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Subtítulos

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Dr. Agustín Stahl, physician and naturalist  
Bayamón, P.R. november 19, 1898.

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On behalf of Pres. Wm. McKinley  
I request from you a report on the  
flora, fauna & natural history of the Island.  
Signed, Rev. Dr. H.K. Carroll, Special  
Commissioner for the U.S. in P.R.  
The natural history of P.R.  
is yet unstudied.

What is known is from studies made  
in the neighboring non-Spanish islands.  
From references to our flora & fauna  
by our historians and chroniclers  
like Oviedo, Abad y La Sierra,  
J.B. Muñoz & the Frenchman Ledrú.  
and of course, my own efforts.  
These writings, my collection.  
my life dream: a museum of natural history  
in P.R. What 's to become of it all?

What do we really know  
of these animals,  
plants and the very origins  
of this marvelous Island?  
In truth Dr. Carroll, my collection  
may look like a grab bag  
of found objects  
These pieces and yet  
at what cost to me

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and how much hard work  
to put it together.

All my life I've been on a mission:  
to know how the island was formed  
and its first inhabitants, what were they like  
These people doomed to disappear?  
I will never forget my first encounter  
with the exuberant nature of this Island  
the mysteries and secrets of the past:  
my adventures exploring the  
Rio Blanco in the Rain Forest.

The casual observer who has  
traveled the island at the break dawn  
feels in the fields and forests of  
Puerto Rico transported.  
Their spirits soar to the sublime  
regions of the mind and spirit.  
We live in a land where transportation  
is nearly impossible  
made worse in the rainy season  
due to the lack of good roads  
and our impenetrable forests.

The indians called their island Boriken.  
Strategically located in the Caribbean  
at the gateway between the Americas  
its flor and fauna is a splendid mix  
of tropical species, native and foreign.

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Coffee came from Arabia, sugarcane & rice  
from Spain, bananas and coconuts from Africa.

Native to the Isand are yuca,  
malanga, avocado, tobacco,  
and a wealth of crops and timber  
all available for the common good.

On this journey I was accompanied  
and assisted by my friend Miguel.

We made our way into the Yunque Rain  
Forest via the Río Blanco de Naguabo  
to look for rare species, some surely  
unknown and never before classified.

The beauty and grandeur of our landscape  
the coolness of dawn  
the splendor of dew in the grass  
awakens in quiet spirits the most  
gentle thoughts and emotions.

Wrapped in the mist of nite  
and spurred by the waking dew  
my soul hungered to unearth  
the unknown history  
of the people who perished  
and whose past still speaks to us

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through found objects  
and monuments they left behind.  
The 4 seasons of the year are barely  
distinguishable one from the other.  
The summer rains and heat  
go from June to October  
coinciding with the hurricane season.  
The lay of the land is irregular, the highland jagged  
and the highest peak is the Yunque  
in the Sierra of Luquillo.

Referencing my research were the  
writings of travelers and historians  
and especially the very monuments  
left behind by our native peoples  
and the evidence found in plants, rocks  
and the fossil record  
of our tropical Caribbean zoology.

Streams everywhere race down  
mountain slopes to form our largest rivers.  
Luko o Lukón is the name given by the indians  
to the Yunque, our highest peak.

I was reminded of names found in  
Anahuac suggesting a kinship between  
our native peoples and our neighbors  
of the Gulf of Mexico.

Looking into these mysteries I headed  
into the heart of the sacred forest of the indians.  
For days we explored up and down the river

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and in and out of the forest.

By that river run I traced out the future line  
of my work and research as a naturalist.

It was there I first questioned  
what man and time  
had left behind in what is today  
our motherland.

—Miguel,

last nite I dreamt of her.

—Who?

—My first wife, the German.

I'm feeling her here, everywhere around me.

—Yes, I had a dream, too.

It was like a shadow.

My father used to say

You got a being haunting you

And I feel something pushing me.

Don't laugh. That's why

I push on.

So, you dreamt of your German wife.

What was it like over in Germany?

—Fantástico, Miguel, fantástico.

They're recording history,

writing the future.

We stroll through the Botanical Gardens.

tour the museums of Berlín.

The kind of museum you want

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here in Puerto Rico, right?  
—Exactly. That's my big dream,  
A Museum of Natural History here in P.R.  
with samples of our flora,  
fauna & history all in one place  
for people to study and appreciate.  
And in the bargain you wouldn't mind me  
collecting my own cut of pebbles of gold, right?  
Surely not, Miguel, not at all.

Miguel and I always got back  
loaded with samples.  
Some we kept for the collection,  
some we ate  
and all of them we classified,  
measured and sketched.

Here in our schools  
studies of nature are taught  
Using books with flora and fauna  
totally different from our own.  
All the names and examples  
Are to plants  
that are not known here.

In my work I describe  
our flora & fauna  
using as examples common plants  
and animals people here know.

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Someone should publish  
a textbook for use in our local schools,  
an enviable chore I leave for  
others.

In the midsts of this infinite variety  
of species one inevitably asks  
has nature provided this or the other  
with any particular value or importance?

How strange, that in a country  
Where gold abounded  
in the early years of the conquest  
and is rich in minerals  
today is unable to help itself  
and pay for part if not all  
the public debt that hobbles its growth.  
As Miguel broke stones looking for gold  
I wondered if a secret connection  
existed between the evolution of  
the Island and its ultimate conquest?  
First the forced labor of the indians  
then African slavery all to feed  
the insatiable greed of the colonizers for gold .  
For thousand of years the rains and rivers  
have transformed the face of the land,  
rocks turned into pebbles then into sand  
and finally shoring to the bottom of the sea.  
There, immense pressure

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and turbulent cataclisms  
compacted sands and sedimentation  
turning them once more  
into the huge rocks that today  
make up our peaks and mountains  
and this has been so for millions of years.

Our giant hardwoods are excellent  
for building ships, houses and furniture.

It's a shame that the need to cook  
with charcoal threatens to reduce to ashes  
our best hardwoods.

Trees like the yaya,maricao, ausubo,  
and tortugo are now practically extinct.

We have but to examine the face  
of the land to understand  
the natural history of the Island.

Along the highest ridges  
huge granite rocks  
pile up helter skelter  
in total disarray.

At some time in the distant past  
the whole island must have been  
buried at the bottom of the ocean  
until a vast explosion  
blew it up  
above the surface of the sea.

Volcanic eruptions  
continued to drive up  
from the ocean bottom

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the enormous granite masses  
that cooled on the surface  
to make up what today  
are the jagged mountains  
of Luquillo, Naguabo and Yabucoa.

The river reflected  
the stream of thoughts  
rushing through my mind.  
To understand the flora & fauna  
One has to know how the geography  
and geology of the island came to be.  
And how on these layers of soil,  
plants and fossils our first inhabitants  
left their mark before the arrival  
of the Spanish conquistadors.

One day one of those  
missing links to the past  
made his appearance.  
He was a dweller of the forest  
and likely a direct descendant  
of the famous Carabali  
our legendary runaway slave  
of bygone days.

I was running past here  
looking for a place to hide  
hoping to find the hut

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my grandmother once had.

I kept moving and stumbled  
on a huge snake  
twisting and turning in her nest.

Dig away.

It's buried right there.

Get it.

That's it.

There it is.

I can see now,  
our native people  
hunted down by packs of dogs  
starved to death, cut down by the sword.

Yeah, before me came others  
and after me others will follow.

When I ran away  
this stone doll saved me.  
It was showing me the way.  
I ran into another big snake  
and didn't stop until this here spot.

The stone doll saved my life.

So don't take it from me.

This box I dug it up.

Go ahead, open it.

You open it.

There's not much here.

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Looks like letters,  
burned pieces of paper,  
entries of a diary.  
1868. Don't know what to do.  
Father's death has been  
A heavy blow to the family.  
The rebellion in Lares doesn't help matters.  
The Creoles and mulattos are up in arms.  
Think I best sell the farm.

December 22, 1849. The law requiring  
working papers is going nowhere.  
Just another failed move  
Typical of this government.  
A black runaway is worth more...  
That was me.  
...than six of these weakling white squatters.  
One runaway showed up recently  
who's like a raging bull.  
That was me.  
It's Xmas eve.  
It's All Saint's Day.  
Father shipped our first harvest,  
one ton of dried coffee beans.  
We've been here now 5 years  
in this God forsaken hole  
that's more like  
a living hell.

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I saw how it all came down.  
They stripped the forest. The coffee crop in ruins.  
The Corsican bossman died.  
Termites ravished the house.  
Everything went to pot  
and I was left with nothing. Look, see .  
Ashes to ashes  
and the rest, silence.

And so all came to an end, with the river  
rushing through that stretch of solitude.

The river, like time carrying  
in its flow the pain of cries  
no longer heard.

After that encounter I was sure  
that the origins of our indians  
were to be found amongst the peoples  
of our neighboring continent.

The stone objects left by our indians  
Bear a striking resemblance  
to those of ancient México & Yucatán.

I am convinced there was  
a direct link between  
the early peoples of Boriken  
and those of the Gulf of Mexico.

My own is probably the largest collectiion

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of ancient artifacts in the Antilles.

And keep in mind it represents  
the efforts of a single individual  
with no help at all from either  
government or state institutions.

And this, moreover, in a country  
where such intellectual pursuits  
are viewed as mental aberrations.

The truth is, Dr.Carroll, that my  
life's work may seem to be a  
hopeless cause, but I hold fast  
to the illusion, that one day,  
be it in a far distant future,  
my dream may still come true

The End

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