Love

In the Amazonian jungle, the first woman and the first man looked at each other with curiosity. It was odd what they had between their legs.

"Did they cut yours off?" asked the man.

"No," she said, "I've always been like that."

He examined her close up. He scratched his head. There was an open wound there. He said: "Better not eat any cassava or bananas or any fruit that splits when it ripens. I'll cure you. Get in the hammock and rest."

She obeyed. Patiently she swallowed herb teas and let him rub on pomades and unguents. She had to grit her teeth to keep from laughing when he said to her, "Don't worry."

She enjoyed the game, although she was beginning to tire of fasting in a hammock. The memory of fruit made her mouth water.

One evening the man came running through the glade. He jumped with excitement and cried, "I found it!"

He had just seen the male monkey curing the female monkey in the arm of a tree.

"That's how it's done," said the man, approaching the woman.

When the long embrace ended, a dense aroma of flowers and fruit filled the air. From the bodies lying together came unheard of vapors and glowings, and it was all so beautiful that the suns and the gods died of embarrassment.

The Rivers and the Sea

There was no water in the forest of the Chocos. God knew that the ant had it and asked her for some. She didn't want to listen. God tightened her waist, making it permanently slim, and the ant exuded the water she kept in her belly.

"Now tell me where you got it."

The ant led God to a tree that had nothing unusual about it. Frogs and men with axes worked on it for four days and four
nights, but the tree wouldn’t fall. A liana kept it from touching the
ground.

God ordered the toucan, “Cut it.”

The toucan couldn’t, and for that was sentenced to eat fruit
whole.

The macaw cut the liana with his hard, sharp beak.

When the water tree fell, the sea was born from its trunk and
the rivers from its branches.

All of the water was sweet. It was the Devil that kept chucking
fistfuls of salt into it.

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The Tides

In olden times, winds blew unremittingly on Vancouver Island.
Good weather didn’t exist, and there was no low tide.

Men decided to kill the winds. They sent in spies. The winter
blackbird failed; so did the sardine. Despite his bad vision and
broken arms, it was the sea gull that managed to dodge the hur-
ricanes mounting guard on the house of the winds.

Then men sent in an army of fish led by the sea gull. The fish
hurled themselves in a body against the door. The winds, rushing
out, trod on them, slipping and falling one after another on the
stingray, which pierced them with his tail and devoured them.

The west wind was captured alive. Imprisoned by the men,
it promised that it would not blow continuously, that there would
be soft air and light breezes, and that the waters would recede a
couple of times a day so that shellfish could be gathered at low
tide. They spared its life.

The west wind has kept its word.

(114)
The Ovenbird

When he reached the age for the three manhood tests, this boy ran and swam better than anyone and spent nine days without food, stretched out by leather thongs, without moving or complaining. During the tests he heard a woman's voice singing to him from far away, which helped him to endure.

The chief of the community decided that the boy should marry his daughter, but he took flight and got lost in the woods of the Paraguay River, searching for the singer.

There you still meet the ovenbird. He flaps his wings powerfully and utters glad sounds when he thinks the sought-after voice is flying his way. Waiting for the one who doesn't come, he has built a house of mud, with the door open to the northern breeze, in a place secure from lightning.

Everyone respects him. He who kills the ovenbird or breaks his house draws the storm upon himself.

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The Crow

The lakes were dry, the riverbeds empty. The Takelma Indians, dying of thirst, sent the male and the female crow to look for water.

The male crow got tired right away. He urinated in a bowl and said that was the water he was bringing from a far place.

The female kept on flying. She returned much later with a load of fresh water and saved the Takelma people from the drought.

As a punishment the male crow was sentenced to suffer thirst through the summers. Unable to moisten his throat, he talks in a very raucous voice while the weather is hot.

(114)
Resurrection

After five days it was the custom for the dead to return to Peru. They drank a glass of chicha and said, "Now I'm eternal."

There were too many people in the world. Crops were sown at the bottom of precipices and on the edge of abysses, but even so, the food wouldn't go around.

Then a man died in Huarocheiri.

The whole community gathered on the fifth day to receive him. They waited for him from morning till well after nightfall. The hot dishes got cold, and sleep began closing eyelids. The dead man didn't come.

He came the next day. Everyone was furious. The one who boiled most with indignation was his wife, who yelled, "You good-for-nothing! Always the same good-for-nothing! All the dead are punctual except you!"

The resurrected one stammered some excuse, but the woman threw a corncob at his head and left him stretched out on the floor. Then the soul left the body and flew off, a quick, buzzing insect, never to return.

Since that time no dead person has come back to mix with the living and compete for their food.

(14)

Magic

An extremely old Tukuna woman chastised some young girls who had denied her food. During the night she tore the bones out of their legs and devoured the marrow, so the girls could never walk again.

In her infancy, soon after birth, the old woman had received from a frog the powers of healing and vengeance. The frog had taught her to cure and kill, to hear unhearable voices and see unseeable colors. She learned to defend herself before she learned to talk. Before she could walk she already knew how to be where she wasn't, because the shafts of love and hate instantly pierce the densest jungles and deepest rivers.
When the Tukunas cut off her head, the old woman collected her own blood in her hands and blew it toward the sun.

“My soul enters you, too!” she shouted.

Since then anyone who kills receives in his body, without wanting or knowing it, the soul of his victim.