

Selection from

Easy Reading

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NOVEL

TITLE: MEMOIRS OF MARÍA DELS ÀNGELS

GUIRAO HUERTAS

GENRE: EASY READ

AUTHOR: MARÍA DELS ÀNGELS GUIRAO HUERTAS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

UCID means Urban Center
for the Intellectually Disabled.
You don't say "they put me in the UCID"
or "they admitted me to the UCID."
You say "I was institutionalized"
and then you don't have to say UCID at all.

I wasn't always institutionalized at a UCID.
First I was institutionalized at a RUCID.
RUCID means Rural Center
for the Intellectually Disabled.
It was near Arcuelamora.
Arcuelamora is the village I'm from.

I was institutionalized there

because when my mother died
the bank took our house.
My mother had a lifetime usufruct on the house.
Lifetime usufruct means you and your kids
can live in a place until you die.
The same year the same bank
took the Los Maderos club.
The prostitutes didn't have a lifetime usufruct.

I went to live at Uncle Joaquín's house
and after three months a social worker showed
up. Her name was Mamen or Miss Mamen.
Social worker means lady who helps
people at risk of social exclusion.
Social exclusion means
being a person who begs for money, commits crimes, takes
drugs or doesn't have a house.

I'm a person at risk of social exclusion?
I asked Mamen.
She said unfortunately I was.
I asked her why.
She said because I had special needs
and at my uncle's house there wasn't even a bathroom. I
said shit, there wasn't a bathroom anywhere in Arcuelamora
except Los Maderos.
Were the hookers the only people in Arcuelamora
not at risk of social exclusion?
I asked Mamen.
She said we were there to talk about me
and not about anyone else.
She also said we don't use words like shit and
hooker we say shoot and prostitute instead
because if we use impolite language
we put ourselves at even more risk of social exclusion.
That was when I learned the word prostitute.

Mamen came to do lots of interviews.
Interviews are like what they have in magazines and on

TV except at your house.

She came to my uncle's house a lot
sometimes in the morning and sometimes in the afternoon
in winter, in summer, in spring and in fall.

But they were really boring interviews
because she always asked the same questions.

Once she gave me some pajamas
and once a sweater too
but they got old and fell apart.

Then one day the interviews were over
and after that the two of us didn't take walks
anymore like we used to
and she didn't come to the garden
when Uncle Joaquín and me
were picking fava beans or apples or when we were plowing,
or when we were feeding La Agustinilla.
La Agustinilla was my uncle's horse.

And she didn't stand outside the front door
to get some air with the neighbors anymore either.

That day Mamen asked my uncle and me
to come inside the house
like we sometimes did in winter
even though it was summer
and she said to sit down
because she wanted to tell us something
important in private.
But it wasn't just one thing,
it was four things:

1) The first thing was she said the government
was going to give me a Social Security benefit.

The government is the politicians who talk on TV
or give speeches at village festivals.

A Social Security benefit means they give you money every month but to get it you have to open an account at the bank. Account at the bank means the government gives money to the bank and then the bank gives it to you.

We opened the account at the same bank who took the house where I lived and the house where the prostitutes lived because it was the only bank in Arcuelamora. The bank is called BANKOREA.

BANKOREA means Bank of the Region of Arcos.

Everyone knows what a bank is and what the Region of Arcos is so I don't have to explain it.

2) The second thing she said was I could go live at the RUCID in Somorrín. Somorrín is a bigger town than mine and it's close if you drive and it's where the doctors and stores and school and BANKOREA and town hall are.

Town hall is where the politicians are.

If you go on a bike or a horse cart Somorrín isn't very close but they always took me in a car.

3) The third thing she said was I was giving the RUCID permission to keep almost all my benefit every month to pay for my room, my clothes, my food,

my bathroom,
my weekend trips
and everything I needed to live.

You can do whatever you want with the rest of your money,
Mamen told me.
That's good Miss Mamen, I said.
You can drop the miss! she said,
we're friends by now
and anyway I'm only six years older than you!

If I was 18,
Mamen was 24.
Now I'm 43
and if she isn't dead, she is 49.
When I'm 49,
if she isn't dead, she will be 55,
and so on as long as neither of us dies.

That's when I started calling Miss Mamen
just Mamen.

My cousin Patricia didn't call her Mamen
she called her "La Mamen"
just like she calls me "La Àngels"
and her sister "La Nati"
and her other cousin "La Marga"
and the Chinese guy downstairs "El Ting"
and she puts a "La" or a "El"
in front of everybody's name
like Catalan people do
when they speak Catalan
and also like they do sometimes when they speak
Spanish because they're used to it.

But my cousin Patricia
isn't Catalan and she doesn't speak Catalan.

I'm Catalan through my aunt

and my name is Ángela.

Ángela, in Catalan, is pronounced Àngels.

Now I live in Barcelona, which is in Catalonia, and I have to integrate into Catalan society.

I have to respect their linguistic diversity so the Catalonians respect my functional diversity.

That's why in Barcelona I go by Àngels.

It's not a lie.

It's just a translation.

In Catalan you can say "La Àngels"

or "La Marga" or "La Nati"

but not in Spanish.

In Spanish it sounds bad

and it's rude.

Back when Patricia called her "La Mamen"

she always used to tell the same joke

which was whenever anybody who lived in the RUCID asked for something

or complained about something or needed something

Patricia said:

Jesus, Mary and Joseph Stalin,

suck my dick or ask La Mamen.

Because of the "Jesus, Mary and Stalin" thing

they took away Patricia's TV

and her allowance and her Sunday walks a bunch of

times. I said maybe she should stop saying it

and she listened to me

and started using polite language.

Then she didn't say La Mamen and she didn't say just Mamen

either. She said Miss Mamen.

That time Mamen didn't say you can drop the Miss.

She was 34 then,

because I was 28,
and Patricia was 18.
Patricia had just been institutionalized
and didn't know the rules very well yet.

I think Mamen liked the Miss
because she wasn't Patricia's friend
and because by then
she was the director of the RUCID in Somorrín.
Director is the person who's in charge of a place
and has the biggest office.

Then one day a resident
said he couldn't find the orange crayon
and Patricia said:

Jesus, Mary and Mrs. Stalin,
suck my dick or ask Miss Mamen.

I don't remember what that resident's name was
now but I remember he had Fragile X syndrome
and I know Fragile X is a hard thing
and I know most people don't know about it
but I don't have time to explain it right now.

I just wanted to say that was when
they put Patricia on the pills
because they said she had
aberrant behavior.

What I said about Patricia and the boy with Fragile X are digressions.

Digression means starting to tell a story
in the middle of another story.

In Easy Read we shouldn't make digressions
because they make the main story
harder to understand.

The main story in this text

is mine.

I still have to explain
the fourth thing Mamen told
my uncle and me.
It was the most important one.

But when you write in Easy Read
you also have to explain all the words
you think people might not understand
because they're hard or not very
common. So right now I'm supposed to
explain Fragile X syndrome
and aberrant behavior
and Easy Read.

But that would be three more digressions.

I've found a problem
the Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials
from the Section for Library Services to
People with Special Needs
can't solve.

So.

I'll tell my support person
at my Tuesday afternoon
Self-Advocacy Group.
Until then I'll do what I can.

I'm not going to explain
what Guidelines means
or what Section for Library Services
to People with Special Needs means
or what support person means
OK?

I'm only going to explain

what Self-Advocacy Group means
because it's something very important. It's
not the same something very important as
the fourth thing
Mamen told my uncle and me
but it's also important.

Since I'm the one writing this story I
guess I get to decide what's important
and what's a digression.
On page 19
of the Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials
it says very clearly:

“Do not limit the author's freedom too much.”

And below that
something I don't understand very well
but I think means
more or less the same thing:

“Do not be dogmatic.
Let fiction be fiction.”

I think fiction
is like science fiction
like “Avatar” and “Star Wars.”
That sounds good to me
so I'll just keep going.

Self-Advocacy Group means
a group formed by adults
with intellectual disabilities
or intellectual functional diversity
who meet once a week
to do six things:

- 1) Acquire communication skills.
- 2) Achieve greater personal and social autonomy.

- 3) Increase their chances of speaking and making decisions for themselves.
- 4) Learn to make decisions in their daily lives.
- 5) Learn to participate in community life.
- 6) Discuss topics of interest to them.

For now I'm not going to explain
what intellectual disabilities means
or what intellectual functional diversity means
or what community life means
OK?

In Easy Read

you have to write short sentences
or make them into short lines
because that way you read faster
and you get less tired reading.
You get less tired writing too.

In Easy Read you don't indent the
text so the lines all have to start
together
on the left side of the page.
That's what not indenting is.

And you don't justify the text either
which has nothing to do
with making justifications.
Since the lines all go to the right side of the
page you have to let each one
go as far as it goes
even if some are longer and some are
shorter and the text isn't a perfect column.
That's not justifying.

One of the tests for making sure
a text is a good Easy Read text
is turning the page on its side.
When you do that it's supposed to look like
the sentences are blades of grass
or mountains

or buildings in a big city
like in the movies.

There are a lot more Guidelines
for Easy-to-Read Materials.
I'm trying to learn them
and I think I'm pretty good at it.
My support person
from my Self-Advocacy Group
says if I keep it up
I can write a book about myself
and publish it at a publishing house.

Publish it means it's in bookstores
and they sell it so other people read
it. Then I would be a writer
and you would be my readers.
I think that's crazy.
It's the craziest shoot that's happened to
me in my whole life.

I haven't been able to think about anything
else ever since Laia said that to me.
I spend all day studying the
Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials
from the Section for Library Services
to People with Special Needs.

This digression has been really long.
This material,
like the Guidelines say,
isn't publishable anymore.
That makes me kind of mad
because I spent four days writing it.
But I also know in movies
writers make lots of paper balls
with things they wrote that aren't publishable
and shoot them into the wastebasket like
basketballs.

I can't wait to finish this sentence
so I can plug my phone into the
computer, and download all these
unpublishable digressions,
and print them out,
and make a paper ball
and throw it in the trash.