

Cecilia
Pavón

translated by
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Dedicated to Juliana Laffitte

I remember that about eight or nine years ago a friend started a blog called **Diary of a Cloud Watcher**. Each day he said something about the clouds he saw. He didn't talk about anything else. At that time, perhaps because I was angry with my friend for some reason, I thought that his project was stupid. It seemed like a mannered idea, typical of someone who had nothing to say. But now, as I ride in a bus toward the Atlantic coast, I can't stop looking at the clouds and thinking up adjectives. Earlier, when the morning was young, they were lumpy clouds, like the layer of cream on the top of some French or Russian pastry (they say that Russian pastries are the most sophisticated in the world). A fine little layer of clouds spread out through the sky like voile petticoats on a woman with thick legs. Now they're midday clouds, white like hail and lit up by the sun. They look like rocks or boats or houses. Beneath them, oblivious to their milky paths, the green of the pampa. Oh, how often I've wanted to write these words! The green of the pampa! The green of the pampa! The green of the pampa! When I was a little girl I longed for the chance to put those words into some school essay, but the moment didn't arrive until today, when, at 42 years old, talking about something else entirely, it happened. What luck. Because the pampa looks so good with the clouds.

Soon the fertile earth will become sand and I will be in the sea, more than 400 kilometers from my house and my block. Because just as I now look at the clouds from a bus on the free and open road, when I'm in my three rooms in Balvanera I look at a painting. A painter who's also a Capricorn, like I am, gave it to me. (Though perhaps naming the painting's author doesn't do it justice because just as the sky has no author, art shouldn't have one either.) It's a painting made from modeling clay that's black, grey, and white and all the shades that you can possibly imagine when you combine those three colors. It's pretty big, maybe a meter high, and it's hanging across from my bed. I look at it for hours every day and I wonder



if it isn't the best painting in the world because I can't stop looking at it. It's difficult to explain in words what's in it, or what it's a painting of, because it's just a tangle of thin threads that sometimes evoke the roots or branches of trees, although the truth is that everything in it is undefined. When I look at it I always see different things, faces of animals or people, cartoon characters, parts of houses, bits of trees ripped out by tornadoes or cyclones; whirlpools and feelings.

But art has to stay behind, because now we're at the beach and that's the only thing that matters; the beach and love. Or hate, which is definitely just as intense, although the clouds, one could say, never, never, feel hate. The life of the family on the beach is the only thing that matters, and how the clouds adorn the happiness (or the unhappiness) of the life of the family on the beach. Yesterday we were in a park with marine hot springs. The hot water came out of the earth. A wonderful feeling. At one point I lay down on one of the wood deck chairs and saw that the clouds were just like the spots on an animal. They were the color of gray ash against a background of gray lead. The spots on some breed of cow perhaps, or a speckled hen, or a cat sleeping peacefully right now on some African plain.

Today, Tuesday, January 21st, the clouds decided to go on a journey and went down to the sea. Those the wind pushed, that restless foam, were no more than tiny clouds with light and invisible feet.

It's ten in the morning and I'm sitting on a dune. The clouds make me think about the stuffing in a ski jacket or the color of a refrigerator door. Right in front of me, the clouds are scarce and spongy; to the right, they form a kind of mesh or net. I don't think a particular word exists to describe a net of clouds. Cloudery? Over there, to the left, toward Mar de Ajó, the cloudery becomes denser and loses its porosity.

Music and everything there is on Earth can also be compared to the clouds. Waves of noise that come and go. In reality the impetus for writing this was the desire to say that what I like about clouds is change. Transformation.



A person I knew is dead. They buried him two months ago. Have the worms already reached his body? Soon his bones will be dust and soon my bones will be dust too. Is the color of bone dust at all like the color of clouds? Will my brother's bones and my bones be clouds one day?

Now I'm drinking coffee at a wooden table in a bar on the one central street in Las Toninas; the outline of the clouds makes me think about the outline of the bubble letters that teenage girls use to write the name of the boy they like on classroom desks.

I'm lying in the sand; just now a cloud looked like a baby goat with a snake of smoke on its head. Looking at it I felt great happiness. The same happiness that I feel when looking at the heavenly sky. In the split second it took to turn over and take out this notebook the baby goat had disappeared completely and all that remained was a solitary and asocial cloud with the form and spirit of a galaxy. But it too disappeared.

It's six in the evening. On the beach there's nothing to do but look at clouds. I'd like for anyone who reads this, if it's ever published, to treat it as a catalogue of descriptions of clouds to be used in novels or stories, that would be great. I'd like it if this text served some function. I'd like to write a thousand pages about clouds and not write anything else. It's obvious that when someone dies those of us who remain on Earth look up at the sky. Toward what I guess is the East, the clouds form tubes with frothy edges and gold trim.

Later, on the patio behind the house, beneath a laurel, the beige leaves don't look like clouds. They're something else, broken graphemes from the age of cuneiform script. In the evening I realize that sky and earth aren't the same, although in the morning, when I'm euphoric, I think they are. Earth is a warm blanket that covers my brother. I wonder if some part of his body now transforming into an entity that is no longer a body feels in some remote and incomprehensible way the heat from the rays of the sun passing through the ground. My brother was death's pioneer. The week before his departure, as he was dying, I had an unrelenting vision of the darkness of the universe, something black and luminous at the same time, and I felt at peace because I knew my brother would go to a still and beautiful place.

I'm on the way back to Buenos Aires and I admire the beauty of the pampa. On the highway, the cars pass at full speed. It's beautiful to see windmills, cows, and reeds bent over in the wind. But it's much more beautiful to look at the clouds. This text has become addictive. Searching for words to describe the clouds above my head is an addictive thing. Maybe thinking about clouds is the only



way not to think about death. Now it seems that a few clouds have escaped toward the West seeking to transform themselves there into pressed flowers.

I was in Buenos Aires for a few days but soon felt an intense longing for the sea and the coast, so I decided to scrape together all my savings and once again get on a bus for Las Toninas. In the city, I couldn't see the clouds well because I live on the ground floor. But one afternoon when I went to the supermarket, as I came out with my two hands full of bags, I decided to turn my head toward the sky and I saw them: a huge carpet of smudges the color of smoke. At that moment I sensed that the clouds were calling me and I headed for the cash machine to take out all the money I had left so I could return to the sea. Now the clouds are like the inside of a stomach, animal or human, it doesn't matter. I'm sure this is how intestines must look. Elsewhere, the contrast between the white of their crests and the gray, almost black, of a sort of bar that crosses them is incredible.

I'm back on the beach and this morning something terrible happened. I was walking in the sun carrying a plastic bag with a half kilo of raw meat I was going to cook for lunch when a group of street dogs (I wouldn't call them a pack because there weren't more than five of them) attacked me. First a little one that looked a lot like a rodent bit my ankle. I screamed like crazy but no one in this half-deserted beach town came to help me. Then, as I was looking for something I could use to defend myself, one as tall as a Great Dane, but identical to a pig and absolutely hideous, put his front paws on my shoulders and knocked me down. They wanted the meat in the bag which I promptly tossed and which the four dogs greedily ripped into pieces. Laid out on the dirt road, on the verge of fainting, I saw how the threads of raw meat mixed with the brighter red of the blood that came from my ankle. With my head on the ground, I could also see the clouds, which were like a vast sheet of salt and air over my suffering.

Then I thought: the spectacle of the clouds is infinitely better than that of blood or any earthly thing. Clouds are pure and uncontaminated. No one should blame anyone ever again for preferring the inconsistency of the clouds to the power struggles waged beneath them.

