

Marina once told me that we only remember what never really happened. It would take me a lifetime to understand what those words meant. But I suppose I'd better start at the beginning, which in this case is the end.

In May 1980 I disappeared from the world for an entire week. For seven days and seven nights nobody knew my whereabouts. Friends, companions, teachers and even the police embarked on a futile search for a fugitive whom they suspected dead or at best lost in the wastelands of the wrong side of town, suffering from amnesia or something worse.

By the end of that week a plain-clothes policeman thought he had recognised the boy: he seemed to fit my description. The suspect was spotted wandering around Barcelona's Estación de Francia like a lost soul in a cathedral hammered out of iron and mist. The policeman



ambled up to me just like a character of his ilk would in a crime novel. He asked me whether my name was Oscar Draí and whether I was the boy from the boarding school who had vanished without a trace. I nodded but didn't say a word. I still remember the reflection of the station's vaulted ceiling on his spectacle lenses.

We sat on one of the platform benches. The policeman lit a cigarette, taking his time, and let it continue to burn without once raising it to his lips. He informed me that there were a whole lot of people waiting to ask me a load of questions for which I'd better have some good answers. I nodded again. Then he looked me straight in the eye, scrutinising me, and said, 'Sometimes telling the truth is not such a good idea, Oscar.' He handed me a few coins and suggested I call my tutor at the boarding school. So I did. The policeman waited for me to finish my call, gave me money for a cab and wished me luck. I asked him how he knew I wasn't going to disappear again. After observing me for a while, he replied, 'People only disappear when they have somewhere to go.' He walked with me as far as the street and said goodbye without asking me where I'd been. I watched him saunter up Paseo Colón, the smoke from his untouched cigarette following him like a faithful dog.

That day Gaudí's ghost had sculpted impossible clouds across the shimmering blue skies of Barcelona. I took a taxi to the school, where I expected to be met by the firing squad.

For the next four weeks an army of teachers, clueless

counsellors and child psychologists bombarded me with questions, trying to prise out my secret. I lied like the best of them, giving each exactly what they wanted to hear or what they were able to accept. In due time they all made an effort to pretend they'd forgotten the whole episode. I followed suit and never told anyone the truth about where I had been during those seven days.

I didn't realise then that sooner or later the ocean of time brings back the memories we submerge in it. Fifteen years on, the remembrance of that day has returned to me. I have seen that boy wandering through the mist of the railway station, and the name Marina has flared up again like a fresh wound.

We all have a secret buried under lock and key in the attic of our soul. This is mine.