

The door slammed shut and the dog

A door slammed shut. Without turning back to look. From the end of the hall, with sleep still in her eyes, she had asked him, “are you leaving”? And the response was the sound of the door closing behind his shoulders. A few minutes before, he had explained, had begged forgiveness for arriving late the previous night without letting her know, saying he had not realized what time it was and that it this was the truth. And she had telephoned him at work because he had once again turned off his mobile phone when she called. On his desk she had placed a bouquet of fresh anemones, his favorite flower. He had not seen them, had not thanked her for them.

Silence, rudeness in the response, unhappy faces, punishing with fleeting attitudes, disappearing for hours and hours, returning home without saying a word, staring at the TV while she was speaking with him. And this for many, many days, weeks, months, years.

Falling out of love always has the same seasons. She did not know them. The first time that he threatened to leave the house after a fight over trivial reasons, to find a new place to live, yelling that this was not how he wanted to live, that there was nothing that was his, calling the animal which followed her all around a “dumb dog”, she collapsed, crying. She could not sleep as her throat tightened only managing a stutter. It was the first of many fights, always over the same causes, and always with the same latent threat of leaving, of breaking up, of screaming that he had self-destructive desires, of leaving with the car and driving off a cliff, of complaining that he had been the one who had lost everything, that she had caused him to get angry and want to leave, that she had been the one responsible for it all, that she had not understood anything and had always acted the same, over and over again.

The result was dependence. To be in permanent anguish, not knowing which face to wear. Many dinners in silence. Calling him on the phone and never getting a response. And never providing explanations. Never asking forgiveness. Always wanting the last word, slamming the door and then disappearing.

Behind the closed door, the dog remained quiet, staring with frightened eyes and a slight tremble; she had not warned him. It stayed there for hours and would not follow her around the house as he always had. Yesterday she noticed the dog’s attitude; sad and disconcerted she saw herself reflected in him.

There are many levels of mistreatment. Women who suffer situations like the one I have just described have to know the manipulation, the threats of leaving, the contempt for feelings and suffering, the disdain towards any attempts at coming closer, the victimization and the coldness, the insults and the violence against pet animals, that all form part of an abuser’s behavior profile. Perhaps they never hit the body, but they do in the heart.

Recovering self-esteem is not easy, but from here I encourage all women who identify with what I have just described to react, to go out in the street, to go out with their friends and family, to concentrate on their jobs when possible, to rediscover their hobbies, to realize that healthy relations are free of dependence, to fight back and to never give in. To confront the bad life. There is a better one. It doesn’t matter if you have to live it alone, if you are happy and dignified. There are no dumb dogs, you don’t have to consent to this, you must react with dignity, not only for yourself, but also for the dog.

THE EDITOR
Teresa Giménez-Candela
Professor of Roman Law
Director of the Animal Law and Society Master
Director of ICALP
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
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