



## ***What Silence Couldn't Hide***

***By Daisy Rodriguez***

Ever since I was little, I was told to sit with my legs crossed. “*Las niñas no se sientan así.* (That’s not how little girls are supposed to sit),” the señoras would say, the voices firm, their eyes scanning me. Sometimes, it felt less like concern and more like frustration, like they were annoyed that I hadn’t learned this “rule” on my own. I could feel it in their sighs, in the way they adjusted my posture without asking.

It was like my body was already expected to perform, even before I understood what that meant. I didn’t know why sitting a certain way mattered so much. I felt as if I was doing something wrong just by being comfortable. I wore dresses chosen for me. Tight at the waist, itchy lace, skirts that made it hard to run or climb. I didn’t understand it then, but my body was already being shaped, not just by fabric.

Looking back, I see how these rules weren’t just about manners. They were warnings. Warnings shaped by fear, by experience, by the quiet understanding that men, even in our own families, watched too closely. Comments like “*Está creciendo rápido* (she’s growing up fast)” or “*Mira qué hermosa* (Look how beautiful )” were said casually, but their tone and gaze lingered, eerie.

They taught me that my body was being seen in ways I didn't understand yet. The older women tried to protect me the only way they knew how: by teaching me to shrink, to cover up, to stay quiet.

Being told how to sit and what to wear didn't just teach me manners; I learned that sitting with my legs open was dangerous, shameful. It felt like if I didn't cross them, something bad would happen, like a monster would come for me down there. That fear wasn't explained, just enforced. My body became something to protect and to hide. It belonged to the adults around me, shaped by their own fears and experiences. I didn't know what I was protecting myself from.

Different forms of protection lived in the silence, in the things adults hid away, in the stories no one wanted to tell. Just like I learned to cross my legs, I would soon learn to carry the weight of truths that weren't meant for a child to hold.

*Speaking what is hidden guards us from carrying it alone. It means opening the doors that were always shut, uncovering the hidden secrets, and revealing the quiet tears.*

The first "closed door" my mom opened with me was when she told me why my dad left. I can't remember my exact age, since much of my early childhood is a blur, but I remember the moments of pain and hurt with clarity. Let's say I was around seven or eight years old.

We were sitting on the couch, my mom across from me. I had always wondered about the stranger who lived only in my mind, the man they called my dad. I had no image, no memory of him, only the occasional comment: "She looks so much like her dad." I would think to myself:

What does he look like?

I thought of him often, I was curious, and I asked my mom: "Why don't I have a dad?"

Her body stiffened. She went from relaxed to stern, as if bracing herself. Before she could answer, tears were already streaming down my face, then she said quietly: "*Tiene otra familia*" (He has another family).

At that time, my mom was in a relationship with a man who was married. I was aware of it, but didn't truly understand what it meant. I remember one day after school, sitting in his car. The air was tense, their moods shifting constantly between affection and aggression. I stayed silent, wishing I could be home.

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When we arrived, my mom asked me: "*Ayuda con las bolsas* (help with the groceries)". As I went to the trunk, I saw a pink and purple scooter. My face lit up; I thought it was a surprise for me. But my mom quickly said without hesitation: "No es para ti, es de su otra hija (It's not for you, it belongs to his other daughter)".

He snapped back angrily: "*¿Por qué puta madre le dices eso?*" (Why the fuck would you tell her that?)

Was it because he didn't like his secret being exposed? My mom, peeling him like an orange, responded calmly but firmly: "*Es la verdad*" (It's the truth). Her tone carried a sharpness, almost

like a small act of defiance.

My memory blurs after that. I only remember their voices rising, arguments spilling into the house.

With the truth out, that my dad had another family, my mom opened that door all the way. From then on, she began to open doors she had kept locked. I learned I had two sisters I would never meet. I learned that my mom had been forced into an abortion. He hadn't pinned her down physically, but through his cruel certainty he made it clear he didn't want another child with her.

That was pain she had carried alone. Isn't that how wounds of abandonment begin, or continue?

That day, I cried in front of my mom like never before. I was a human waterfall, while she didn't shed a single tear. Maybe she had already cried them all in silence, where no one could see. She just told me: *"No llores. Él nunca regresó por nosotras. Tuvo oportunidades"* (Don't cry. He never came back for us. He had opportunities).

I think back to her choice of words, "nosotras" (us). When he left, he didn't just leave a daughter. He left a mother, too. And I can't help but wonder how my mom ended up in the same situation twice, being with a man who was married again. It sparked the question: How do I piece her life together to understand? What would it reveal?

My first feeling of rejection stands out to me as the moment I began carrying the weight of abandonment.

I still find myself reacting and attracting situations that leave me wanting to stay silent, wishing I could be home.

But when revealing the truth, it also becomes a form of protection, because once the silence is broken, we have the ability to decide whether to continue the cycle or finally end it.

