

## **“Does Not Kill” by Gabriela Cabezón Cámara**

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The hand of God squeezes but does not choke. And does not kill: with His hand God gathered up the clay to make the little figurines and create man and woman in His trans image and likeness; then the Creator closed His fist and extended His index finger and pointed at the tiny pair made of dust and water, and shot the bolt of life as He exhaled a “Fiat!” that packed more Pegasus-power than there are grains of sand in the beaches and desserts of the Earth, and filled it with the spirit of divine breath that is the origin of the air we breathe, and for that very reason His hand cannot choke. And does not kill.



*Photograph of Omar Octavio Carrasco published by the newspaper Los Andes.*

Does not kill, he might have repeated as a prayer, like when we ask to be delivered from evil when evil’s teeth have us by the nose, like when declaring, almost without breath, that God squeezes but does not suffocate, although he is suffocating, and the soldier of Jesus Christ and the Argentine Army Omar Octavio Carrasco might have asserted it and reasserted it, because he well knew, after five years of bible school, that God vomits the lukewarm. This was not the time to wonder if He hawked out the

hot and shat out the cold, he was only certain in that minute that could be his last that he should not doubt like the lukewarm though he doubted when he was gasping like a fish because he was drowning, because instead of air he was taking in a sweet liquid that was perhaps God's vomit, and before the liquid filled him, blows had rained down on him like manna, and one, the final blow, hit him like a bolt from God: he saw it coming with the one eye he still had only half closed and with the half of a vocal cord that still vibrated he screamed *no* when the officer's boot that he saw swing away at full speed swung back like an increasingly larger missile, and he closed his eyes when the tip dug into his ribs and punctured a lung that began to fill with blood and he began to breathe His vomit instead of His breath, that air with which He filled the earth so that birds may fly and trees may sway and all the creatures He created may breathe, what for, not to be alone perhaps, and so there was something that God was missing, doubted Carrasco as the brunt of a kick entered his body and never again left, that kick would be inside him forever, and forever lasted about twenty four hours: it had come at him with all the momentum a well-trained, long-legged military man could muster, he must have seen it coming like one sees a bomb fall, splitting the air God made for birds and for airplanes and surely also for missiles, that's how Carrasco must have seen the boot that ended up killing him from respiratory arrest even though the soldier said to himself that the hand of God squeezes but does not suffocate and that the mouth of God damns but also exhales the divine breath of life into the dust that we are, and that if He does kill, it is those who are evil, but not since Jesus Christ, and besides he, a soldier of the Motherland as of three days ago, but soldier of the World Evangelical Army Torch of Faith since the beginning, he was named one of the chosen around his eighth month of gestation when his father drove off the road from Cutral C6 to Trenque Lauquen, and while the van rolled he saw the cargo of headless, featherless chickens fall, he saw them slide down the side of the road as if a river of dead chickens flowed out of the rear of the delivery van, a wave of chickens rose up, fell forcefully and lifted a cloud of dirt from the earth that shone like diamonds, shitty, good-for-nothing earth, not even fit to plant soybeans, that plague, one of the latest, one of the five horsemen, earth that was so shitty it was like damned from its origins, but its particles shone in the evening sun by the side of the road while Don Francisco Carrasco, chicken deliveryman, son of an oil worker who wanted a better life for him and had gotten him hired as a farmhand at the Desertpollo

farm, where the boy had risen to the post of deliveryman and so had gotten married and unwittingly planted the seed of the multitudes that would be his issue, and he learned of it then, when the dead chickens flew through the same air in which the shitty earth shone and he bumped his head against the ceiling of the van's cabin and was afraid he'd lose his job or die, and the desert sun sunk and the pinkish yellow chickens looked like pale sun sparks and the sun looked always the same despite his changing viewpoint, which spun inside the van that fell, rolling over itself, and from that sun that shot out chickens like pale sparks came a voice that said, "Do not be afraid," using the Spanish *tú* although Francisco Carrasco was Paraguayan and used *vos* with everyone, even with the general when he did his military service. "Do not be afraid, my son," said the voice. "You are saved. And your issue shall be multitudes." At that moment, Francisco passed out peacefully, and hours later he was found and taken to the hospital, and from the fright he gave her, his wife went into premature labor and that is when he was born, already in the grace of Our Savior, Jesus Christ, the world evangelical soldier Omar Carrasco. From God's words, the new father thought his firstborn would initiate a long line of children but no, the soldier's mother was only impregnated once more, and many times they asked themselves what had God meant to say to his beloved chicken deliveryman Francisco Carrasco by "your issue shall be multitudes" and they speculated with Sarah and Abraham, who had Isaac at the age of one hundred, but even so they prayed and prayed for an explanation. They would finally understand eighteen years after the day of His message, exactly one month after he had taken his only male child to the door of the barracks for him to fulfill his duty to the Motherland. It was the second time they had been outside of Cutral C6 since their boy's birth.

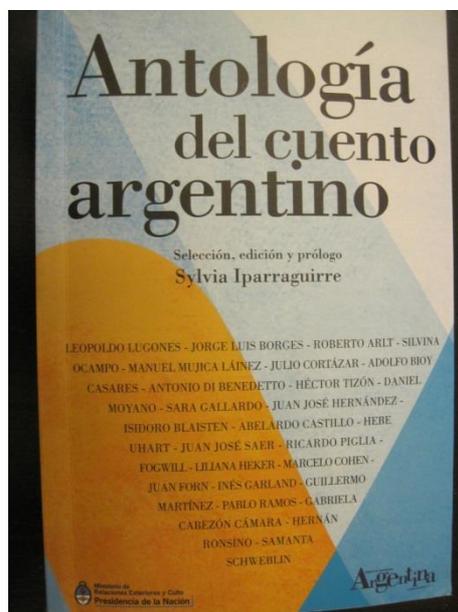
His father had driven him to the barracks in the van he bought after he totaled the previous one that very moment he had come to know Christ. He told him the military would make a man of him, that things would be different from how they were in their small village. The boy had replied, "Don't worry, Papa, I'll make you proud." And in he went with the Bible under his arm, singing, "*Forever forward we march with Christ, with his word, the word of truth. Ready like soldiers, for Jesus Christ is our general. We are soldiers of Jehovah. We are soldiers of Christ.*" That was March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1994. He was beaten on the 6<sup>th</sup> by an officer and two soldiers. And his body

reappeared in the military installations exactly one month later, on April 6<sup>th</sup>. No cause-and-effect relationship can be deduced between the day he entered and the day he left the barracks. What can be inferred is that God, if He does exist, is not particularly attentive to the requests of his soldiers. Because the boy must have asked Him to make them stop beating him, to keep them from killing him, to let him return to Cutral-Có to ride his bicycle and compose songs for Him: besides Jesus, his passions were playing the guitar at temple, River Plate and biking. For this favor, he must have promised some impossible feat: to forsake River for Boca, or to stop jerking off, or to go to Peru to preach the Gospel to the Shining Path. He must have prayed, he must have pleaded and he must have promised anything, but neither the Argentine Army nor General Jesus were moved, and so no more bicycle, no more jerking off and no more chicken deliveries—he had begun to work with his father—for His soldier Carrasco. Few photos of him remain. In fact, just two. The last one must have been taken the day before his death: his head is shaved, eyes forward, dressed in his army uniform. He was brown-skinned, slanty-eyed, and grew to be no more than five foot, seven inches tall. He would have likely grown taller; he was only 18 when he was surprised to learn the difference between being a soldier of Christ and being a soldier of the Argentine Army, the institution that brought him death. And fame that would have been difficult for him to achieve had he survived.

He was a shy kid. And his habit of keeping a Bible under his arm or next to his bed or on his pillow must have seemed non-negotiable, something he owed God, his General. To the officer who gave him the final kick it must have seemed queer, and he took it upon himself to make him a man. And kaput, no more world for Omar Octavio Carrasco: the Lord called him into His presence. Four months later, while his murder, a national scandal, was being investigated, the sacrifice of the soldier Carrasco was accepted. It is not clear if it was because of General Jesus or the polling firm surveying the citizenry's voting intention, or a whim of the commander and chief of the Armed Forces of the Nation, President Carlos Menem, or all of these combined, for they are not mutually exclusive.

And his issue was multitudes.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: *This story refers to the murder of Omar Octavio Carrasco soon after his arrival at the military base in Zapala, Province of Neuquén, to perform his mandatory military service. The media scandal and public outcry that resulted from the discovery of his corpse after a prolonged cover-up by the Argentine army, led then President Carlos Saúl Menem to issue a decree eliminating the mandatory military service requirement. President Menem signed the decree on August 31, 1994 and was then reelected on May 14, 1995.*



*Translated by Dario Bard from a manuscript of "No mata" provided by Sylvia Iparraguirre. This story was posted on the website [CordobaMata](#) and appeared, together with this translation, in the bilingual Antología del cuento argentino/Argentine Short Story Anthology. The Anthology was edited and selected by Sylvia Iparraguirre and published by the Cultural Affairs Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship on the occasion of the 2014 Guadalajara International Book Fair.*

*Gabriela Cabezón Cámara is a writer from San Isidro, Province of Buenos Aires. Her short stories have appeared in various anthologies and magazines. She has also written the critically acclaimed novel, *La Virgen Cabeza* (2009), and the novellas *Le**

viste la cara a Dios (2011) and Romance de la negra rubia (2014), as well as the graphic novel Beya (2013), illustrated by Iñaki Echeverría.

*In this radio interview with Maria Ines Nouzeilles of FM Plaza, Cabezón Cámara discusses her novella Romance de la negra rubia:*

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUVQn-XqDv0>*

*The 1997 movie Bajo Bandera is also based on the murder of Omar Carrasco:*

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xyb8WC93UIY>*