

## 2nd Place - Fiction

I WIN!  
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We live in the outskirts of Ixtapa in a small house with a dirt floor. We do not have running water or plumbing but it is not a bad life. The banditos have left us alone, so far. My dad, always a hard worker, lost his leg at work and even though he has a fake leg, no one will hire him. My mom and I make dresses to sell in town to the tourists. My mom also makes tamales for my dad to sell. I am the oldest of seven children. I no longer attend school because I have to help my parents earn money to feed the family.

It is a hot summer day as we head to town to sell our wares. A very nice looking gringo approaches my father and they engage in a long conversation. The conversation makes me uneasy because they keep looking my way. Later that night my father and mother argue. I know it has to do with me. Finally, they come to talk with me. This man, who works for a charity wants to marry me. He has promised that if I marry him he will send money every month to my family and that I will have a wonderful life at his beautiful house in Texas. He has shown my father pictures of his house and his nice cars. I am only 15 and this man is at least 30. I am very sad, angry, confused. How could my father even consider this? I don't want to go to the United States. I like my home here. I like going to the beach. I like watching my little brothers and sisters. Who will take care of them when mom and dad are selling stuff in the centro?

The man comes to our house the next day. I cannot look him in the eyes. I am too nervous and mad. He tells me I am the most beautiful woman he has ever seen and that he wants me to be his wife. He tells me he will provide for me and my family. He promises me he will get me papers so I will be there legally. He promises I can go back to school if I want. In the end, I give in. I tell my dad that I will marry this man. I don't want to but it is what is best for the family. I will be sending money home and they will have one less mouth to feed.

We are married the next day and he takes me to the best hotel in Ixtapa, right on the beach. He is very nice and gentle with me and does not make me become a woman that night or at any time during our honeymoon. Instead he talks of America (as if we Mexicans are not also North Americans!), he talks of what a wonderful life we will have. He has gone to the embassy and obtained all the necessary paperwork. So just a few days after meeting this man, I say goodbye to my family and to my country. I board an airplane, something that is scary to me as I have never been on one before.

When we land at DFW airport a few hours later I realize how lost I really will be. I do not speak enough English to even ask where my bag is or where the bathroom is. This is my first premonition that I have made a grave mistake. He has a car pick us up, it is his sister and she is smirking at me. She says something in English that I do not understand. I ask him about his nice cars that were in the picture, not at all like this beat up car I am being picked up in. He said this is his sister's car and that his is in the shop for repair.

After a short drive through traffic, we arrive at a place he calls apartments. He says this is where he is temporarily living while his house is under repair. I have a sick feeling in my stomach. Is anything he told me or my parents true? That night his family members come over and meet me. Some speak a little Spanish but most do not. There is a lot of drinking. That night

he says I will become a woman. I am scared. I have never been with a man. He is no longer gentle. He forces himself on me. It is horrible. I lay there and cry. He slaps me and tells me he knows I am enjoying this and to stop pretending I am a virgin. Can he not see the stain on the sheet? He tells me that I am a whore that he has paid for and that I have to do everything he wants.

As the days go by I am afraid of everything. He won't let me leave the house for anything. He won't let me call my family. He won't let me have friends. He has his sister stay with me every day to make sure I do what I am supposed to and that I do not leave the house. One night I ask him if he sent my family any money and he laughs then his eyes turn dark and he hits me. How dare I be so ungrateful and question him. He is not sending this whore's family any money.

Sometimes he takes me out to a movie, to a party or out to eat. Every time I receive a beating from an imagined infraction. He tells me I was looking at this man, I was flirting with that man, I was disrespectful, and the list goes on.

On Fridays he goes out after work when he receives his paycheck. He comes home drunk. He accuses me of cheating on him. He beats me. I beg him to stop. I tell him I am pregnant. He softens. He is so happy. He says maybe this time he won't lose his child to a lying whore. I find out later from his sister, who does not like me but does like to gossip, that he had another wife. He met her the same way he met me. They had four children together but his rights were terminated for those children. This makes me very scared. She tells me his wife lied and told CPS that he beat the children and beat her and that he used drugs and was always drunk. Oh god what have I done, how could I have let myself get pregnant? Now I have to worry about him beating our child too.

During my 6<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy he gets mad because I do not want to have sex. He chokes me and kicks me in the stomach. I start bleeding. He takes me to the hospital and warns me not to say anything. The doctors make him leave the room and ask me to tell them the truth. They say I did not fall down stairs, what really happened? If I will tell them, they will get me help. I do not tell them. I am too afraid.

When I am 8 months pregnant we are driving down the road and he starts accusing me of cheating again and that this baby is probably a bastard and not even his. He pulls over to the side of the road and starts hitting me. He notices a lady pulled over and watching us. He steps on the gas and pushes me out of the truck. This lady comes up to me at first speaking English then she begins speaking Spanish. She is a guera but speaks good Spanish. She is very nice and telling me this is not my fault. She calls the police. I tell her not to. She does anyway. The police come and she takes me to the police station to make a report. They do not have a Spanish speaker available so she stays. She tells me she is an attorney who helps victims of domestic violence and that I really need help. She tells me there are a lot of people who can help me and that I will not be deported for making this report. She gives me the number to the local shelter, her number, legal aid's phone number. She leaves and crime victims advocate comes and gives me a lot of the same information but is not as nice and does not make me feel comfortable about pressing charges. She makes me feel like I could be deported. I cannot go home now, not like this. I will be a shame to my family.

I call his sister. She picks me up at the police station. I tell her I will not press charges. She actually seems nervous, almost like she is afraid to take me back to him but she does anyway. When we get home he is there waiting with a belt in his hand. I beg him for the baby's sake not to hit me. He takes the numbers the nice lady gave me and burns them in the ashtray. He

laughs and says it is funny that a whore like me thinks anyone would want to help me. His eyes darken and his face is rigid. He says, "You are lucky this time I will not leave any marks, it is too close to the end or your pregnancy, but you are not getting away with talking to the police without some punishment". He grabs my hand and takes me to the bedroom. His sister leaves. He pushes me on the bed and puts a gun to my head (Oh my god now he has a gun!). He says he will not kill me until after the baby is born but that I should be lucky he does not kill me and my bastard child right now. He takes a pillow and covers my mouth and nose. I cannot breathe. I am struggling. I am just about to pass out when he removes the pillow. He laughs some and then he brutally rapes me. He warns me never again to speak to the police or I will be dead.

Around Thanksgiving our baby comes. Oh what an angel she is. She is the most beautiful thing I have seen. He is with me through the whole thing. We look like a happy family. I have no complication of my delivery so they send me home the same day. .

He gets upset when the baby cries. So, I try to keep her quiet. He makes me see a social worker to get WIC and Food Stamps. He lies about our income. He gets mad when I say I need to take her for a check-up or to get formula or medicine or diapers. He finally lets me go to the store for these items. He times me and if I am late I am punished. If he shows up and I have gone to a male cashier he accuses me of cheating and I am punished. He reminds me that he never finished my papers and that I can be deported anytime. He reminds me that our child would stay in the United States because, after all, SHE is a citizen.

I am thankful that his sister is not there all the time anymore. She does not like to be around crying children. I have some nice ladies I have met, we might become friends. He comes home about 2 weeks after our baby is born. He is drunk. He accuses me of cheating. He beats me and kicks me out of the house. He makes me sleep in the truck with no blanket. The next morning he pulls me out of the truck and hits me and begins choking me. Some neighbors tell him to stop. He peels out and leaves for work but not before warning me not to go to the police. He told me if I do they will never find where he buries my body.

One of my neighbors takes me to legal aid for some help. The attorney notices my bruises and goes to get a camera. She said she normally does not do this and gets her secretary to come in and she takes pictures of the various bruises all over my body. She wants to file an emergency protective order. I told her I am nervous because his sister would not let me leave the house with my baby. She says she will file something called a habeas or writ to get child. The attorney stays with me all day taking my words and putting them to paper and translating for me. She gets a judge to sign it at 4:00 p.m. The constable's office has already picked up the paperwork for the day so we have to find one who will serve this late in the day. The attorney drives me to a precinct office and finds someone to serve the papers. The constable does not speak Spanish so my attorney has to stay with me. We drive around forever it seems. He is not at home. No worries, the constable then takes us across town to the sister's apartment. It is now dark outside and very late. She refuses to turn over the child. The constable gives the paperwork to my husband and tells them he has to bring the child to court on Monday.

I can see the evilness in his eyes. When no one is looking at him he makes a gun finger and points it at our baby's head and pretends to pull the trigger then he does the same at me and then smiles.

My attorney goes to court on Monday and she does not know I have returned to him. I am too afraid for my baby. My attorney comes to our house and tells him that if he doesn't let her see me, she will have the police do a welfare check. I am badly beaten and bruised. I beg her to leave and tell her I made everything up and that even if she calls the police I will not be here to

make a report and that she must leave. She quietly tells me that I can come back anytime and then so that he can hear she says I am glad you are okay and I will close your case, I am sorry for the intrusion and any problems.

I am relieved when she leaves because he is convinced he has won and does not beat me today. However, about a week later he drives me out to a remote field and has me get out of the car. He has me kneel on the ground and put my hands behind my head. My baby is crying in the car. I cry please don't hurt me. He says it is either you or her. I tell him to kill me and get it over with. He pulls back the trigger and shoots into the air. Then he rapes me in the field and leaves me. He says I must find my own way home and that next time I go for help will be the last time.

Several months go by and several more beatings. I don't know how I am still alive. I can only think that I am living for my daughter. Before I know it she is a year old. He does not pay her much attention unless other people are around. When we are alone and on the few occasions he does pay any attention he holds her and tells her she is a bastard from a whore of a mother and he tells her how stupid she is and how stupid I am. It hurts so much. I am just glad she cannot yet understand. I must get away! Then one day she tries to get his attention and he pushes her down, hard. He acts like he is going to kick her. I intervene and he begins kicking me instead. From then on I try to keep her away from him unless he wants her around.

I cut a hole in my mattress and beginning putting money in there. Little by little I save up some money. Not enough to live on and not so much that he will miss it but enough to hopefully get me out of the house and to a shelter with my daughter. When I spoke with the attorney the last time I left she gave me a safety plan. So, I know I need to take my important documents with me I know I need my temporary visa, even though it has expired, I need my ID card from Mexico, I need my daughter's birth certificate, I need to plan the safest time to leave. I have no phone so it is hard to call anyone to help so I will have to trust one of my neighbor ladies. She is also illegal and left an abusive relationship. She assures me I will be okay but that I need to go to a shelter.

So, one Friday when I knew he would be late at the bar, I make my move. I go to my friend's house after he leaves for work. She takes me and my daughter to a building and has me meet with some workers who then take me to a shelter. The shelter sets me up an interview with an attorney. It is the same attorney who tried to help me before. I see relief on her face when she sees me. She said she was so afraid that he would kill me. She hugs me and sits me down and we begin the long process of telling her what all has happened in the two years since I last saw her. She calls the social worker and asks her to help me get into a GED program now that my English is a little better, she asks her to get me into a temporary housing program if possible. She gets another attorney from the shelter to talk to me about my immigration status. I am overwhelmed with anxiety and also with gratefulness. She did not turn me away even though I let her down last time. She asks me if I need any medical treatment for my fresh bruises and wounds. I say not, I am fine. I just need some rest.

Two weeks later we are going to court. She makes sure we have a victims advocate there and there is a court appointed translator. Still I am very nervous. He has an attorney who starts yelling at my attorney in the hallway about how I have made everything up and that he is going to seek sanctions. He even will have an expert there to state that his client does not fit the profile of an abuser. He does not know what my attorney knows. I think had he not yelled at my attorney that maybe my attorney would have tried to negotiate with him.

I am the first to take the stand. My stomach is turning. I want to vomit. Please lord help me get through this. My attorney asks about the violence and shows me pictures from this time

and the ones she has from last time. The judge looks at those pictures, that are very graphic and show marks around my neck, cigarette burns, rope burns, bruises. The judge says she is going to grant the protective order without the other side getting to ask me questions. I am happy for about a second. Then, his attorney stood up and started objecting and saying something about his clients rights so they judge let him cross-examine me. I was proud of myself. My attorney had told me what type of questions he would likely ask so when he did I was not so shaken up. The hardest part was remembering what my attorney said – no matter what DO NOT LOOK AT HIM. I did glance at him once and quickly looked away because I could feel the threats in his stare.

Then his attorney called him as a witness. He lied so much. I wanted to cry. He said I was a liar, a cheat and that I was a whore that I slept around on him all the time, that I never watched our baby and that I was always out partying and doing drugs. When my attorney got to cross examine him I actually felt relief. First she went over the pictures. He claimed I had done all of this to myself. That I was a klutz who was always falling and hurting myself. He said the rope burns and choke marks were from rough sex because I liked it rough. My attorney stayed calm and asked him how many children he had he said one. She asked about his four children in Georgia. His jaw dropped. He claimed his right to those children were terminated all based on lies by CPS and his ex-wife. Then she asked about the permanent protective order granted against him by his ex-wife. Again it was all based on lies he said. My attorney goes over his criminal record relating to assaults, again it was all based on lies he says. The Judge is once again ready to issue the protective order but his attorney says he has one more witness.

His attorney calls a counselor who goes on about what a wonderful client he is and that he does not meet the profile of an abuser and that I must have made everything up. I am worried the judge will believe her. Then my attorney gets her chance. She asks her if she performed certain tests, no she says. She asked if she has studied profiling and how long she has studied it. She says for 1 semester in college. My attorney asks her if profiles are always 100 percent accurate. She says oh yes, even the FBI uses them. My attorney asks her if she is aware that the FBI's lead profiler for years published a book which discounts her assertion and that, for example, the profile of the famous Green River killer was wrong. She says know she did not know that. Then my attorney has her look at the pictures. She asked her if they looked like something someone did to themselves. She stuttered, looked at him then looked down and said no. Then my attorney asked if she was aware that he had a prior protective order from his ex-wife issued against him. No, she wasn't. Was she aware that he had his rights terminated due to child abuse to 4 other children? No she wasn't.

That was the end of the hearing and the beginning of my new life. I did go back and get a GED. I speak fluent English. I have a job. I am enrolled in college courses and will graduate soon. I am a citizen of the United States. I do send money back to my parents and have taken my daughter to visit them. I still keep in touch with my attorney who is always encouraging me. I am so thankful that she believed in my when I did not believe in myself. Actually, I am so thankful for everyone who helped in the process. When I graduate I hope to help others like me. I want to help someone else like my attorney helped me. She told me; it is not very often that I get to see the benefits of my encouraging a client to help herself and to actually see that she can make a difference in someone's life. She says I did all the work; all she did was encourage me. One day I hope to say that I made a difference in someone's life.