

# Otilia's Story

I was already used to the feeling of guilt. That the sun was shining too brightly, or that it wasn't shining enough. Everything in this world was my fault. I was guilty when I received the punches that my husband handed out with greatness. I was guilty that acquaintances greeted me on the street, that men looked at me. And we get punched for that too.

It all started 24 years ago, in a somewhat romantic way. He was presentable, with a respectable social status. His attention overwhelmed me. His all-consuming and possessive love flattered my country girl sensibilities, raised in a modest family, but where people loved and respected each other. We moved in together and the scandals started. My parents, witnessing an ugly scene, told me to go home with them. But I loved him and I was convinced that my love would cure him of the disillusionment left by his parents' divorce. I will be his family, his rock. And we got married. I remember a slap I received, being pregnant with our son, because a man looked at our table. Then there was a cruel beating that took me straight to the emergency room, for some money that my father-in-law had decided not to give us. Then there were daily scandals almost related to his chronic alcohol consumption and his irrational jealousy. It was a scandal that I didn't get home from work fast enough, being dependent on buses that didn't always respect the schedule.

6 years after our son appeared in the world and our daughter. I was happy, believing that a delicate miracle that resembled him, would make him want to protect and become a better man. The fact that he worked away from home somehow made the evil more bearable. The children loved him, they missed him. We had started to build a house on which I also worked hard, even after the night shift, and whenever needed. It was always needed. I was a mother, a wife, a worker at home and at work, and a father when he was away. I was doing all this guided by the belief that if I do everything he will see, appreciate, love me. Love didn't come, but slaps came, fists sometimes. I was convinced that I was not trying hard enough and this is the reason why he is not satisfied.

Sometimes the target of his violence was the children and then I revolted and confronted him. I had learned to appear to him by hiding the scandals from them and trying to keep him at a distance from them when he was angry. That's how I knew how to protect them, charging in their place if needed and feeling proud when I removed the evil around them. The first to say that we are not right as a family was my son. Growing up, he became his father's target - less physically but with endless tirades about how he sees his life and his future. Then the first attempt to take my children and leave the house sprouted in my mind. But our daughter felt comfortable in the world she had created in her new home. I thought I was doing good by staying there, even if the physical and emotional costs had become

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impossible to bear. To be able to feed his thirst for money, I took another job. I was exhausted but happy to leave the hell that had become our home.

The boy had gone to college in another city. The husband had retired and left the house only very rarely. One evening, my 15-year-old daughter told me that she didn't feel well and that she wanted to die. I knew what depression was and how much black thoughts can attract you when you are caught in their nets. I wanted to help her, but I knew that her father would have considered the whole thing a fad and would not have approved of the idea. But when I left for work the next day, I feared for the fragility of her soul and asked her father to take care of her. The monster went to her and asked her what she had. And she answered that she wanted to die. Nothing shook in him, as it would shake in any parent. He replied that if she wanted to die, he would help her. When my daughter called me at work and told me all this, all my patience broke. He had destroyed my health, he had destroyed my soul, but I never imagined that he could be so eager to destroy his own child. I returned home, faced him like never before and took my child and left. After 24 years, I only took 3 backpacks and the cats.

At this moment we are doing therapy to heal. I know how wrong everything was and how wrong it was that I stayed with a psychopath (I use the term with discernment). But the high price was paid by the children who grew up without important landmarks, in a dysfunctional family, with an alcoholic and abusive father and a depressed mother unable to protect herself and those around her. When you choose a husband, remember that you are not choosing just for yourself. Children come into the world only with an inexhaustible love for their parents. They just want the love of their parents in their early years. They want beautiful memories with their parents. My daughter, whom I raised mostly alone (I had a nanny who only came when I was at work) has no memories of me. I was there, but I wasn't there for her. I was tired, upset, overwhelmed by the responsibilities I was assuming alone. Now we are trying to build a mother relationship from the pieces. We stumble often. I lost a lot by leaving, but the most I lost was that I didn't leave fast enough. Our children cannot choose the family they will live in, so we adults should choose correctly for them.

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