

My Name is Luka

by Cerrid Wynn

They always ask me, "Why did you stay?" The reasons are simple. The reasons are complex. The reason is I am human. I had other choices I could have made, but didn't. There's a sick and twisted comfort in being a victim. When you allow someone else to have control over you, it's easy to believe that you have no other choice. When everything goes wrong, you can comfort yourself that you couldn't do anything about it, even though you are told over and over again it's your fault. You think maybe it was, but you don't know how you could have fixed it.

The first and easiest reason was that he never hit me. Well, if he never hit me, then how could it possibly be abuse? Never mind the threats to stab me in the neck. He was only angry. He really didn't mean that. Never mind he restrained me, or cornered me, to hurl insults at me while I couldn't escape. Pay no attention to how he would often wrap his hands around my throat, or knock me over.

Conveniently forget he would often blame me for his anger, and ask me if I wanted to make him angry. None of that mattered. He never hit me. He told me every day I was beautiful, and he loved me. He often brought me flowers without a reason to do so. Abusers only brought them as apologies, didn't they? And he never hit me, so why would I even think I was being abused?

I stayed for the children. Growing up in various circumstances of blended families, and facing a great deal of criticism for the person I was marrying, I was arrogant. I believed I could do what none of my parents could, and keep a single nuclear family together. I was damned and determined to prove I was a big girl. I had romantic notions my then-husband and I would survive the odds and everyone's criticisms, and we would be married for life. Reality set in after the first couple of years, and arrogance turned into the sense I was serving a penance for my arrogance. I'd made my bed, and I would lie in it, because I had children to consider. I did not want them to have a broken home. Never mind the way their father was

treating their mother, and the fact she could not set a healthy boundary to save her life, or theirs, was doing them no favors. Never mind the homes we lived in were CPS's field day for neglect, and they were not receiving proper schooling. A little neglect was better than a broken home, wasn't it? It would get better, just give it time. I stood by, and allowed it, because I was facing the consequences of my choices. I became the fixer. I tried to fix everything all the time. It was exhausting. The ex, well in his mind I should have been putting forth that effort all along.

I stayed because I was ashamed. I didn't know how to tell my family I was so very wrong. I failed. It hurt. How could I possibly ask them for help after the way I'd treated them? I didn't recognize what was happening to me, even though they could see it clear as day. But I didn't want to hear it when they tried to point it out to me either. I thought it was all my fault. I couldn't cope. I was depressed. We were destitute. Everything going wrong was my fault, how could I possibly even deign to ask for help. I made this mess, and I needed to find a way to fix it, except no matter what I tried to do it just made a bigger mess. I was such a failure.

I stayed because I believed at heart he really was a good person. I believed he was well intentioned, and circumstances kept him down, although I knew many of those circumstances he often created for himself. He just needed someone to believe in and love him enough. I could do that. I could love myself out, if that's what he needed. And that's what I did. But it wasn't enough.

I stayed because I couldn't afford to leave. I had no money. He saw to it. In fact most times we were being evicted out of homes or having utilities shut off. He would walk out on jobs or get fired. I would find work and he would hound me about quitting, or show up at my job and distract me or get into altercations with my co-workers. He would take my paycheck out of my purse. My family was a couple thousand miles away, and we never stayed anywhere long enough to really make any friends. Even if I left with the children, where would I take them? The street? A homeless shelter? Yeah, that would look awesome in court. And if I left by myself it

would be considered abandoning my family. I was sure a judge wouldn't look too favorably on that choice either.

I stayed because I thought maybe I was the abusive one. During a couple of arguments I did hit him. I lost my temper, and I felt lousy. I had no idea what the concept of reactive abuse was. There was no excuse to hit him, no matter what he said or how angry I got. He never hit me. What if I was really the one to blame? I was the bad person. How could I hit the man who was so good to me? What was wrong with me? I was so broken. I was the one that needed help, not him.

I stayed because I was afraid he'd bring up my history of abuse and resulting mental health issues, and he would keep me from seeing my children ever again. He told me he would.

I stayed because I was afraid of what he might do if I left.

I stayed because I cared about what it might do to him if I left.

I stayed because it was too much work, it took too much energy, to try to think of another choice. I was so focused on day to day survival, I couldn't take the time to see another way. I felt like a hamster on a wheel, and I had no idea how to jump off it, so all I could do was keep running.

I stayed because I was afraid I couldn't take care of the children by myself.

I stayed because I was afraid no one else would want me.

I stayed because I didn't think I deserved to be treated any better. Too bad I didn't see sooner that my children deserved to be treated better.

I stayed because of health issues while I was pregnant.

I stayed because even if I left the children with him, I was breastfeeding and he had no way to feed the baby.

I stayed because I hoped it would get better. I stayed because I was convinced it was my fault that it didn't.

Then I left because he found another woman. I called my mom to humbly ask for advice about getting a divorce, and she sent me bus tickets, and we left. I left to find out why I stayed, so I would never stay there again.

