

The Day Broke Clear: An autobiographical monologue/a letter

It was the middle of the spring break and the university clinic was empty. They needed a lot of information from me since it was my first time going, or maybe because I'm foreign and they wanted to make sure they had it all under control. Either way, I got to talk a lot about myself with this stranger, who quickly became a psychologist of some sort. I liked the doctor right away, she wore her hair very short and had laryngitis. She apologized at the beginning; she couldn't talk a lot, the sound of her voice deep and harsh, Leonard Cohen style. I was having some asthma problems. "I hate going to the doctor," I told her, "but I was getting worried, having trouble breathing at night, I didn't want it to get worse."

I was asked about my nosebleeds, did I take any medication; she made sure my blood pressure was fine and took my temperature. Then asked me if both my parents were alive. "No, my father isn't." She wanted to know how he died. "He killed himself," I said. "I was three months old, I never met him, so it's ok. I mean, not ok, but, you know." She nodded. She was very nice about everything. Then asked if I was sexually active, if I was being fucked in my vagina. No doctor in Spain had ever asked me about that when I was worried about my throat, but, alright, this is America, I thought. Do I have sex with males or females. "Females, I mean, males, or...I guess, I don't know." She smiled and asked me if my mother had married again. "No, I mean, yes, actually she did, two years ago." I almost went on about my relationship with my mother's boyfriend, he had been around ever since I was six, but I had never allowed him to get close to me. I wanted her to know they got married to make some things easier, just paperwork. I almost told her about the wedding too. I really felt like telling her everything there was to know about my life. "Am I making you nervous?" she asked. "No, no, I mean, yes, maybe, I'm just writing an essay now dealing with all

that, so, I guess I'm very much into that train of thought, and kind of worried too." She smiled again, and then kept asking about my time in Iowa while she checked my lungs and my bronchus. She told me to drink tea with honey. She told me I was ok. She told me to come back if I wasn't feeling better by Saturday. When I left the room, wishing her a recovery from laryngitis and getting her good wishes for my essay, I thought, had I been asked some of those questions 15 years ago, I would have lied. I would have lied without knowing it. And, you know, that's fucked up. I left the room happy. For some reason I felt very good about myself. And proud of having made it to the doctor for once. My cough was still there. But I guess I had a story to tell, and isn't that what we always want/need/love/search for?

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It might have been like this, me being seven or eight years old the first time you thought about telling me how it'd happened. Pretty smart but too innocent for my age, and mostly worried about having to leave my school in Nieva to start anew in Segovia. Maybe then you remembered the reason to leave and the reason to stay were the same. And that, had I known about it, I might have been able to better understand why I had to leave my friends and my favorite teacher behind. *But no, no way.* You could not tell me. *Too young. She wouldn't understand a thing, she'd think we didn't love her.* I'm aware it wouldn't have been easy to tell me then, but I don't think that was the biggest problem. You could not confront the idea yourself. *Not like this, impossible.*

I turned ten, and had been suffering the nun's school in Segovia for a year by then. Crying at night when dreaming of the devil appearing in my window. You finally considered my nightmares were my way of dealing with the silence, and that telling me about my origin could have helped things get better. But no. *She still plays with dolls, she loves her Playmobil big mansion more than*

anything... I will not break her heart, everything will become something different, and it is not so, it isn't true he didn't love her, it isn't true he didn't love me, it isn't true he longed to be gone. You convinced yourself it was not the right time.

Days and years went by. Your friends started asking about it, your sister pressured you, *You can't wait any longer, Maite, this is getting out of hand, don't you see? Yes, but each person deals with things differently.* Your tone became harsher, it maddened you that people dared to talk to you like that. And how would I ever know? You had stopped taking me to the village, there was no one who could tell me. Your sister, who loved you greatly, would look at you, her eyes sad, and finally say, *Yes, ok. But you'll have to face it sooner or later.* How to talk about what had cut you in half. When you dared look at your wounds, and seeing they were still fresh, you trembled.

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The story goes like this. My parents, young, newlywed, hippies, doctors, born in Madrid, lived in a very small town in Segovia. My father had a little farm, a mule; they had chickens, rabbits, a dog. They decided on babies. I came into the picture. During those months, when they were waiting on me, my dad met another woman, Oliva, and fell in love. She was also young and newlywed, but not pregnant. Her father had farms, and that potentially offered my dad a life in the fields. My dad was a doctor, but he was also a man of the fields. He kept a diary, "the day broke clear, but without frost, it's sunny now, the road clean of snow." For months he switched from one place to the other. My mum was in love with my dad. She says her heart kept leaping when he got back home. My mum, she says, had no doubts, she never had. He was her first and only love. My dad, they say, was broken inside. Afraid to be left alone. Afraid to go wrong. Afraid, I guess, of the child to come. It can't be denied, my arrival worried him. He was scared of not being loved enough, that my mot-

her's attention would divert to me. But I've never found pleasure in guilt. After the obvious, *I wish it did not happen like this*, where does my responsibility lie?

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When I was born my mum was happy, but fucked up, because my dad wouldn't decide. When I was born my dad was happy, but fucked up, because he couldn't decide. The doubts and vacillations continued for two months. During that time, which included a trip to Asturias (from which I have the only picture of the two of us together), my dad killed himself. As it happens with suicide, the reasons are many, complex, hard to discern. My mother was destroyed, the other woman was destroyed, my family, his friends, everyone. My first years of existence were surrounded by sadness, though I'm aware there were efforts to give me love, calm, and happiness. For years my mother cried, her body all bones. She insists it was me who kept her alive. For fifteen years my mother deliberately lied about my father's death. I still have a relationship with her. We share tenderness. There is, however, a distance that can never be bridged, nurtured during those fifteen years when I thought my dad had frozen to death. That's a pretty cruel death. I wish they'd come up with something nicer. This is what they told me: Your father went up to the mountains, he enjoyed walking (like Walter Benjamin, like Thoreau, I would have told myself now). It was very cold that night, unexpectedly cold, he wasn't ready for it. So he froze to death in his sleep. They skipped the part about the strong pills he ingested, easily accessible to him, being a doctor. That was a detail they skipped. Fifteen years. For fifteen years. I also lied for a while, when I told my friends, my lovers, I said it was thirteen. What an absurd difference. For some reason it seemed more forgivable. I was forgiving my mum two years by telling it like that. I felt better that way, less embarrassed. But now I tell it like this, it was not thirteen years, Maite, it was fifteen. For fifteen years you told me a story with almost no resemblance to the truth. You lied. You did it to protect me, Maite, but you also did

it to protect yourself. And that's what we've kept doing until now. We are nice, we don't fight, we don't bring any of this up.

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I was fifteen, Rebeca thirteen. It was a long weekend, we were in Segovia, it was cold. We went for a walk, we went for a drink at a bar behind the central square. Rebeca had dark curly hair, dark skin, deep brown eyes, and her voice was a bit affected, not too much. She was very pretty. She seemed older, in a constant hurry, and wanted to leave home as soon as possible. That day Rebeca needed to talk to me. Her parents were getting a divorce, but her dad could not bear it, he threatened to commit suicide. "Just like yours," Rebeca said. I stopped still. Fifteen years old, under the aqueduct, the December cold and my own arrogance, I did not know how my father had died. "No, my father didn't kill himself, who told you that?" "Angela, she told me." She was not trying to shock me or hurt me. "Angela told me when we met." So Angela and Rebeca knew that about my life months before I did. I denied it again, saying my dad loved life; he would never do that. I remember saying it with no basis at all since nobody had told me that, but stated it with conviction. "Ok then," Rebeca said, "she must have gotten it wrong." she probably figured I didn't want to talk about it, or just hadn't gotten over it, who knows. Maybe she didn't think anything, she was young and not all that great in the empathy department. We said goodbye shortly after, and I went back home. I didn't know what to think. Everything started to feel odd. Everything in my life was shifting and coming to mean something slightly different. A fault line cracked between us, my mother and I stayed in two different lands separated by a physical chasm. My body also experienced a fault inside, it didn't know how to respond to her love or just to love anymore. I was fifteen, went to theatre classes, I was in the students union, went to all the meetings, organised demonstrations, I had a red coat. I was fifteen and did not know how my father died.

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I try to imagine how it was for you; from one day to the next, everything you took as truth disappeared. You felt like you had to stay alive because of me. But you could not go on with life normally. I try to imagine how impossible it must have felt to do chores, to shower, or even to face me, every day looking at me as a reminder. Loss was loss, but it had a face and a body. They say it happens in every family, yet, it always feels painfully new. You always say you looked good fully clothed during those years, but you were embarrassed to look at your naked image in the mirror, the lines of your bones perfectly shaped against your skin, as if they were about to come out. You were very young. It's true, I always think about his age, and about the day I surpassed it. But you got stuck at that age too. I wish I knew you as you would have been at all the different ages that kept coming after he was gone. I never really met you, Maite, I could say that. The person in the pictures you show me is not the same person who brought me up. The person I lived with until I was seventeen was not the same who studied to be a doctor, who went to Greece and Peru, who voted in the first democratic election in Spain in forty years. She is not the same. There are traces of her, there are gestures. Maite was strong and is still strong, she is capable of love, she is a very good listener. Maite at 26 loved hiking, Maite at 60 does too. They'd both rather spend money on trips than any other thing. But the Maite I know, she cannot talk about the past, cannot talk about many things, she says she can, makes it look like she can, but she is not capable, she hasn't trained herself to do so. She kept a mortal secret, and at least she had that.

Control of that information gave her a hold over me. If she could keep me safe, if she could shape her version of the events, she could own our history. I imagine she longed for the years in which she still managed everything related to my father. Hiding information is a heavy weight, but

it allows you to guide others. For years I was not able to hurt her, for I had no means, no stories. In the act of sharing information she also gave me the opportunity to question, to demand things from her, to keep going on my own, to hurt.

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After 40 years of dictatorship, over 200,000 assassinations, 30,000 stolen children, 27,000 refugees and a completely destroyed country, Franco died the 20th of November, 1975. With Franco dead, Spain would finally have its chance to be in control of its history. They could be European, they could be free, they would no longer go to London to get abortions, to France to see porn or censored films. They would be able to gather in the streets with a purpose, or to have purposeless meetings wherever they liked. They wouldn't have to run before mounted policemen. They could love horses all over again for that matter. My parents were twenty years old.

They were both handsome. In the picture I keep of him in my desk he has dark straight hair, long beard, green eyes, big mouth (like mine). She had really long hair and a clear forehead. She believed in work, never missed a class, with the sense of duty of a first generation university student. He was smart, arrogant at times. He sang awfully. She thought he did so beautifully. When he sang "A cántaros," a protest song, he was completely off key. The first time she heard Pablo Guerrero singing his own song she thought Pablo Guerrero was off key.

In January 1983 she got pregnant. The socialist party was ruling by then, and they felt happy. Hopeful. Full of energy. Ready to change the country, which had been under Franco's rule for 40 years. 40 years.

You know what, when I think of the Pablo Guerrero story, I never find it funny, Maite. I can say it now that I write in a different language that you hopefully won't read or understand. It's not that I don't believe in love, Maite. I don't know, I am prejudiced, or maybe I am too cautious, but I don't let myself get carried away like that. I have trained myself too much. Is that wrong? I don't really feel envious of that sort of state. I'm holding on to the distance between us. I'm sorry, Maite. I do love you. But I just can't love you the way you love me. I don't want to be ungrateful; don't want to be cold. But I am. It doesn't seem so because I smile and hug warmly. But I don't let love grow. I take lovers and leave them when they get too close. When it seems we are going to love each other forever I fuck up. I lie to them, lie to friends, I lie to you. I deceive them, deceive myself. I feel I'm above them all, I can do whatever I want, like I have the right. I would not admit this to them. But do it over and over again. I won't fall in love for a lifetime, could I ever promise that? Years of trying not to repeat what you did, and here I am. Lying and pretending otherwise. Having a relationship with you in which I can't tell you where I am, who I am, or whom I love. Maite, I will not ask you any more questions, I don't want to know what you do with the stories you keep. They are yours. I have also trained myself not to need them anymore. That's how countries gain independence after having been colonised. I'm still under your rule, but I'm fighting, will I conquer myself before I die?

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PS:

My father, José, left four suicide notes: one for my grandparents, one for my mum, one for Oliva and one for me. I have never seen that letter. I've been told it is lost. Nobody seems to understand how that happened, but they say it doesn't exist now. My mother says she remembers exactly where she kept it. She remembers taking it out everyday to read it again. One day the letter disappeared. Absurd. A letter like that does not disappear. But it really is nowhere to be found, believe

me. So I haven't ever read it. She tells me the words, she says she remembers them exactly as they were composed in the page. She repeats them. But that's not the important thing. I just want to see the letter. I want to see the fucking letter. I want to see it.