

They say that my country is very beautiful because it is very green and it has lakes and volcanoes. I have to say that the volcanoes sometimes scare people and that I never went to the lakes. As far as I can remember, I never saw one. But my mother talked a lot about them. Granny says that dad and mom loved each other very much. Granny Mirta says they met a long time ago, during the war, and that a sheath of sun put them on fire and the fire was never extinguished. The way Granny tells the story, with all that passion, it seems that they met in Talolinga where the earth trembles. Nevertheless, during the war everything must have looked more like an enormous charcoal hole. Now, Granny hardly has the strength to tell any stories at all. She is blind, like cows when they are old. My poor patient, Mirta, my grandmother. From time to time, the strong fever makes her delirious and she says things that do not make sense. She has been suffering from malaria for a long time now. The mosquitoes brought it —the nearly invisible mosquitoes that bite you at dawn. Even so, she now and then sings some sarcastic song, my sweet granny Mirta, and she helps us and she loves us more than her own life even if she cannot manage on her own any more. Taquin says that in the silence of the grandmothers lies the greatest wisdom, because they will be the real grannies in heaven. He might be exaggerating, Taquin, because heaven would be too enormous for them alone. I have heard that heaven is infinite. It never ends.

Dad died more than three years ago, I think. The paramilitary troops killed him. Mum says it was retaliation. Because they -my mum and my dad- took part in the revolution and fought in the mountains for justice and freedom. And, even if he wanted to do well, they killed him. Honestly, I believe that they killed him because in this place, where we live, they kill you because of anything. Nobody is safe. At night, you hear nothing but gunshots. Then, in the morning you see nothing but blood. Now, apart from the paramilitary guys, some peasants got together in self-defence and returned to the mountains. I think that's fine. It's to protect us, to save our lives. Because here, as mom says, life has no value. At night, a warm quilt, a candle that sometimes is suddenly blown out and spits in your face. As far as I can remember, the night seems to me to be an enormous coal-black hole. I have seen that black earth, black as the night and blacker than charcoal. I saw it at the foot of the volcanoes. But the volcanoes do not scare me. Even if at times they get angry and want to scare us, I am not afraid of them. They are handsome as grass in the rainy season. And they hypnotize you like the movement a wild beast makes when breathing.

SHINY elephants
Fragment from the novel for children

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