



The landless

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“I was born here and this is where I will die,” my father told me for as long as I can remember. He was identical to me and I to him like everyone in my community. They call us Guarayos, but we are Ayoreo. They don’t care to know or learn who we are. They despise us.

They dress differently from us, they look like they are from another planet, no matter if their skin is darker or lighter than ours, they still look down on us. They grab, enter the forests, and proclaim this land belongs to them. They want to cut down the trees and bring in cattle. My mother says that nature feels things, but they never understand.

My family has always had to flee. First, we fled from those who came wrapped in metal saying that they had discovered us. We fled to the plains and we lost them, we thought we were safe, but they came back, this time with giant machines that drilled the earth and dried up life. We had to grow around it. I saw the birds learn to fly, the brocket deer walk for the first time, but that is of no value to them.

“They don’t want to integrate,” they tell us, but no one takes the time to learn our culture. They resent our accent and our way of living.

I suppose that's why they did it, because they hate what they don't know, so they decided to end it. One night there was a thick smoke that surrounded the whole forest. When we left, the green was painted red, the animals howled in pain, and I remembered what they call hell.

My grandfather said that when they tried to change him, they told him about heaven and hell, good and evil. They read him a book that spoke of men who parted the sea with their words and turned stones into bread. The story my grandfather repeated the most was that of the man who found a land for his people, because he believed that was our destiny.

If you are good, good things will happen to you, they said, but that night I knew that bad things happen to you if you do not obey those in power.

We had to leave everything behind and flee again. My father did not have the strength, so he stayed behind to keep his promise.

And as the flames consumed everything in our path, I wondered if we would ever find our promised land...

Traducción: Sofie Van Renterghem

