

SEVENTEEN YEARS

His naked body appeared on one of the sidewalks of the old neighborhood like a bundle, like an inert thing, like a piece of debris, like something repellent capable of hurting the gaze of any passerby who had accidentally come across it. Seven escapades, all with a specific objective: a coke, a pack of tobacco, a piece of hashish, a pair of shoes, a piece of coke, a watch, a mobile phone.

He entered a juvenile center at a tender age. His family, according to social services, was clearly dysfunctional: no stable income, drug addiction problems, substandard housing, he frequently did not attend school, he spent entire days on the street, sometimes without eating. There he very soon understood that life was hard, that he had to be strong. He learned to hide her fear, no one except the pillow on her bunk could see her cry. She was secretive, she never showed weakness to others. If she had to fight she did it with determination because if she didn't hit the other person she was going to hit him, although most of the time she wasn't the one who had started the argument.

She was adopted by a couple as soon as she turned twelve. The interest of families in children of that age was not usual, her preferences focused on more tender children. She knew it. At first she struggled to adapt to the new situation. She had to stop being so hieratic and suspicious to be closer and kinder. Going from the fight for survival to the warmth of home would not be easy, but she was now immersed in a warmer environment and had to modify her attitude. She considered herself a lucky girl for everything that destiny offered her: the premiere of new clothes; the affection with which her new parents treated her; the careful preparation of her birthday party so that she could celebrate it with her friends; the explanations of the doubts that arose when carrying out school tasks; the goodnight kiss; her tender, whispering voice that woke her up in the morning, sweetly penetrating inside her... But the past that had marked her in the years of greatest need for her affection proved too heavy a burden. The discipline problems at the Institute, the new colleagues, the bulls one day in and the next, the curiosity to experience new emotions so typical of puberty and the excesses to which it led him, the manifest contradictions between the adoptive tutors when it came to facing these challenges and the two weekend escapes (the first resolved with dialogue and the commitment that it would never happen again, the second led to a monumental fight and a few blows resulting from poorly

channeled anger that suddenly struck like a hurricane) put an end to the adoption process.

She felt alone again, very alone, abandoned. She needed to escape from reality, to have things that made her feel important, to look for support to hold on to, to get together with someone who loved her and with whom she could have a good time. Uncontrolled outings and dates began through a social network in some places where she and her friend met with other teenagers and adults. There, for a day or two, all kinds of excesses took place. When both returned to the center on their own or in the police car, especially in the last escapades, their image was usually deplorable: dirty, hungry, with some injury, anxious, sleepy, emotionally weak and on occasion destroyed.

She was seventeen years old. That night she consumed cocaine while she rode frantically on the penis of a man who could have been her grandfather. A man who had promised him a state-of-the-art mobile phone.

She never knew that in her country there were more than fifty thousand children in care; nor that her soul friend, the one who was always with her, at eighteen would be told that she could no longer belong to the Child Protection Service; that at twenty-one she would have two children with an individual who mistreated her and whom she did not want to denounce for fear of being separated from her children; that later, when the scorn and beatings became unbearable, she would bring it to the attention of the authorities, she would enter a foster home and the Community Social Services would take away the two children from her and she would begin to fight for them.

“Stories without Mufflers” (2006 -)