

Cuento

**NINE MISINTERPRETED
WORDS**

My immune system had never been my particular strength, and two days after my 14th birthday, my doctor told me to go there weekly in order to get my dose of allergy shot. At the beginning, my mother used to accompany me to each and every consultation. Every Thursday at 9.30, we would both go there. We waited a few eternal minutes in the waiting room until the doctor came out and called my name, inviting me to enter the room. While my mother kept flipping through the sudoku section of the newspaper, I got the liquid injected into my veins. Then, I would return to where she was and sit down next to her, following the doctor's instructions, in case the vaccine caused me some kind of reaction. When we made sure that everything was going as expected, we got up and went out through the same door that we had entered roughly 45 minutes ago.

Two years later, it was still routine. The same prosy routine. A Thursday like any other, my mother decided that I was old enough to go to the appointments alone, so she did not accompany me. She never did it again. So the visits began to be much more boring if possible, since there was never anyone in that cold room. It was just me and the annoying ticking of the clock.

One of those days, however, a blond-haired girl with rosy cheeks surprised me occupying the chair in which I always used to sit. At first it bothered me a bit, since I had been sitting in that same seat for more than two years and had ended up considering it my property, but I decided not to pay too much attention to it. After all, it would only be matter of a day. The following Thursday, the whole room would once again belong solely to me.

But when, a week later, I went back in there at 9.30 as usual, the girl was there anew, in the same seat, letting her eyes wander through the countless pages of a voluminous book. At that moment I decided that, from then on, I would go at 9.00 to make sure I could get ahead of her. And that's what I started doing.

For two weeks I could watch her arrive at 9.22. The third week she dedicated a smile to me, and I smiled back shyly. On the fourth, I decided to ask her for her name.

—My name is Lea —she answered with a sweet voice—.

Lea... What a beautiful name. I thought.

So that's how I met the one who, thirteen years later, walked next to me on my way to the altar. Everything was already fantastic when we were only dating, but that bond brought us together much more. Every day I felt like I was in heaven, and I'd bet my extra Christmas pay that she felt the same too.

But like everything in life, I suppose that love also wears out little by little. It slowly fades away without you even being able to perceive it, until one day you recapitulate and realize how much things have changed. That's exactly what happened to Lea and me, who knows how long after we got married.

One day while we were having dinner, I addressed Lea:

—Could you bring me the salt shaker, please?

She put it on my side of the table without even looking at my face or answering me with words. It was then that I first reflected on how that impertinent silence had gradually settled into our coexistence, making it more and more monotonous and unbearable every passing day. Lea and I had stopped communicating. The few words we crossed were just like the ones just mentioned, totally aseptic. *Lunch is ready, there is no toilet paper left, I'm leaving, Can you pick up the phone? My hands are busy, Smells like burnt. Would you mind getting the damn toast out of the toaster once and for all?, As long as the electricity is paid with my salary, here the news will be seen on the channel that I decide.* Outside of that, silence.

That night, after having scrubbed the last of silverware and swept the crumbs off the floor, I locked myself in my study and checked the album in which we kept the photos of our honeymoon. There was no picture in which

both of us did not appear with a sincere smile drawn on our faces. Remembering those moments made me also smile, but with a deep melancholy this time. I didn't know how we had got to the point where we were at that moment. Actually, how it had happened wasn't important then. The important thing was that I wanted our old lives back and was completely willing to do whatever I had to do to achieve my purpose.

Several solutions came to my mind, but none seemed good enough to get Lea's approval. If it had been for me, I would have decided to go to a couple therapy to work in our conflicts together. Yes, talking to each other with a mediator in between seemed to be the best of the options, but I knew Lea perfectly and I was completely sure that she wouldn't think the same.

Suddenly, I remembered the interview that a renowned psychologist, doctor Elizabeth Wembley, had granted to my favorite journalist, which I had read in a magazine not so long ago. They dealt with the issue of couple relationships and the moment of deciding to expand the family. She advised that all those couples determined to take this step in the future should begin by adopting a pet, preferably a dog, because, as she pointed out, those animals help build a previous step to that commitment that must inherently exist in every relationship.

It is clearly needless to mention that Lea and I were not at the most opportune moment to enlarge the family with a child, but the idea of taking care of a dog would serve in the same way to strengthen the ties between us again. So that was how I made the decision to adopt a *Border Collie* puppy, which would later receive the name Zeus.

When I took Zeus home for the first time, Lea must have thought that I had completely lost my mind, but she had always loved animals above anything else and I had no doubt that she wouldn't be able to make me take him back to the dog shelter. Indeed, she seemed to like the puppy and I could

feel a sincere happiness in her, after so many years of seeing the impassivity with which she faced any daily situation.

But the cuddly puppy soon became just another element of our hell. The first night I placed the doggie's bed in a corner of the living room, along with some toys and the velvet blanket which I always used to cover my body on the sofa. However, it was not even two minutes after we went to bed until we began to notice his clumsy and disoriented steps throughout all the corridors of our flat. Then, scratches on the door. Finally, desperate barks accompanying an endless crying.

Lea and I spent some countless hours fluttering between the sheets trying, in vain, to ignore the scandal caused by the bothersome animal. As it was customary in our relationship, she didn't say anything. Neither did I. Nevertheless, it was clear that she was just as upset or more than me, so I decided to take the dog down to the garden for a few minutes. After all, I was the one who had taken him there and it was only fair that I took care of him in that situation. I looked at Zeus with a somewhat hateful look. *It will only take two or three days until you get used to it, I know.* I thought aloud.

But two, three, four weeks passed and the situation did not change. Zeus destroyed everything that was put in front of him and his barks got louder and louder every single day. In the end, I even came to consider them a threat to the structure of the building. At any moment they would make it burst.

Sleeping at nights turned out to be impossible, and going to work with the temples throbbing to the syncopated rhythm of the barkings was a cruel torture. In addition, it also brought us problems with the neighbors, who on more than one occasion lined up against the noise caused by our pet, which meant the visit of some grumpy policemen in their night surveillance and pacification work, in addition to the fine that this entailed.

But the worst of all was that the fuss had built up in our relationship to such an extent that we had begun to tell each other everything that, until then, we had learned to show through silence. Reproaches and fights returned and, along with them, the need to verbalize our decisions. It was Lea who took the initiative:

—This situation is untenable. We cannot continue like this —she told me one day like any other—.

But I, who after so many years had learned to interpret her silences better than anyone, had become unaccustomed to interpreting her words. So instead of packing my suitcases and preparing the divorce papers, I went to my study, where the computer was, ready to do a quick search on the Internet: *ranking of the most lethal poisons*. At the top of the list, *botulinum toxin*.

So this is the story of how I poisoned our dog. But of course, not even the absence of the barkings could already save our relationship.