

THE HUG

I was preparing dinner. A skull had appeared at dusk in the field. I related the discovery to one of the two goats that had disappeared a few months ago in the mountains when that terrible storm hit. He had left it at the door of the ship. The next day, he intended, before taking the tractor, to shred it and put it in the compost bin.

-How was my boy doing at school today? -I asked as we sat at the table, looking for his eyes, but they were wandering somewhere indefinite beyond the horizon. I wasn't expecting an answer, I had already gotten used to his silence.

When we finished dinner, he got up from the table. He opened the door of the house and came out. After a while, he returned hiding the animal's head in his lap and, after giving me a defiant look, he closed the door to his room with a sharp knock.

The guidance team that attended the school asked me for consent to carry out a psycho-educational evaluation on my son. In a subsequent interview they told me that, since we buried my wife, he had begun to exhibit marked isolationist behavior whose main symptom was the almost total absence of interaction with the outside world.

In the confidential report that was given to me at the end of the study, it was stated that the child suffered from a disorder as a result of having experienced a traumatic event. I also needed to forget, but those critical moments came back to my mind recurrently. They constituted a dense network that trapped me, from which it was impossible to get out. He barely slept, he was in a continuous state of anxiety.

The village could be said to exist outside the world, away from civilization. Five people lived there: us; those from the El Royo house, Pablo and his wife, an older couple who dragged their feet on their morning walk from their house to the square and from the square to the fountain; and José, from the El Herrero house, who at his advanced age still worked with metal. I think it was so as not to lose the habit and to entertain himself, because he didn't get any benefit from it. Of course, the entire ground floor was full of small sculptures and various work utensils, widely used in another era, but then already outdated. Once a month the guy from the bank came so we could withdraw money and carry out the necessary operations, and every fifteen days the guy from the grocery store arrived with his van loaded with bread, vacuum-packed meat, frozen fish and various hygiene and food items. I had to take my son to the intersection every morning so that the school bus would pick him up and take him to the Roncacrucis school, the head of our region, where we had to go to be attended to by public services.

Over time, Antonio began to overcome his muteness at school. With me he remained elusive and hostile until the day of the great hug that I will never be able to forget. During puberty he presented several acts of rebellion both at school and at home, although I must admit that I was more concerned about the way he behaved outside the home because of "what will they say." It was difficult for me to understand that the core of the problem would not be resolved until our relationship was normalized. He responded in a bad way to the teachers, he hung out with a group of people who, like him, were resentful and did not feel integrated into conventional society, he did not do his homework, he was absent from classes and went outside the school grounds without permission, I had frequent fights with other classmates, on two occasions they called me to attend a meeting with the director and the tutor because I was involved in serious episodes of bullying, I had to pay for the damage caused to a teacher's car and the breakage due to abuse of a computer..., in short, the typical thing of any person who had something inside that made his life bitter and that, like me, did not let him rest.

Before things deteriorated further and the course of his life could no longer be reversed, she had to talk to him. I knew from what happened with the skull, from the orientation team's report and from other issues that arose over the years, what the starting point was, the traffic jam that did not allow it to grow, what it could not achieve. understand and that drilled his soul incessantly. Every weekend I took him to Roncacrucis. One night, when I considered that Antonio was already old enough to understand the complexity of some issues and the difficulty of making certain decisions regarding them, I decided to talk seriously with him. I told him what his mother's last days were like, I didn't hide anything from him. I described all kinds of situations and details to him, I wanted to be very honest with him. He had the right to it, I even reproached myself for not having done it sooner. Although I started out calm, I ended up crying, overwhelmed. He simply said: "Stop, I can't continue here, I have to go down, you have ruined my life and now what are you trying to do: buy my silence? Make me share in your remorse? That's not gonna happen". He opened the car door and ran down one of the town's streets.

A few days later, he returned home riding a friend's motorcycle. The motorist left, he looked at my face with humility, with level eyes. I went to him, he came to me. We hugged each other wrapped in a sea of tears. There was no need to talk, we had both been waiting for this moment for so long it seemed like an eternity. It was the only thing we had left, forgiveness.

She asked me to put an end to his agony and I couldn't fail her. Did I act out of love? Did I act out of compassion? Did I act correctly? Don't know. In any case I did what I had to. There are decisions that are very difficult to make.

“Stories without mufflers” (2006 -)

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