

JUAN CARLOS GALEANO

Translated by Frederick H. Fornoff

Healing

For Ernest Rehder

Sad Indians, burdened by memories, come to our house.

My brother, knowing how, prays and protects them
with tobacco smoke.

The Indians leave him their sadness in stones
and he turns them into clouds.

My brother earns little, but his clientele grows day by day.

JUAN CARLOS GALEANO

Translated by Angela Ball

Hérons

For Margarito Cuéllar

The fishermen who scale and gut their catch
find a river in the bellies of the fish.

In the river shines a beach where some boys play soccer.

Some herons come to the beach to take off their feathers and go for a
swim.

The fishermen wink at the boys
urging them to bathe with the herons.

But the boys prefer to hide the herons' clothes.

Then those who scale and gut their fish
laugh so hard they fall down, choking.

The herons dress themselves in the scales of the fish and dive into the
river.

JUAN CARLOS GALEANO

Translated by Delia Poey

Table

For Luiz Moro

The table often dreams of having been an animal.

But if it had been an animal, it wouldn't be a table.

If it had been an animal, it would have run away like the others
when the chainsaws came to take down the trees that would become
tables.

In the house a woman comes every night
and rubs a warm rag over its haunches as if it were an animal.

With its four legs, the table could leave the house.
But it thinks about the chairs surrounding it, and an animal would not
abandon its family.

What the table likes best is for the woman to tickle it
as she gathers the breadcrumbs left behind by the children.

JUAN CARLOS GALEANO
Translated by Angela Ball

Kites

To Iván Oñate

Because we lacked paper to make kites, we flew our windows.

The windows with their white aprons told us what they saw.

But the Indians who saw our windows flying had neither house nor win-
dows
to fly, let alone a kite.

It was only natural that the Indians would want to fly something.

In exchange for rotten fish, the circling vultures let strings be tied
around their necks and served as kites for the Indians.

JUAN CARLOS GALEANO
Translated by Angela Ball

Clouds

My father came to live in the Amazon to teach the Indians to make
puzzles from clouds.

To help our father, every afternoon, my brother and I run after the idle
clouds
passing by up there.

The clouds, like thoughts, appear and disappear.

Near our house many Indians line up to piece together puzzles
out of the clouds they know best.

Around here some clouds look like trees, and the others remind people of
pirarucu fish.

Far off, the Indians are looking for a cloud to complete the head of an ar-
madillo.

"With the water of our rivers and with the city games," my father writes
to his friends, "our Indians are having fun and learning to think."

My brother and I would like it better if the clouds would turn into me-
ringues
that we could eat with milk at suppertime.

JUAN CARLOS GALEANO

Translated by Delia Poey

Eraser

For Roberto Fernández

The man who needs space in his mind for important things
rubs a giant eraser on his forehead every night.

He erases many thoughts of his homeland, and every day he wakes up
with fewer square miles of memories.

His parents tell him to erase carefully, not to get so carried away
that one day he may end up erasing them, too.

The man assures them that he has a lot of practice, that he only erases
the lands and things that aren't important.

He says that he knows how to strip the trees of their leaves and let
the houses and people go untouched.