

I Chose Van Gogh

LETTER WRITER #2. Dear Sugar,

Four years ago, I was raped.

Anger and panic became a deep part of my life and almost dragged me under. It took a long time but I pulled myself up and onward.

I feel it's behind me and I am over it.

Well, I have been dating a great guy for about a year and a half, we have a healthy and positive relationship.

Do I tell him about my sexual assault?

Do I need to?

We've been through some stuff but I don't know if he's capable of hearing about this.

I worry it might freak him out and affect our relationship.

I need your advice.

Signed,

Why Tell?

SUGAR. Dear Why Tell,

I asked my friend, a talented painter, how she recovered from being sexually assaulted, how she resumed having healthy sexual relationships with men, how she continued to go on and be a talented painter and live a full life. She told me that we get to decide who we allow to influence us.

She said, "I could allow myself to be influenced by a man who screwed me against my will or I could allow myself to be influenced by van Gogh."

I chose van Gogh.

You chose van Gogh too. I salute you for making your way through your experience to this side of it.

But you have a secret within you.

Keeping this trauma from your boyfriend doesn't let him know what a warrior you are.

We need to let the people who love us see what made us.

Tell your boyfriend about your sexual assault. What happened. How you suffered. How you made your way through it. How you feel about it now. Tell him. Otherwise it creates the burden of a secret you are too wonderful to keep.

Yours,

Sugar

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# Letter writer 2

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## How You Get Unstuck

LETTER WRITER #2. Dear Sugar,

I got pregnant, and my boyfriend and me - we were excited to become parents.

When I was six-and-a-half months pregnant, I miscarried.

(SUGAR turns to LETTER WRITER #2.)

Since then, not a day has gone by when I haven't thought about who that child would have been. A girl. She had a name. Every day I wake up and think, "My daughter would be six months old," or, "My daughter would maybe have started crawling today." Sometimes, all I can think is the word *daughter*, *daughter* over and over and over.

I'm not sad or pissed off. I just don't care about anything. I'm numb. And I can't get past it. Most of the people in my life expect me to have moved on by now. One pointed out, "It was only a miscarriage." So I also feel guilty about being so stuck, grieving for a child that never was.

~~There is the reason I lost the baby. My doctor said it was because I was overweight. Part of me thinks the doctor was an asshole for saying that, but another part of me believes that this was my fault. Sometimes, I don't eat for days and then sometimes, I eat everything in sight and throw it all up. I spend hours at the gym, walking on the treadmill until I can't lift my legs.~~

~~The rational part of me understands that if I don't pull myself out of this, I'll do serious damage to myself. I know this, and yet I just don't care. I want to know how to live again.~~

~~Signed,~~

~~Stuck~~



The Ordinary Miraculous

LETTER WRITER #3. Dear Sugar,

One of the general mysteries of life is that I don't know what something will turn out to be until I've lived through it. Will you give us an example of something you thought was one thing, and then became another?

Signed,

Curious

SUGAR. Dear Curious,

The summer I was eighteen, I was driving down a country road with my mother when we stopped at a yard sale. There was nothing much of interest at the sale, but a moment before I was about to suggest we leave, something caught my eye: a red velvet dress trimmed with white lace, fit for a toddler.

I was pretty certain at that moment that I would never be a mother myself. Children were fine but ultimately annoying. I wanted more out of life. And yet, ridiculously, inexplicably I wanted that red dress. Something about it called powerfully to me. My mother picked it up.

LETTER WRITER #2. *(As Sugar's mother.)* You want this dress? For someday?

*(SUGAR sees LETTER WRITER #2 as her mother in the past.)*

SUGAR. But I'm not even going to have kids...

LETTER WRITER #2. *(As Sugar's mother.)* You can put it in a box. Then you'll have it, no matter what you decide.

SUGAR. I don't have a dollar.

LETTER WRITER #2. I do.

*(SUGAR addresses the audience.)*

SUGAR. Three years later, I'd be standing in a field not far from that yard sale, holding the ashes of my mother's body in my palms. My mother was gone, the red dress

was still with me, packed into a cedar box that had belonged to her. I dragged it with me all the way along the scorching trail of my twenties and into my thirties, when I had two children: a son and then a daughter. The red dress was a secret only known by me, buried for years among my mother's best things. When I unearthed it and held it again it was like being slapped and kissed at the same time, like the volume was being turned way up and also way down. The two things that were true about its existence had an opposite effect and were yet the same single fact:

*My mother bought a dress for the granddaughter she'll never know.*

*My mother bought a dress for the granddaughter she'll never know.*

How beautiful. How ugly.

How little. How big.

How painful. How sweet

It's seldom that we can draw a direct line between this and that. My desire to buy the dress was made meaningful only by my mother's death and my daughter's birth. The dress was the material evidence of my loss, but also of the way my mother's love had carried me forth beyond her, her life extending years into my own in ways I never could have imagined in the moment the red dress caught my eye. And seeing my daughter on the second Christmas of her life wearing the dress the grandmother she'd never meet bought for her, returned something to me that I thought had been lost forever.

We cannot possibly know what will manifest in our lives. We live and have experiences and leave people we love and get left by them. People we thought would be with us forever aren't and people we didn't know would come into our lives do. Our work here is to keep faith with that, to put it in a box and wait. To trust that