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Stories 4 Wings

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Critical Thinking

The Farm of Silence





When Lucía arrived at the farm, it smelled of damp earth and suspended time. The old man was sitting under a tree, hat tilted, eyes closed, ears tuned to another frequency.

“Are you Mujica?” she asked, unsure whether she was interrupting something sacred.

The old man slowly opened his eyes, like someone returning from afar.

“No. I’m a gardener who talks too much,” he said, offering her a chair made of recycled wood.

Lucía had come all the way from Montevideo. She was studying philosophy but couldn’t seem to find the answers she needed. Her thesis was about critical thinking, and someone had told her this man knew how to think with his feet in the mud.

“What do you want to know?” he asked, while gently petting an old dog sleeping at his feet.

“How do you think critically without becoming cynical?”

The old man smiled, not with disdain but with tenderness.

“Thinking critically doesn’t mean distrusting everything. It means asking why we believe what we believe. Looking at the world and asking: ‘Does this make sense, or do I repeat it simply because someone taught me to?’”

Lucía pulled out her notebook, eager to jot down every word. But Mujica stopped her.

“Don’t write. Listen. And if something sticks, it’s because it’s useful.”

He spoke of his youth, the guerrilla movement, prison. How confinement taught him that freedom doesn’t hide within walls but within the mind. That knowledge is born not from books but from pain, contradiction, and failure.

“I wanted to change the world. But then I realized that without changing people’s hearts, nothing really changes.”



Lucía looked at him in shock.

“So, is it not worth fighting?”

“Of course it is. But you must know why you’re fighting. And for whom.”

He told her how, even as president, he lived on the same farm, with the same dog and the same Volkswagen. That donating 90% of his salary wasn’t heroic—it was logical.

“What do I need more for if I already have what I need?” he said to a journalist, sipped his mate, and added in a soft voice, “You need to know when to stop. Because if you don’t, you become a slave to what you’re chasing.”

Lucía thought of her studies, her professors, the debates that felt like wordplay without substance. She thought of her father, a retired laborer, who never read Kant but knew exactly when something was unjust.

“And how do you teach someone to know when to stop?” she asked.

“You don’t teach it. You spread it—through coherence, example, and recognized mistakes.”

“And I realize the hardest part isn’t thinking. It’s having the courage to change when what you think no longer fits.”

The sun began to set. Mujica rose slowly. He offered her a mate.

“You know what’s the hardest thing?” She shook her head.

“To accept that we’re wrong sometimes. That we’re not the good ones just because we think differently. The world isn’t divided into fools and enlightened ones. It’s divided between those who question and those who repeat.”

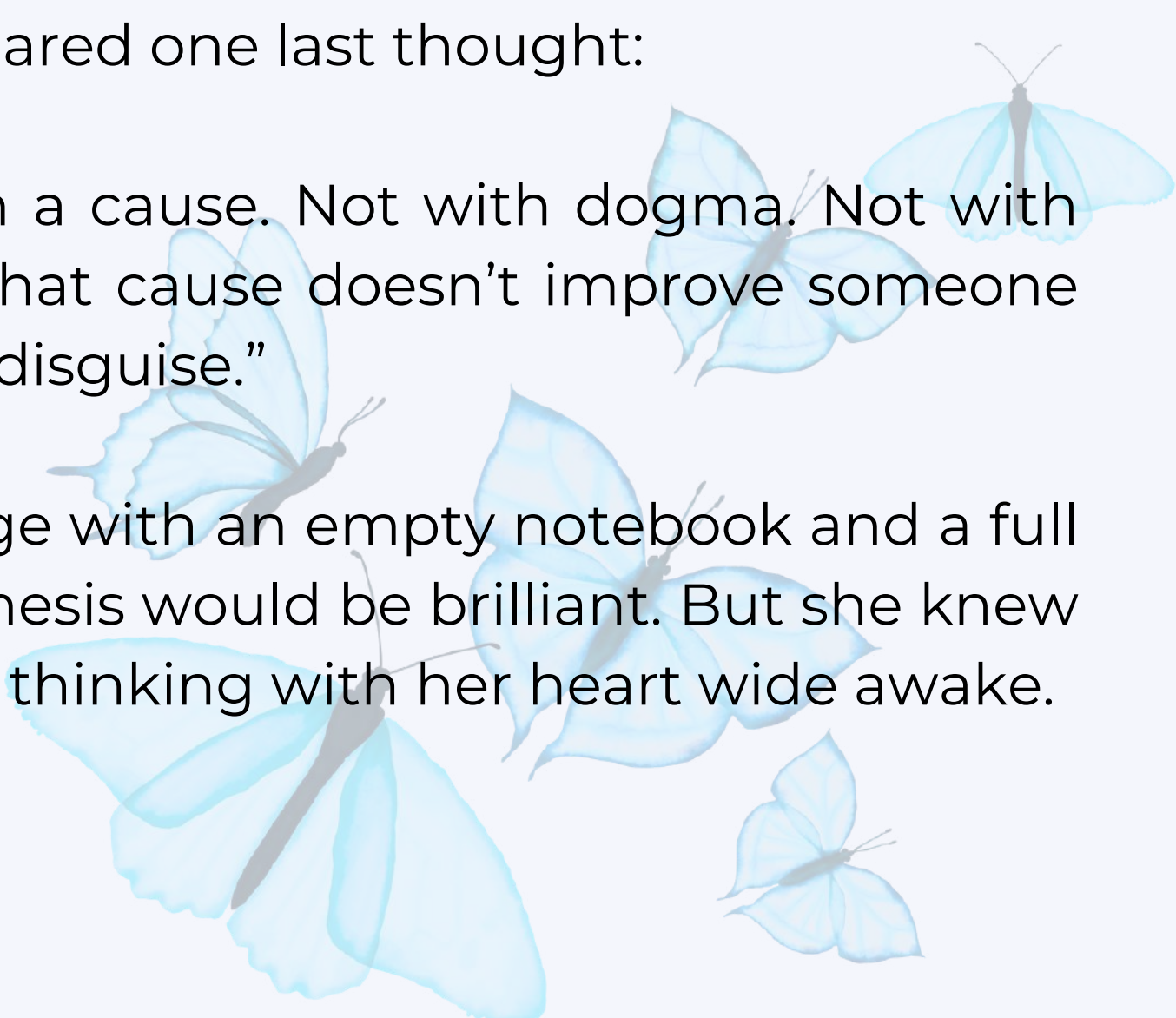
Lucía took a sip of mate and realized something had shifted. She was no longer looking for certainties, but questions worth asking.



Before she left, the old man shared one last thought:

“Critical thinking is living with a cause. Not with dogma. Not with hatred. With a cause. And if that cause doesn’t improve someone else’s life... then it’s just ego in disguise.”

Lucía walked back to the village with an empty notebook and a full mind. She didn’t know if her thesis would be brilliant. But she knew that, for the first time, she was thinking with her heart wide awake.



José Alberto Mujica Cordano (Montevideo, May 20, 1935 – Montevideo, May 13, 2025), known as Pepe Mujica, was a Uruguayan politician and flower grower who served as President of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay from March 2010 to March 2015.



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