

*There is no time left [...] Time is like a chicken with
its head cut off, racing around madly, every which way.
Blood is flowing from its decapitated neck, and we're drowning in it*

Wajdi Mouawad,
Incendies

The Cave

By Omar Ruiz

Shrine of the Storms 9000 B.E.C.

"It was present when the Dream began. The Dream is the tale of the Time. The Spirit solemnly witnessed the end of days. It tried to understand the vanishing of that which is imperceptible.

To the Spirit, the actual disappearance of the world is irrelevant. It doesn't oppose the idea of the ethereal becoming tangible. It just tries to decipher the complex riddle the cogs of Time have become now. It doesn't care if existence as a whole ceases to be. It just wants to abandon the Good Land.

I know all of this because the Spirit itself told me about it. I know what you are thinking: spirits don't speak. And you are right, spirits have neither mouth, nor eyes, nor hands. Nor do they have feet to leave footprints in the mud either.

But this Spirit is different. It was inhabiting a vessel just in the same way a father and a daughter occupy a cave, just for the same reason you and I do it, to take refuge from the rain and the nightmares. The Spirit set up home inside the guts of the most horrific monster you can imagine: bigger than the whales we usually see under the moonlight. You have eaten octopi's tentacles before. I assure you, this beast was similar to an octopus. However, its proportions were gargantuan to the point it could have easily grabbed a whale in each of its tentacles. The creature was as crimson as the blood that flows through the veins of the penguins that come ashore from other worlds.

The Spirit, which was as massive as a mountain of elephants stacked on top of each other, told me there was a time when even larger beasts walked among the trees and swam under the seas. It knows because it encountered every single one of them. It possessed their stomachs as well. They were balmy and deep as this cave. The Spirit told me there will not be living beings of such magnitude ever again. It told me the night has shrunk, so there is no more roaming space for them.

The Spirit spoke to me from the inside of the monstrosity's intestines. I could hear it in the same manner one can hear a storm is approaching. I was standing right there, at the base of the cliff, where the waves come crashing down upon the rocks. I was afraid. I thought I was going to die. Half of the creature's body remained hidden under the water. The slightest of its movements made the stones vibrate and enraged the sea. I was holding tight to one of the black boulders and was begging the Spirit not to end my life. Back then I was a kid, way younger than you are right now. Back then, I feared death.

It told me that it was not there to eat me, that it was not how the end of my life was written. It revealed to me the place and hour of my decease. I will not tell you. A daughter should never know where and when will her father die.

It told me to listen carefully to what it had to say. It told me that life repeats itself over and over again, always the same, like the stories we tell every night. If we didn't tell stories, life would cease to exist in the Good Land. It made me understand that we all live inside a great story that it itself invented many days before, before parents had daughters. I believe that this Spirit is the first-born child of Mother Spider since it helped her to extend her threads and to weave them, to create the paths that men, animals, and rivers walk. But the web of the Mother is dangerous. Whatever touches it gets trapped. The Spirit told me that sadness invades him, that it does not like the cobweb. It does not belong there and seeks a way out.

The Spirit also spoke to me in mysteries. It told me that Time does not spread like the wings of a bird, but coils like hair. The Spirit always remains in the middle of that circle, like an egg swallowed by a snake from the place with no water.

The Spirit told me that it inhabits the Realm of Memories, which is also the Realm of Destiny. There, yesterday and tomorrow intersect, confused like the cry of a newborn baby. The Spirit asked me to imagine what it would be like if I remembered every day of my passage through the Good Land. I did not have to close my eyes to feel the weight of a thousand darknesses in my heart. It told me then, that Time remembers itself, just like when a daughter remembers looking at her reflection in a body of water. There is a circle in which everything that exists has been ensnared and immobilized, like those wooden animals with which you played at the age when your teeth were still falling out. The Spirit has walked so many times among wooden animals that it is already tired and bored. But you... you still don't know the weight of life.

The Spirit told me that Time has repeated itself many times. Always in the same order. It has traveled to each one of those epochs, as it created everything with its tale. It told me that a part of it stayed in each of the things that are seen and those that are not seen. At first, during the first laps of Time, it was unable to put together all the pieces of itself. Its language was hidden on a white island many lives from here; its head was thrown into the cold sea; its arms and nails to the sun; its legs covered by mist; its blood drunk by giants; its guts and feces cooked under the burning earth; its teeth, hidden in one of the closed hands of a blue baboon; its nails were pulled out and thrown into the fire; they turned to ashes that sometimes rise like a black whirlpool that runs through the Good Land. Its being was distributed in all things in the world,

alive or inert, huge as clouds or small as lice. Its heart is in each of the riddles that crawl underneath things. It is everything, although all things inhabit and torture it. It's like this cave full of bats that always screech the same to say the same thing. Those demons don't let it sleep. It exists awake, like a dead man walking among wooden beings unable to see him.

With each turn of Time, the Spirit managed to reunite some of the parts of its being. But becoming a single entity did not bring it happiness. What the Spirit wishes the most now is to sleep, to escape the web of the Mother. No son should stay with their parents.

Hence, I will disappear. I'll leave you alone so you forge your own trajectory. Here, at the end of the world, you will begin the tale of your own path, whether you decide to do it by heading inland or jumping into the sea and swim as far as the fog allows you to see, to the world where the penguins come from."

"What if my heart's desire was to fly to the villages in the clouds?"

"No one would envy you, because there is where the bird that laid the egg from which the first man emerged lives."

"But we are children of the Spider Mother."

"The first woman was. And we are children of the first woman, grandchildren of the Mother Spider."

"Then, is the Spirit you are talking about, a woman like me?"

"Do you want it to be a woman?"

"I do not care.

So... does the Spirit still linger in the Good Land? Or did it manage to escape?"

"Do you want it to remain here?"

"I don't know. I feel sorry about it being trapped, but I'd like to meet it."

"The Spirit became an enemy of Time that repeats itself, although Time was born from its voice. It confessed to me that it wants to break the web of the Mother and escape. That is the reason why it decided to be more than just a house full of demons; it itself became a demon, one so terrible that on its toothless face, the shapes of everything that is seen can be molded, as if it were mud."

"Dirt, for example?"

"Yes. It became a dune and tried to make a house of sand."

"Where is that house? Would it take a lifetime to get there?"

"That house doesn't exist. The Spirit failed, so it tried to control the flight of a beetle all the way into a chameleon's tongue. But It failed again. It knew very well the exact movements and the heartbeats of both animals, but it was written in Time: the former had to live and the latter stay hungry.

The Spirit is a witness without a voice. It helped Mother Spider build Time, but every spider web, like every destiny, is a trap. Regardless, it preferred from then on to spend eternity keeping and appreciating the pieces it managed to gather of itself. Sometimes, its toothless, tongueless face looks like an elegant towering waterfall; sometimes it is a fish that dies on the beach. It keeps getting tortured by the never-changing voices of everything that exists. Every now and then, the Spirit is able to perceive the unique beauty of those proclamations, as it knows they ceaselessly reborn and extinguish, their tone, different from each other in nature, albeit equal in essence to the turn of the cogs of Time.

Daughter, I will tell you a secret: we are those voices, we are its demons and the Spirit envies our clueless and naive existence, and the way we long for the day that comes next as if it were a new land, open to the sky, without horizons.

But beauty is not beauty if there is no risk of forgetting it.

The Spirit has seen the night rising so many times. It has seen it emerge like a worm from a white hole just the size of its gaze. It has seen how the night always fades away in the same direction, towards the destination where its story began. It has seen its cycle, backward and forward, in a time before Time. That fate is the man who dies... you and me.

Stories don't always start at the beginning; sometimes they start near the end. Before circular Time, we emerged as a seed deposited on its curled tongue. The Spirit built Time similar to your undulated hair, always alive, ever-extending into the dusk.

Things did not go as expected. The Spirit felt the fate of a story without an exit."

"But stories must have escape routes. You showed me."

"Soon you will take my place and the Sun will continue to rise over the sea. A story must have holes, even if they are as small as your fingers. If a story has no holes, it will become a lie."

"Then the Mother's web has a way out."

"Or we live in a lie..."

During countless turns of the cogs of Time, the Spirit, in its ceaseless ambulation, avoided the dying man, because they reminded it more than anything else, the tangible and the ephemeral. The Spirit saw the Good Land as a plate of fire. It saw the black eyes of the Sun. It saw the Moon in those days when it could be reached by hand."

"By hand?"

"Yes. The Spirit saw the first men, who were the sons of older beasts. Strange, horrible beasts that cursed the fruits before eating them. It saw stars rise and fall. It saw blood and mountains roaring. It saw monster scales hidden forever in sacred grottoes. Then, it also saw us, sitting by the fire, telling the stories that the Sun needs to hear in order to rise. Thus, the Spirit solved the riddle.

What we do, daughter, is the most important thing anyone can do. That is why we cannot live in the village. That is why our house is the cave, the beach, the tree, and the place without water; that's why the night is our roof. The Spirit told me that it is like us.

Back then, when I was still clinging to that black boulder, trembling without feeling cold, I told it that I knew what is lost when one tells stories and tales. I asked it what it wanted from me if it was not my life, as I would have been honored to serve as food for a beast that was older than the world.

Do you know what it answered?"

"No."

"That we should dedicate ourselves to tell stories and tales. That it would listen to them. That it would be a different being with every story it heard, that Time would be different with each tale told in the Good Land. It confessed to me that it suffers because, without a tongue, its voice no longer has the power to make whales swim through the seas. But a new story told by a woman or a vision received by a man, or a nightmare dreamt by three babies could break the web.

I felt sorry for him. I promised it that I would tell you its story, which from now on is also my story and yours, and your children's, and your children's children."

"What happened then? With the beast, what happened?"

"He got lost in the sea from which it came. The water rose with the force of forty elephants and covered the black rock I was holding onto. I was thrown against the slope of the cliff and did not wake up until the next day."

"Have you seen it again?"

"No. But it assured me that, like me, many others will see it. It will be disguised as even scarier creatures, although not that big."

"How do you know that it was not an evil spirit that wanted to steal your soul?"

"I don't know, daughter. But it is also possible to learn secrets from evil spirits."

"Evil secrets."

"You are young and you have not filled your heart with Time.
But I need to leave now."

"Where will you go?"

"The footprints of a father must not be visible to his daughter."

"I'll go to the clouds."

"I must not be informed of your way."

"You know it now."

"You can change your destination."

"So can you, father."