



A Very Easy Death

Simone de Beauvoir , Patrick O'Brian (translator)

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A Very Easy Death has long been considered one of Simone de Beauvoir's masterpieces. The profoundly moving, day-by-day recounting of her mother's death "shows the power of compassion when it is allied with acute intelligence" (*The Sunday Telegraph*).

Powerful, touching, and sometimes shocking, this is an end-of-life account that no reader is ever likely to forget.

A Very Easy Death Details

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KamRun says

1

התאבדות היא תופעה מורכבת ורבת-פנים, המושפעת מגורמים רבים, כולל גורמים ביולוגיים, פסיכולוגיים, סוציאליים ורוחניים. ההבנת התהליכים המובילים להתאבדות היא מפתח חשוב להקטנת הסיכונים ולצמצום הנזק. מחקר מתמשך מתמקד בהיבטים אלו, ומנסה לזהות את הגורמים המרכזיים ולהציע פתרונות יעילים. לדוגמה, מחקרים מצביעים על כך ששינויים כימיים במוח, בעיקר בקשרים הנוגעים לרגשות ולחשיבה, יכולים להוות גורם סיכון. בנוסף, מצבים של בדידות, דיכאון קשה ושימוש במוצרים מסוכנים מהוות גורמים סיכונים נוספים. חשוב לזכור כי התאבדות היא תוצאה של שיתוף פעולה של גורמים אלו, ולא גורם יחיד. לכן, גישה רב-תחומית היא הנכונה לטיפול ולמניעה.

2

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femminista radicale scomoda che ha segnato la sua epoca, in questo scritto autobiografico abbandona il ruolo di intellettuale di dura icona della cultura francese del tempo e mostra il suo lato più umano, quello di figlia di madre.

Rompe la sua corazza per raccontare un'esperienza universale, così drammatica e d'impatto ma anche formativa e arricchente come può esserlo assistere e accompagnare la propria madre malata verso la morte.

Una morte dolcissima dice il titolo.

Se e quando e quanto una morte è dolce.

La morte può essere traumatica, a volte invocata, o giungere inattesa e accolta con stupore perchè anzitempo, o intesa come una punizione, ma dolce?

Per De Beauvoir una morte è dolce quando non lascia il morente in preda alle belve della solitudine e dell'agonia, abbandonato come una cosa indifesa senza un calmante nè una mano sulla fronte o oggetto di medici indifferenti.

Simone De Beauvoir comprende *per suo conto e fino nel midollo delle ossa* che la morte chiudendo un cerchio e aprendone un altro (per chi ha fede) *negli ultimi istanti di un moribondo può racchiudere l'infinito*. Ma questo scritto autobiografico non è solo riflessione esistenziale è un resoconto vivido, senza afflato o romanticismo, di come la malattia trasformi quel corpo di madre, quel corpo che tanto abbiamo amato e che diventa anche terra altrui, come una carcassa senza difesa, palpata manipolata da mani amorevoli o professionali, un cadavere in sospeso.

Quel corpo malato, forse ignaro della storia che sta vivendo, che guardi con infinita tenerezza come tralcio di vite screpolato e secco.

Perché la fine della propria madre è sempre situato in un tempo mitico come al di là del pensiero e del suo realizzarsi, nonostante l'età e qualunque essa sia dire "è in tempo di morire" è come pronunciare parole vuote.

E il rimpianto ineluttabile è l'identica punizione che ci affligge quanto il senso di mancanza e di vuoto che la sua morte dolcissima lascia in noi perché:

Quando scompare qualcuno che ci è caro, paghiamo con mille cocenti rimpianti la colpa di sopravvivere. La morte ce ne svela la singolarità unica [...] Ci sembra che avremmo dovuto dargli più posto nella nostra vita: direi quasi, tutto il posto. [...] Ma poiché non facciamo mai tutto il possibile, per nessuno - neppure nei limiti, discutibili, che ci siamo prefissi - sono ancora molti i rimproveri che dobbiamo rivolgere a noi stessi. Di fronte a mamma, eravamo soprattutto colpevoli, in questi ultimi anni, di negligenze, omissioni, astensioni. Ci sembrò di averne meritato il perdono dedicando a lei quelle giornate, dandole pace con la nostra presenza, riportando una vittoria sulla paura e sul dolore.

Ellen says

I encountered *A Very Easy Death* twice before actually reading it. The two encounters amounted to radically different readings of the same text. My first encounter with *A Very Easy Death* was not exactly a reading but an abridgment of the book that appeared in an anthology entitled *Mothers: Memories, Dreams and Reflections by Literary Daughters* edited by Susan Cahill.

The collection aims to present an array of well-known women writers' memories of their mothers depicted in "positive tones and vivid colors" (xii). The section from Beauvoir's book, recounts her mother's death from cancer. Despite the general excellence of the anthology, I later found the abridgment of Beauvoir's text amounted to a bowdlerization: the less positive aspects of their mother-daughter relationship, and Beauvoir's

more explicit descriptions—the body parts, the private parts—had all been removed. The rest of the book, describing her mother’s brutal illness and death, is also omitted. Only the final pages of the book, where Beauvoir writes movingly of her mother’s death and death in general, are again included.

My second encounter with *A Very Easy Death* occurred when reading an article by Alice Jardine entitled “Death Sentences: Writing Couples and Ideology.” It was Jardine’s article that prompted me to go back to Beauvoir’s original text, because none of the quotes Jardine cited had appeared in the anthologized version of *A Very Easy Death*. Unlike Susan Cahill, who edited the anthology to conform to more sentimental notions of motherhood, Alice Jardine focuses specifically on how Beauvoir’s mother is “buried in and by narrative” (93), on Beauvoir’s clinically explicit descriptions of her mother’s cancerous, decomposing body. In particular, Jardine cites the passage where Beauvoir has walked into the hospital room and suddenly sees her mother exposed by her open hospital nightdress.

In Jardine’s quotation the dialogue between Beauvoir and her mother is deleted. By deleting the dialogue and the introduction to the incident from her mother’s perspective (“Maman had an open nightdress on and she did not mind that her wrinkled belly. . .”), Jardine specifically fore-grounds the body of Beauvoir’s mother. “Seeing my mother’s sex organs” is far more stark than Patrick O’Brien’s translation (done for the 1965 English edition): “The sight of my mother’s nakedness . . .” (19). Jardine demonstrates that Beauvoir exposes her mother’s body in words in order “to evacuate the dangerous body, the poisoned body, so that she [Beauvoir:] may continue to write” (94) but then revalorizes her mother as phallic when she dreams, lying next to her mother in bed, that her mother has become Sartre. In short, Jardine focuses on Beauvoir’s descriptions of her mother’s body while the Cahill anthology deletes the body in order to present a positive mother-daughter relationship. The body of the text—literally Beauvoir’s mother’s body—becomes the site of critical blindness and/or insight. The body is either seen or absent and the text has been variously called a masterpiece, indelicate, honest, moving, beautiful, and brutal.

A Very Easy Death arouses controversy because it is textually irritating. It is neither a touching memorial or a caustic dissection of her mother’s body. Yet the intersection of clinical discourse and emotional asides—a clash of logos and pathos—makes a reader uneasy. A mother’s body, particularly a mother’s dying body, may be eulogized or sentimentalized, but certainly not made sexually explicit. When Beauvoir refers to her mother’s bald pubis—her sex organs—she breaks taboos.

In “Stabat Mater,” Julia Kristeva traces the taboos surrounding the mother’s body back to the Virgin Mary: the original mother in Western culture. In short, the sight catches Beauvoir by surprise and forces her to confront all her ambivalence about the maternal body in general and her mother’s body in particular. Beauvoir’s first reaction to the sight of her mother’s sex organs is to turn away. Conversely, the body of the mother, specifically the mother’s vagina, underscores our helplessness, reminding us that we did not spring into the world as little gods. When Beauvoir “sees” her mother, the site of origin, she also realizes she is seeing the end, for it is only in the extremities of death that her mother would cease being ashamed of her body. This time, however, in opposition to her portrayal of her mother in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, Beauvoir attempts to reconstruct her mother’s history, re-visioning her mother as a daughter, so that her mother may be understood as victim as well as perpetrator. Importantly, Beauvoir does not withhold the unpleasant. She still finds her mother somewhat stupid, often silly, and similarly refuses to idealize her disease—her mother’s cancer is described in relentless, clinical detail.

What Beauvoir starts in *A Very Easy Death* she does not finish. The complex representation of her mother gets somewhat cast aside at the end of the book when Beauvoir retreats into general comments about death. Yet, without sentiment, Beauvoir attempts to really see her mother, and in seeing her, sees herself. Beauvoir is also forced, in caring for her mother, to radically shift perspectives. As opposed to the more gradual course Kathleen Woodward outlines, where a woman is first “daughter to her mother,” then “mother to her daughter,” and finally, “as she grows older . . . becomes mother to her mother” (“Aging” 96), Beauvoir, childless, switches directly from a daughter to her mother to the mother of her mother. Moreover, in this text

the account. For many, like Beauvoir's mother, dying may be a far worse ordeal than death. A must read for anyone who wants to prepare for and face death.

Simone De Beauvoir

Mostafa says

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Teresa Proença says

*"Não entres docilmente nessa noite fria.
A velhice deveria arder de raiva ao anoitecer;
Revolta-te, revolta-te contra a escuridão."*
Dylan Thomas

Simone de Beauvoir influenciou a construção do meu pensamento e da minha identidade feminina quando, aos vinte anos, li a sua obra o **Segundo Sexo**.

Aos cinquenta e oito anos destroça-me o coração com **Uma Morte Suave** onde, sem pudores e desnecessários dramatismos, relata a doença e morte da mãe. Fá-lo de uma forma genuína e pura, sem ocultar as mágoas e os conflitos, gerados por divergências entre ambas, ao longo das suas vidas.

Françoise de Beauvoir aos setenta e sete anos é internada com um sarcoma intestinal. Durante trinta dias sofreu um calvário de dor e medo, perante a impotência e desespero das filhas - Hélène e Simone - que viram a sua agonia prolongada pelos médicos que têm de cumprir o seu dever...

Nada me preparou para o que estava dentro deste livro. Uma capa simples; sem sinopse, e com um título sedutor para quem, como eu, já tem idade para acreditar que a vida tem um fim, só desejando que ele seja *suave*...

Nunca senti tanto terror da morte, não só da minha, nem só por mim, pois que sou filha e sou mãe...Mas, mais do que medo da morte, senti revolta e uma infinita tristeza pelo destino de alguns, que têm de pagar um preço tão alto para deixar a vida e entrar na *noite fria*...

"Sim, todos os homens são mortais: mas, para cada um deles, a sua própria morte é um acidente e, mesmo se a conhece e aceita, uma violência ilegítima."

(Simone de Beauvoir (à direita), sua mãe Françoise e a sua irmã Hélène em 1912.)
