clear to her that this short interaction was fraught with the exertion of the power that set her apart. Such power offered her a qualified inclusion emphasizing that she was a woman, yes, but a trans woman.

Being trans distanced her from the hundreds of anonymous girls like the one she had just spoken to. The ones whose breath smelled of guaro⁵, with perfect eye contour, a French manicure, a super-cute date, and "who meant well."



⁵ *Translator's note:* Guaro is a typical Costa Rican liquor made from sugar cane. However, colloquially, the word is used extensively for most alcoholic beverages.

In the following years, things got better and then worse. Visibility is rarely gained from those with good intentions alone. Changing the *status quo* in favor of any minority fuels a counter-reaction proportional to the fear it produces in the people benefiting from the social hierarchies.

Before, people lived in silence; now, they lived amidst too much hustle and bustle. They were deafened by the voices and cries of people who publicly debated in favor and against every dimension of the life of what they imagined a trans person was.

Before, people lived in silence; now, they lived amidst too much hustle and bustle. They were deafened by the voices and cries of people who publicly debated in favor and against every dimension of the life of what they imagined a trans person was.

The inclusion of health services, which had been developed without trumpeting in public hospital offices, was now being exposed in detail in morning programs.

Paloma felt that it was worse than life in relative darkness. It was now difficult to go a week without some new controversy about trans people. Her body and existence were the subjects of arguments in debates that were generally an exercise in intellectual posturing.

Amidst the cries, her voice was nonexistent.

On one day, her body was responsible for the impending collapse of Western society and its values. On another, it was a foretoken of fast-approaching transhumanism. Paloma failed to understand how while accumulating estrogen capsules, she had so much power over the fate of the human species, whether for its destruction or its transcendence.

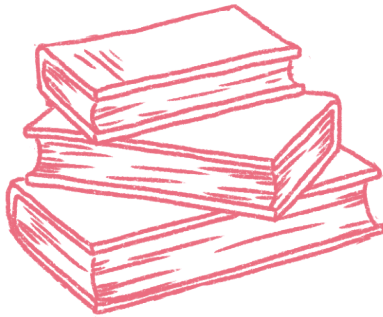
Withdrawn in her mind, she recalled that in the last years of high school, when she stayed up late to finish homework and procrastinate, she found a video. It was about how angels were not as they were represented in churches. On the contrary, they were terrifying as only the divine can be. That which the human mind can scarcely comprehend causes bewilderment, dread, and wonder.

Perhaps (if all she heard was true), she was like an angel. A being who existed midway between the human and the divine. It was the only way to make sense of the reactions she caused in people.



Unfortunately for those who basked in prophetic trends - but comfortingly for Paloma - trans people ended up being all too normal: busy with an office job, two hours commuting one way, two the other; dirty dishes, shopping at the market.

Paloma grew up and saw the world become less hostile, though not altogether friendly. Being openly transphobic became a social faux pas.



In society's endless frenzy to have the correct opinions and express them the right way, disgust and mistrust took on a more refined and less crude appearance.

The night before her fortieth birthday, she mentally went over everything supposed to be ready before the party. Yet all Paloma could remember was the fear that kept her awake so many nights in her adolescence: the promise that she would never reach that age.

With each passing year, the sentence was prolonged. Paloma made observations, pondered reasons, and became less artful. Until, finally, she turned forty, surrounded by close friends and in front of a cake baked by her partner. Never again did she hear of the promised imminent death.

Days later, Paloma and her partner decided to celebrate with a trip to the Pacific: they had started the adoption process!



The idea was to spend a few weeks at the beach. It would have to be in a hotel because that house where she had spent so many holidays as a child had been wiped out by the sea years ago.

The fact was the environmental collapse had been delayed. However, neither Paloma nor the planet had survived the process without loss or pain.

That's why, that same night, Paloma was in the basement of a hotel.

The fact was the environmental collapse had been delayed. However, neither Paloma nor the planet had survived the process without loss or pain.

Halogen lights illuminated the area; her suitcases were stacked in a corner along with many others. At the base of the stairs, the water running down from the upper floor made puddles.

Yes, humanity had dodged the major catastrophe, but not without severely disrupting the planet's life cycles: high temperatures, rain, hurricanes, and storms occurred without a predictable rhythm.



A significant percentage of habitable land had been lost. Migrations of unsuspected magnitude had occurred, and several nations had disappeared amid local wars over water resources and arable land. Losses, both human and natural, had been profound.

In any case, that's how Paloma ended up spending her vacation in the basement of a hotel in Guanacaste⁶. Her shirt and shorts damp, her hair a mess, and holding a glass of wine as she followed the news of the storm's progress along the west coast of the country on her phone.

The presenter asked the guest about the storm's progress, policies to assist the flooded areas, and how the government would mitigate the storm's impact on agricultural production.

As she heard the presenter mention that every nation was experiencing a moderate shortage situation at the time, she saw a figure out of the corner of her eye.

⁶ *Translator's note:* Guanacaste is one of Costa Rica's seven provinces. It is located Northwest of the country, bordering the Pacific Ocean and Nicaragua. It concentrates much of the country's tourism activity.

COOL

A woman who appeared to be the same age as she approached her. Paloma could smell the wine in her breath. When she looked up, she discovered a beautiful round face. Behind her, her husband gestured on the phone. He was attractive. They both had that completely average particular something about them.

Paloma, aware that water was running into her shoes, looked at her kindly but with an underhanded edge.

Then, the woman said, "Oh, you're trans, aren't you? *That's so cool*".



A CAS TREE

♦ *Luis Chaves* ♦

A flock of parakeets flies across Zapote's¹ sky. Marce rinses some glasses at the kitchen sink, and through the window, she sees them pass by. Birds always fly diagonally, she thinks as the tap water massages her hands. It starts raining as if those parakeets tore the clouds apart with the edge of their wings. First, there are some sparse fat raindrops or some kind of heavy acupuncture on the gable roof. Then, the sustained concert like hundreds of half-inch iron nails over the zinc roofing sheet.

¹ *Translator's note:* Zapote is a neighborhood in the Southeast of San José.



Teo comes in, running from the backyard. He was taking a leak outside when it started raining. With his powerful jet of piss, he focused on destroying a column of black ants slowly going up the cas tree trunk. The pencil stroke of the ants was erased with pressurized urine.

***El cas es familia de la guayaba, el primo reprimido.
El fruto de la guayaba es dulce, el del cas es ácido.
Da flores de cinco pétalos blancos y estambres
finísimos que cuando caen tardan en llegar al
suelo, suspendidos en el tiempo y el aire.***

A cas belongs to the guava family, the repressed cousin. Guava fruit is sweet, but cas fruit is sour. The cas tree blooms into five-petal white flowers and very fine stamens that take forever to land on the ground when they fall. They are suspended in air and time; flakes of vegetable snow.

Like every other tree in the activation zones (urban areas of carbon capture and zero-emission), this tree was being protected, conserved, and monitored according to the concession signed by the government with international entities. Rather than looking healthy, it seems brawny.



A CAS TREE



A weightlifter, as if it were about to start running. The dense foliage, colored in an expansive green, seems to utter something when the wind cuts through it. Under the cas tree, where rain waters down Teo's warm urination, there are two burials:

1. An Old Colony² bottle filled with water and New Guinea impatiens petals resealed with the original crown cork (1974).
2. Mini's remains (Pekingese, female, 1977).

Marce and Teo know nothing about what is buried at the foot of the tree; not even their parents were born back then. Marce and Teo have lived in this rented house for around 5 years.

They were lucky enough to have signed a contract to move in some months before the Great Pit, a term coined by news shows, businessmen, and technocrats to refer to the global economic contraction of January 2046.



2 *Translator's note:* Old Colony is a discontinued soft drink produced by the Orange Crush company.



Teo walks straight into the living room and lets himself fall onto the sofa. Then, tells NOVA to play some ambient music. With a neutral voice, NOVA bases its refusal on the fact that he still hasn't paid for the money he got from the ISB. The International Solidarity Bank is an entity that emerged as a unified global bank after the Great Pit. Also, the civil penalty date for tobacco consumption isn't due yet (he was caught red-handed on January 5, 2021, almost a week ago).

—You pissed all over the *Psidium friedrichsthalianum*— says Marce while she curls up in the armchair facing the sofa.

—Whatever!— answers Teo as he frowns. Help me out this time; ask her to play some music.

Marce, turning a deaf ear, sticks her hand inside the sides of the cushion and feels around as if she could see with her hands. She comments and stares in a general direction—if it were possible—, she stares at a rhetorical point.

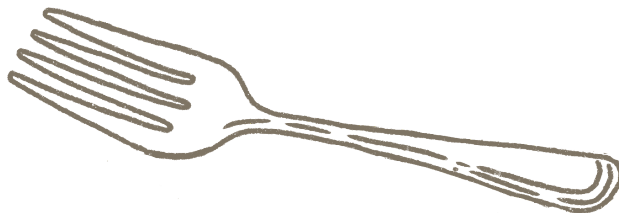
—Things run away from us as soon as they can. They hide.

Under the cushion, there is an aluminum fork, a clothespin, a fossilized wheat cookie, a shoelace, a spool of white thread, three coins of various denominations, a red sock, a bubblegum wrapper, a bent crown cork, and half a button.

Teo doesn't acknowledge receipt and starts a new conversation from scratch.

—How much longer before the green inspection? It's been a while since we've made ends meet.

The rain stops, but water won't stop working. Now it's become the accelerated metronome from the gutters, downspouts, drains, and pipes. Marce, barefoot, sitting in the armchair, her legs folded against her chest, intertwines her fingers with each of her toes.



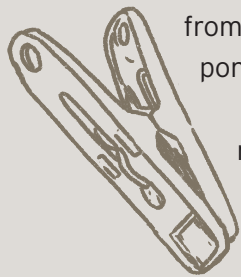
—Water does too.

—Water does what?— replies Teo, lying horizontally on the sofa, one arm as a pillow and the other submerged inside the tracksuit and underpants, as if searching for the same thing Marce was groping for in the depths of the armchair.

—It runs away from us too.



The doorbell rings at 8 a.m., and the inspector announces himself. He sounds more like a paramilitary than like a public official. After asking him to hold on a minute, Marce, in pajamas (i.e., T-shirt and shorts), peeks out into the backyard and whistles their secret code. Teo climbs down the high branches of the cas tree faster. It is the only safe place to smoke far from the municipal smoke detectors and far away, too, from the neighbors' sniffing. They have already won green coupons for snitching on him several times.



It is a fresh, bright morning; the sky is clear and deep. So much so, it looks fake. Marce opens the door barely enough to make the inspector uncomfortable. But instead, in his mind, that obstacle is an opportunity. He manages to

squeeze himself in, just between the door frame and the door, and he is face to face with Marce. He tightens his chest, abdomen, and biceps. They are all well defined under a shirt that is two sizes too small. Just like a bodybuilder, the public official, with a leather bag over his shoulder, walks through the living-dining room and gets to the yard. In the meantime, he puts his badge in the pocket of his tight shirt. Two logos on his shirt compete for attention: the National Office of Emissions Control (NOEC) and the ISB.

At the foot of the tree, Teo, with a cigarette butt in the back pocket of his shorts, takes a couple of steps back to give the public official some room.

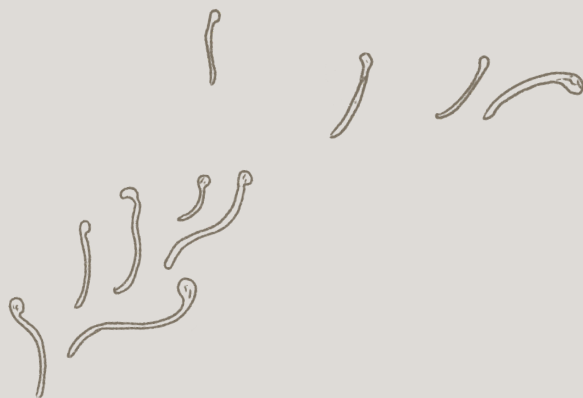
They are out of sight, but you can hear the coarse, chopping sound of the electric helicopters on their morning watch. The spears of light that make their way through the branches, the dense foliage of the cas tree, and the prolonged snow of stamens bring about a slow-motion effect to this police moment.

With her hand above her eyebrow as a visor, Marce watches from the open backyard gate. At the foot of the tree, Teo, with a cigarette butt in the

back pocket of his shorts, takes a couple of steps back to give the public official some room. He greets him with a monosyllable that does not belong to any language and, generally speaking, tries to project tolerance.

Marce is fully committed to what she sees: a 12 frame per second short film, the intermittent sun shining through the leaves, the deep blue of the blue dazes blooming near the vegetable garden (the words *Evolvulus glomeratus* pop up in her head, like those speech bubbles in comic strips), the slow snow coating both men, and a cyclical and faraway noise. There's no scent.

The public officer, who checks out the reflection of his torso in the windows overlooking the courtyard, walks around the tree. He scans him from head to toe. From his leather bag, he pulls out devices that measure, analyze, and store data. This data is immediately sent to oth-



A CAS TREE



er devices, where everything is converted to numbers, units, and exact ratios. Teo stands some meters away from the cas tree, the inspector, and the technology. There, without thinking about it in words, he feels at a disadvantage.

One of the devices beeps, and the public official reads the information on the screen. He clears his throat.

"This quarter, you are entitled to lower reimbursement. Some of the variables dropped, and a holdback percentage due to a pending fine is indicated here." He approaches Teo and shows him what the device displays. Marce returned to the same realm where these men were when the doorbell rang. She gets closer to see what Teo, testy, can only argue with by holding his genitals over his shorts and putting his general feeling of defeat into words.

—"Why don't you suck my wiener?"



Teo's father's inheritance is running low; the Green Allowance is almost half of what it should be after all the deductions and fines. The only thing left untouched is the official No-offspring subsidy. That's what Marce and Teo think about without saying anything, or more precisely, almost without thinking about it.

It's not exactly an idea. It's more the suspicion of something tangible, something with volume and density. This dome covers Marce and Teo every hour of every day.

A cloud that is black yet invisible. It is suspended and motionless over the house.



She read 15 pages before getting up from the toilet. Now she is naked in front of the bathroom mirror;

she stares at the eyes that look back at her. She keeps at it until the very moment in which

everyone who has ever stared at their own eyes in the mirror experiences vertigo over that which has neither name, nor shape, nor answer. She comes back to the material realm and, leisurely, navigates the duplicity of her body there before her. Then she realizes she has

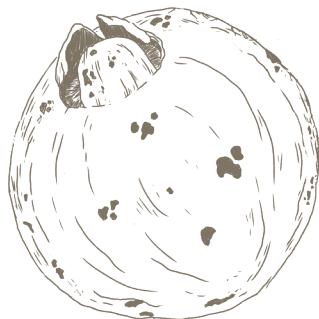


been squeezing her thighs together against the corner of the sink. And nothing interrupts her.



It poured every single afternoon of every single day of the whole week: more milliliters of rain than the soil was ever able to soak up. Right now, heavy raindrops that, as they touch the standing water, create instant crowns which are impossible to hold with the naked eye are falling off from the eaves. Standing still on the dry side of the outdoor-indoor border, that's precisely what Marce thinks: "you don't see the crown; you see the memory of the crown."

Some days ago, Teo turned the only table they had into a workshop. He is focused on tightening some minute screws with the equally tiny Philips head screwdriver from his toolbox. He finishes fixing a transistor radio he found in a rudimentary attic (or rather the space between the wooden rafters of the gable roof and the ceiling). It was in a cardboard box along with some other things: photo albums from the previous cen-



tury, school notebooks, newspaper clippings, pencil cases with pencils and pens, an electronic pocket calculator, a measuring tape, and postcards with pictures of cities or foreign national parks. Teo kept the radio, Marce kept everything else.



It's been three months since the notice of fine for aggravated social misconduct arrived for "disrespecting a representative of the Government-LSB alliance." They got both forms, digital and printed, with letterheads bearing the logos of the global bank, NOEC, and the Public Prosecutor's Office.

The clandestine AM radio broadcasts, which they now listen to religiously every night on the transistor radio, are discouraging. They are clumsy plain speeches which Teo thinks are also suspiciously timorous.

They stoically endure the empty speeches because, after that, they get a long stretch (around two hours) of banned music, which is otherwise inaccessible—at least for them.



It's squirrel mating season. Together with other rodents, small mammals, and birds, they have gained territory since the first years of the global climate offensive. From the cas tree comes the racket of hormonal squirrels fighting the clay-colored robins and parakeets for some space. As soon as the radio is off, Marce and Teo have pasta with butter for dinner in bowls that, once in their hands, only sit on the table when they finish chewing.

—They are living in the ceiling. It's either squirrels or possums. I don't think it's cats.

—Yes —replies Marce with her mouth full, —Do you think they are registered?

—Even if the house is invaded, they still belong to the bank. Or —changing his voice to mimic the public official who denounced him—to the State.



Wearing a shirt and a tracksuit and sitting on the edge of the bed, Marce presses the crown cork she had found under the armchair against her forearm. With her left hand against her right forearm, she leaves red markings with dotted circles that resemble tiny suns or a cogwheel from an old machine. Temporary tattoos.

“I’ve tried to write the story of myself as if I had already died, and I were looking at my life from another world. It hasn’t been difficult at all since my life is coming to an end.

From Teo’s room, she hears the vague murmur of the radio. Next to him, on the comforter, rests the photo album from the last century. It’s wide open, and you can see pictures of strangers (to Marce and Teo) pasted symmetrically in different contexts. All of them are family pictures; many were taken in the same house where they now live. A boy with wet short black hair, a side part, and a school uniform stands against the wall as he is blinded by the sunlight. A cat sleeps in the sun surrounded by pots with flowering plants (*Impatiens walleriana*, recognized Marce, busy Lizzies, garden balsams, or sultanas). Some women lie on a check-

ered picnic cloth. The same child is surrounded by his mother's arm, presumably. That same woman plays with a Pekingese dog under the cas tree (but it looks less imposing than now).

Another book rests on the comforter; it is also wide open: *Recollections of the Development of my Mind and Character* by Charles Darwin. On one of those pages, you can see the underlining in pencil of a passage. It broadly states: "I've tried to write the story of myself as if I had already died, and I were looking at my life from another world. It hasn't been difficult at all since my life is coming to an end. I haven't worried about polishing my writing style."



Picture this: Teo went into the bathroom to take a shower. To take off his socks, he sat on the toilet without lifting the lid. From the dirty laundry hamper, Marce's panties were calling out to him. He brought them to his nose with the determination and urgency of someone who pulls an oxygen mask to their face.





Inside the house, on the table, Marce carefully empties half the tobacco from two cigarettes, and placing them vertically, she fills them up with chopped dried sage stems from the garden. Dear *Salvia divinorum*, she says aloud as she tries not to waste the tiniest bit of that stem. On the other side of the table, Teo tries to tune in to the clandestine station that changes frequency without warning.

—Maikol was caught.

This is the last packet we have left.

— We've lost a friend rather than a dealer — says Marce, somewhere between heartbreak and a performance.

—In your case, to be precise, you've lost an ex-boyfriend and a dealer at the same time.



Teo picks a cas, as big as a baseball, from one of the lower branches and bites into it. His mouth is full of fruit and copious saliva that reacts to the acid. He feels the tiny seeds that he crushes with his teeth as he examines the inside of the fruit, where the cas worm (harmless and

edible) twists, blinded by the sunlight. "Until you bite a fruit, the inside of the fruit is all darkness," he says out loud even though he is alone. And immediately, he says, "Now I sound just like Marce."



As if he were about to have a revelation, Teo, standing with the bitten cas in one hand, is dazzled by the glare all over the busy Lizzies that grow on one side of the garden. It's the sunlight bouncing off an empty blister pack that's been there for months. That which looks like a tiny star fallen from heaven straight into a yard in Zapote indeed hypnotizes. However, with no revelations or epiphanies, the whirling helicopter rotors put him on guard, and, reflexively, he enters the house to escape the eye of the cameras.



He still hasn't seen it, and he probably never will. On the last pages of the album, there is a picture of the boy squatting under the cas tree. He is not looking at the camera; he isn't aware of the photograph since the boy is focused on what he is up to with his garden shovel. He is wearing shorts and orthopedic shoes from which a pair of loose socks stick out. His light button-up shirt with some geometrical pattern is dirty from soil softened with water (which is not the same as mud).

You'll see some dotted circles made by pressing a crown cork against one of his arms if you look closely.



They are sitting outside in the yard. It isn't dark yet, but you can already see the moon in the sky: a clear crescent. Further down, diagonally, a star that is actually Jupiter.



A CAS TREE

A fresh breeze moves forward, without haste, towards its destination and blows through the tree full of birds, squirrels, and the heavy fruit that makes the branches bend. It smells like cas and tobacco mixed with sage that they smoke without worrying about the wind blowing the smoke into their neighbor's house. The nasal sound of the AM radio comes from inside the house. A fast and direct percussion supports the rhythmic thrust of two electric guitars. They, in turn, back up the voice that sings: *I left my baby, and it feels so bad / Guess my race is run / She's the best girl that I ever had.*

The feeling is that everything is in order. Someone else's order at that, but it's still ordered.

Their shoulders touch as they look straight ahead. You would think they are looking at the tree, but not really; it's the kind of look you could call conceptual.

—Let's have a daughter— says Teo.



It's all still happening, Grandpa

♦ *Santiago Porras* ♦

Today, the announcement of the start of operation of the first electric power plant produced from the artificial sun that China has developed brought back your memory, grandpa; it has been thirty years since we last spoke. I recognize that, although you were only a modest beekeeper in my village, the effects of climate change on your hives were enough to make you aware of the disaster that was coming our way. I remember your words clearly: "What we are doing to bees, we shall also suffer".





I now understand that -as is characteristic of grandparents- you had a yearning desire to sow good memories in me. I will never forget that morning when, with my inexperienced help, we prepared the tools to go and harvest the honey from your hives. For the first time, I began to be aware of what those tools were and what they were for: the knife that served as a scalpel, the feather duster that you used as a brush, the basin, and the ever-present smoker, without which the bees would be much more aggressive.

At that time we took out the combs full of honey and squeezed them over the basin (you did not yet have a modern centrifuge given the small scale of your apiary) and condemned the poor workers to spend

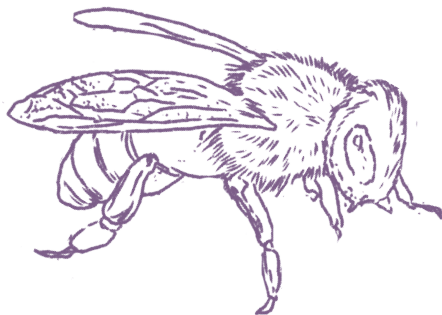
many flying hours to rebuild all the combs again to store the next year's honey. You wanted to justify yourself, "It's something like what Eskimos do with their igloos."

only one queen or grandmother as you liked to call her, an oscillating population of worker bees, and a few drones with an uncertain future that didn't seem to worry them. "As it happens to many people," you added.

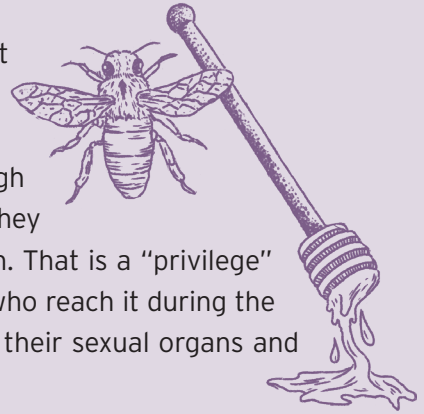
On the way to the apiary, which you had prudently placed far from the house and under the partial shade of some fig trees, you gave me a lecture on bees, using language that even I, being only six years old, could easily understand. You began by explaining to me the social structure of the hive: only one queen or grandmother as you liked to call her, an oscillating population of worker bees, and a few drones with an uncertain future that didn't seem to worry them. "As it happens to many people," you added.

The hive, you emphasized, is an organization with well-defined roles that each member abides by without demur. "If only we human beings were that obedient," you commented with guile, denoting your sympathy for authoritarian governments, such as the one in Singapore at the time, and to which we are so inclined nowadays, even in our still "democratic" country.

You explained to me in detail how the numerous workers performed the laborious tasks of the hive, such as collecting nectar to produce honey, pollen to feed the larvae, and plant resins to produce propolis; they also make the wax to manufacture the cells. When the queen had to be replaced, the workers would give a particular food to the larva of a simple worker and turn it into a prodigious queen, something comparable, you said with mockery, to when citizens elect their rulers.



The drones enjoy some of that comfort at least for a while, you said, lowering your voice ("Like the employees of the incumbent government," you added, smiling) because, although they don't work, the workers feed them, and they seem to exist only to copulate with the queen. That is a "privilege" that very few get to enjoy, that is, just those who reach it during the nuptial flight at the expensive price of losing their sexual organs and consequently their lives.



Once the succession is resolved, the drones are victims of the workers' hostility, to the point that when the honey decreases a lot, they are usually expelled from the hive. "That very thing," I remember you added chuckling, "is what we citizens would like to do to the state parasites." In that regard, things have not changed, grandpa.

For many years, I remember the apiary was a source of happiness for you. It was evident the enthusiasm with which you talked about the excellent management you gave to the bees and the good production you obtained. Your countenance would light up, and your nasal voice would reach an unusual clarity as you gave impromptu talks to friends inter-

ested in the subject, until the difficult times came, when “the weather went crazy,” I remember you started saying.

We had already heard something about climate change in the *Escuela para todos*¹ program. Still, you pretended the matter was none of your business and blamed it on the effect of pesticides until you noticed that there were fewer and fewer honey cells in the honeycomb. Then you did

By then, most of the world’s governments had already realized that something had to be done to curb and, if possible, lessen the growing effects of climate change.

associate it with the short cycles of native blossoming due to the intermittent summers, and you started to worry. You had overcome several bee diseases with good management practices. You were also able to

¹ Translator’s note: *Escuela para todos* is a radio program that broadcasts information on various topics and is aimed at rural communities in Costa Rica and Central America. It began broadcasting in the early 1960s as a means to fill the educational gap in those communities.

cope with significant honey losses, but the time came when you had to leave only a fraction of the hives you had at your peak as a beekeeper.

By then, most of the world's governments had already realized that something had to be done to curb and, if possible, lessen the growing effects of climate change. Well-recognized forums arose where measures were proposed, such as carbon-neutral, to which the Costa Rican government adhered enthusiastically. Still, in the face of something you were skeptical about, partly because you didn't quite understand how these things worked and partly because you weren't very optimistic about the future of humanity given its predatory nature, you affirmed. But, although you did not believe it possible, in terms of zero emissions, Costa Rica has achieved the goals it set for itself. However, I must accept to justify your mistake that they developed energy alternatives that were not yet very clear in your time, such as artificial suns.

You should see, Grandpa, with the development of more efficient batteries to store electricity, all motors are now electric. Given the progress achieved by this technology, several transnational oil companies successfully ventured into the development of electric vehicles. The entry of Chinese and Russian companies in that race also influenced the entire

world, including Costa Rica, to adopt electricity as the driving force. Consequently, net-zero emissions were substantially exceeded.

You were right, grandpa, when you concluded that to guarantee the survival of wild forest species, it was necessary to encourage meliponiculture. The cultivation of meliponine bees, the native ones, stingless, that although they are not major honey producers, they do ensure the pollination of native plants because they survive the effects of climate change better. That is why society now pays stingless beekeepers for the environmental services they provide through pollination, just as in your time, forest owners were paid for carbon sequestration.

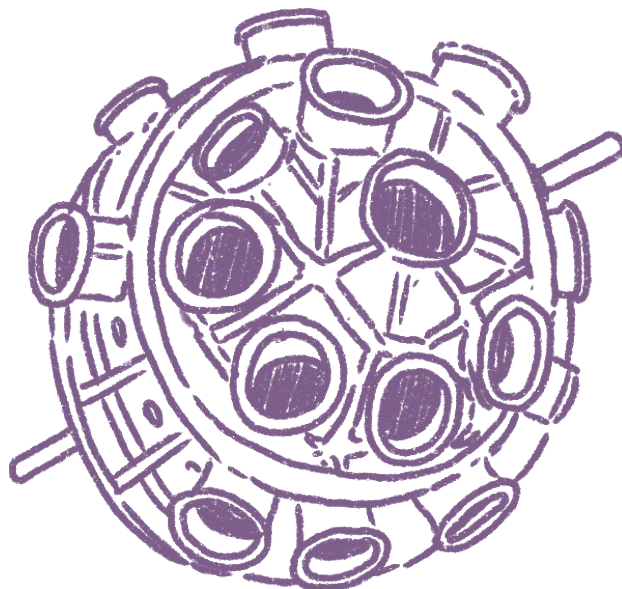


But just as you feared, Grandpa, the effects of Climate Change, while slowing in pace, have not been reversed. Several of our coastal cities are, all too often, flooded by the sea, and many of our most emblematic beaches are no longer visited by tourists because the rise in the high tide level has reduced their enjoyable area. The rainfall pattern has become

Now our country is debating between continuing to rely on traditional renewable energy sources, even though they affect large areas and the end of their useful lives is ever closer, mainly hydroelectric dams.

more inaccurate and has changed in different regions, similar to what has happened in other parts of the world. That is why water catchment and land irrigation has become a priority for our country. Fortunately, that situation has been well addressed since your time.

Now our country is debating between continuing to rely on traditional renewable energy sources, even though they affect large areas and



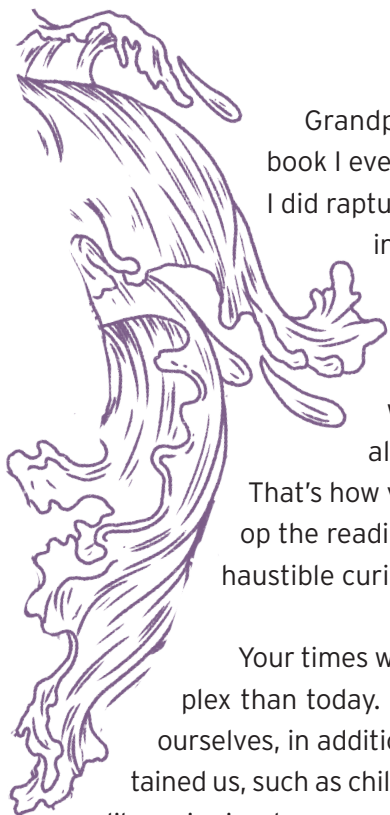
the end of their useful lives is ever closer, mainly hydroelectric dams. Besides, industrial waste from ancient wind towers is not negligible either. Another option is to migrate towards acquiring energy produced by artificial suns, whose hydrogen supply for nuclear fusion is almost infinite, making it a clean and inexpensive energy source.

But this last option has its objections as well. Clearly, the production of this energy source will only be within reach of a select group of coun-

tries, such as the club of nuclear nations, who will be able to unilaterally increase prices. In addition, it would establish another unnecessary dependency (like the one we still have with much of the food we import) that would further compromise our sovereignty.

Many Ticos survive engaged in organic agriculture, with little technology, but well remunerated by people who want to eat food free of agrochemicals. The technological differences between the countryside and the city have become too accentuated.

Just like your pampered stingless bees, many Ticos survive engaged in organic agriculture, with little technology, but well remunerated by people who want to eat food free of agrochemicals. The technological differences between the countryside and the city have become too accentuated. On the other hand, more and more people choose a frugal and simple life in the countryside, without the overwhelming stress of technologies and extreme productivities prevailing in the cities.



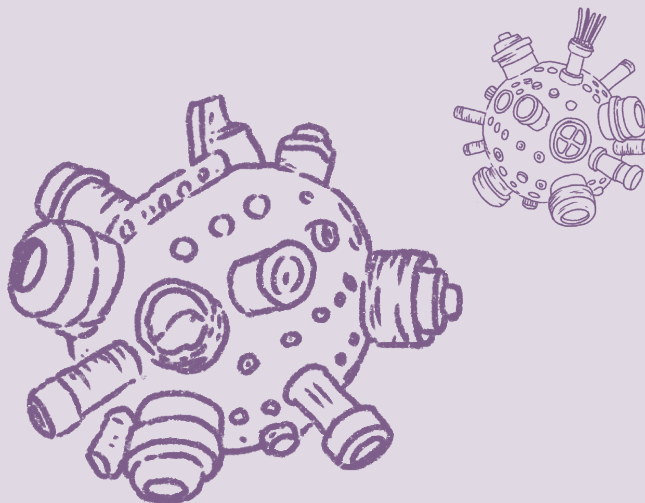
Grandpa, your *Farmer's Handbook* was the first book I ever held in my hands; I couldn't read it yet, but I did rapturously appreciate the illustrations in it. That inability to understand the written part stimulated my eagerness to go to school, where half a year later, I was already literate. You liked to brag with your friends about how well I read, and you would have me read aloud passages from the manual for them. That's how you got me to learn about bees and to develop the reading habit that has served to quench my inexhaustible curiosity.

Your times were good, Grandpa. That world was less complex than today. We had enough time in the day to dedicate ourselves, in addition to subsistence tasks, to things that entertained us, such as children's games with toys that you made for me, like spinning tops, cup-and-balls, and stick horses, and, of course, devoting ourselves to the bees. Only disease and death could bring me out of that rapture.

IT'S ALL STILL HAPPENING, GRANDPA

I thought you had the answer to everything back then. Today, I see that you did, but only in the small world of my childhood because you had your mistakes in terms of your speculations. I would like to tell you in person so that we could laugh out loud. Like that day in your sickbed, when you confided to me with a soft voice that “a beehive is a very efficient matriarchy.” while glancing knowingly at grandma.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆



The Magic Garden

♦ *Shirley Campbell Barr* ♦

Carol adjusts her glasses while keeping her gaze fixed on the window facing the front of the house. Sitting on a large sofa, she gets up from time to time and, with difficulty, walks to the door that remains open, looks to both sides of the road, and a few minutes later returns to her seat. Carol is about 90 years old and has admirable lucidity. She enjoys sitting in her living room while going over memories and recapping stories to share them with those who visit her or whoever stops at her door to listen. She might also reveal some secrets about her plants. These secrets are jealously guarded in her secret garden and in a few selected places in the community.





As she tells her stories, her eyes shine. Sometimes, she repeats memories and describes some passages more than once. She apologizes when she realizes her forgetfulness and continues to intersperse memories with plant stories and plant tips. She likes to call her forest a “magic garden.” It is full of plants, edible vegetables, medicinal herbs, enchanted stones, trees, and flowers nourished with mysteries and secrets.

Carol understands that she doesn’t have much longer to live. She knows she needs to find someone to safeguard her legacy when she leaves. Carol had no sons or daughters, so in her direct line, there are no

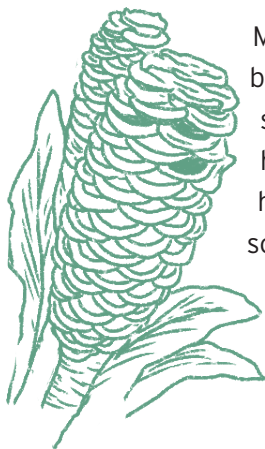
possibilities. She has no close relatives, but she knows the names and stories of each of the people who make up the community. She has already thought of some possible heirs but is waiting for that sign confirming who will finally be the right person.

Her plants no longer exist anywhere in the country. She preserves a treasure of her time: there are no remnants of most of her trees and species in the rest of the country. Her garden is home to birds, butterflies, and many animals erased from the nation with deforestation.

She would like to delegate her garden to someone who has sons or daughters and history in the village. But above all, to someone willing to continue the task of maintaining plants, herbs, fruits, rocks, animals and secrets, for the good of the community and the whole of humanity. On this, she concentrates her daily attention. Her days are spent between conversations and notes she writes to make sure she doesn't forget. This space is truly an oasis for her time. Her plants no longer exist anywhere in the country. She preserves a treasure of her time: there are no rem-

nants of most of her trees and species in the rest of the country. Her garden is home to birds, butterflies, and many animals erased from the nation with deforestation.

When the decision is made, she will hand over her garden, each corner's magic, and the rituals that accompany them. In return, she expects to receive the promise that it will be guarded and inherited by someone worthy and committed to continuing the legacy. She has shared her magic with very few people. Still, the real promise is that in a couple of generations, the garden will be handed over to be replicated and used by the entire community and eventually with whoever is ready to receive it.



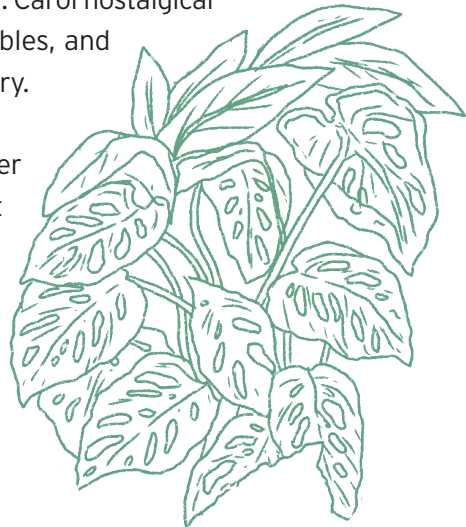
Many years ago, Carol came to Saint Gregory, almost by accident, and ended up settling in, determined to support the transformation of her mother's family's hometown. As a child, she visited many times with her brothers and sisters. Those were beautiful seasons spent with uncles, aunts, cousins, and holiday friends. She remembers the many times she visited when the community did not have electricity, and the houses had latrines. Back then, the town

seemed magical and mysterious to her. The railway line in front of the houses defined the landscape.

Back then, the predominant crops were those her predecessors had brought from Jamaica, in that great migration that began at the end of the 19th century and attracted thousands of people to build the railway line. Most of the population was still self-sufficient. The main activities were agriculture, some cattle raising, and subsistence fishing. In addition, native crops, those brought from the Caribbean, and domestic animals for settlers' work and consumption dominated. Carol nostalgically recalled growing up eating tubers, vegetables, and fruits, many unknown in the rest of the country.

Carol excitedly recalled the trips to the river with cousins and friends; they are the most beautiful memories she has, together with the fishing afternoons that provided them with food and fun.

After her adolescence, Carol never returned. It took more than thirty years for her



to return, now a different person. She lived for more than twenty-five years in the outside world, a world of things, cement, vehicles, and pollution. A world to which she had become accustomed and which seemed necessary to her. Only a few days had passed since her arrival when her mother insisted that she accompany her to her aunt's funeral. Her grandmother's last sister had passed away, and for the time being, she was the one there to share the mourning. Her mother's insistence that she accompany her brought Carol face to face with a town strange to her memory.

Many families had been forced to give up their land to large companies that cultivated and marketed some polluting monocultures.

Upon returning, Carol was over forty-five years old and was surprised to find the vegetation drastically changed. The community had lost its identity, and due to population fluctuation, the town's appearance had changed. Many families had been forced to give up their land to large companies that cultivated and marketed some polluting monocultures. These

THE MAGIC GARDEN

companies now employed many villagers, and they did not even grant their workers proper labor rights. Many were the people who came in search of employment. Very few of her relatives and childhood friends were left. The environment she remembered no longer existed, and the rivers, which had once given her so much joy, were dirty, and their flows had subsided.

During that visit, Carol met Elena, who was in her eighties. It was at her aunt's funeral. Amidst conversations and stories, she took her away from the group leading her to explore community corners. She told her the story of the town's founding, told her about each of the first families,





the first ones who died, and those who were still alive, carrying on the legacy of the first. Carol had shown interest in the stories, and magically, Mrs. Elena had chosen her to show her a small garden she jealously guarded behind her house. It was a wonderful garden full of traditional and native plants, many brought by her ancestors.

The garden was on the original land where Elena's family had settled more than 100 years ago. The way to access the park was through the house's front door. Upon entering, you had to advance directly towards

the back door. It mysteriously opened up to an unimaginable forest full of plants, enormous trees, fruits, plants full of flowers with striking colors, aromas, and lights. Birds, sloths, jaguars, and ocelots roamed the space as if it were their sacred home. Carol had never seen anything like it. Perfumes and sensations permeated the garden, bringing about an incredible peace. What most impressed Carol was that it was impossible to tell that the yard extended into a space of such magnitude from the front of the house.

Today, fifty years later, at ninety years of age, Carol still feels the urgency to find someone to give her garden to. She spends her days without receiving that long-awaited sign.

Carol asked all the questions she could think of about plants, trees, and fruits. Every corner seemed beautiful and full of magic. Each flower and scent took her back to her childhood and the presence of absent family members. They all meant so much to her as a child.



This garden contrasted with life outside, which had impressed her so much because of its deterioration and neglect. It was a magical garden. This experience awakened in her an urge to return, live in this town, and be part of this garden forever. Elena felt the energy, excitement, and commitment in Carol, indicating that the right person to pass on her legacy had arrived, and so she did.

Today, fifty years later, at ninety years of age, Carol still feels the urgency to find someone to give her garden to. She spends her days without receiving that long-awaited sign, and the park has multiplied in size, diversity, and production. It is her pride and sacred secret.

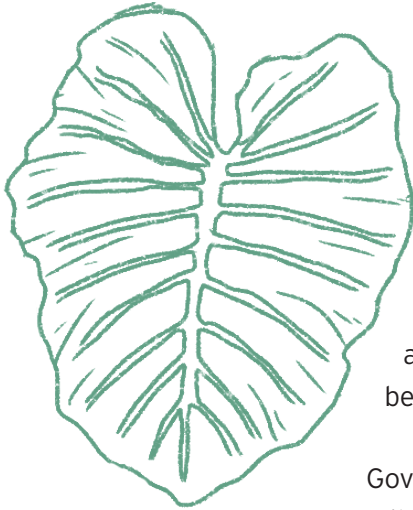
A new government has recently assumed power. However, despite the hundreds of promises that speak of transformations in resource management and new ecological conservation policies, eight years of the same old thing are looming. Twenty years ago, a constitutional reform increased the presidential term from four to eight years. This could favor the achievement of longer-term objectives, but it also increases the possibility of corruption.

The expectation is that this government will be yet the same old thing: decisions and actions that will not benefit environmental conservation in any way. The promise of transformation to reduce pollution, electric cars, and profound modifications to solid waste management and others are behind us. It seems that no one cares about the future, although global warming threatens it at alarming rates.

The campaign promises of the new president, a young thirty-two-year-old woman, were based on programs towards environmental recovery and decarbonization. Her government is a young team, which indicates energy and intentions to make drastic changes. However, nobody believes in promises anymore, and apathy is the only thing that grows. In fact, abstentionism reached 80% in the last elections.

Against all odds, however, the president's first decree has been the reforestation and restoration of all possible areas in the national territory. The project will start with a pilot plan in the Caribbean. Saint Gregory, Carol's community, has been chosen to start the whole process.





The deforestation processes the country has undergone exterminated native tree species. Given these limitations and the offering of species donation from a European country, reforestation and restoration would be done with exotic species. This decision has already provoked adverse reactions, and various groups have been protesting for several consecutive days.

Government representatives have come to the community to promote the initiative and define the areas to be reforested. They have announced that committees should be organized and that they would manage the reforestation. Failure to do so would require the local government to resolve, but reforestation would occur anyway. The decision was made, and the trees will begin to arrive in town in approximately three months.

This community had not been organized for a long time. It had lost the habit and interest. Consequently, the new initiative did not provoke any reaction.

THE MAGIC GARDEN

When Carol found out about the new project and the imposition of planting exotic species such as pines, firs, and oaks, she was upset and decided to talk to the promoters. She succeeded, but to no effect. The technicians, all young, had no time to listen to a ninety-year-old. She then decided to call several people in the community, the very people she had considered as her possible



When Carol found out about the new project and the imposition of planting exotic species such as pines, firs, and oaks, she was upset and decided to talk to the promoters.

legacy heirs. She insisted that they express their opposition to the type of reforestation proposed. However, after raising her concerns with them, they could not see any alternative to the government's decision since they had no options to offer. What was to happen, they thought, was better than doing nothing.

In the face of this scenario, Carol made the decision she had put off for so long. She thought this was the expected sign for which she had waited so long. She would open her garden to the community. With this decision and just as planned, the community of Saint Gregory would change forever.



Carol left already thirty years ago. Today, Saint Gregory is a beautiful forest of native species. Plants, enormous trees, various fruits, and flowers of many colors and aromas adorn the town. Diverse birds roam the yards and corridors of houses; they often meet sloths, jaguars, ocelots, and other animals that share the space with the locals. Sun, air, and incredible peace can be sensed.

The entire Caribbean has already replicated the model, and the forest and species have spread far beyond Saint Gregory. On weekends, there is a community market where products from surplus agricultural production are traded and exchanged. The community's rivers are visited because they are clean, mighty and the fishing is excellent.

THE MAGIC GARDEN

Carol's ashes rest in the yard of the house. They at the foot of the breadfruit tree that her great-great-grandmother planted one day when she arrived in 1902, built her home, a community, and contributed to constructing a railway line.



The Dead Fish Museum

♦ José Pablo León ♦

“If they take away our right to live in the sea, they will have taken everything from us.”

Ilived among estuaries and streams. I'm not going to say that in my time, the sea was transparent. Sometimes, after a storm, just about anything would wash up on the shore... Not to mention the mouth of the Tárcoles¹ or Guacalillo² beach!

¹ *Translator's note:* Tárcoles is a river on the Costa Rican Pacific coast.

² *Translator's note:* Guacalillo beach is located on the central Pacific coast of Costa Rica, next to the mouth of the Tárcoles River.



Título: "Desalojo"

Técnica: Bogres sobre manglar

Año: 2021

Still, water meant everything to us: the beginning and the end. The blue fabrics of an awning on the beach covered my mother's eyes so she wouldn't be dazzled as she endured labor pains on the brown sand. My siblings and I were born with hermit crabs on our toes.

My life was always simple. As children, we used to wake up to see the sea through the window, and all we needed was shells and a deflated rubber ball to be happy.

My life was always simple. As children, we used to wake up to see the sea through the window, and all we needed was shells and a deflated rubber ball to be happy.

We made a living from fishing for a long time, from what the sea gave us in our ground ropes.

I remember my grandmother would sell fresh fish on the side of the road. She would hang them on a string, and a hook would support their weight to then offer them for hours.

The smoke from cars and the infernal heat was changing the appearance of the mackerels: they were turning matte, and the whiff of urine

THE DEAD FISH MUSEUM



indicated a lousy day. In my case, at least, at night, I ate the leftovers, the eyes and the tail well toasted, and slept satisfied with my greasy and salivated fingers under the sheets.

And so it was until that afternoon when the sea and the estuary overflowed at the same time. The spring tide no sooner began than we were bleeding the jacks. Killing them gently was useless. We produced the lactic acid ourselves when we ran out to save what little we had.

Because tides rise and are unforgiving! It took our beds, sofas, fishing rods, the little plants we had in the entrance, and the souvenirs we kept in the house. The water reached the height of the clothesline. Only the firewood for cooking and the surrounding houses' rotten walls, which softened like sponges, stayed afloat. That night, I kept waiting for the colorful butterflies to arrive...!



Afterward, and for a long time, we abandoned the sea: the African palms near the wetland promised us a better fate. They had to be removed little by little to clear the land. That way, the crabs and shrimp that used to surface when we harvested the cockles would come back to the mangrove swamp.

Every morning I felt the mist in my eyelashes, and, like everyone else, I was awakened by the sound of the mosquitoes. My muddy legs balanced on the dry stalks of the red mangroves tangled in the shimmering marsh.

Little wooden boats with metal hooks on their edges, boxes with ice, long-sleeved shirts, and caps for sun protection shone in the distance. They shone like the colored satin paper we had put on the altar of the Virgin of the Sea.

Our house was actually in “forbidden” territory, on the borderline between eviction and flooding. The other wetlands had suffered because of that.

Ours, which still held out hope of becoming a village, became the community's refuge and the province's pantry.

Water meant everything to us: the beginning and the end. We had been promised that they would let us live next to our beautiful mangrove swamp.

But one day, we were evicted; they didn't want men, women, or children there. Just nature. But the truth is that animals were brought by us when we removed the palms. And well, three generations later, we all fit together: the corals, the mangrove swamp, and us.

But to save our nature which we had saved regardless of the water rusting our tin walls, they threw us out. It wasn't peaceful, of course.

That early morning, around three o'clock, my siblings and I went out in the sky-blue canoe to catch a few kilos of catfish. As usual, we tied up the canoe and challenged each other to see who could cross the strait the fastest and swim to the first sandbank.

So we continued while the sunset dyed the waters purple. Suddenly, a spontaneous fire caught our attention amid the mangrove. It was just beginning. It felt like a moan. We took the ice chests, the oars and put the fire out with the strength of our bare arms. We were scared!





Even after the scare, my younger siblings started dancing. The canoe moved in endless circles, and laughter accompanied us back home. When we arrived, three park rangers and two policemen were waiting for us. The first thing that crossed my mind was the fire.

- But we put it out!- my brothers shouted. The coolers loaded with catfish slipped out of our hands from the shock. They were out of water and ice. We had used everything to put out the fire. Our dead, tense, and stiff fish fell on the ground... The colorful butterflies came to eat us alive, and we left everything there... when they threw us out.

Only some stacked tins were left from our shacks, and the stuff inside was put in any way, anywhere.

We abandoned the water the same way children detached themselves from their parents and began plans that none had made for our own lives. We migrated like birds and never saw each other again.

I came to the city. I almost didn't think about all that in order not to be saddened. Until television and newspapers announced the inauguration of the Dead Fish Museum, that is.

It was going to be soon, in September 2050, and everyone was invited. Well, not everyone. In fact, the entrance is restricted for people of a certain age who had lived on the coast. To protect us, or so they were saying, from something called post-traumatic stress.

But I didn't want to miss it. I cut out the page from the newspaper and read it on the bus. "Museums are created to exalt national pride, to commemorate unfortunate events or to confront the most shameful events of humanity face to face."

When I arrived, I ran head-on into the building. The truth is, I was impressed. I would have said that it looked like a turtle shell. Still, the man describing it with a microphone explained that it was instead a small-scale artificial islet, which creates the sensation of floating on the sea. Thus, visitors will become aware of the damage that our coastlines



have suffered. While “submerging” in the life of our ancestors, they will reflect on how economic growth made it unsustainable for these areas to be inhabited by humans and by marine species. Progress has an impact on the world we live in.

Yes indeed!... I couldn't agree more! Anyway, it was best to keep quiet because, despite my sun-damaged skin, I still look kind of young, and I had gotten a fake ID in case someone prevented me from entering.

In the next room, we will see the remains of houses devastated by floods that preserve the fossils of organisms attached to the walls.

“In the first room, we see thousands of dead anchovetas and on them, brightly colored butterflies that fed on their flesh,” said the guide. The tourists held their noses because of the smell of ammonia; I didn't. I rather clasped my hands behind my back with my fingers and thought that it was like the smell of fear. The one you have in your body when you are a coward but pretend to be brave.

THE DEAD FISH MUSEUM

I stood alone watching, and from afar, I heard the voice. "The rubber tires in the corridors portray the barricades made by people of the area. Like warriors, they fought against the power of the water. In the next room, we will see the remains of houses devastated by floods that preserve the fossils of organisms attached to the walls. It is a sight that will capture the attention of everyone, from the youngest to the oldest."

I decided that I didn't want to see it, it would be better... what's the point? Then I went ahead and entered another well-lit place full of old harpoons, trawl nets, hooks, and sawfish rostrums, the kind that were always used as trophies for those who won cockfights. Then the group that followed the voice caught up with me: "In this room, life and death



coexist; in the showcases, you can see objects of yesteryear, such as those that were on the verge of destroying marine wealth. In fact, sawfish, whose dry jaws you see there, after having been in extinction and after a process of artificial repopulation, are just being released into the seas."

The tour ended there, and I sat on a bench. My eyes were itchy. People passed me by as if they could not see me. They walked into a little old shop that had a sign announcing: "Secrets of a container."

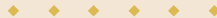
I didn't even know that they had managed to save the "saws" from extermination. How fortunate! I really got so happy that I followed the group as one of them and we entered what they call the white room... What a feeling! Like being trapped, but outside... "What you are feeling is called agoraphobia. The mirrors, lights, and pale, whitish corals that seem infinite in a desert of sand produce it. The intention, ladies and gentlemen, is that this vision will arouse a feeling of regret in you and that if we do not act now, which is our last chance: such will be the landscape of the coasts".

The tour ended there, and I sat on a bench. My eyes were itchy. People passed me by as if they could not see me. They walked into a little old shop that had a sign announcing: "Secrets of a container."

I checked, and the newspaper said visitors could take various souvenirs. "Bottles with old advertising, waterproof shoes, diving goggles, straws, and many other objects recovered from the polluted watersheds." Why would people want to carry a dump? I didn't understand, nor was I able to overcome the last paragraph. "This museum joins other global actions to defend the responsible management of marine ecosystems. Consequently, future generations can resume fishing activities, and coastal territories can become livable places again."

But they were livable; I mean, what if they had let us stay? Perhaps the mangrove would not have been invaded by the "swamp fern" as happened when we had to leave. Maybe the fish would not be dead like in the museum, and there would not even be a museum to understand how people used to live.

We would have been born again, as it were, with hermit crabs prowling around our feet and the circular waves as the course of our motorboats.



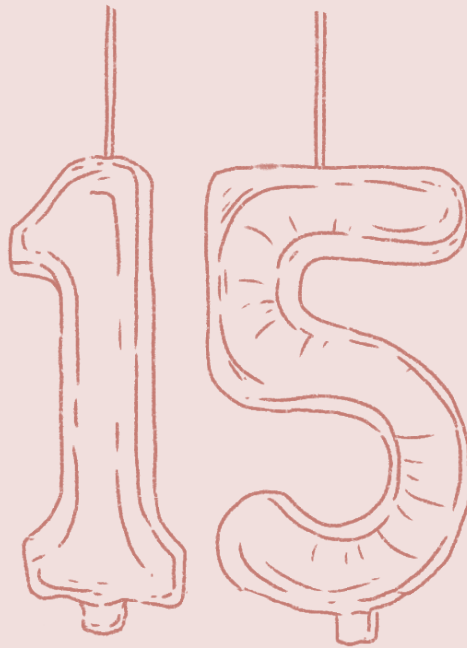
Seeing Yourself in Others¹

♦ *Camila Schumacher* ♦

Today I turn 15 years old. For a long time, especially for women, that meant a lot of things. Being my age forced them to have the leading role in a party, where you had to be proud of making a fool of yourself. In my great-grandmother's time, the last century, that is, they had to waltz and put on high heels for the first time (these two things in themselves half-condemned them to waddle like ducks). They also had to dress up as "princesses" in pastel-colored satin dresses and give and receive hugs and smiles.

¹ Translator's note: The Spanish title and some words in the story transgress the language in an untranslatable way in English. All nouns in Spanish have a gender: masculine or feminine. They can usually be identified by the use of "a" or "o." The same occurs with the pronouns and adjectives used with a noun. Throughout the text, the author uses "e" as an alternative, inclusive case ending.





By the time my grandmother reached her fifteenth birthday, tradition had changed somewhat. The ideal -financial conditions permitting- was to travel on a cruise ship. That's the worst. I mean, it's like getting on a floating mall. Besides, those barges that were pure luxury and fun for the passengers inside were a disaster for the environment. The noise frightened and even stranded some marine species; oil and fuel leaks remained floating, as well as garbage..... The thing is, believe it or not, few people cared about such things.

My mom's fifteenth birthday was in 2020, which was a bad year for almost everything because it was the first year in which COVID became a pandemic. No one knew what to do, what to think, how to avoid the virus or the fear. It was as if the world was on pause, and science fiction had jumped out from books and movies to newscasts and newspapers. So, she had a *zoom-birthday*: she was just with her mother, and her "guests" would connect from their homes on a virtual platform that, at the time, was a *hit*.

She had a zoom-birthday: she was just with her mother, and her "guests" would connect from their homes on a virtual platform that, at the time, was a hit.

I, perhaps, would choose the last one from the three options because, at least, it is not ridiculous and does not harm anyone. But I prefer what I get because now, turning fifteen is different. It does not force you to do anything. Instead, it gives you the possibility, in some countries, to vote and participate more actively and autonomously in citizen life.



Before, people my age were not listened to or given the slightest choice. Now, they realize we are not a promise, nor are we waiting in line for our turn to be considered persons or to be taken into account.

It wasn't like that before. Before, there was good on one side, wrong on the other, and nothing in the middle. Well, there was one thing: a tremendous fear of what was different. Fear of what was on the other end. Before, above all, a change did not seem possible. Any modification took a lot of time, discussions, and confrontations. In the end, if there was a change, it was because no other alternative was left: it had become law, and whoever did not comply with it was punished.

Now, it is clear to us that things are not as they could be, but as they are. That's neither good nor bad; it's like that, and it can change. It depends on each person, their realities, their hopes, and their actions.

Before, people believed that the only existing history was described in books and that elders, who had accumulated experience and years, were right. As if having been alive had made them wise! Moreover, memory was an indisputable good quality.

Instead, like most people of my generation, I developed a knack for not holding on to memories. It's not about forgetting, but it looks like it. And no, that is not a defect: there are many, many ways to "travel" to the past and recover unimportant data such as what we ate or how we were dressed last year or on any specific or relevant date, such as when slavery was abolished, when water was no longer considered an inexhaustible resource or when -finally because it was tough- women began to be considered as deserving not only the same rights, opportunities and salaries as men, but also the same respect. Oh, when gender was no longer a birthmark, like a navel. But a cultural construct that each person identified with and lived in their own way and to their liking.



Those who remember everything are often sad, drag anger and miss a time that no longer exists. To people my age, and to me, however, yesterday seems as distant as tomorrow. A couple of unalterable mirages. If we devote too much attention to them, they separate us from today, which is the only thing that belongs to us, the last freedom we have left.

People say that before, anyone could have pets, and no one would interfere. What they do not say is that there was overpopulation, abuse, and neglect.

Today we are, we stand, we do, we decide, love, and hate. Today is the only time on hand. Today, in my case, my birthday, I am currently in my pajamas, writing in bed while Smoke, my cat, purrs on my feet.



Yes ... I have a cat. I recently passed the necessary tests for the State to consider me fit to have a pet. They found out that I had enough space, a sense of responsibility, and possibilities to handle it. My life plans were not going to get in the way of its well-being. Many people think that asking for such requirements is an exaggeration or downright stupidity.

People say that before, anyone could have pets, and no one would interfere. What they do not say is that there was overpopulation, abuse, and neglect. Sometimes -clearly, when needed- even domestic animals were eaten. In natural disasters, they were left behind because of the compulsion to run away to protect one's own life. Some people would have rather rescued a television than a dog!

Smoke is a tabby cat and is named that way because she was born on the same day as my great-grandmother. That one, the one I told you about, the one who had to suffer from the quinceañera dance. She always said to me that when she was a child, she was continually surrounded by smoke.

At the time, smoke came not only from factories and cars, as it did until my mother became an adult but also from people. When she was a little girl, all adults smoked cigarettes that contained some uncertain substances in addition to tobacco, nicotine, and tar. Thus, in theaters, movies were seen behind a kind of haze that floated in the atmosphere. The same thing happened on buses, on trains, even on airplanes where the air is recycled.





Even in hospitals! When a baby was born or a successful surgery was celebrated, doctors, nurses, and family members would celebrate with cigars. They were not as harmful as cigarettes, sure, but they also clouded everything! Smoking was standard and, what's more, it was fashionable...

There was a minimum legal smoking age, but breathing so much foul air was almost as if people had been smoking since they were born. So that, along with continuous adult surveillance, stifled them.

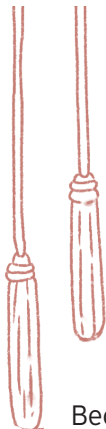
My grandmother managed a little better with the smoke thing. When she was about my age, the world and science came to an agreement.

Smoking began to be frowned upon; it was banned in enclosed places. Later, in some parts, it was even forbidden outdoors. Those who earned money by making and selling cigarettes complained; they objected. They went to great lengths to keep the business running... they invented electronic gadgets, vaporizers, and I don't know what else.

Smoking with a covered mouth and nose was simply not possible. So, a little grudgingly and a little because there was no choice, it ended up being eradicated.

But it was not until my mother's time that this deeply rooted custom became a private vice. With the super contagious disease that attacked the lungs and forced people to wear masks for many years, smoking with a covered mouth and nose was simply not possible. So, a little grudgingly and a little because there was no choice, it ended up being eradicated.

The same, but by far more complicated, happened with cars and factories, which continued to spit their waste into the air. They began to be disfavored. They suffocated the cities, were limited, hidden, and relocated to the poorest places until, slowly and finally, they disappeared.



Now, smoke accompanies us from time to time; when we light a bonfire or a fireplace and sit around it. Yes.... as at the beginning of time: sometimes, to move forward, it is necessary to go backward!

The same thing happened with other issues in recent years. Because before, everyone believed and tried to convince themselves that infinity was just around the corner. That “forever” was the ideal

Because before, everyone believed and tried to convince themselves that infinity was just around the corner. That “forever” was the ideal length of time for love, happiness, books, ideas, objects, some governments, life, and even humanity itself.

length of time for love, happiness, books, ideas, objects, some governments, life, and even humanity itself. They pursued eternity and transcendence, and the end made their teeth chatter in fear of it.

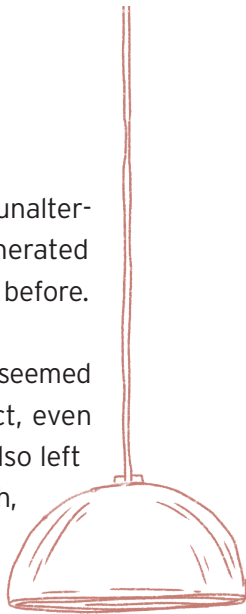
They were so attached that even the language seemed unalterable. The “e” in “todes”² that is now so obvious to us generated controversy, rejection, discussions, arguments, and mockery before.

Plastic and religion were the best allies for centuries: they seemed to do the trick for everything. To preserve anything intact, even when it had ceased to be useful. That’s why garbage was also left as it was, and a place had to be found for it...So on and so forth, until it didn’t fit anywhere, and it was sent to space and thousands of other barbarities that now, just thinking about them seems horrible to us.

But the fact is that humanity’s self-concept of being intelligent took a heavy toll on it. It was hard for humans to realize that they were wrong no matter how hard they tried or how much they wanted to be correct.

Everything comes to an end, and to insist otherwise is the origin of any tragedy.

I don’t know if now that we have fewer certainties, we live better. We continue to be born without having asked for it. Still, in any case, each



² *Translator’s note:* “todes” in this text means everyone. The author is using it deliberately instead of “todas” or “todos” to make it an inclusive term.



one is responsible for what they choose, for not leaving indelible traces of their transit through the planet. We do what we want and enjoy it while it lasts... We are passing through; we know that even sadness has its days numbered.

Now we write as soon as we wake up, not for someone to read us but for ourselves, to capture something from our dreams, so that each day has a compass. It's not engraved. Every morning we have to start over. A bit like Sisyphus, a very ancient character, and who I won't tell you who he was because I don't remember well and, in any case, his story can be found in those memory archives to which anyone has access.

Now, we agree that we do not agree, but that the minimum and the maximum touch each other, and we are obliged to find a balance.

The hardest thing is to deal with two hyper-old inventions that refuse to disappear because they do not live in the world but inside every more or less human organism. This has remained a challenge from my great-grandmother's time until now,

I am talking about the ego and the collective. About overcoming the temptation of some people who think they are superior or love to feel that others must be inferior and deserve fewer opportunities and more hunger.

SEEING YOURSELF IN OTHERS



Today, as I turn 15, I believe that eradicating mirrors may be the right solution. That way, we will only be able to recognize ourselves if we reflect on others. I'll try it, at least for 24 hours...

Smoke seemed to agree because she suddenly woke up, jumped on me, and licked my face. It's either that or she's hungry. We still need to fine-tune communication among species.



Corn flower

♦ *Leonardo Porras* ♦

Isabella is 16 years old; she lives in Cartago¹. She loves to dance, but in public, it embarrasses her. Studying makes her lazy, but she has no choice: she is studying to be an electromechanical technician besides completing high school online. She can't imagine herself working. She doesn't think much about the future.

The thing is that when her parents insist on something, there's no way around it. So there she goes, on the bus to Bijagual². Not that she's uncomfortable. Public transportation is safe; the problem is that there is only one trip per day: it leaves at 6 a.m. and it comes back at 4 p.m.

¹ *Translator's note:* Cartago is one of Costa Rica's 7 provinces.

² *Translator's note:* Bijagual is a community in the Térraba indigenous territory in southern Costa Rica.



And anyway, who is going to go to that lost mountain village! Only someone who has left and, for some reason, must return!

Isabella doesn't have a choice: she must go. Her parents were unable to take time off work — in recent years, labor laws had become comparatively inflexible — and her grandmother was soon to pass away. Someone has to represent the family.

Ėb Naná wears two long black braids, and Isabella has short hair with colored tips; she wears platform sneakers; her cousin, whenever possible, walks barefoot.

Ėb Naná is the same age as Isabella ... plus, they were born the same day. Her grandmother used to say full moons speed up deliveries. Thus, within the family, for some time, they were considered daughters of the same moon.

In fact, they are cousins: both are tall, slender rather than thin, and with straight hair, yet they do not look alike. Ėb Naná wears two long

CORN FLOWER

black braids, and Isabella has short hair with colored tips; she wears platform sneakers; her cousin, whenever possible, walks barefoot.

They don't get along well or badly; they just don't know each other. As grandma would have said, "they're fish from another river."

The cousins arrive at the house. Isabella tries to be nice. She does not want to offend anyone, but the truth is, she does not understand why they decided to continue living by turning their backs on the world, on progress. Like an open-air museum. She is not naive; she knows that somehow they have all they need, but they settle for so little!





In fact, there was a time when everyone had phones, several televisions in their houses, motorcycles and ATVs, supermarkets where all fruits and vegetables were available all year round. Sowing had stopped.

Then, around 2035, more or less when they were born, Bijagual decided to return to the land: to eat avocados in May and June and corn in August to make the tamales in their husk; that is when it is harvest time. Once again, the colors of seeds formed the rainbow between the village mountains.

It is true that when the community decided to remove what was not their own, they were at a crossroads: they had never been so similar to the rest of the country. Yet, their schools had been closed. Children had to walk miles to be taught that the country had been discovered in 1502 when Columbus arrived at Uvita Island.

CORN FLOWER



Fewer and fewer people were left; they lived at a more hurried pace and enjoyed less. Young people migrated to the cities.

That's when they reinvented themselves. They recovered their life-style. They re-established the school and the high school; they kept wifi in communal areas; they made applications in Bröran³ for their students, and each one had access to their computer; they relinquished some motorcycles to recover hikes and horses.

Isabella decided to follow her cousin; that way, she wouldn't slip up. After leaving her things on Ėb Naná's bed, she went out to the backyard. They sat at the foot of a tree. Since her cousin was gazing at the sky, she

³ *Translator's note:* Bröran refers to the language spoken by the Indigenous community with the same name. They live in the South of Costa Rica.



imitated her, and soon, a flock of white herons flew over their heads. There were so many of them!

Ėb Naná explained that they were going to the lagoon because the day was over. Isabella was not familiar with the lagoon. She didn't even know how far it was, but she felt like going. Her cousin smiled, she didn't promise her anything, but she told her that water brought the town together more than the proximity of one house to another.

The next day, Ėb Naná offered to get bijao⁴ leaves to make the rice tamales that grandma had requested. Only a few details were missing to cater to the people who would come to see her off. The girl saddled two horses and beckoned to her cousin. Isabella had never ridden before. Her cousin had to lift her up.

Ėb Naná told her that they had to be silent when they arrived at the lagoon; no taking pictures.... What they were going to do was not strictly forbidden, but almost. She told her that some half-people, half-snake

4 *Translator's note:* Bijao is an American tropical plant whose leaves are used to wrap food while cooking.

creatures lived in the lakeshore caves; the spotted pacas and collared peccaries crawled into furrows and disappeared from hunters.

As they arrived, the horse that was ahead of them reared up. It left Ėb Naná on the ground and then turned around. Isabella was frightened: if it had been her, she would surely be dead, but her cousin dusted herself off and asked her to move back to share the saddle. When Ėb Naná was about to get on the horse, she was bitten tremendously on the arm, but she concealed the pain and fear that she was also beginning to feel.

Animals have their wisdom, and there must be a reason if the horses didn't want to go.

But they were already in front of the *Alto del Grito*⁵. They cut a nice roll of leaves for the tamales. Having done that, they felt an irresistible desire to go deeper. They jumped over the three stones that spanned the creek and entered the depths of the trees.



5 *Translator's note:* Alto del Grito could be translated as *the Screaming Height*. It is a hill next to the lagoon located in Bijagual.



What they saw and what they felt made them sit down. There was no doubt: it was a different place, with contrasting colors and giant trees guarding the shores. The only noise was made by ducks hiding among the reeds. Suddenly a voice broke the silence.

— What are you looking for? — it said.

Isabella got up and took a stone; Ėb Naná wanted to speak, but her voice failed to come out. They were going to run away.

— Don't go. I know who you are. I met your grandparents and their grandparents.

The young women discovered that they could not move.

— Come behind this tree, and you'll know who I am.

Isabella followed the path traced by the voice and left her footprints in the mud. Ėb Naná lingered, she wanted to understand what she felt.

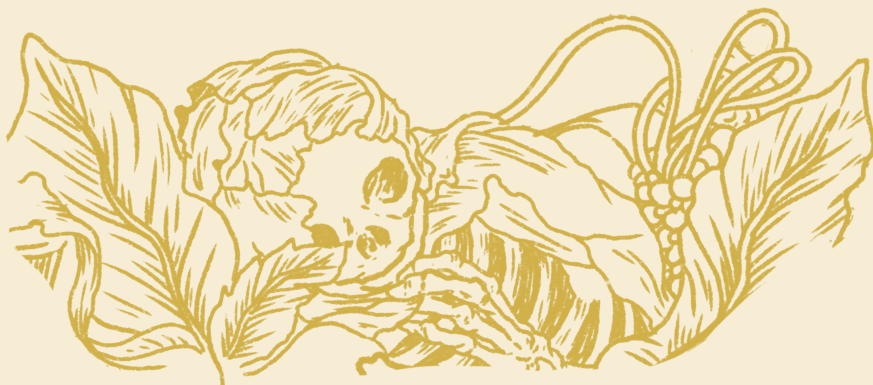
When they arrived, they saw a familiar face, as if it were them reflected in the mirror of time. It was an agile woman with a deep, fixed gaze that mocked time: it was as if she saw both the past and the future simultaneously.

- The answer to all your questions is on the other side of the cave, behind the mountain guarding the lagoon, follow the route to T'ër Di.
- But-but..." stammered Ėb Naná, "Isn't that where animals get lost?"
- Isn't that another country?- wondered Isabella.

The girls felt strange. Isabella wanted to tell her cousin what she experienced inside virtual reality helmets. Ėb Naná felt she could look at herself from the outside, as though being in two places at once;

- Yes and yes. But it is the only way to discover the history that was never written, to embrace roots that have not been buried.

The girls felt strange. Isabella wanted to tell her cousin what she experienced inside virtual reality helmets. Ėb Naná felt she could look at herself from the outside, as though being in two places at once; she lit a beeswax candle that she carried in her pocket. Her cousin used her cell phone's flashlight.



They both became silent to listen to the river flowing outside. A cold wind blew through the cave. The place where the trees had seen their ancestors grow was on the other side. The very same trees were still standing, survivors of the storms, the landslides, and even the axes' oblivion.

The cave led out to a high blue mountain. The river was no longer visible. They were on the other side of the mountain range, but at the same time, it was as if they were in a lost world. If Isabella felt that her Bróran family lived with their backs to "progress," this was on a whole other level.

CORN FLOWER

A world at a standstill thought Ĕb Naná, where families fish with bacsha—a liana that is crushed until it releases a sap that stuns fish and makes it possible to catch them with one's hands—. She had heard a bit about that, but she never saw it, never really saw it.

Around the fire, the children sang along to the voice of an older woman leaning firmly on a cane on the ground: "Wibing, wibing, wibing Trenhuo, trene, trene Llë laydë cuzong?"

Ĕb Naná understood very few words; to both their surprise, Isabella joined the chorus and even translated it: "What do birds want to tell us with their song? The flycatchers, what message do they have for us?"

None of them understood what was happening or why. Isabella sat on the ground; her cousin watched her looking for an answer.

"One does not choose one's name," she said, "but I would have liked to have been called T'ër."

"That doesn't make sense, T'ër is our grandmother," replied her cousin.

— And what does make sense? Don't you feel like we're in a dream?—. Waving



and with a whistle, Isabella said goodbye to the people and began to retrace her steps. Ėb Naná followed. They thought it was great to have had access to that world.

On the back of the same horse, they reached the house and began to make the tamales. They said nothing about what they'd just experienced.

Some cried, and others told jokes and stories about grandma. Isabella made a video call to her dad, but not even that got him permission from work to go there.

Their uncles prepared chicha in another pot: they stirred the chicha corn atol with a wooden spoon. They separated a part of it to let it rest. That way, three days later, it would ferment and get everyone up and dancing. It would have at least 8% alcohol.

When the tamales were boiling, they heard grandma sigh until she emptied her lungs. She just died. Presiding over her own funeral.

CORN FLOWER



Some cried, and others told jokes and stories about grandma. Isabella made a video call to her dad, but not even that got him permission from work to go there. Nothing, neither the photo nor the death certificate was any good. Before she hung up, Isabella asked her father to send her money to buy some hair dye: she wanted to get her black hair back. She also told them her plans to spend her vacation in the village and asked them to cancel the exchange she would participate in to improve her Japanese language skills.

Her father asked her to think about her future, and she assured him that precisely that was what she was thinking about. As she said goodbye, rain tears streamed down her cheeks.



Isabella started using the name T'ër hua and to speak exclusively Bröran. At first, only Ėb Naná could understand her. Little by little, by listening to her, more and more people –especially children– used those words. It was as if they were playing games, but they were serious about it.

T'ër hua was like a magnet. People would approach her, and she would suggest what to do: dance, sing, take the ripe cacao that hangs from the tree, separate eight seeds and then sow them.

On Tuesdays she prepared ěb jonio. She had more than enough hands to help her grind the corn, strain it, remove the husk and cook it on the woodstove - yes, they had again come to value the space of fire!-. They sweetened it with ripe bananas and served it hot when the sun started to rise.

On one Friday, the entire community organized a hike to the Carse lagoon. They all sat silently on the shore and watched the mountains bluer than ever. Squirrels flew from the espavel trees: the children fought with the iguanas over the green fruits.

CORN FLOWER

Tër hua had not charged the phone again. But, Ęb Naná kept in touch with her uncle and aunt in the city and told them that her cousin was well. Different from the person they knew, but happy or beyond that. Meanwhile, she felt gloomy, as if she had lost her place in the world.

One night, the cousins who continued to share a room made a deal: Ęb Naná would go to the city. She could use all the clothes and devices that her cousin had left there. There would be plenty of people to teach her how to use them.

Mind you: it would be a round trip

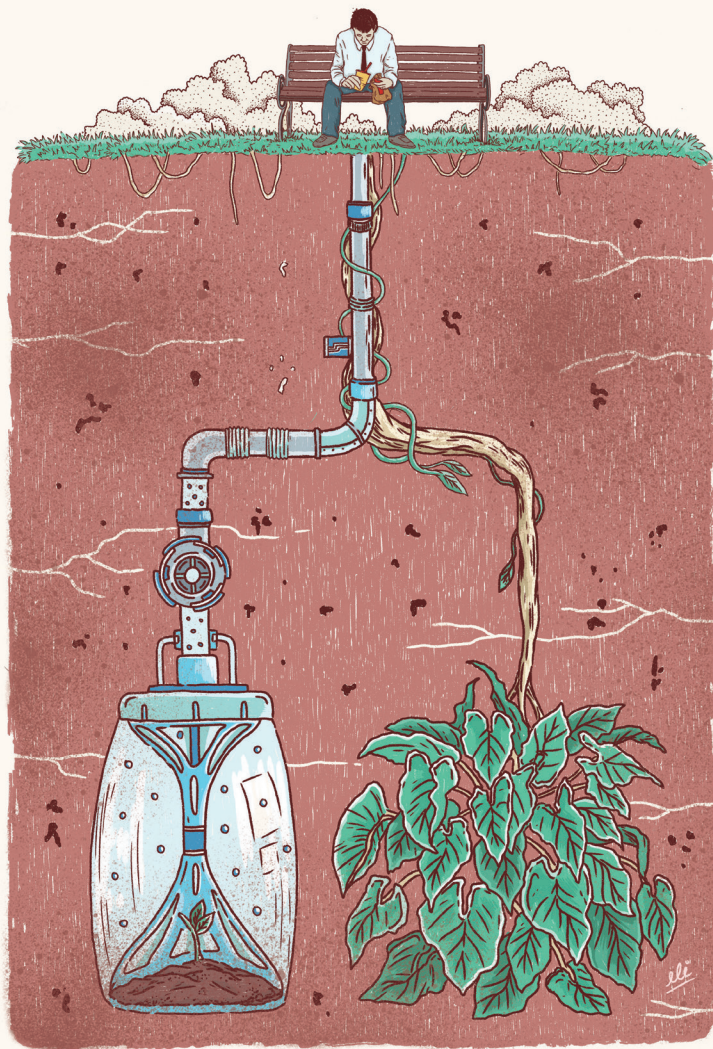


AN EARTHLY ISSUE

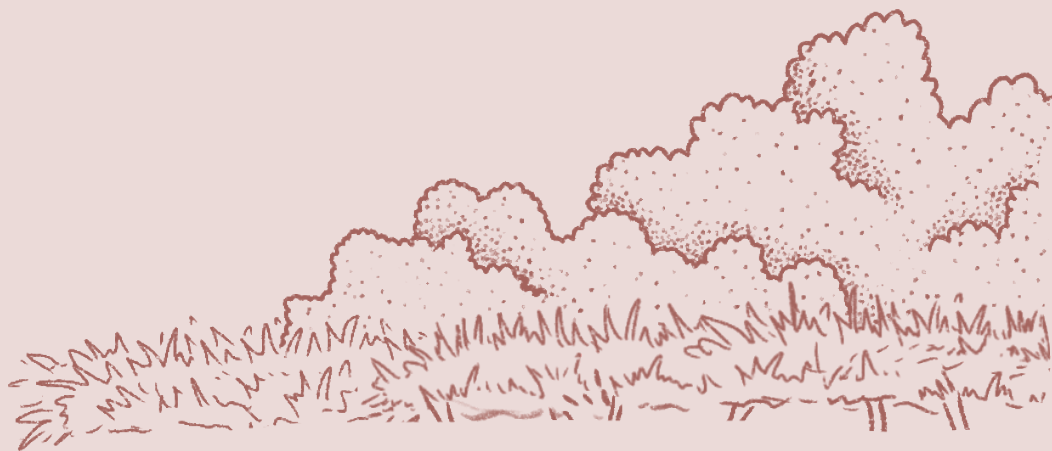
♦ *Emilia Macaya T.* ♦

Yes, it is you I am talking to. You who came to this park to have your midday meal at noon, at the right time. Twelve o'clock sharp. I've seen you leave your office when the clock strikes the very first second of your work break: no more and no less. Looking for a place outdoors, you flew away at full speed instead of lingering in that enclosed cubicle that was designated for you. Fed up with confinement, reports, numbers, and invoices, you've run looking for that little piece of nature in the middle of the racket of the city: the park.

Be aware that I know well who you are and what you are after. For the time being, you aim to alleviate the hunger that has built up through-



out the morning because the coffee to which you are entitled tasted like hell. That's how it settled in your stomach: a burning fire to set your gut ablaze. I saw you leave swiftly with that cute little bundle hanging from your right hand, a colorful gastronomic chain bag with two plastic containers, one for food, the other for the fizzy drink, a must-have. You've gone without dessert for days. And even though the combo no longer includes it, your wife has uprooted your promise of zero sugar. The fatty orbit that has begun to grow around your waist bothers her, and very much so.



You see? I know everything about you, even the intimacies. At this very moment, I continue to watch you, even though I am invisible to you. I knew that if I stood here, in the corner of this story where I have imprisoned you, I would be able to notice all your movements, even the slightest. You

I'm used to yielding power in the best way possible, and the freedom I am withholding from you now, I will give handsomely to you later.

could argue that I have the upper hand, or that you are right before me, or even that I am looking at you as I please. You are an average Joe with no secrets, with your food so daintily wrapped in such an eye-catching costume just to make it desirable. As for myself, you are going to have to picture me. Privileges of those who write and tell, as I do now. I can build everything to my liking, establish your traits entirely, build a world, and make you act in it. In other words -since it's up to me-, I'm going to lock you up in this story for a while. Why would I resort to something so disrespectful? Because that's what we do as storytellers. But, please don't mistrust me; on the contrary, I am highly trustworthy, and I mean

well. I'm used to yielding power in the best way possible, and the freedom I am withholding from you now, I will give handsomely to you later. It will turn out to be a good deal. But that will be when the time comes. In the meantime, you have no choice but to submit to me and obey quietly. That is why I remain in this corner, I the almighty one. I am invisible, and you are present. And to top it off, at my mercy.

But enough of this preamble. It's time we got to the point. From my corner, I can see you've finished your meal. You savor the last mouthful and hold in your hands the lump of paper, the plastic tray no longer containing any food, and the obscenely large vessel, of the same material and color. I fix my eyes on the

scene, and I notice you are hesitant, your gaze has become elusive, and I see what others don't, but it does not escape me. You don't know what to do with the rest of your lunch; you don't know where your garbage will go. Because it is your garbage. And with your hands above your head, you turn your torso one way and the other, looking for the trash can. I



AN EARTHLY ISSUE



see you can't find it. You can't see it for a straightforward reason: it's right behind you behind that bench, where you are sitting. I might add that there's not only one container but many. Besides, they are labeled according to their content, and as if that weren't enough, they have pictures to make it easier.

Now, while you are overtaken by doubt (because you haven't decided what to do with the leftovers), I flaunt my power and start breaking the story. I part it in two paths, two very different routes. All this to decide where to go at the end of this narrative we are in. For you to choose, in the whole exercise of your free will, finally overcome the confinement in which I have locked you up. And why such a sudden twist?—you think to

yourself. Maybe because this story wants to resemble the planet we inhabit: both are a broken balance. In the meantime, we still have a long way to go; this story hasn't yet come to an end. And perhaps something can be worked out. However—I know this for a fact—you haven't gone through the trouble of lifting your buttocks off the seat to look back. You take on an air of innocence and turn a blind eye.

Although if it is true that there is a shared destiny, it must also be knitted by the infinite sum of all our individual actions.

On the sly, with angelic appearance, you are about to plunge your hand into the shadows, under the bench, to leave the corpus delicti there artfully hidden. I insist on adding details up to that point. Then and there, I step in to warn you:

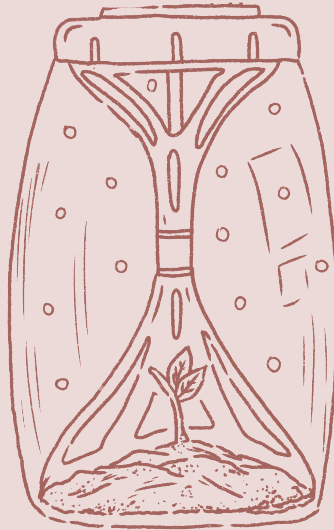
“Careful!”

“Think through what you are about to do!”

It is in the details where our destiny is usually at stake. There are always general guidelines, and they play a role: major decisions in significant instances. Although if it is true that there is a shared destiny, it must also be knitted by the infinite sum of all our individual actions. The vast sea of that which is human is also nourished by those small gestures. And you must remember this, since perhaps it will be helpful to you at the end, when, as I announced, you must give a denouement to this story. To achieve all of that, I've kidnapped you. Plagues and imbalances lead us to realize that we give up our individual freedom for the sake of the common good.

Let's go back to the twist, to the rupture -do not fear misfortunes yet-, and to the crossroads. Let's go back to those two paths created by your doubt: looking for a trash can or littering. Considering that you've given in to laziness —you blame it on heat and post-lunch slump—, let's imagine, at first, that you did not bother to search, so the garbage ended up on the ground. Since you've made that choice, let's start our trip by following the colorful jumble that didn't stay in the park but rolled through the city, found a streambed, and flowed into a river. Along the way, it found some company in a rusty paint can, a bottle cut in half, some used gauze, and, at some point, all





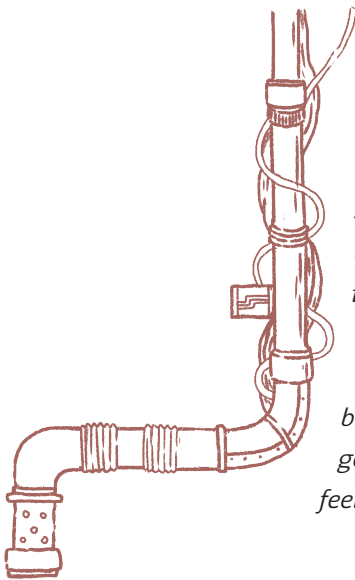
of it landed in a gutted freezer. From there, they went straight to one of the floating garbage islands in the middle of the ocean. So let us pause here and look forward into the future to see where that waste ended up.

In the desolate desert landscape, a dome-like crystal bubble concentrates the only spot where a shy hint of greenery can be seen. A particular gadget with shiny digits, placed on an outdoors column, states, at the top, the year 2050 and a little lower, the three degrees Celsius rise in global warming. Inside the bubble, a young woman eagerly tends to a myriad of containers with

plants, half-sprouted seeds, and tiny vegetable and animal embryos. She looks engrossed in her task since she knows the importance of the endeavor. She read that in other times a man named Noah had to preserve all life of his time in a huge boat to save humanity from the debacle. Next to the young woman, but a bit further back, sitting at a sort of crystal desk, an elderly woman writes on sheets that light up with a strange gleam as she glides her stylus. In the background, there is a sarcophagus-like crystal box where a young man lies

In the meantime, there's nothing left to do but wait. However, with her labor, the young woman bets on the hope of a future. The elderly woman, on the other hand, rebuilds and records past events.

sleeping. Both women also take care of him; they've been warned that he will wake up when Mother Earth can be repopulated if that day ever comes. In the meantime, there's nothing left to do but wait. However, with her labor, the young woman bets on the hope of a future. The elderly woman, on the other hand, rebuilds and records past events. Rarely does she take her eyes off of those sheets, and when she does, they are filled with longing. On the sheet

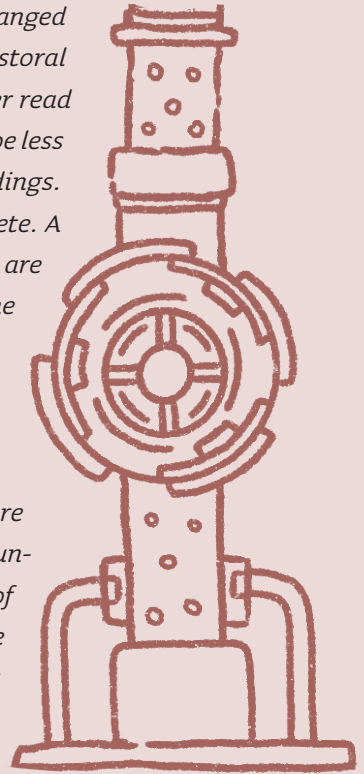


she is holding, strokes from an old story can be read, and you can clearly see the title: “Earthly Issue.” Beings unknown to them, in vehicles that resemble incandescent spheres, are in charge of providing whatever is necessary so that nothing is missing in the bubble, despite the decreed isolation. They can no longer tell between loneliness and companionship, two feelings that have become alien.

I can see you are frowning. Astonishment, fear? I can already tell it's a mixture of both and then some. Let us now go back to our park, and don't lose your temper just yet.

Perhaps this imaginative exercise has relieved your stomach and rid you of your laziness. Turn around and look behind you: those waste bins within arm's reach. Perhaps a little exercise is in order; a little walk and stretching your legs does a body much good. With that effort -a tiny gesture-, you might be able to alter the new story, the one that is still pending. Let's imagine, therefore, that you have delivered the garbage to the right place. This time around, we will stay here, in our park, albeit moving forward in time again. One more time, it's the year 2050.

Abracadabra! We did it. It's done. Even though I've given you indisputable proof of my power, you still don't trust me. You claim you don't know this place, although I've stated that it is, indeed, the same. Your midday park. You refuse to accept that it can have changed so much: it looks like a pleasant space out of a pastoral poem. You don't know what that is, and you've never read them? Your loss! Maybe if you knew them, you would be less sloppy. You would be friendlier with your surroundings. Let's allow the events to unfold; the story is incomplete. A magic wand didn't just multiply that greenery -as you are inclined to think-, nor did it make the air we breathe purer or more pleasant. It is science and people's good sense that has worked this miracle. Those vertical gardens you are looking at were cement walls with that tone of gray that is so overwhelming. However, there are more surprises ahead. Go ahead, venture out and walk on the impeccable trail, cool off in the fountain to your right, and cut through the water stream of the cascade with your fingers. The fountain and the falls hold clean water -rainwater collected in water traps-. Or else they are fed with liquid waste appro-



priately treated once the human grind is over in all the buildings. Yes, you've got to believe it since that entire process allows you to have that crystal-clear matter that runs through your fingers. You can also drink it, don't be afraid; we are already over chlorination and bottled water. What about that other matter, you ask me, that is far more concrete and helps you satiate your

***The choice is now yours; I no longer define the outcome.
Before that, turn your head around and look at
yourself: you are still holding those crinkled wrappers.***

hunger? I have excellent news. To find the best food, you may go to your neighborhood and look for it in your house. Just wait a few minutes for the collective vehicle in the constant and orderly flow that the company organizes. It runs on hydrogen energy. The workday is shorter thanks to more efficient schedules, suitability of areas, and transportation efficiency, so you don't need to have your meal here. You'll do that at home because you live in a residential cluster powered by solar energy and built around a rather ample central garden with playgrounds, sports facilities, and leisure areas. There are also comfortable, spacious workrooms according to the best technological

resources. And food, you keep on asking yourself, what is it like? You'll get your food precisely at the right time; it'll be delivered by drones and prepared at nutrition centers that ensure the best and most delicious diet: clean meat, vegetable, and grain production; healthy energy drinks; and comforting beverages. What do you think about that?

Now, let us return to our usual place and time. The moment of truth has arrived, and we shouldn't put off any decisions, nor should we delay this story's ending. The clock is ticking. I hand you, as promised, the keys to the story. The choice is now yours; I no longer define the outcome. Before that, turn your head around and look at yourself: you are still holding those crinkled wrappers. Decide where they will end up and write the ending. It is up to you to decide what course this story will take.



Rest Easy Edith

♦ Ana Luisa Mora Fernández ♦

In 2022, the world was about to end. The pandemic gave no respite for the third year in a row. In February, Guanacaste¹ burned for 30 days. In August, the rainy season wiped out several towns at the foot of volcanoes. In November, they said that the port of Puntarenas² would disappear under the waters of the Pacific “within the remainder of the century,” this being an optimistic projection.

Edith was born that year, on the threshold of the end.

¹ *Translator’s note:* Guanacaste is one of Costa Rica’s seven provinces. It is located northwest of the country, bordering the Pacific Ocean and Nicaragua.

² *Translator’s note:* Puntarenas is another of Costa Rica’s seven provinces. It is on the central and southern Pacific coast of Costa Rica



As with most born at the time, the photos of her first days in the hospital showed her parents -a couple in their thirties, from Heredia³-wearing surgical masks over their mouths. It was impossible to tell if they were smiling. They had put off starting a family as long as they could,

Her parents' angst accompanied Edith during her early years. Despite being a very healthy baby, she grew up expecting death.

and the unplanned pregnancy came into their lives like a slap in the face. They were aware that it was an awful time to bring a human being into the world. They cried, held hands, and looked into each other's eyes filled with deep fears when they found out.

Her parents' angst accompanied Edith during her early years. Despite being a very healthy baby, she grew up expecting death. She would share not just any death but a tragedy with each and every person who inhab-

³ *Translator's note:* Heredia is also a Costa Rican province, and its capital has the same name. It is located north of San José.

REST EASY EDITH



ited the planet, whom she did not and would not know. Those people or their children. Herself or her children.

She had no siblings: her parents had drawn up escape plans and survival strategies in which they could only account for three people. It was never more evident than when Edith was six years old, and as she stood in the middle of the house's living room, she witnessed how the hallway had turned into a river. Although, for little Edith, her parents were adults capable of anything, they could do nothing to stop the violent course of water. All three had been leaning out of the windows for thirty minutes before the event, ears buzzing with adrenaline, helpless spectators of

the current beginning to reach the front door. Panic soon set in. An unbelievable roar carried away rags, furniture, favorite toys, ornaments, and houseplants. It forced Edith's parents to scream at each other over thunder and wind to coordinate a way out through the open backyard door that revealed the storm they were about to face. Looking down, Edith saw that water had reached her feet; her mom scooped her up off the ground deftly and settled her on her haunches. She plunged into the filthy water, maundering through and resisting the backward tug of her wet jeans.

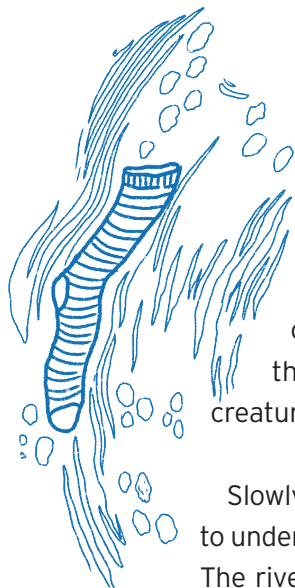
Before leaving the house, the last thing Edith saw was the cats perched on the table, meowing with squinty eyes. After that, she hid her face in her mother's chest and heard her heart beating fast.



When they returned from the shelter, they discovered that they had lost most of their belongings, the cats had escaped, and the car had been dragged against the front windows. Edith was furious, but her mom squatted down in front of her and said, "Edith, the water is not to blame."

After that, they disposed of the car and the garage. Before their neighbors' disapproving eyes, they filled in those square meters with living soil. In the middle, they planted a rain tree, and together they scattered bush grass seeds all around it.

After that, they disposed of the car and the garage. Before their neighbors' disapproving eyes, they filled in those square meters with living soil. In the middle, they planted a rain tree, and together they scattered bush grass seeds all around it. As they grew, plant roots colonized the soil. The hummingbirds and bees brought unexpected fruits that the family had not intended to plant, becoming part of their diet. The house almost completely disappeared behind this little forest and



gave them the constant company of birds and sunsets that cast the plants' shadows on the house's white walls.

It also brought them a very particular kind of melancholy. Feeling part of the garden; therefore, understanding that humans had precipitated the tragedy of all delicate creatures living there.

Slowly, with intervals of a few years, neighbors began to resolve to undergo similar transformations with doubts and reservations.

The river continued to enter their homes, overflowing onto the concrete, spreading as was its right across the width of its original course. That's why they started doing things they didn't do before. They began stopping to say hello, for instance, and asking for advice on the best way to care for a particular plant or harvesting their first carrots and radishes to hand out around the neighborhood.

When Edith was twelve years old, her parents divorced symbolically; they decided under the shade of the rain tree. Their inner lives had grown so large that they no longer fit inside the same house. During the negotiations, it became clear that neither of them could or wanted to



part with the garden, so they divided the property. Her father bought a hectare at the back of the plot and began receiving a public stipend to regenerate it; he built a cabin on stilts behind the original house and became a neighbor.

Seventeen years later, one morning in January 2052, Edith, an adult but still a permanent victim of her melancholy, was riding her bike towards Montes de Oca⁴ along the Freses⁵ green corridor. The corridor nearly connected her apartment in Curridabat⁶ with the San Pedro⁷ train station from one end to the other.

4 *Translator's note:* Montes de Oca is a canton East of San José known for hosting many important universities in Costa Rica.

5 *Translator's note:* Freses is a neighborhood in the canton of Curridabat.

6 *Translator's note:* Curridabat is a canton East of San José.

7 *Translator's note:* San Pedro is a neighborhood in the canton of Montes de Oca.

The wind brushed against her face; the dry season had finally begun, and dawn was filtering through the trees and plants on both sides of the road, casting shadows on the ground.

It was urgent to know because the day before, she had learned that she was pregnant. This had brought up many emotions, but above all, the dread of having to imagine a possible future.

Although she was apparently at peace and on time, her mind was restless: she was determined to take the first train to Heredia and visit her parents, hoping to find out if now, in their 60s, they were happy. It was urgent to know because the day before, she had learned that she was pregnant. This had brought up many emotions, but above all, the dread of having to imagine a possible future.

Some things had changed. Some of the weeds that barely crept through the concrete cracks while Edith learned to ride a bike twenty years earlier had become a forest. They brought coolness and silence to

the urban areas, strips of green that were now indispensable to absorb the increasingly heavy rains of the ever-lengthening rainy season.

“The port”⁸ still existed; they had postponed the date of its cataclysm by twenty years.

Despite this, tuning in to optimism was very difficult: sometimes Edith felt it like a bit of fire in her chest which, then, feeling that it was too early to proclaim victory, she would purposely extinguish.

The train crossed the mountains, still wet from the recent rains. Some private neighborhoods along the way had removed their gates and electric fences and replaced them with trees, wadis, and green corridors. Fences and walls that still existed looked increasingly outdated, vestiges of that imminent end of the world that had not happened yet.



8 *Translator's note:* “The port” is how Costa Ricans commonly call the city of Puntarenas, the province’s capital.

Upon arriving in Heredia, Edith observed the clear sky, the 7:30 a.m. sunlight and felt like walking. She left her bicycle at the station parking lot. Then, she began the forty-minute journey through the town center and its surrounding hilly geography until she reached her childhood neighborhood.

She left her bicycle at the station parking lot. Then, she began the forty-minute journey through the town center and its surrounding hilly geography until she reached her childhood neighborhood.

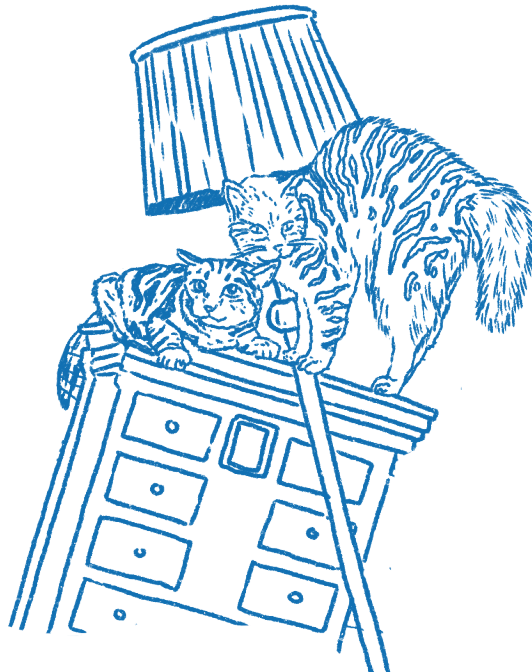
The communal vegetable garden that marked the end of the road welcomed her. That's where the pedestrian path that bordered the property and led to her parents' house began.

Amid the lettuce, a group of retirees shared coffee and tortillas. Edith called out each of their names.

—iHello, Ms.Julia, Ms. Laura, Mr. Eric, Mr.Pablo, Mr. Luis Diego!

She found her parents having breakfast together on the wooden little deck they shared. Just by looking at her father, she got the answer to her question. He was evidently pleased, sitting cross-legged with his back against the back of his chair, reading confidently on his phone.

Her mother's condition was more difficult to decipher, as she persistently shooed away the flies that landed on the fruit and refused to sit down.



Edith split her time between them, as was customary when she visited. She spent the morning with her father, whose eyes were more naive and bright than ever. That look, intense as a downpour, had appeared when Edith was about ten years old. He had taken retroactive paternity leave as part of a pilot generation that allowed him to devote a few months to *fatherhood*.

During that period, he instilled in Edith her love of bicycles and brave “weeds” that grew everywhere and were bees’ favorite food.

During that period, he instilled in Edith her love of bicycles and brave “weeds” that grew everywhere and were bees’ favorite food. On his morning walks through the neighborhoods of Heredia, he would carry Edith on horseback and tell her: “You have to be like a weed, brave above all, growing in the most unexpected places, feeding the bees.”

Now, newly pensioned and proud of his hectare of forest, he fathered his tomatoes and bell peppers --the bravest of all his crops- in his back yard.

—Tomatoes are also “weeds”— he told Edith, showing her the splendid plants that smelled of abundance. They twisted and wriggled and yielded all kinds of tomatoes. He had small sweet ones to eat one after the other, like grapes and large and misshapen ones that neighbors coveted the most.

As they inspected the bell pepper plants, Edith asked him loosely if he was contented. He replied that he was happy because the birds had scattered tomato seeds in Marlen the neighbor's yard

As they inspected the bell pepper plants, Edith asked him loosely if he was contented. He replied that he *was happy* because the birds had scattered tomato seeds in Marlen the neighbor's yard, and in return, she gave him cartons of eggs.

—How are you?— he asked back.

Feeling satisfied, Edith spent the rest of the day with her mother. They prepared a light lunch and went for a walk. They knocked on Marlen's door, who hurried to bring her shoes to join them. The three women took a stroll through the neighborhood. They stopped several times to admire the mountain immortelles, rain trees, Indian snakeweeds, and the stunning vines in their neighbors' front yards.

All this time, Edith watched her mother. She measured her body postures and tried to determine if there were also downpours in her eyes;



sometimes, her mom felt her gaze on her and smiled as mothers usually do - a bit quizzical and, perhaps, insecure-

Edith couldn't find the courage to ask her question. She was afraid that her mother's angst would prove to be unchangeable in time and that, should she decide to continue with her pregnancy, it would also be her fate.

Edith couldn't find the courage to ask her question. She was afraid that her mother's angst would prove to be unchangeable in time and that, should she decide to continue with her pregnancy, it would also be her fate.

Marlen returned home after four o'clock. Edith and her mother sat again on the deck, and birds came to perch in the tree branches. With her heart racing and her ears buzzing with adrenaline, Edith seized the contemplative silence to ask.

Her mother pondered the answer for a long time.

— I am at ease, my love.

—But that's not the same as being happy—," said Edith almost to herself while extinguishing the little fire that had been kindled in her chest.

There was another silence.

—I disagree— her mother finally said, as the shadows of trees and plants danced across her face.



Later, when Edith was on her way back from San Pedro station, she felt like taking a detour and visiting the María Aguilar River wadi. She drove amongst passers-by and people exercising until she reached a place to rest. She leaned her bike against a tree and went down the slope towards the riverbed.

Two women rested nearby. Edith smiled and mumbled a shy "hello," as if asking permission to share the spot. They smiled back.

Edith sat at the river's edge. Little did she know that clinging to the upper branches of a tree, a sleepy three-toed sloth was watching her. As the sloth repositioned herself, she lifted her front paw to reveal her baby, just weeks old, dozing calmly at her breast.





Authors' biographies

THE STORIES

Olivia Fernández Torres is a graduate of the School of Philosophy at the University of Costa Rica, a tattooist, and an artist who supports accelerationism and gender liberation. She studies utopian thought and its political implications.

Leonardo Porras Cabrera is a native of the Brorán territory. He is a culture teacher in Bijagual, La Sabana, and Ceibón, and the author of the poetry book *Dbon shríc shríc orcuo bon* (*Huella de Jaguar/ Footprint of a Jaguar*) published by Amargord Publisher. He won first place in the regional poetry category in the Brunca Literary Contest, organized by the National University of Costa Rica.

Shirley Campbell Barr is a poet, writer, and anthropologist with a background in African feminism. She has six poetry books and dozens of articles, chronicles, interviews, and poetry published in several countries. An expert in international cooperation, she has lived in Zimbabwe, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, the United States, Brazil, and Panama.

Emilia Macaya is an essayist and a narrator who holds a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of Montreal, Canada. Her published works include *La Sombra en el Espejo* (The Shadow in the Mirror), *Espíritu en Carne Altiva* (Spirit in Haughty Flesh) and the novels *Diez Días de un Fin de Siglo* (Ten Days of a Century's End) and *Más Allá del Río* (Beyond the River). She was awarded the 1987-1988 Ancora Literature Prize and the Aquileo Echeverría National Literature Prize in 2020.

Luis Chaves has published poetry, narrative, and chronicles. His work has been translated into several languages. Some of his publications are the novel *Salvapantallas* (Screensaver) (Seix Barral, 2015) and the book gathering all his poetry so far, *Falso Documental* (False Documentary) (Seix Barral, 2016). Other books include the chronicle *Vamos a Tocar el Agua* (Let's Touch the Water) (Seix Barral, 2020) and the fable *O.W.* (Encino Ediciones, 2020).

David Ulloa is a writer and journalist. He is the founder of *Orgullo* (Pride) magazine, given the Joaquín García Monge National Cultural Communication Award in 2020. He published his first short story anthology, *Cartas a Hombres* (Letters to Men) (2018), with the independent publisher Feliz Feliz and its republishing with Editorial UNED in 2020.

Daniel Quirós holds a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of California, San Diego, where he also completed a Master's degree in Latin American Studies. He has published the short story collection *A los Cuatro Vientos* (To the Four Winds) (2009/2021) and the novels *Verano Rojo* (Red Summer) (Aquileo Echeverría National Award 2010), *Lluvia del Norte* (Northern Rain) (2014), and *Mazunte* (2015). He works as a professor at Lafayette College.



Santiago Porras Jiménez is an agronomist and writer with studies at the Pan-american Agricultural School in Honduras (El Zamorano, 1972), at Monterrey Tech (1982), at Autonomous University of Puebla, Mexico, and the Distance State University, Costa Rica (2002). He has published four short stories, two novels, a book of essays, a book of travel chronicles, and a book about El Zamorano.

José Pablo León, son of southern San José, and a student of Food Engineering at the University of Costa Rica, is fond of writing and loves short stories. He is a member of the group Plumas Disidentes (Dissident Pens). Anything subaltern inspires him, as does political action, biological and cultural diversity, and the “beauty” within everyday life.

Ana Luisa Mora Fernández is an audiovisual scriptwriter and English teacher who writes prose and poetry. Also, a language, sound narrative, and pollinator enthusiast, she published the poetry book *Un Hombre Teórico* (A Theoretical Man) with Germinal publishing house in 2014. She resides between San José, Costa Rica, and Stockholm, Sweden.

Camila Schumacher is an immigrant, daughter, and granddaughter of immigrants. She has published seven books, ranging from poetry collections to teenage novels. In 2019, she won the Aquileo Echeverría National Award for *Atrevidas*, *Relatos Polifónicos de Mujeres Trans* (Bold, Polyphonic Stories of Trans Women). She is a communicator, teacher, activist, and facilitator of literary workshops and educational projects with vulnerable populations.





Catalina Murillo has lived all her life from the written, spoken, or interpreted word. She studied journalism, communication, and audiovisual scriptwriting. Catalina has published several books, countless articles and has devoted herself to writing film and T.V. scripts. On June 6, 2070, she will be 100 years old.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS

From an early age, **Elizabeth Argüello** acquired the ability to speak aloud with her drawings and create visual conversations. Her work combines illustration, painting, and muralism. She has worked on public art, sculptural, editorial, textile, and virtual projects. Her work has been exhibited in Argentina, Mexico, the United States, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Zoveck Estudio was established in 2004, in Mexico, by Sonia Romero and Julio Carrasco, graduates of Graphic Communication and holders of a master's degree in Visual Arts. Together, Romero and Carrasco have developed their own surreal, universal, and timeless design styles. Their aesthetic proposal is inspired by everyday objects, Mexican kitsch, and collage, and it has earned them a prominent place in prestigious art and design publications,



Copyright © 2022 Inter-American Development Bank.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons IGO 3.0 Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC-IGO BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/igo/legalcode>) and may be reproduced with attribution to the IDB and for any non-commercial purpose. No derivative work is allowed. Any dispute related to the use of the works of the IDB that cannot be settled amicably shall be submitted to arbitration pursuant to the UNCITRAL rules. The use of the IDB's name for any purpose other than for attribution, and the use of IDB's logo shall be subject to a separate written license agreement between the IDB and the user and is not authorized as part of this CC-IGO license.

Note that link provided above includes additional terms and conditions of the license.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Inter-American Development Bank, its Board of Directors, or the countries they represent.

