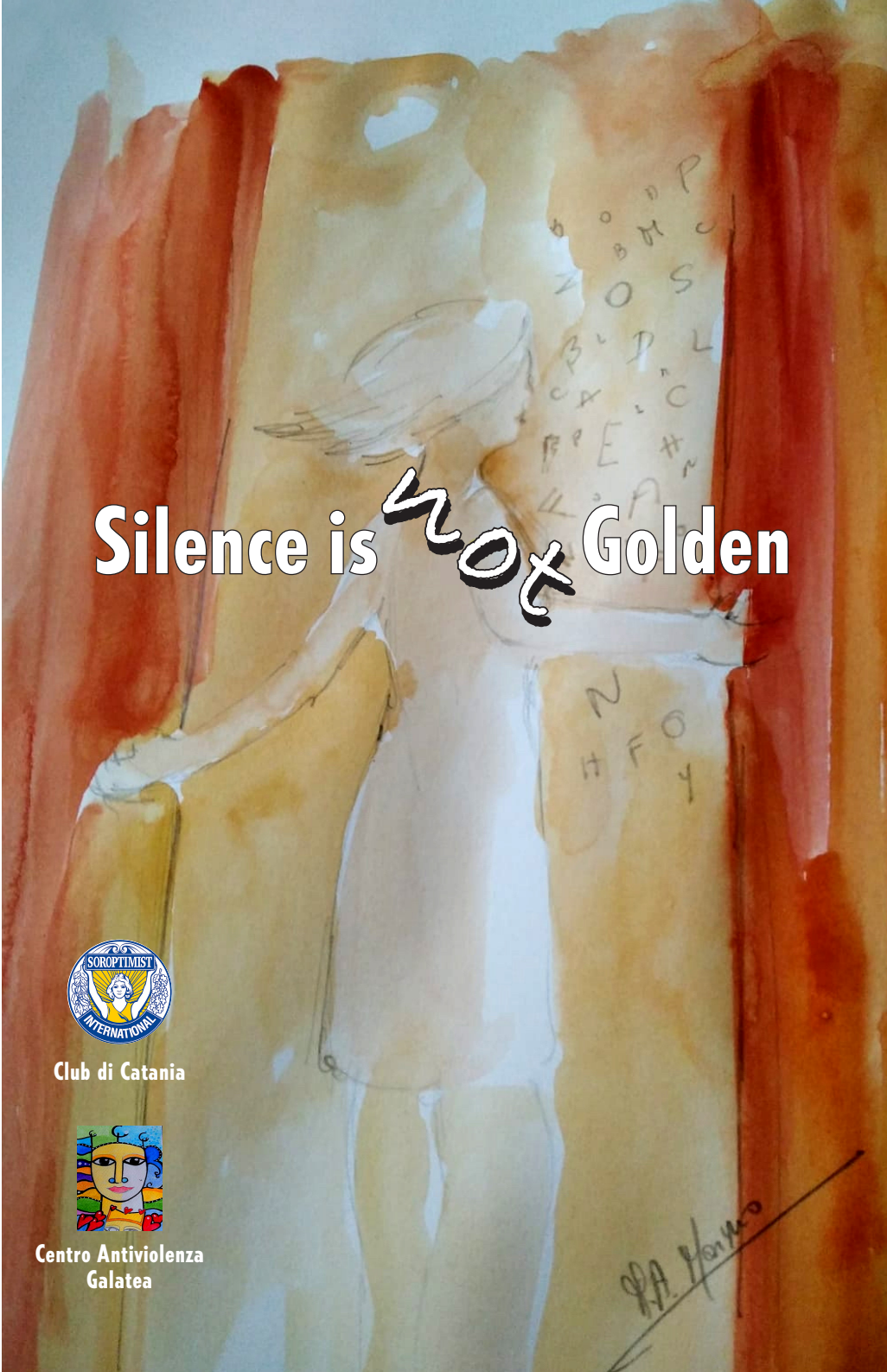


Club di Catania

Centro Antiviolenza
Galatea

Silence in *not* Golden

Soroptimist project 2020-2022
Aiutiamo Euridice

Galatea Anti-Violence Center Laboratory 2021
Raccontare la violenza

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Preface

Silence is not golden, it is a title that we wanted to give, provocatively, to this text intended for those silent women, too many, who are daily victims of a thousand forms of violence. The golden quality, metaphorically assigned to silence, contradicts, for proverbial tradition, the object of this collection of testimonies to which the oxymoron the «black noise of silence» could adapt: that tangible and astounding roar of the testimonies of women, victims of violence, who finally found the strength to shout out the discomfort and pain suffered.

Through their stories, these women managed to overcome the reluctance of the immovable, they filled those useless deafening voids in order to «be» and be there, to take back their lives. They broke the silence by narrating about themselves and the other. In a sort of sworn appraisal, they underwent a strict critical autopsy. These victims with the revelation described have overcome the fence of fear and silence, motivated by the courage to assert themselves in order to reach the summit of equality and justice. Their meditative writing helps them retracing the stages of their experience and creates pages of light and encouragement for those who continue to remain silent, uncertain between in-

stinct and seemingly useful calculations. Breaking the impunity of silence through narration means overcoming the dark side of a path in order to restore a conscience and a dignity and getting rid of non-existent faults. Abstaining from silence saves life: «We write to not die» (Blanchot)

«We write to remember, to win within ourselves amnesia, the grey hole of time...but we also write to forget, to make the pain harmless and destroy it. We write to avert...for analgesia and placebo. We write to surrogate life, to live another one.» (Bufalino).

We write to approve ourselves.

Through the pen I say everything, I do not lie and I have no shame.

Where the tongue hesitates and stops,
the hand flows smoothly and lightly.
I write to look inside myself.
I write to stop time.
I write to arouse feelings and to express mine.
I write to give the silence a meaning.
(Dacia Maraini)

Written testimony to cure ourselves and to encourage «the others» to overcome that concept of minority that sees women caged in atavistic sexist laws.

A cathartic journey that has been proposed, stimulated and supported by the Soroptimist of Catania and the Anti-Violence Center Galatea through the confessions of women who were saved from gender prejudice.

Lisania Giordano
President of Soroptomist
Club of Catania 2020-2022

To tell about violence
of
Marinella Fiume

Lead your existence even if it seems dark.
Seek your words.
Those who seek their own words get very little sickness.
Franco Arminio, *La cura dello sguardo (The care of gaze)*

To tell about violence is a title that encapsulates many concepts. To start with it is an infinite verb, a tense that indicates a situation that does not begin and does not end at a particular time, but unfolds in an indefinite dimension that is a time continuum. The subject is also missing. Who is telling? Women themselves must tell because no man can fully understand not only how a woman experiences violence itself, but also the fear of being able to experience it. The fear of violence concretely limits the lives of many women: not going out alone at night, not coming home alone late, not travelling alone...Our whole upbringing since childhood has been permeated by the need to protect ourselves. So many of us are not even aware of this, do not perceive violence, or «prefer» not to think about the fact that, as women, they had to learn to live differently from men. To deny that a woman can understand the drama of sexual violence more than a man is to deny

the educational stereotypes that women endure from early childhood because of the different ways sexuality is made to be experienced by males and females from early childhood: sex as merit and boast for males and guilt and shame for females, the need to become a man through sex and preserve oneself as a virgin for women.

It was the year 1999 when the Supreme Court caused a scandal with its ruling No. 1636, the infamous «jeans ruling.» We know very well that how we dress does not give us a responsibility in case of violence, but women are still conditioned by this today. The common thought is: 'if she wants to show off, she brought it on herself!' And it is not only the idea of sexual violence that hurts us the most; an advertisement that uses women's bodies makes us feel humiliated, degraded and raped, as if we were exposed to the lascivious gazes of others. In short, a male narrative, even with the best of intentions, is somehow «polluted» by the very angle from which a man views other men's violence against women. Just us as women have the cognition to narrate it because we have gone through the same experiences. We know well what the language of media is in the narrative of violence, and there is an undeniable link between the way media represents women by narrating episodes of violence and femicide, male aggression, and victim blaming. However, it must be admitted that in recent times the way violence is told has changed, we are witnessing a more victim-friendly narrative. All thanks to the work of anti-violence centers, committed women and men journalists, although some newspapers still too often dismiss femicides as a family affair, an act of madness, a rapture,

the result of jealousy, too much love, or depression over the end of a relationship. In doing so, the woman is held responsible for the violence she suffers and the act is «justified» by the reporter and appears, therefore, socially «accepted and acceptable.»

Narrating

As a writer, I would like to dwell here briefly on the way women writers narrate violence. it is a must to refer to the actress, playwright, activist and senator (for a short time because she soon resigned), Franca Rame (1929-2013). With her husband Dario Fo, she joined the protest movement and has been active in the feminist movement since the 1970s.

On the evening of March 9, 1973, in Milan, Franca Rame was flanked by a van, forced into it, tortured, raped in turn by five members of the neo-fascist milieu, and then abandoned. This is a punitive rape for her political views and civil battles, violence inflicted on her because of being a woman. Although the perpetrators were never discovered, Franca Rame has tried overcoming her shame and suffering. She has denounced and defeated violence by speaking out in the theatre, in front of a large audience, thus trying to overcome the trauma by writing a script, the monologue «Lo stupro»(The rape), and bringing it to the theatre and television. Gender-based violence is a manifestation of an unequal relationship in which men prevail over women. The use of the female body as a battlefield is a long story that has not yet come to an end. And this makes us think about war rape and women as spoils of

war, something I have mentioned in my last book, "Le ciociare di Capizzi", showing that war rape against civilian populations originates from a culture of subalternity that does not change in peace or war because there is no real post-war period for women. But there is a common thread between supporting groups and communities scarred by the trauma of violence and individual help work aimed at recovering memory and reprocessing memories removed because they are too painful. And this is what we wanted to do in that research in which we made the entire community speak for the first time in more than 75 years.

To narrate of ourselves

Not all of us are writers and not all of us are capable or simply trained to use language in an expressive manner, yet telling the story of violence we have suffered helps to make sense of something that does not make sense, such as the stories of violence that we as women suffer, without necessarily having to go as far as rape. There are many forms of violence, we must get used to not considering them normal but recognise them. This is something storytelling can help us with. To narrate and produce biographical and autobiographical narrative texts it is necessary to practice:

- advertise, put in order, organise and re-signify the fluid and chaotic world of memory (Memory is a «shelter asset», one of those that always retains its value and even increases it when things go wrong);
- adopting simple narrative techniques to narrate the encounter with the other and oneself;

- experience the formative value of writing as a tool for awareness and self-analysis.

Autobiographical storytelling involves: the emotions of memories; self-care through the recomposition of plots and characters; the search for meaning in one's life; the pleasure of storytelling.

Leonardo Sciascia wrote: «No matter how bitter, how painful and how distressing the things one writes about might be, writing is always a joy, always a «state of grace».

And Duccio Demetrio: «There is a moment in life when one feels the need to tell one's story differently. It happens to everyone, sooner or later. To women and men, it has happened punctually for hundreds of years now, especially in Western cultures. Ever since, perhaps, writing means telling in the first person what happened and resisting the oblivion of memory. It is a sensation, even more than a project that not everyone has realised and completed; almost a message that reaches us suddenly, capable of taking on more narrative forms very soon. Almost an urgency or an emergency, a duty or a right: depending on the case and circumstances.

This need, the contours of which are blurred and may remain so for the rest of existence as an unfinished, recurring, insistent presence, is known as autobiographical thinking»[1]

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[1] D. Demetrio, *Raccontarsi. L'autobiografia come cura di sé*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 1995.

Again with Demetrio, we can say that the (auto)biographical narrative gathers the identity of an individual and draws the identity of an individual by revealing the meaning of a story. The narration goes on without predicting the flow of actions and orders the lived experience. Our entire existence is made up of stories through which we interpret and intervene in the world: the stories we in as breathed as children are in our eyes and it is also through them that we read changes in personal and social life.

Storytelling is a tool that allows us to accurately read the world and our place in it. It accumulates around moments of passage or crisis, which trigger the need for storytelling in which to revisit experience and encounter pain. If it is not possible to heal the wound, one needs to go through it again to take care of oneself. The narrative becomes a support to resist fear. Thus, identity is better prepared to cope with crises, pains become bearable and unforeseen episodes more controllable. And storytelling, in turn, writes Duccio Demetrio, «reveals the meaning of what would otherwise remain an intolerable sequence of events».

Narration is an important tool to support and control critical events, it helps to free oneself from violence, integrating it with one's own experience, because «it acts on the sphere of thought favoring a global rearrangement of sensations, memories, emotions, making them now acceptable to the person concerned. The new narrative will have a resolving function. When you tell a story to someone, from the change in their state you perceive that the story has been received».

Narrating is a personal effort to oppose the dissolution caused by vulnerability because pain finds words, forms, and images to express itself, it is an attempt to give a sense to our experiences. Telling stories is our tool to come to terms with the surprises and strangeness of the human condition because stories make the unexpected less surprising. It is useless to think that a certain kind of memory will go away with time because the traumatic event is remembered for life. But storytelling helps in moments of anxiety or tension, of violence felt and suffered, it has a therapeutic value, as the practice of psychotherapy demonstrates. In this sense, the narration is self-healing because it helps the narrating subject to discover the meaning of life and experience and to give it a new meaning.

Making others listen to one's tale is no less important because, although the narrative originates as a subjective activity, it is relational, it seeks ears that will listen to it, an interlocutor who will react in one way or another and who is part of the narrator's own life in the past.

As far as the narrative form is concerned, in the story, one can reproduce the traumatic event of the past, without reworking it, to accept it and reconcile with it, but the aim is to give the event a new meaning. For this, the wounded ego must transform itself into a written word that has the power to 'well connect' (eulegein) what we experience as fragmentary, disordered, capable of transforming a painful experience into a creative drive. Hence the need to make one's voice heard, without any other voice speaking for another.

To narrate we must not wait for the perfect moment,

place or state of mind. The urge to write becomes public, shared with the reader in a process that is not easy, and the writing of the self becomes a powerful healing dialogue for the reader as well. Sharing stories helps to understand the non-singularity of suffering and the possibility of empathy that connects one with another. Writing is not only salvific for the writer, but also the reader[2].

[2] Vedi a questo proposito Louise DeSalvo, *Scrivere per stare meglio*, Dino Audino Editore, Roma 2011 e Id., *Vertigo*, Nutrimenti, Roma 2006.

Stories

Some authors wished to sign their story; others preferred to remain anonymous; others , Arianna Ciccia, Martina Di Biasi, Roberta Guzzardi, Domenica Maurigi, Giuseppa Patanè, Giulia Puglisi and Anna Maria Rizzo, only chose to confirm their participation in the workshop.

The dirty ladle of gravy

Today I am a woman,
Today wrinkles lightly mark my smile,
Eyes are alert,
And hands varnished in a strong colour.
It is December, it is Saturday and the mind goes back in time.
In my head resounds the theme song of a well-known Sunday programme,
In the kitchen, there is the smell of fresh gravy,
In the bedroom, the toys are all on the carpet in the middle of the room,
I hear him shouting from the other side of the house,
The door to the corridor is closed. But the noise is dull. I recognise him. He has strong hands.
Not her, she cries with the dirty ladle of gravy still in her hand.
I cry too.
I am not strong enough, we are not strong enough.
I take her hand and carry her into the room with me.
With a Barbie in my hand, I promise myself that it won't happen again, that I will always be there and that we won't be afraid anymore.

I grow. I become a woman. I become strong.

I denounce and forgive.

I am still here holding her hand, life has

changed us. Love has brought us together. Mighty hands now embrace and caress.

I sleep more peacefully.

I am a woman, a professional in a world of men.

I increase the volume of the radio when the whistle of a guy on a scooter chills my day.

I increase my pace when I get home and realise I am not alone in the street.

I raise my eyebrow when a colleague belittles me by calling me a young lady.

I have grown up, I am a woman, but I am still

scared.

I feel cold and squeeze myself tightly into my jumper this December morning.

I am alone. The fear of a dirty ladle of gravy and tears makes me choose again to be alone.

I wipe a tear that tastes of distant and sad memories.

I put a pot on the stove. Today I make gravy.

I do it for me who has grown up, who has become a woman and decided to face my fears.

R.

Forgive/Forgive yourself

It always seems to happen to someone else, no one tells you that evil is done by men and not by monsters.

Perhaps it is a defence mechanism of our mind, but when we learn of yet another woman murdered by her partner, inside of us, without the courage to say it out loud, we think: «it won't happen to me», and you say this because you are strong, resolute women, that such a monster would have left at the first slap. No one tells us that the man who will set us on fire, who will strangle us, who will psychologically annihilate us to the point of wishing for death will not be a monster, but will be that sweet, attentive man who made us feel safe, the same one who reassured us at night after a bad dream, who made us laugh and beat our hearts.

But most of all, no one tells us that, often, that first slap is not the beginning but the end of a devious game that began long before.

There was a time at the beginning of our relationship when he seemed completely disinterested, sometimes I had the feeling that I was invisible to him, at that time it often happened that he would suddenly disappear for days or stand me up for appointments without even telling me. He said he had big problems: he

had lost his job, had no money and didn't know how to pay the rent, which made him sad, deprived of life, energy and joy.

I took him into my and my parent's home when he was homeless, gave him my money, looked him for a job, and took on his pain, problems, his dramas. And he always appeared apathetic. I was 18 and already tired, everything was grey around me, I saw the relationships of my peers and envied them. In the prime of my youth, I already felt old.

There was never room for me, my problems were never relevant, my panic attacks and anxiety, my fears, and my desires were not important. There was him, only him. I was fighting, every day, for his life with the conviction that sooner or later I would solve all his problems and everything would finally be perfect between us.

And I decided to stay by his side even when another man read my discomfort and pain without the need for words, making me feel womanly, young, beautiful, and light.

I stayed by his side, but that 'everything perfect' never came.

His disinterest turned over the years into a pervasive, morbid, asphyxiating, all-encompassing jealousy.

I tried to leave him many, too many times.

Once he began to cry, to despair and then he took a razor blade and cut his wrists in front of me, at the sight of blood I started screaming, calling for help, crying.

I wanted to leave him, yet the thought that he might hurt himself paralysed me.

Then the first slap; we were sleeping together and as I was about to fall asleep, he accused me of sleeping with several men. I ignored him, I was tired and by then, such accusations were the order of the day. He slapped me twice really hard, hit my nose and a lot of blood came out. I stood still for a few seconds, paralysed, in shock that he had gone this far.

I left him and he despaired, cried, screamed and threatened to kill himself and I went back with him even though I no longer loved him. While we made love I remained inert, like a zombie and pretended in my imagination to be with another man, that good man who understood me, consoled me and helped me in those difficult moments.

A few months later, while we were driving to a shopping centre, we started arguing in the car and I told him I would leave him again. He started driving at a high speed and said: «this time we will die together». I shuddered, I started to scream, to struggle, but he drove faster and faster, I punched the window, and I screamed as if my survival depended on the intensity of my voice. He stopped in an isolated car park and said: «here you can shout for help as much as you want, no one can hear you». I opened the door and tried to run to get to the road I could see in the distance, stop a car and call for help, but as I ran, he grabbed me, threw me to the ground and dragged me into the car; there he grabbed me by the neck and strangled me. I will never forget his eyes at that moment: cold, mean, wicked. At a certain point, I stopped screaming and started asking him for forgiveness, telling him I loved him and that I had done everything wrong.

He said he didn't believe me and I kept telling him I loved him, lying because all I felt for him was revulsion and terror. Finally, he was convinced, he took his hands off my neck and said: « There, you have ruined our Sunday». I replied that we could still catch up, but that I had to go home and change because my jeans were torn and my knees were skinned. I tried to convince him, finally he told me he wanted my mobile phone as 'insurance', I gave it to him immediately, I had to save myself. We arrived in front of the house gate, I smiled at him and got out of the car. When I got inside the house I burst into tears, tears of rage, pain, of shame, but also of joy at having returned home alive. I told my family everything and asked them for help.

It took me a while to forgive and forgive myself, overcome my fear and regain trust in myself and others. It was not an easy journey and at times I thought I was going crazy, he was out of my life but his words often resonated within me and I ended up asking myself: «what if he was right?» maybe I am worthless, maybe I am a whore, a madwoman, a bad person.

I used to leave the house terrified of meeting him and what scared me, at a certain point, was no longer the idea that he would hurt me, but that he would convince me, once again, to go back with him. I couldn't trust myself.

I could never have done it alone, without psychotherapy, antidepressants, friends and my family.

Today I have finished my psychotherapy, I have graduated, and today I am proud of the woman I am and have been.

Between girlfriends

A: My friend, give me the courage to let go, give me the courage not to fall, give me the courage not to go back. I have left him but I will see him again on Sunday to get my car back. I don't want to hear from him anymore. Guess why I'm texting you here and not on whatsapp?

It's a nightmare.

V: Oh my God. Does he keep looking to see if you're online? Does he check up on you?

A: No, it gets worse. At 11:30 pm he invents that I'm on the phone and that his phone tells him when the call is on hold. This morning he admits to me that he made it all up because he wasn't convinced by Dario's story.

Whether he likes it or not I told him the way things were... We've already talked about it, we've clarified, he's calmed down and then when I'm here he takes up old conversations that are over and ruin my holiday. I don't want to let him do that. Will you help me?

V: Better off alone. Don't let him do that at all.

A: I don't want to think about it. He has already ruined a lot of moments here...

V: Did you tell him that on Sunday you're taking the car and leaving or is it just a thought of yours?

A: I told him. I'll let him know the arrival time. Even though he told me there would be no problem, to exercise his perennial control, he asked me if I came back with the same people as on the way out... A nightmare.

I still think he's a good person...but I can't continue being with someone like him. I felt again that anxiety that I felt with Mario and that I had forgotten. I have to go now. I'll call you later

V: Call whenever you want.

The painter and my red hair*

We will call him Pablo. After the painter Pablo Picasso. Although he is actually as evil as Pablo Escobar. I met him four years ago, almost by chance.

Confident and very charming. A few years older than me, a life certainly much more adventurous than mine, I have always led a normal life and a course of study that led me to be a criminal lawyer. But my solid concreteness seemed to dissolve in front of his words and stories. He lived abroad, working as a croupier in a casino in a major European city. But he had always dreamed of being a painter. He painted in his spare time, mainly paintings of female nudes.

He began to court me assiduously with what psychologists who are experts in narcissism call 'love bombing'. He used to paint my portraits, always saying that «my red hair and eyes imbued with emerald beauty» made his «inner fabric» vibrate and inspire him.

I fell madly in love with him.

I thought I was living a fairy tale, I felt like the luckiest woman on earth.

And even though I knew that a few years earlier he

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* Story by Maria Chiara Ragusa.

had left his partner and abandoned his two children, I was convinced that he would have changed with me.

The «I will save you» which all victims of violence believe.

I told myself that it would not happen to me, that he would never abandon me.

I would have made a difference.

And I was ready to leave my whole life, my affections, to follow him.

I was blind. I couldn't read signs that were obvious to everyone.

Shortly after the initial love bombing, his nature as a narcissist with all the characteristics emerged: manipulative, lying, self-centred, absolute lack of empathy.

He would often disappear for days, leaving me in despair. The betrayals could not be counted.

Yet I was always there, ready to forgive him and strive to want to change him, to want to instil love in him, real love. I would not fail, I would succeed.

He would disappear, then return with big promises, an engagement ring, presentations to the family, and love exhibited rather than felt.

He was the Latin lover who had conquered the lawyer, and today I know that this was just a source of satisfaction for him.

I did not realise that I was only destroying myself and that he was draining all my energy.

One day , suspicious of his behaviour, I discovered he was leading a double life with another woman.

The pain was crushing me and I was even more

heartbroken by the fact that he gave me no explanation.

When I found out and asked him «Why are you doing this to me?» his reply was «I will call you tomorrow» and he never called back.

I spent days, months of hell. The pain was breaking my breath.

All my dreams seemed to have gone up in smoke.

I could not even look at my image in the mirror so much that I decided to dye my hair black. I could no longer see myself with the red hair he so extolled. I wanted to be someone else, not the one he had painted. Not the one who had been happy with him. Not the one who had built dreams and plans that were then miserably destroyed.

A lot of time has passed since then and many things have happened.

I realised that he will never be able to love anyone.

It was a dream, and fragments of it will remain, but this has nothing to do with love, the real kind, where the two protagonists do not cheat and put themselves on the line, for better or worse, without losing themselves.

I am no longer that woman who hoped to change him.

I realised that he used my pure feeling to feed his barren soul and that perhaps offending my heart made him feel powerful.

I am a reborn soul, and my hair has turned red again.

Story of bullies and stomach aches

The story I am telling here is about a 15-16-year-old girl who did not suffer physical violence but psychological violence. Her classmates in primary school were the same as in middle school and even high school, fortunate, many would say, but not for her.

Her classmates bullied her a little differently than usual. In the classroom, they seemed nice (all appearance!), but they excluded her from the group. They did not invite her to birthday parties and during the first outings, when someone took the liberty of inviting her, they physically excluded her from the circle they formed to talk to each other.

Soon their bullying became mobbing, even involving the institutional figures of teachers. Their questions were supported by correct suggestions and instead, when our protagonist was in difficulty, they gave her incorrect suggestions. Faced with her mistakes, the class laughed and laughed at her. Even the teachers lent a helping hand to the little group. The sacrifices to achieve the sufficiency mark were immense.

Loneliness was becoming more and more felt and around there was no friend by whom she could be supported. They made her believe that she could not be a

friend, a trustworthy person or a person with critical capacity with whom to establish a confrontation without resulting in derision.

The girl was psychologically destroyed and her school performance was also deteriorating.

What was the point of studying, of spending hours and hours in front of the books if all efforts were in vain?

What good would it do her to be questioned in front of everyone and then not get a 6? And if at every mistake everyone, in common agreement, laughed at her?

It was a black period and physical problems added to it. The stomach aches in the morning before going to school, the tachycardia behind the desks. Her heart beat so fast that she felt her temples throbbing, her carotid artery felt like it could burst at any moment, her mouth was dry and those damn legs wouldn't stop shaking.

As soon as the teacher called her for questioning, a knot in her throat choked her and only tears could find an escape.

Her salvation was her family, those parents who never left her alone, who believed in her and always told her that it is not a grade that defines a person.

Our protagonist changed class and magically that hard-earned 6 became an 8.

That girl at risk of failing at school became the first of the class and, thanks to her mum and dad, who always believed in her, she is a strong and resilient person.

To this day, this story no longer touches me. I know who I am, I know my characteristics, I know how to

stand up and I know how to deal with difficulties. I only need to look into my parent's eyes. They are the horizon that welcomes me when I turn away and without saying anything everything becomes clear.

I have overcome psychological violence, bullying, being underestimated in everything, and mockery and prejudice made by mass manipulation.

I pointed this out to some mobbers and their reaction was a smile and the terrible statement «we were young, what did we know?». Yet I have suffered that violence and, although it has been overcome, it is part of me.

The queen bee

I found myself in the street... it was raining but the sun was out, it was there pale and absorbed, silent in the deafening silence of the morning, everything was cold... I talked to myself as I always do... I kept myself company...

I hadn't realised that I had gone out in my armour, as always;

It was too cold to go to the beehive; the Queen would not have allowed such boldness; I wandered aimlessly, with the hot coffee still churning in my gut, while my thoughts went far away.

Could it be that nature promotes disequilibrium?

... But in all this the animals seem more organised than man-made and finished, I said to myself... why then men?... there are also women inside, for God's sake, don't they? And yet no, in the eyes of creation we are men, we are species... and I am actually a species of this species...

Nature is strange, I said to myself, look at that... it looks like me...it resembles me.....this already reassured me a little, as the uneven pebbles hurt my soles as I passed...if I open a honeycomb cover and put my nose inside a beehive, I do so by breaking a balance... a balance made by a woman... everything there

is soaked with pheromone...the Queen's, not the King's, though...

There is no need to be there...the presence is in the air... and the smell is enough for the beehive system to live in its apparent equilibrium... some keep watch... some store... some flap their wings to thermoregulate the environment...some follow His Majesty as she lays eggs and packs new offspring...

small cells for females, large cells for drones and royal cells if the pheromone does not convince or convince too much. Nice catch. A conspiracy.

Nature seeks balance.

If there are too many, the Queen escapes with her faithful subjects in search of the new, leaving the old to the new in inheritance...but if she is the victim of a plot...A plot done right by female subjects, then she finds herself with other Queen daughters in the hive, eager to snatch the sceptre and crown. And the war-made woman is a song, an ancient, ritual song. A song of death.

The little queen bee sings and the others respond; the war begins. Either emigrate or succumb..that's life!

A world of amazons. Without too many words, without added sugars, honey is stowed and sentries are strict and militaristic.

Shall we talk about this matriarchal world...?

The queens take care of breeding the drones, gorge them, marginalise them, waiting for the nuptial flight..relegated only to allow the new offspring...they do not forage...nor do they act as sentinels...they drag their bellies in the hive waiting for that nuptial flight that will mark their death...

Tragic is their end. The nuptial flight is the dramatic scene that allows no repetition...

When the dart is shot, it remains in imperishable memory.

Drones that have managed to fertilise the Queen die immediately after mating, due to the detachment of the reproductive apparatus from the abdomen. A drone can only mate once in a lifetime and two queens cannot under any circumstances be fertilised by the same drone. Got it?... If you want your «moment of glory» then pay with your life... nature demands it!

I wonder if it's better among us men... in short, in the 'Man species'... in which there are also women though... let's be clear!

I mean the ones with vaginas...yes, because it's easier to recognise them, right?

Oh no?

We'd have to uncover ourselves, but it's not allowed. Men decide that.

So who are women?

Those with their offspring attached to their breasts?

or those with messy hair running around telling the world we are women?

If someone would open the cover of the «MAN System» and flood us with smoke to destabilise us a bit a bit... and lifted the canvases of our system, how would they figure out who is a woman and who is a man... who is in charge and who is not?

Who knows, maybe there are worlds where no one is in charge no one commands... and everyone is equal... Can you imagine? ...a revolution! Unheard of!!!

The question is, would it take intellect or heart?

I wonder, but I don't have the answer. I make my revolution every day when I am a beekeeper...when I raise a honeycomb and not by wearing a stiletto heel; when I do what men do and honestly, women do too.

A bit clumsy, yes, because it's not easy.

But have the Queen in flight outside her hive ever experienced Love? Or does the Queen take up service and then clock out when she retires, knowing that she will end up like the drone?

We, women, raise men, we nurture them, we protect them, not necessarily give birth to them; we let them fly, hoping for a revolution.

But... life is different... the brutality is always there! Will we ever get to live in a world where instead of looking under our clothes we will look at our faces... and we will not feel the atavistic need to swarm, to build elsewhere, to eliminate traces.. of saying «I am» without the need for capital letters or of raising our voice?

Nature is in constant evolution... and it doesn't matter if we walk on the pavement or the moon... the real revolution is evolution; it is respect, love.. is feeling equal.

Who knows if, in the future, evolution will bring the Queen Bee to recognise the dignity of the drone to love, to raise offspring?

And we women will be a species that will not need gender characterisation to be, leaving appearance and prevarication to the past.

How can *Love*?

How can love make your life impossible? How can love make you dependent? Why real life can't be like the life in fairy tales.

What I am going to tell you is the story of a girl with a very sad background, but who, despite the difficulties that life has presented her with over the years (loss of loved ones, abandonment by her father figure), has always been apparently strong. An independent, fearless, socially active woman.

On a normal evening with friends, she met him, an apparently normal boy, with the face of a 'good boy'. He courted her for a while and invited her out several times, but she initially preferred not to accept. The girl has never had a person beside her and so she is afraid, does not feel ready, and does not feel perhaps suitable for a relationship.

One day, after repeated invitations, she decides to accept. The two go out and have a quiet evening. This also happens other times, until the two begin a stable relationship. He showered her with attention, with gifts, but these attentions were gradually followed by strange behaviour. Outings with friends became less and less frequent, she had to give up her friendships. She was not even allowed to have a coffee with a friend.

In a short time she found herself no longer in control of her life, he was driving her to work, he would pick her up, there was no more going out, there was only family, his family! When she had free time at her disposal, she would go and help him at work, after he would drive her home, send her a message: 'I'm home, good night'.

But in reality he had a parallel life, other girls to devote time to.

One day, while the two were together, the girl noticed that his phone was constantly receiving messages and that some girls were looking for him.

They must be friends, she thought, but realised that this was not the case and asked for an explanation.

The furious boy began to tug at her, but she, humiliated and now totally dependent on him, forgave him.

She did not tell anyone about what had happened and went on with her life, pretending that nothing had happened.

The affair and his disrespectful acts went on for years followed by increasingly violent ones.

She no longer heard from her friends, she was alone, he was the only one in her life and so she always forgave him.

After about eight years, he decided to leave her to start a relationship with someone else and she fell into a deep depression.

Without him she thinks she cannot go on, because she only has him, because maybe she did deserve those violent acts, maybe she should not have doubted him,

maybe she led him, with her jealousy, to attach himself to another person.

She is certainly better than me, she is beautiful, she can give him more, she..

She kept blaming herself for everything, she kept justifying him.

One evening she decided to go for a drive and, assailed by bad thoughts, had a panic attack that led her to drive her vehicle off the road. The paramedics who came to her rescue found her in a state of severe shock.

She was no longer in her right mind. Taken to the emergency room, after various investigations she was transferred to the psychiatric ward, where she was admitted.

Once discharged, the girl returned home, deeply bewildered. «What has happened to me? What have I done?» There were so many questions she asked herself.

She had forgotten everything or perhaps she wanted to forget everything. He had driven her to annihilation, and because of him, she started to contemplate death.

The girl is still being treated today, she is following a psychological course and is finally slowly returning to the person she was before she met him. If she had reported everything at the first incidents, perhaps all this would not have happened, but unfortunately, she was as if locked in a glass bubble, he had become her world.

Not everyone can have the strength and courage to say enough! Everyone has their own life and it is not right that someone can take it over!

The miracle of loving ourselves

No one ever asked us if we were ready to face violence, many wondered why us.

I firmly believe that every woman is born to bring and receive peace, but some have to fight for their simplest rights, first and foremost the right to live.

Life teaches that everything can end, even that which is beautiful and generates happiness.

Love is not exempt from this law.

Perhaps more painful was discovering not so much the consummation of a relationship, but its non-existence.

To process the violence probably means realising that one has loved a man who was never there... justifying the executioner in the expectation of change that will never happen, in the expectation of a miracle.

The only miracle we must reserve for ourselves, on the path to salvation, is to begin to love ourselves, with the same vital impulse and vigour that we took to love him. We must remember what we were before, before him!

As if it was more important to reassure than to reassure ourselves, to pretend that everything is going well instead of really going well.

But I am also sure that they are all imagining life beyond the horror. And perhaps, there are those who, covering a bruise with blush and cleansing the violence with tears, are letting themselves to the sweetest thoughts of that love that will come sooner or later.

It is useless to mock ourselves and say that violence has not changed us: life changes everyone and violence leaves indelible marks, which must not be hidden from the world, because no warrior returns unscathed from battle.

It is not against the executioner that one should fight, because he is a miserable existence, and he would rather be challenged than ignored.

It is against our demons that we must fight because the violent man appeals to them.

Freedom is within ourselves, we must shout and be heard.

We have been stripped of everything, even of our dignity, and this means being reborn, coming into the world again, naked, with nothing but with that loud cry that is a hymn to life.

Let us give ourselves a chance to start again from here, from the sadistic jaws of violence. well, rather than to make it really go well.

Giving up dreams

Thinking back to the past has provoked
strong emotions in me from which
I cannot easily shake.
I was young and did not think
at all about what might have happened;
I trusted and this led me to ruin.
I gave birth when I was 16 and since then
I have had to give up
all my dreams.

For better or for worse*

It seems to be rape when consent is missing. It also appears to be rape when consent changes into dissent. These things should be said. Organise campaigns, raise awareness, and make any girl, any woman, any child know about it.

Explain that it is rape even when the one forcing you is your husband, the man you love. The man you have chosen.

That it is not enough to wear a wedding ring on your finger to become the property of another human being. Those people, women as much as men, are born to be free. If these concepts were engraved in large letters on school facades, if they were specified during wedding ceremonies, she would not have suffered so much. She would not have endured the unspeakable convinced that it was the norm, convinced that love was a duty, and never a gift.

She would not have lost a little piece of herself every day, of her dignity. Of her self-respect. Torn to pieces on her thalamus, the man had taken everything that belonged to her, that made her who she was.

---

* Story by Veronica Sicari.

That gentleman had turned into her executioner, her jailer. Yet she had loved him. For not even a short time.

She had conceived her two children with that man, the same children for whom she had always given up defending herself. Children must be protected. Loved. Even at the cost of our own peace, our own life.

This is what a mother does.

For those children she has kept, with difficulty, her head bowed. She has learned not to keep her gaze fixed ahead because this defiant attitude will only end up damaging her. For there is no life to take back, when you have never had one.

For years the shadow of that love had confused her. Her husband had taken care of the rest.

She was left alone. Alone with that man who had the claim and firm conviction that he was sufficient. Sufficient for both of them. That his needs should be the absolute priority.

First came jealousy. Blind, senseless. At times insane. Then the isolation: friends, relatives, and affections became enemies for that exclusive love.

And then the beatings. The slaps, the shoves, the punches.

The broken dishes, the messy house. The humiliations, even in front of the children. The strict upbringing of children, for they must grow up virile.

The reproaches of ineptitude, for a few consoled tears.

She resisted, she stayed, she did not run away, convinced that outside the door of that house there was no room for her. For an obviously wrong, obviously inade-

quate woman, for a bad mother. And so the years passed and came the mental problems.

The belief that she was being observed, that she was constantly in danger. The religious delusion. The violent reactions, the weapons left in plain sight to intimidate. As a reminder that life, her life, continued to pulsate solely by courtesy of the one who possessed her.

The rapes had never ceased. They continued for years. In the most humiliating ways.

Filthy practices if not accompanied by the tenderness of love.

Love does not hurt, but she did not know that.

Rapes kept silent for years. Endured for years.

One day the turning point. After the umpteenth outburst, the usual punches, finally a glimmer of courage.

Taking advantage of a momentary absence, she opens the locked doors, pulls the chains off the front door, and calls for help. She admits, with difficulty, that she is the victim of unspeakable harassment. She decides to react, to finally find some peace.

No claim to happiness convinced she did not deserve it. She only wanted peace, that peace that terror had kept from her for all those long, interminable years.

She discovers the denunciation. She becomes fierce.

A new ordeal begins.

The craved peace does not exist. Of happiness, not even a faint shadow.

Although fear is now a memory, although vivid, a new feeling takes over.

Guilt. Shame.

They make her weigh her choice.

Different methods can be found. It is possible to forgive this violent man, and start again, perhaps in different places, but without causing too much scandal.

And then, the rape. How can one speak of rape between spouses? How could she tell strangers the details of her intimate life?

She hesitates. She has always wavered. She was never quite sure she deserved to be defended.

The man is now an old man. The children are grown up.

Shame has fallen on their family. No one will forget the terrible sins that have been shouted the four winds.

By the way, he is sick.

He threatened suicide. He has mental disorders. Even his friends say so.

Of him, of course.

His friends, the very few left, say something else. They speak of denied freedom, of constant suspicions, of alleged and imagined plots.

But women's voices are always weaker than that of men. An entire female choir would not be enough to overpower a single male vocalist.

Eventually, she gives up. She closes herself in silence.

And it does not matter if the horror of which she has been the victim is so severe that it has damaged her soul. The peace that she has long desired is always far away.

The trial will go on anyway, explained to her by her incredulous, and sorry, lawyer.

She wished she had not given up. She wished that it would go on. She would have wanted her to make the effort to seek happiness, that there was a place for her in this world. But she could not, did not have the strength.

Her feeble voice was silenced once more, overpowered by the violent noise of those who claim to love her. Abandoned to her pain.

Fear of the Dark

As a child, the most common fear is that of the dark, well, speaking for myself, my greatest fear has always been that.

As a child, at night, my mother always turned on a small light next to my bed to comfort me, so in the event of a bad dream or a sudden awakening to have a drink of water, I would see the little light and receive relief.

As I grew up, I decided that I could go without it but, in reality, the fear of the dark remained a little. I got my driving licence at the age of eighteen and started going out in my car at night; at first, the curfew was 11 p.m. but as I grew older it softened.

One evening, after a birthday party, I was walking back to the car alone, in a dimly lit street

because of a broken streetlight and I began to hear voices behind me.

The voices, distant at first, gradually got closer. They were male voices.

I saw two very tall and sturdy guys holding two bottles of beer. I do not know whether they saw me peeking but they started snickering.

«Hello, beauty» I heard.

Suddenly I started feeling cold, my legs were shaking and my salivation was zero.The car seemed more and more distant and the road more and more darker and deserted.

«Calm down» I repeated to myself «they are just two silly harmless guys», meanwhile I could hear them sniggering and approaching. I thought at that moment even if I wanted to shout, my voice wouldn't come out. I thought about my mother's recommendations. But most of all I thought that if I had been a man I would never have felt that fear.

I held the car keys in my hand and squeezed them so hard that it hurt. I saw the car, which seemed to me a mirage, like water in the desert, I ran in and locked it with the safety catch.

I started the car but my legs were shaking so much that a few meters ahead I stopped for a few minutes, which seemed like an eternity.

When I got home I said nothing to my mother, was waiting awake on the sofa as usual. For a few months I no longer drove at night. After some time I started driving again with my friends beside me. And even today, when I go out alone at night, I think back to that fear, I think back to my legs shaking and I feel terrified.

The fear of the dark, which had to go away as I grew up, has returned stronger than before.

Story of a friend

I always remember with great suffering a story that was told to me by a very dear friend of mine that happened about twenty years ago.

A girl whom I will call Lucia (fictitious name) in her early twenties, to help her family-where her father was an invalid after an accident; her mother was a domestic helper; her two brothers were still very young-she abandoned her dream of becoming a doctor and started working in a restaurant whose owner was partnered with a professional, a very renowned doctor in her country.

Lucia travelled to work using her mother's car, an old Fiat Panda,

which one evening after working hours, decided to leave her stranded. Realising this situation, the professional, whom I'll call Mario, offered to drive Lucia home.

Lucia accepted with extreme serenity because she had always seen this man as a father figure; several times she had confided in him, asking for advice that, unfortunately, her father, given his condition, could not dispense.

Lucia trusted Dr Mario and that is why she got into the car with him.

The two were quietly chatting when Lucia realised that the road they were on was not the right one. It wasn't leading them to her house, so she asked for an explanation.

Suddenly Mario, who until then had been polite, turned and ordered her to shut up and turned onto a dirt road and immediately stopped the car. Lucia tried to flee but the safety locks were on and Mario managed to block her, turning into a ferocious and violent beast and also turning Lucia into a beast, because that is how he treated her. He raped her with unprecedented force and unacceptable coldness, causing her immense pain and, to prevent Lucia from screaming, he plugged her mouth risking suffocating her.

Lucia suffered physical and moral pain.

After abusing her, he left Lucia near the house and ordered her not to say anything because no one would have believed her. Lucia returned home distraught, in pain, and disgusted.

From that moment on, she no longer went to work at the restaurant and suffered severe depression. She did not say anything for a long time because she was afraid of suffering further pain.

She was a small and defenceless girl, and the brute ogre, a renowned professional, belonging to a wealthy and politically prominent family. The mother, a great woman, noticed Lucia's change and with extreme politeness managed, after almost two years, to receive her daughter's confidence.

Lucia was angry because she was aware of the law

of the strongest; she felt ashamed but did not understand why. She wanted her life back but was well aware that there was no going back.

The mother, in full autonomy, turned to a psychologist friend and through her, she managed to help Lucia.

Today Lucia is a doctor and works on herself to find the serenity that an ogre took away from her in one hour.

My Prince Charming*

Ever since I was a child, I have been told the fairy tale of the Charming Prince, who with a kiss opens wide the doors to «true Love».

I believed it, my father was my first Prince Charming. Yes, he taught me that I am weak, fragile, and in need of protection and guidance. The world is bad and I must do everything to have and keep the love of a man, otherwise, he will abandon me.

I must obey so that I can be worthy of his love. So he will protect me, but only if I am dependent on him! I must be a wife, mother, sister, comforter, helper, cook, and servant. In return? Protection and guidance.

And me? Where am I? I am a person who has thoughts, emotions, needs, and desires. Where did my space go? Why can't I declare them? Why don't I have the right?

Sure, I am worthless, I am not capable of taking care of myself, I need him to make me feel useful and loved! If I expose my desires, he will feel neglected and frustrated because I don't love him enough.

---

* Story by Gabriella Campagna

I don't love him enough.

AND... HE WILL REACT!

I cannot and must not provoke him, after all he is good to me. Better to annul myself, I must live only for him, I am nothing without him. I DON'T EXIST!

He is my Prince Charming.

The violence you do not see

When you talk about violence, you always think of the physical one, you tend to underestimate the psychological one, then you start to discover it and realise that there are realities you have never experienced because you grew up in a family where there was no shouting, where there were no flying objects, where there were no punches on the table or breaking chairs. You grew up in a family and in a context where respect was and is the basis of relationships.

Initially, you do not understand that this is also violence, you have never known it, you never heard about a type of jealousy that is so absurd that it could lead to some form of violence.

You have always heard someone talking about it, but you have always told yourself that it could not happen to you, also because until recently you had no reason to think that this kind of 'attitude' could enter your life. Yet you should have understood the signs, you are an intelligent person, you are not stupid, you should have understood this when the first episode happen. But you didn't, you didn't understand anything, or rather you didn't want to see.

You should have understood that it was a sick love from which you had to escape.

Time passes, flows inexorably until you begin to suffer daily something that you had never seen or heard, verbal violence. But what is verbal violence? It is something that strikes you day after day, it gets inside you little by little, it wears you down, it destroys you, but sometimes you remain inert, you cannot react, and you begin to let it all wash over you as if it did not concern you, as if it was not addressed to you.

You think you've found the method, after all, if you let words slide they can't hurt you... And yet it is not like that, they hurt you more than you think.

And you don't talk about it with anyone, only with some friends, woe if you tell your loved ones, who knows what could happen.

You worry and you don't want to involve them, so you keep everything inside and day after day you repress your feelings.

You are a time bomb, which sooner or later will explode, but when it does, what happens?

That's what happened, you exploded... What now? You went away, at which point you started to feel better, you no longer had that suffocating feeling, you're free, and you start to breathe.

On one hand, you're sorry, he's not a bad person, he's someone who desperately needs help and doesn't realise it. You tried everything to help him but you have failed, the only thing that could bring a result, that could induce him to work on himself was that of leaving, suddenly and without warning.

And that's what you did, you chose YOU.

But, there is one thing in this story, at a certain point he reappears, and you learn with enormous pleasure that he has started on a path, and of course, you are happy about it, so you decide to give him another chance. You start asking yourself: did I do the right thing or was I wrong? Who can tell! Indeed everything is a bit different now,

he seems to have realised he has problems to work on. But the question is: is he doing all this to win you back or is he doing it because he is aware and conscious of having a pathology? After all, that is what it is. Be honest with yourself, you don't get it, do you?

After a while you realised very well that he only did it to win you back, and I must say that he succeeded, you fell for it again, poor deluded girl!

Now you are different, no longer as fragile as before, so you start to put your foot down: either he gets therapy or everything ends and can never start again.

Yes, because at the end of the day you love him and want him well, it must be because of the nurse's spirit within you. You have always tried to help the sick, from animals to human beings, but today you do it with a different awareness, today you love yourself, today YOU come first and then everything else.

It is true, something has indeed changed.

Prevent

Violence today is unfortunately a still very frequent topic, it is really sad to think that a man can, consciously or as a result of substance abuse, mistreat a woman in many ways.

Violence destroys a woman in her morality, physicality and psyche.

A lot of work should be done on prevention, information and training of health and social workers.

As far as information is concerned, no one should be excluded, so the target audience should range from the youngest to the oldest.

With the development of technology, social networks and television programmes, there are several occasions where the topics of violence enter people's homes to spread knowledge of the problem and raise awareness on the subject.

This problem does not only concern adults involved in unsuccessful marriages, but also young people, which is why we need to raise awareness and open everyone's minds, as well as educate men to be sensitive and open-minded.

Violence should not have stereotypes, it does not

concern poorly educated social classes, but also wealthy and educated people.

Recently there has been a lot of talk about a recently discussed case on television of a girl who was raped for many hours in a room by a known man.

When I heard this story, beyond the details of drug use, parties in flats and villas at the time of covid, I felt the need to emphasise that this young girl was abused.

We are not talking about age, but considering that this young woman is only one of many, I would like to point out that her intimate, psychological sphere has been harmed, and above all how she will have to slowly, with the help of professionals, move on closing forever in a box this violence suffered for hours.

Today, the problem is still widespread, so I believe that this workshop will certainly be useful to open our eyes more and more and confront ourselves on such a sensitive issue.

Women who enter this vicious circle must be protected, helped, and supported in taking back their lives, but above all understand the value they have as human persons, as distinct from the figure of the partner.

It can happen to me too

I was born and raised in a quiet and loving family. My family taught me values and kindness for everyone, even if they did not always deserve them.

I am 23 years old and I never thought that all those things that happened to other women could somehow touch me in any way, especially by people well known to me. I have a lot of male friends, some more protective, some more uncaring. The evening I am about to tell you is not comparable to anything we hear on television or from others.

My story is different, painful, but different.

It was summertime and I was waiting for some friends to hang out with for the evening, one of whom was waiting for me at his house.

When I got there, I waited before ringing the bell and, as fate wanted, I met the brother who let me in. I waited for my friend to get dressed and in the meantime, his brother asked me to smoke the usual cigarette between friends. I trusted, perhaps naively, that person whom I did not see as a threat.

I dressed up as a normal 23 years old girl who goes out on a summer evening, wearing a skirt below the knee, a leotard and a pair of sneakers.

It all started with the end of that cigarette, me sitting on the bed, and he was sitting on the chair opposite me; he approached me and started touching my legs and making a series of unwelcome jokes. I asked him to stop, but he, with no remorse, climbed on top of me, blocking my legs and arms and covering my mouth, so that I couldn't scream and be heard by the others in the house. I was under his body, helpless, unable to move; he decided to take off his panties and touch himself in a despicable and disgusting way, I dare say.

I thought of everything at that moment, that he would have gone further. I thought about my mum, about my sister and I didn't know how I was going to get out of there, whether dead without ever being able to see them again, or alive and able to tell my mum everything. Before I managed to get out of that room, he reblocked me with his body continuing his masturbation and touching me between my legs and neck. It wasn't easy to find the strength not to cry, not to scream and call my friend. I managed to get out of that room and went straight to the kitchen where he was. It didn't stop there; he kept sending me messages, asking me to return to that room.

I didn't. I walked out of that house.

It was no longer an evening of a 23-year-old going out with friends to have fun, it turned out to be a horrible night, a nightmare that I never thought would have happened to me. That night, when I got home I burst into tears. I washed vigorously because I felt dirty and disgusted. I realised I had been so afraid, but also so brave to be able to leave that house. I knew what

house I was entering. It wasn't the first time. It was for me like a second home, a second family, I entered serene and calm, but I realised that maybe one should not always trust so much.

Despite everything, I consider myself lucky compared to other girls to whom it did not go the same way.

February 7, 2010

I'm as excited as a teenager... my heart is pounding.

He invited me to the cinema, finally!

I explained to him that I'll be leaving work very late and that I'd be joining him at the cinema, and he was being nice and sorry because he wanted to pick me up.

It's finally time! I get ready and off I go! I decide to walk to the cinema, which is nearby my office.

The evening is wintry, but the sky is clear and full of stars.

It's not very cold and walking at a brisk pace warms me up.

The fresh air caresses my cheeks. For a long time I have been waiting for him to invite me, it has been «in the air» for a while.

I walk at a pretty fast pace, it's 8:15 pm, and the movie starts at 08:30 pm. My walking boots resound all over Via Etnea, full of lights and decorations for the festival of Sant'Agata that has just ended.

However, I hear another step behind mine; close, too close, heavy. I turn to look.

It is a middle-aged man with a long beard, spirited

eyes, tall and stout, unkempt, with a worn and torn coat. He swears at me and tries to reach for my coat, and my skirt. Corso Sicilia, although it is still early, is strangely desolate and dark, the cinema is five minutes away... I quicken my pace and I start running. The man chases me and runs after me, saying dirty things.

My heart explodes in my chest. I try to figure out what to do, whether to keep running, whether to scream, whether to turn around and face him, whether to take my phone out of my bag and call for help, call the guy who is waiting for me a few metres away, unaware of everything, or call the police.

But I don't make up my mind and I can only run, run with my heart in my throat and the fear preventing me from being clear-headed.

In a second, the man grabs me and throws me to the ground on my stomach, crushing me with all his weight.

He searches everywhere, but his and my coat prevent direct contact between his skin and mine, between his hands and me; I scream, I cry, I struggle but I have all his weight on me. It is hard to get out of that situation. My despair is infinite: not a single person passes that stretch of road and I can't understand how!

My mobile starts ringing, one, two, three calls. I can't answer, and I cry. I try to talk to him; I ask him to stop. The man is awkward, and reeks of smoke and alcohol. He insults me and moves on me, but I realise that he does not have the physical strength to use violence on me, perhaps because of the alcohol. The mobile phone does not stop ringing.

Suddenly, in the dark of the evening, in the desert

of the street, I hear a male voice shout my name with unprecedented force, I cannot see him but I recognise him: it is him.

Not seeing me arrive at the cinema, unable to reach me by phone, he got worried and went out to look for me. He could not have imagined finding me a few steps away from the cinema in that situation. In a second he pounced on the man, lifted him, held him by the coat and in the meantime he holds me and embraces me with incredible strength.

He asks me with tear-filled eyes if he had dared to hurt me, I tell him everything. His hands shake, and he picks up his mobile phone and calls the police. The man struggles like a madman; he is drunk and ranting, but he does not let him go; he holds him with one hand and caresses me with the other, reassuring me, and protecting me. I don't have a single scratch on me. My stockings are ripped, and I'm physically fine, but I can't stop shaking and crying.

I have never been afraid to go out alone, I have never been afraid of men, and now I can't say anything. I can only cry and hold him.

It has been ten years since that night. That man had a history of rape and violence and to my knowledge, he is still in jail.

The wonderful man who saved me from that attack was my partner for a while and today we are very friends. That experience bonded us inextricably.

I came out of it well almost immediately, certainly because the assault, although prolonged and violent, did not turn into sexual violence. I was afraid to go out alone for a while, but not anymore.

This story is about two men: one alcoholic, violent and evil; the other sweet, protective, caring and gentle.

Some men are capable of terrible deeds and tremendous violence, often towards the women who love them and whom they claim to love. However, I have never stopped thinking that there are many others capable of completing us, of standing by our side with love, gentleness, sensitivity and respect.

I dedicate this autobiographical account of mine to them.

To them and to the Women more unfortunate than me who have not been able to defend themselves against those who wanted to hurt them.

Just because women

Alda Merini said: 'we have been loved and hated, adored and disowned, kissed and killed simply because we are women.'

This is the categorisation of women created by society. Women are too often victims of violence. For what reasons?

Futile reasons, political, religious, economic or, often because of the vulnerability of a man, not just any man, but the one who is right next to you. He is inside your world and you do not realise it; he makes you feel wrong, deluded, mocked, trivialised, and incapable.

When we become aware of it, we often think that it will never happen to us.

We are not different from others, there are no women to whom it can and does happen and others to whom it does not. Violence manifests itself in various types, from words to sentences, gestures, attitudes, behaviour, controls and prohibitions.

It arrives, even psychologically, when we least expect it, it destroys our minds and our thoughts.

All this because we have made man superior, powerful, capable of acting, commanding, imposing and

deciding on our person, our body and character; our personality and soul.

Considering unequal behaviour, unequal treatment, and hierarchisation; he can, because he is a man because he is male. I just have to go along with him.

I have to forgive him, because then 'you never know...'.

That's right, 'you never know;' when that word becomes a slap, then it becomes physical submission, sexual submission, and death. And maybe I brought it on myself.

Maybe I am wrong, maybe I pushed him to give me that slap, to tell me that word, but yes, maybe, surely he was right. Maybe it's just a different way of loving. After all, it doesn't always happen, other times he hugs me, and kisses me. It's just that at a certain point maybe I make him angry and he reacts like that, but again, maybe it's just my fault. But he loves me.

Initially, at the first phenomenon of violence, you have the feeling of wanting to resist, to fight, to tolerate for the good of the couple, the family, and the children. We are strong women. We can also tolerate this moment. One thinks that the best for the children is to stay together and to be responsible parents. But children are the second to suffer violence, they are forced to hear, to see, to suffer.

Then, tolerance drops and the woman decides to denounce, denounce the fact, perhaps too late, after having suffered too much, having suffered herself and her children, but perhaps it is never too late.

She is afraid, she feels uncomfortable, she is frightened that she is not protected enough, and thinks that at any moment it could come again.

And then, again and again.

Unfortunately, the numerous reports of the many cases of violence that still occur today, are not only phenomena and episodes that fall within the heads of already-formed families, but also affect many young people, so it is necessary to promote, raise awareness and educate every individual to be a man, to know how to love a woman, to respect her, and to understand that love in a relationship with the other begins from the moment one recognises that one is a free individual, that one is not subject to any limits, to no submission, to no service.

The container

Violence is a container of existence that is very wide for some, more contained for others.

It depends,

it depends above all at what age you started putting things into this invisible basket you carry on your shoulders,

that curves them,

that lowers your gaze

and engages your arms to not lose the balance that you established according to the new weight of it.

When you grow up without anyone having cared for the child that you were,

that you had inside,

inevitably the basket over the years gets heavier and heavier because much of what happens to you, inside you has resonances of images that have been zoomed in, amplified sounds, mixed and it becomes very difficult to distinguish the real weight of present and past events.

Everything has the same strange acrid smell of fear.

To solve it there are THEM, who tell you that you are exaggerated, that you are too sensitive,

that you are no longer a child, that a slap is not violence, not even a shove if you don't hit an edge,

that being called an 'idiot' is not violence,

that being left alone at night in the middle of the street in the rain for a 'no' is not violence,

that being left without keys, without a car and a fridge out of spite is not violence,

that feeling like nothing, because the other person tells you so, is not violence.

If your mother doesn't tell you otherwise, you can't get there on your own to understand what is violence until after years and events for which the basket has become heavier and heavier, so heavy that despite your unshakeable fear of unhooking it, you have to necessarily stop because it is impossible to go on.

It is impossible to go on, otherwise, you would still be going.

Your legs no longer hold,

and your body gives way.

The basket falls and years of violence spread all over the floor.

Some wither at your gaze, others recede until they disappear, others sink under the earth to germinate into carnivorous plants that attack you and then the fight begins, heart to heart.

You have already begun to win your war against violence.

The thousand faces of violence

It is hard to collect violence in a single episode, in a single moment of one's life, because violence as such, has a thousand facets, meanings, images.

We have been taught to do good, respect others, to love our neighbour, too bad that this teaching is accompanied by various preconceptions that start from the very jargon that, from generation to generation, we are used to using.

«Don't cry like a sissy»... as if a man cannot afford a moment of beautiful weakness and fragility.

«You're queer»... as if a person cannot afford to love whoever he wants.

«You're fat, so you don't fit»... as if the aesthetic canon allowed is just what we see on TV.

«The man works and the woman stays at home to look after the children»... where is the freedom to live life as we want?

What if it is the man who want to look after the children? He would be mocked and humiliated.

In short, all is nullified when we are the authors of categorisations of such magnitude towards the little ones.

All this leads to the realisation that I cannot narrate

one particular episode, because we have all been and will be victims of a society that exposes us to violence on a daily basis.

Chiara's tears

Chiara is in tears, the swollen eyes of someone who has spent the night crying and tormenting herself. She cannot speak, she cannot say it. So she writes in chat: 'Last night a person took advantage of me'. She makes sure I read it and deleted it immediately as if to delete the traces of what happened. It takes several minutes, but after a while, the emotional charge eases and I managed to get her to tell me what happened.

A violent, possessive ex-boyfriend, I had good-naturedly deluded myself that we had managed to break the thread of dependence that still bound her to him.

She still loves him and this was enough for her to agree to a meeting, it was enough for him to

take advantage of her once again. There is no anger in Chiara, there is torment, and there is a sense of guilt for still loving him.

It is devastating. Guilt is the most devastating emotion there is. If you feel it inappropriately, it torments you. If you are not aware of the inadequacy of feeling it, it wears you down.

It wears down Chiara and me a little.

Chiara does not want to denounce it, she still wants

to delude herself that this is the last time and that it will never happen again.

I feel powerless. My support is enough for her, but it's not enough for me, it's not enough for women. It is devastating.

The ocean is composed of many tiny drops

Violence is a very broad and emotionally charged topic.

Just being a woman makes you feel like a potential victim...After all, we are labelled by society as the 'weaker sex' and, as such, easy targets. And we become weak whenever we are blamed, even subtly, not explicitly, for a violent act we have suffered.

Violence is any act, any experience that hurts the sensibility, the soul, as well as the body; it is something that disturbs your sleep, makes you wake up suddenly or does not make you fall asleep. Violence is the

look in the street that makes you feel as if you are walking around naked; it is that appreciation that comes and makes you regret wearing that skirt or that blouse.

Violence is the word/stone thrown with such lightness that you cannot imagine the evil that can result from it: «Yes, but what was she wearing?», «She didn't have to play the coquette, though...»; «Man is, you know, weak...the woman must understand, comprehend these weaknesses», and so on.

How, then, can we try to fight, to contain such a hostile reality towards women? That's a good question!

Not an easy one to answer. We could try to get rid of certain stereotypes within ourselves but it is difficult to recognise them because they are unconsciously present in us. To give an example, in the myth of Prince Charming: you grow up with the idea of an ideal, fairy-tale love, of finding a perfect 'catalogue' man only to realise that he does not exist and that it is an illusory ideal.

Another possible way is through the education of children, which must be based on respect for oneself (and others), and one's own body, and making them understand that we are all worthy of value, love and respect.

I am aware that little is done in this sense and direction, but everyone's contribution is crucial because, if we think about it, after all, the ocean is composed of many tiny drops!

The perfect man

She is 19, intelligent and beautiful; he is ten years older.

He is the man my mother considers «perfect», the one her friends call the «right person».

I am not convinced and I want to wait, I want to understand.

I try to leave him, but he doesn't want to, and my parents don't want to: the perfect man is impossible to leave.

I marry him.

I leave for Milan with him, alone.

I am alone in his «safe» hands.

Me a child, according to him, a man posing as a father who treats me like a dumb daughter incapable of deciding even what to wear.

I collapse, become incapable and ugly.

I have extreme psychological strength and rebellious nature to hold my head high and express my opinions.

Crises, furious fights, fierce and sharp words, silent screams, angry tears.

And you feel wrong, gosh how wrong you feel!

I keep quiet, I don't talk to anyone - who would believe me?

«He is the man every woman would like to have!» my mum used to say.

And, then, I become more and more convinced that I am the wrong one, the one with stupid ideas, with banal thoughts, who knows nothing about life: his ideas, his thoughts, his impositions were right.

I «little», he «right» with the freedom of being able to «be» because he was a man.

I was allowed to adore him as the rare embodiment of perfection on earth, to read his banal poems and do anything that would boost his sick ego.

I decide not to fight anymore.

The psychological warfare I had to face every day had flattened me, making me one with the sofa.

I hit rock bottom.

I can no longer study, I no longer leave the house, I no longer speak or remember to eat and I no longer answer the telephone.

While I drag, from the bed to the sofa, the shadow of the one I once was, he does not stop stroking his service pistol.

How can one at twenty years old find the strength to get out of such a situation?

I find it, though.

The shadow gets up from the sofa, screams and throws him out of the house.

My mother begins to understand and picks me up.

I finally get home, forget and never speak of it ever again...until today.

Today I am almost 42 and I am this woman who

screams and makes her voice heard, thanks to that girl I was in my twenties and also to that «poor guy» who never realised that the loaded gun was ME.

Everything seemed finished*

A dark bubble, an unbreakable glass bell, an iron lid, and a felted woollen hood segregated and forced Mrs T into a world of strange things and sounds. A reality, normality but also obscenity and disbelief.

The woman was now used to the mere sound of fists banging on the table, to chairs flying all over the house; she no longer understood what should begin and what should end.

Fear assailed her almost every night «Enough! Shut up! I hate you! You are worthless! You suck!» These were the words that accompanied her during the early hours of the night.

It was a continuous duel between the weakness of a fragile, stupid man incapable of overcoming his limits and her: a woman as strong and resilient as steel, who responded to every act of violence with strength and confidence.

But one day, psychological pressure turned into physical fury. No longer fists on the table, but on the face; push against the wall and free falls to the floor; heavy hands around the neck and kicks to her legs.

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* Story by Carlotta Bonadonna.

Terror at every wrong word said by her. His jealousy towards the world and the type of life the woman was living became more and more unbearable. Suddenly she unconsciously began to 'hate' the man, to treat him badly, but she did not realise that they were now both victims and executioners in a ruthless game and circle. They lived a relationship that had become hell, there was no longer love and devotion but destruction, end, death, and annulment.

He continued to «love her»: 'But I love you, sorry it's all your fault, you deserve all this! You must learn not to answer, to be as I want you to be! you must be like me, yes just like ME!!!».

Mrs T understood that she was the victim of a sick man, but that she could not leave, there was a rope, torn and sharp, that was choking her; one morning she woke up and said to herself: «We are the victims of an «unhealthy», strange, obsessive relationship but maybe... Love is also this... and it's all my fault».

The days passed and the short circuit between the brain and the woman's heart had now burst. She went from a state of euphoria to profound laxity in a very short time; different and contradictory thoughts were running through her head.

One day she met a friend and told her that everything was going very well but in fact, she had a blue haematoma on her forehead, she was about to burst into tears when her work colleague asked her about that spot but something prevented her from speaking. That cursed blue had materialised in the dark blue jacket of her executioner. The man had perfect timing and

seemed to listen to every Mrs T's word. He as always in public was a loving and wonderful companion, he squeezed her arm with violence, that type of violence hidden by a fake smile and sweet words loaded with sarcasm.

When they returned home he told her that the bruise was just a mistake and that it would never happen again, but Mrs T knew very well that it would happen again.

One day the girl looked intensely at herself in the mirror; her eyes seemed to shatter the glass, she was in tears but started laughing after a few minutes.. a burst of hysterical and liberating laughter. She was crying and laughing at the same time and felt different, lighter.

She had rediscovered a dress she had not worn for a long time, the same one worn for the presentation of her first book, she felt overwhelmed by regenerating happiness. Like as if her old soul had been reconciled to its true body and its deep essence.

But something extinguished that cathartic moment: «Ahahaha how ridiculous! Do you really think you can put on that girlish rag again? I guess you didn't realise what you've become,

you may leave me but who do you think will want you? Who's going to support you economically?».

Well, I think it is pointless to continue telling this story. Many will think that Mrs T is dead, killed by the bloodstained hands of that worm of a husband. Well, gentlemen, it would have surely ended like that, it is the classic conclusion of all these «wonderful anti-love stories». There were all the ingredients: anger, hatred,

jealousy, psychological and physical violence, a fragile and insane man and a woman strong and in love, her guilt and his manipulation. Something, however, changed the ending.

Mrs T left the man because life had always taught her to love, especially herself and when she returned to look at herself in the mirror, she no longer recognised herself as a nullity, it returned to her mind that day when her dignity had been wiped off without reaction: she decided to turn the page. She finally saw her true and deep self reflected in the mirror. She was now laughing, there were no more tears. She wanted to return to adore the world, her soul and a real man. One evening held in his arms and inebriated by the kisses and tenderness of her new companion she rediscovered that she was still alive, a person capable of loving clearly and harmoniously. She rediscovered her essence, the sweetness and joy that characterised her reflected again in her eyes.

Mrs T. had finally returned!

Is this a true story? It doesn't matter. It is the fruit of my pen anyway and I have tried, with few words, to recount what happens to many women. However, I wanted to give you a happy ending with the hope that many of these stories will no longer end with femicides, but with the freedom and rebirth of women who are increasingly strong and capable of loving themselves.

We are worth much more than that*

Today too is gone.

Tired, looks at herself in the mirror, runs her hands over her face, and the black mascara runs down her cheeks. She washes her hands. She feels ridiculous. Today too the day is over, she would just like to disappear or sleep for two days. But it is already ten o'clock, she has to cook, tidy up and prepare for tomorrow's speech. Tonight, however, she has no more energy, she feels empty, thoughts are swirling inside her and she feels overwhelmed as if by a vortex whose bottom she cannot see.

Perhaps she should not have worn that skirt.

Her friend had told her when she had tried it on, «It looks really good on you! You'll look great in this!» So why did she wear it this morning? Did she want to feel more attractive? Did she want to seduce her boss or her colleague who hasn't taken his eyes off her for months? Maybe it was the shoes: too high.

After all, you know, women who wear high shoes sway dangerously as if in a sinuous, sensual dance, and

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* Story of Giulia De Iorio

poor men can't help but observe them with lust. But no, it must have been the make-up's fault: way too much! Why on earth did she use lipstick in that colour? Then with her so plump lips.

That is the type of lipstick that attracts too much attention, how could she think they would listen to the sounds coming from those lips? They would be lost in the murkiest thoughts, fantasising about the worst obscenities with that mouth. And then why all those smiles? She smiled too much, all day.

Yet she had prepared so much, had studied for days, done the research, and did overtime until late at night.

Everyone, however, seemed to be more impressed by her ass than by her speech. All her fault, it's clear! It was her fault if her boss instead of complimenting her put his hand on her thigh. If her colleague told her that 'whatever she would say with that mouth he would listen to it for hours.' If, while she was in the bathroom satisfied with how the presentation had gone, she heard her male colleagues calling her «good only for fucking», a «nice little slut», snickering like 15-year-olds.

If in the street the bricklayers working in the neighbouring building shouted phrases worthy of the worst bars at her, accompanied by whistles and smirks of complicity. If that afternoon a customer called her «pretty lady», mistaking her for the secretary as she batted her boss's eye. All normal, all her fault. She still thinks back on the day. She sighs.

This morning she had wasted too much time getting ready and had forgotten her appointment at the mechanic. How stupid of her not to have thought of that

earlier. She should have come back even without a car. She still didn't manage to change car: her boss had decided to give her younger male colleague a pay rise, so she is forced to still drive around in that junker that is often out of order.

At that time, in the dark, alone, she had to take the metro home. Her boss had offered to bring her home but lately, he had been looking at her strangely,

today he even put his hand on her so casually, as if it was natural. He pretends nothing, yet she has understood everything; something in him has changed.

He called her to his room for no real reason, and made unwelcome confidences; he walked

past her and touched her. Maybe that is why his wife looks at her lately with a certain diffidence, who knows what she has guessed. She does not want to be alone with him, she prefers the metro.

She also thinks back to those moments, a feeling of annoyance mixed with indignation and fear tightens her throat. She has entered the first carriage, better to be closer to the driver. The driver is fat and stinks. He greets her with a lascivious smile. She walked out of the station and ran. Too dark. Damn her and the fact that she did not accept that lift, she would have avoided even this terror! After all, what could her boss do?

He could have put another hand on her thigh, better than an encounter with an unknown man who could chase her and do what he wanted with her. Like in a movie plot he could rape her, tear her to pieces and disappear forever. No one would ever know anything about her again. Her poor mother would grieve for her.

But these are all fantasies, she is home safe and sound.

She looks in the mirror again and tears mark her face. Today she feels very tired. She looks at herself: no, it is not her fault. It is not her fault that she has been bothered by harassing looks, violent sentences, and unwelcome advances. It is not her fault that she was afraid. Nor of what she wore, her smiles, her charm, her beauty, her hair. It is not her fault if she feels so drained, offended, and mortified. Now she looks at herself and smiles. She knows she is good, capable, and determined, she was top of her class at university. Nothing and no one will ever stop her from achieving her goals. Even tomorrow she will have to shout more to be heard, study harder to be the best, and fight harder.

Because every female knows: for us, life is a bit more complicated, we have to fight and defend ourselves without ever giving up on ourselves, on being free. Free to wear what we want, to say what we think, to do what we want, to be who we are. Because we are worth so much more.

I still learn*

'You can't do it! It's not for you! You'll never succeed.'. Is this not violence? Is it not violence to let a human being believe of himself that he always have to prove something?

Your opinion doesn't matter, you are a woman. Women don't talk politics, don't know how to park, don't walk around alone, say silly things, and are frivolous. They have to be beautiful, but not too much; they have to be smart but never cross imposed boundaries; they have to know how to do things although discreetly.

If they do, if they cross the boundary, if they show off, well, there is something rotten. They are unstable and unreliable, they want to be liked - as if to be liked is a sin to be punished -, and they even want to control their own lives, to be in charge.

I then learnt: I learnt to drive, to go out alone, to talk politics, I learnt to be the master of my existence. And I learnt through deprivation: I had to cry, I had to scream, I had to challenge others, I have had to con-

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* Story by Lisa Bonica.

stantly question myself. And I thought I had to do it alone. Because often men do this: they isolate us, they prevent us from loving and understanding ourselves; they limit our ability to look at each other as accomplices.

I still learn. I learn not to judge, I learn to reflect, and first of all, I try to understand what I feel.

It is difficult to grow up always feeling inadequate or out of place. There is a moment when you end up believing that you deserve what happens to you because you cannot follow rules that you did not help to create; you believe you are wrong because no one around you is willing to recognise you as a person.

Sometimes you are lucky, some can explain to you that it is not so, that you can, that you can do it, that no one can afford to tell you who you are and what you are worth. And you react. And the more you go on, the stronger you feel.

You live, and you know that for everyone to live well, you have to be educated to respect, be self-aware, knowing that you are free to be what you want.

The light beyond*

The street lamps in front of me still emit their yellowish light, a sign that the darkness is still struggling to go away.

My run in the early hours of the morning is a miracle.

Me.

Me alone.

Me alone running.

Me alone running in the dark.

The silence in the distance is a curtain torn by the song of a rooster and the chatter of dustmen picking up the leftovers from the streets and the sound of my thoughts.

You look like a badly filled mattress, he told me.

Your cousin looks better.

I turn the corner, a little out of breath, and slow down.

Take that headband off your hair you look ridiculous, she said. Give up, you're not capable.

The bakery next to the big square is lighted up;

from outside you can already smell the wood burn-

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*Story by Rita Fondacaro.

ing and which will soon embrace the neighbouring streets.

Without me you won't go out, he said. You know what will happen if you leave.

No, when I left I did not know. It was like coming out of the bad plot of a movie, all the same, all already written, to enter reality.

A reality in which my loneliness and my fears were there in front of me, like the trees I could see approaching beyond the dirt road.

And from there the turnoff: turning to seek yet another crazy salvation in its erotic and hostile arms, or accept to look into the face of my shadows which are sometimes familiar and fairytale-like and sometimes terrible. I chose to go straight.

Straight on my way and through that darkness.

And here I am.

At the side of the square, the fish merchant has stopped his wagon; we exchange a mutual nod of greeting like travellers who meet up in the woods.

Meanwhile, thoughts and memories drift away like the darkness that gradually gives way to the first warm daylight. Inside me are drops of gratitude and hope.

I accept all that has been, I tell myself.

I forgive myself and my history.

I allow myself to be what I am.

I thank life.

The best is yet to come.

The sun is already on the rooftops and the streetlights are out.

Light. I can stop now.

The kiosk has opened; I breathe deeply and smile. I feel like a coffee.

Woman, you are light

The courage to be a woman
The courage to look in the mirror and recognise the pain
The courage to forgive ourselves
The strength to be a woman
The strength to speak the most feared words
The strength to fight the discomfort that is forced upon us.
But by whom then?
Sometimes by ourselves,
sometimes by a society so patriarchal that it seems almost a vortex of endless suffering.
Sometimes the people we would like to love, treat us so in a way that upsets us so much that we feel responsible for our suffering.
Then there are those images whose faces we would like to erase,
erase every feeling, every emotion, as if they were suddenly without smell, without colour, but they always remain without shame.
Because in our minds, always remains the memory of having been violated. Of having lost control.
When we speak of emotions a smile appears and naturally raises our cheekbones, and we often forget the cursed ones.

Anger
Frustration
Resentment
Sadness
Pain.
But why do we let them do it?
Why don't we fight?
Why do we pretend to be immune?
Why are we not proud to be women?

The night becomes a nightmare with open eyes because you don't need to close them to let in those images that torture your soul.

No one can touch you without you breaking as a rope stretched beyond all limits.

No more trust, no more love, no more serenity.
Do you think this is a life worthy of a woman?
Do you think you are the only one?
Think you can make it on your own?
You deserve to be bright
We all deserve it, indiscriminately.
It's difficult, but not impossible
It's scary, but you're a hero
It's hard, but you're not alone
It's scary, but you can find yourself
It's hard, but you deserve redemption
It's scary, but you are a Woman
Yes, we are Women
We are warriors
We are united
We are an immense heart that beats for all.

If you are a Woman, you are Love, Courage, and Strength.

If you are a Woman, you are Light.

A secret between us

This is the first time I am talking about this experience and is also one of the reasons why I chose to participate in the course as soon as I heard about its existence. I chose to do so because first of all, I wanted to try to help myself in an attempt to be able to talk about it, to be able to understand what happened.

It has only been a few years since I can understand those moments before it was as if I had repressed everything. Often, when you go through bad experiences, you tend to remove them, or at least for me it was like that. Then, two years ago, I happened to meet him again in the street and everything was clear, as if that pain had resurfaced, without actually ever having left.

When certain things happen as a child you don't give importance, you don't understand what happens, especially when you have always grown up in a simple, honest family with values.

Above my house lived elderly gentlemen, husband and wife, who were very kind to all of us, whom they now regarded as grandchildren to them.

It often happened that my parents would let us come up to their house for work reasons, and we would play, until one day, suddenly, sitting on the sofa, he

started to caress me and from that day he started doing it every time I went up there to them.

I didn't say anything because he kept telling me that it was a secret between us, and I, although I saw it as an obligation, could do nothing but remain motionless and impassive.

It has now been a long time and that bad experience was fortunately short-lived.

Characteristically, I have always been strong but, despite always wanting to remove the incident, these things mark you. To be able to talk about it today, even though I still can't talk about it in detail, is a great relief and I hope that this project will be able to help many people who, in addition to wanting to undertake service in this area, want to help themselves.

Conclusions

Reading out loud in front of all of you, who agreed to do so, your stories was an experience of authentic growth not only for you but also for me.

A positive experience that has changed and improved us.

At the end of the course organised by the Anti-Violence Centre Galatea, I would like to thank and wish the organisers, but especially the students that generously and confidently granted me their stories, with the words of Clarissa Pinkola Estés, writer and specialist in post-traumatic disorders. «I wish you to live your life fully and wisely,» she writes.

''When one lives fully, so do others''. This is the main imperative of the wise woman; ''to live in a way that inspires others too''.

How is one wise? One is wise if at certain times is capable of releasing a wave of healthy anger that shakes the heavens, if we are capable of having hard dreams in hard times like these, real dreams that, if we put our minds to it, will come true. But what are wise women and how do we become wise?

«Wise women are those who can live life without shame according to their spirituality in such a way that

others will take an example from them". On this path of rebirth and wisdom, it is necessary to surround ourselves with people of a certain type, because «when you are fighting for something important, one must surround oneself with people who support our work. It is a trap and a poison to have people around who have the same wounds as us but not the real desire to heal them". Today perhaps we have all become a little wiser.

And particularly on the usefulness of this work of ours I like to quote the meaningful e-mail received from a trainee:

«Dear Doctor,

I am the author of the paper on narcissism. I am bothering you with this email to thank you.

I was very excited today to read my story (100% autobiographical) by you.

It provoked feelings that I cannot describe.

Hearing my story told, although written in just a few lines, as time constraints dictated, had an enormous emotional impact on me.

I confess to you that I had been thinking of writing my story, even without the ambition of seeing it published.

Living four years with this man was like living the story in a book.

Today, to be able to write at least a little of it was like realising a dream.

Thank you again».

C.

Marinella Fiume

What's in the end?

We have reached the end, at the end of the pages that you have read and which conclude a training experience that is born within the Galatea Anti-Violence Centre.

But what is there, at the end of the journey?

At the end of the tunnel of violence and the journey towards liberation, we like to think that for women there is a new day full of possibilities. We want to try to subvert the dark horizon of Madame Bovary sung by Guccini, to say that there is still no night at the end of the night.

The Galatea Anti-Violence Centre was born for this, in Catania. It is spring 2012 and the project is a thread worked by the will and perseverance of a group of lawyers, social workers, and psychologists, all committed in various ways to social work.

The story starts from a bright flat that overlooks the railway station square.The priority is the woman, with her children and her children, often victims of witnessing violence.

The terrain is unstable, it is made of quicksand that is swallowing: those who have been abused find it very difficult to leave their doorstep. And Galatea

wants to be the other door, the welcoming one, the one that is always open.

The attempt to rebuild a better existence is never an easy or short path. It is an impervious walk, in extreme conditions, so it is best to do it with a helper close by.

Stories of gender-based violence are stories of violence of all kinds. We could choose different words to describe the horror of a woman reduced to one thing, the risk of going down the road of the rhetoric of good and evil is, however, very high.

A lot we know today about violence. We know from the numbers: one out of every three women has suffered in the course of her life some form of abuse or harassment; one every two days is slaughtered, just because woman, and falls under beatings from a partner or an ex-partner, by someone with whom she shared her life.

The issue of freedom- of choosing, of self-determination, of wanting, of being, but also of not wanting and not to be - is central. We do not know everything about the phenomenon, but we know a lot, and the rest we can try to reconstruct it.

We have therefore chosen to collect testimonies, intending to continue to give voice to those who have none. We have chosen to tell to understand better and for real.

The stories that animate this book are the mirror of what happens, of the dynamics that all too often lead to femicide. And so they confirm how, for example, it is not possible to draw an identikit of the victim: it could be any one of us.

Violence is transversal, it knows no boundaries. There is no social class, no culture, there is no wealth that shields or preserves us from a certain kind of danger. By contrast, the abuser or predator is not a personality with defined contours. He is not necessarily unemployed, or a drug addict: he is not necessarily a man with a problematic life.

Dying at the hands of a violent partner can also happen even when the one seems to possess each of the qualities that society would make him, instead, an appreciable companion.

The astonishment in the reactions of acquaintances or relatives to the news of femicide is the best thermometer, it tells us that we are dealing with a monster with blurred contours.

What is being perpetrated against women in every latitude it is a horror that knows how to camouflage itself, to the point of becoming invisible.

But if it is prevarication that we must speak of, it is from equality that we must start.

That equality that is today a missed objective, pursued perhaps not even too convincingly, is the problem and the solution.

Article 3 of our Republican Constitution, in the text that we owe to the strength of Lina Merlin, is a gospel that we forget to observe every day. The principle of equality beyond the distinction of sex, what is it if not the most democratic and revolutionary way of being in the world?

The idea that one can still object to this today is an absence of rationality.

A lot could be said about the dynamics of an antiviolence centre.

It is the most concrete and tangible way to trace out spaces for intervention while experimenting. It is the place where actions go beyond intentions.

The welcoming (which is care for the victim) and the legal and psychological support (which is also defence in court and, too often, even from the judgement) are binaries. On

these, those who want to put an end to abuse against women move every day. But there is a third and nurturing suggestion of being able to change the world: prevention is an ambitious project that brings experiences, problems encountered and solutions found, to the crowd.

Just so it happens that, to practise prevention, words need to be searched to recount the horror.

They finally serve to tell about us, about how much help and how many require that help.

Telling violence: telling it in institutional settings, in information, as in literature is an objective that we must give ourselves as a priority, because it is words that build thoughts and never vice versa.

If you have come and read this far, it means something. It means in the meantime that you have sharpened your sight and hearing in the face of a phenomenon that is a hidden and for too long submerged evil and that you have sought answers after having attempted to decipher questions.

It means that you have had the curiosity to discover, once again, what women's voices are trying to tell you.

Maria Concetta Tringali

INDEX

Preface
(Lisania Giordano) 5

To tell about violence
(Marinella Fiume) 7

The dirty ladle of gravy 17

Forgive/ Forgive yourself 19

Between girlfriends 23

The painter and my red hair
(Maria Chiara Ragusa) 25

Story of bullies and stomach aches 28

The queen bee 31

How can Love? 35

The miracle of loving ourselves 38

Giving up dreams 40

For better or for worse
(Veronica Sicari) 41

Fear of the Dark 46

Story of a friend 48

My Prince Charming 51

The violence you do not see 53

Prevent 56

It can happen to me too 58

February 7, 2010 61

Just because women 65

The container 68

The thousand faces of violence 70

Chiara's tears 72

The ocean is composed of many tiny drops 74

The perfect man 76

Everything seemed finished
(Carlotta Bonadonna) 79

We are worth much more than that
(Giulia De Iorio) 83

I still learn
(Lisa Bonica) 87

The light beyond
(Rita Fondacaro) 89

Woman, you are light 91

A secret between us 93

Conclusions
(Marinella Fiume) 95

What's in the end?
(Maria Concetta Tring*ali*) 97

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