**The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma by Junot Diaz**

Dear X—

Yes, it happened to me.

I was raped when I was eight years old. By a grownup that I truly trusted.

After he raped me, he told me I had to return the next day or I would be “in trouble.” And because I was terrified, and confused, I went back the next day and was raped again.

I never told anyone what happened, but today I’m telling you. And anyone else who cares to listen.

That violación. Not enough pages in the world to describe what it did to me. Not only the rapes but all the sequelae: the agony, the bitterness, the self-recrimination, the asco, the desperate need to keep it hidden and silent.

More than being Dominican, more than being an immigrant, more, even, than being of African descent, my rape defined me. I spent more energy running from it than I did living.

And always I was afraid—afraid that the rape had “ruined” me; afraid that I would be “found out” afraid, afraid. “Real” Dominican men, after all, aren’t raped. And if I wasn’t a “real” Dominican man I wasn’t anything. The rape excluded me from manhood, from love, from everything.

The kid before—hard to remember. Trauma is a time traveller, an uroboros that reaches back and devours everything that came before. Only fragments remain.

By the time I was eleven, I was suffering from both depression and uncontrollable rage. By fourteen, I was holding one of my father’s pistols to my head. I had trouble at home. I had trouble at school. I had mood swings like you wouldn’t believe. Since I’d never told anyone what had happened my family assumed that was just who I was—un maldito loco.

Of course, I never got any kind of help, any kind of therapy. Like I said, I never told anyone. In a family as big as mine—five kids—it was easy to get lost, even when you were going under.

And in no time at all I was failing everything. Quizzes, quarters, and then entire classes. First I got booted out of my high school’s gifted-and-talented program, then out of the honors track. I sat in class and either dozed or read Stephen King books. Eventually I stopped showing up altogether. School friends drifted away; home friends couldn’t wrap their heads around it.

Senior year, while everyone was getting their college acceptances, I went another way: I tried to kill myself. I swallowed all these leftover drugs from my brother’s cancer treatment, three bottles’ worth.

Didn’t work. You know why I didn’t try again the next day?

Because my one and only college acceptance arrived in the mail. I had assumed I wasn’t going anywhere, had completely forgotten that I had any schools left to hear from. But as I read that letter it felt as if the door of the world had cracked open again, ever so slightly.

I often tell people that college saved me. Which in part is true. Rutgers, only an hour from my home by bus, was so far from my old life and so alive with possibility that for the first time in the longest I felt something approaching safety, something approximating hope.