

The background image is a composite. At the top, a large, stylized Danish flag (Dannebrog) with its characteristic red field and white Scandinavian cross is shown waving. Below the flag, a large, historic stone castle with multiple towers and red-tiled roofs, likely Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen, sits on a distant shore. In the foreground, a family of four—a man, a woman, and two children—are seen from behind, standing on a frozen body of water. They are holding hands and looking towards the castle. The ground is covered in snow, and the water is partially frozen with some cracks visible. The overall atmosphere is cold and serene.

# DENMARKABLE

Written by:  
Marcelo "Ataxexe" Guimarães

A story about family, loss, resilience and how terrifying the alliance between school and municipality can be.

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# Preface

This is a true story. It is neither an accusation nor a plea. It is a testimony of how bureaucracy can turn into a weapon — and how love can remain intact even through the most distressing moments. The dates and place names have been preserved to honor the truth. Every line breathes the air of Denmark; every pause carries the weight of silence; and every anguish portrayed conceals a sense of helplessness I never imagined feeling in my life.

An experience I can only describe as *denmarkable*. Would that be a good word? A bad one? It's probably the product of a paradox — where a high Human Development Index cannot explain a cold and calculated system, one in which any behavior daring to stray from the rulebook can trigger a downward spiral and tear a family apart.

# Part I - The Crisis

## Chapter 1: The Trip

I keep noticing people's distant gazes — I just can't help it. It's as if there's a barrier between parents and children, an invisible wall that prevents them from truly connecting. And this goes beyond the airport; it's something you can see everywhere. But since I'm here with nothing else to do, I spend my time observing any organic form around me.

Airports are all the same at their core: they level human beings down. The same annoyances I used to experience at Brasília International Airport I find here at Copenhagen Airport as well — all of them tied to the terrible habits humans display when racing against the clock.

Of course, unlike the rush inside an airport, life can be much calmer here in Denmark. In February 2019, when I moved with my family — my wife and two kids, one of whom could barely crawl — the search for peace of mind was the only thing that mattered. I'll admit, it's hard to find that peace when you travel weekly as a consultant (and leave your family alone in unfamiliar territory), but everything has its price, doesn't it?

Life here hasn't been easy. Peaceful, yes — but we constantly face problems that shouldn't exist in Nordic lands. We started off by paying a bribe just to rent a house, and of course the landlord raised the rent too, creating the kind of combo that would make many Brazilians jealous. A bank account? Of course not! Who would open one for a newly arrived Brazilian? Luckily, a coworker managed to convince a small bank to open a highly restricted account so I could pay the bribe and, eventually, receive my salary.

I guess I was wrong about airports. Nothing really works here under the third solar

station.

## Chapter 2: The Price of Peace

Things started to settle down months later. I signed up on a waiting list to rent a semi-detached house in a quiet little town north of *Roskilde*, a place that took me even longer to learn how to pronounce: *Jyllinge*. We didn't make it in the first round, but after a few people dropped out, we were selected. The move in was scheduled for October that year, when the houses would finally be delivered.

We soon discovered the reason behind all those withdrawals, during the house inspection. It was a very interesting house. The walls were basically only external. Want access to one of the rooms advertised as part of the house? Easy! Just pay, and the construction company will build the wall for you. We rented a house with DLC<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, the house was built with pure greed. It didn't come with any of the basic appliances typically included in Danish houses. No dishwasher, no washing machine, no stove, no oven, no fridge. We had to buy them all ourselves, and we were expected to take them along when moving out, together with everything else we installed. How modern! Bring Your Own Device<sup>2</sup> finally broke out of the bubble.

I just heard someone choking in the seats nearby. I thought it was because of the hot dog (quite traditional around here) but it was actually the language. Danish is a constant barrier, even for the Danes themselves, as children can take up to ten years to become fluent in it. I even tried taking Danish classes, but the school scheduled a test for me without telling me, and I failed. I ended up losing both my spot in the program and the deposit I had paid to enroll.

At least, here in the airport, the announcements are also given in English. It doesn't help much when the message is about boarding gates opening, though. The herd starts running before the Danish announcement even ends. I've learned to just run at

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<sup>1</sup> Acronym for Downloadable Content. Refers to purchasing extra content that isn't part of a game's original package.

<sup>2</sup> IT policy allowing employees to use their own devices for work.

any unidentified noise I hear. After so many months of back-and-forth travels, I got quite used to life at the airport.

We also adapted easily to life in *Jyllinge*. The residential complex had been built less than a kilometer from the town center, which had three supermarkets and a *Røde Kors* – Red Cross – secondhand shop (a well-known NGO there). The short walk made driving unnecessary, and the house was so small there wasn't room to store anything anyway. The car was most useful for taking out the trash, since the central waste station was a bit farther away.

But the real highlight was the neighborhood. Because the houses were brand new, everyone moved in on the same day, which meant everyone was forced to meet each other. And they were incredibly helpful. It was rare for anyone to have a problem that lasted more than a few hours without a solution. The housing company's idea was to create a community where everyone could contribute with a specific skill. There were committees for all kinds of things, and perhaps the one for waste management was the trickiest of them all. We nearly ended up with one garbage bin for every vowel sound in the Danish language, just like at the local recycling center and its almost 40 types of containers.

Someone really should explain to the Danes that such magnitudes shouldn't apply to vowel sounds. Whenever someone calls me, I feel like a dial-up modem trying to connect.

### Chapter 3: A Soulless Bureaucracy

I wasn't expecting to receive a phone call in Portuguese that fateful day, February 25th, 2025. I was on my way back from the grocery store, crossing in front of my children's school, when the phone rang. A woman spoke to me in a European Portuguese accent, almost as hard for me to understand as Danish, and introduced herself as a translator hired by the *Roskilde* municipality. She said my daughter had a problem at school and that the municipality had scheduled a meeting with us for that same day.

I found it extremely strange. Firstly, the municipality never schedules anything informally, much less through translators. Secondly, for my daughter to have a problem serious enough to get the municipality involved, it had to be something major. So I did the only sensible thing: I changed course and went straight to my daughter's classroom.

When I got there, she simply said, "Daddy, I'm sorry. I don't know how to express myself," before bursting into tears. That's when I immediately knew something really bad was about to happen.

In Denmark, teachers are relentless when it comes to reporting any behavior from parents that might upset their children. And when I say any behavior, I truly mean any. The smallest gesture, word, or even facial expression that bothers a child is enough for the school to notify the authorities against the parents.

And, apparently, that's exactly what had happened. My daughter's teacher told me she had heard that my wife had been too harsh with her. Yes.. harsh. In Denmark, we can't be harsh with our children. In fact, we can't be anything with our children, because at the slightest sign of disapproval, the government strikes back.



Slowly, I began to understand that sad distance between parents and children I had observed before. Those distant gazes, separated by an impenetrable state-imposed barrier, seemed to conceal a quiet sadness. The pain of conforming to the price of living in a country that presents itself to the world as a symbol of happiness.

And that price was unbearably high. When we arrived at the municipality, we were informed that our children had been taken into state custody. We demanded documentation about the municipality's actions. They denied us both the documents and any explanation. They even threatened that we would never see our children again if we sought help from the embassy or hired a lawyer. According to them, we had no rights whatsoever.

I didn't know there was legal kidnapping in this country.

## Chapter 4: The Legalized Kidnaping

At first, our children were taken to the home of my daughter's Danish teacher. She was the one who had filed the report with the municipality, and now she was the one holding custody of our children. We later found out that this was not right, and that she was probably receiving a generous payment from the government for keeping them. The children were not only supposed to stay with someone neutral, but also having their interests protected by someone neutral as well. But I had already realized that formalities were nothing more than a decorative concept by that point.

In Denmark, there's an entire economy built around this system. Anyone can register as a "professional family" and receive custody of children taken away from their parents by the state, in exchange for a hefty government allowance. We later discovered that the teacher had demand my daughter to say certain things against us, threatening that otherwise they would never return home.

And what was the accusation, exactly?

At first, the municipality's social worker kept repeating "it's something terrible", like a Pokémon, stuck on a single phrase. We weren't allowed to know the formal complaint, nor were we given the right to see our children one last time. The municipality had gone to the school as soon as we arrived for the meeting and had already taken the kids away, allegedly to a safe place. I didn't know there was an euphemism for captivity.

But the biggest shock was the clear, though ambiguous, smile painted on the face of that monstrous social worker as she left us completely in the dark about the situation.

Our family consultant, who had been following our case on behalf of the municipality for almost two years, was present at the meeting. During the

discussion, I mentioned that this was not exactly how I imagined my taxes were being put to use (I used the yearly amount for a better punch effect). The municipality twisted that statement, claiming that the consultant was the one who brought up the taxes and the amount, using that as justification to remove her from our case and from our family altogether. Apparently, the translator had translated my words as if they had been hers.

Days later, with the help of an excellent private social worker we hired, we finally managed to gain access to the official documents. The narrative constructed unilaterally by the municipality was appalling. According to them, we supposedly beat our children daily in various ways, even claiming that we told people that, in Brazil, children could be beaten. The document was so absurd that even our doctors were horrified by the municipality's perverse creativity.

For years, we had been asking the municipality for help because both our children are autistic and need specialized care. Every time our doctors requested support from the municipality, we would instead be investigated for ridiculous reasons, and every single time the cases were closed with the same conclusion: that we were good parents. When I asked the smiling social worker whether she had read our previous case files, she simply replied, "No, and I won't."

At least one person came out benefited from all of this (though she was the one who needed it least): my daughter's Danish teacher.



And now, more families pass through the boarding gates. The feeling of being stripped of parental rights is terrifying. All these families are just one lie away from being psychologically torn apart by the state. Every distant gaze I see translates, for me, into a dreadful sense of helplessness. It has already become part of society. It's rooted deep within the culture.

# Part II - The War

## Chapter 5: The Psychological War

At first I thought that if we were natives, this wouldn't have happened. I was painfully wrong. My Danish colleague, the one who helped us open the bank account, also has an autistic son, who requires a higher level of support. He and his wife spent more than five years seeking help for their child, and they are constantly fighting with the municipality and the school even after securing a special school for him. I understand this isn't about race, but I also understand that we were in a weaker position because we lacked deep knowledge of the language and the system.

We do have a certain ability to pick up bits and bites of the Danish language. During all the meetings, the translator seemed to heavily summarize what the municipality told us, and to condense what we said as well. She broke some professional rules, the most important: neutrality. In the middle of a meeting she told us she had also had her children taken by the state, and she sort of tried to guide us in the face of the municipality's threats. When we finally hired a private social worker, we discovered that all of the translator's "guidelines" were, unsurprisingly, the worst possible advice. Our social worker also helped us understand two crucial points: the translator was indeed mistranslating; and the municipality was playing a cruel psychological game with my wife.

In the first days my wife suffered several relapses. She nearly fell while climbing the stairs, and could only sleep with strong medication prescribed by the psychiatrist at the hospital where I took her in an emergency. This was practically triggered because the municipality initially claimed she alone was the aggressor. The municipality decided to edit the narrative to include a special appearance by me, but the emotional damage had already been done from the start.

The key issue at the beginning of the process was consent to the removal of the children. The municipality told us, in a threatening tone, that if we did not consent to the children's removal they would take them by force and involve the police. They said our chances of seeing our children again would be practically zero. On the other hand, consenting would supposedly make the case much simpler, and the children would be released on February 27th, two days after the seizure. In desperation, and after the translator's disorienting advice, we made the mistake of consenting. That opened the door for the municipality to do as it pleased, including failing to return the children on the promised day. From fabricating the narrative to threatening us in various ways, they acted with impunity. Despite all this, the law required them to provide us with the case documentation.

During the first meeting in which the private social worker participated, I asked to step out so I could speak with her privately. Since the translator was causing so much trouble that I was beginning to imagine conspiracies, I asked the social worker to speak for us in Danish at the meeting. We aligned what would be said and I returned to the room. While the social worker spoke on the phone the words we had agreed on, I noticed a sudden change in the expression of the caseworker in charge. She told me not to trust my social worker, and said she would give me a few more minutes to think, then left the room with the translator. A lawyer called me shortly after and introduced herself as a colleague of the social worker and said she would be my lawyer for the case. She also advised me not to believe anything the municipality told me, otherwise our chances of success would be minimal.

When the two returned, I called the social worker and confirmed we would not change our stance. We refused to consent to the children being placed with a professional family. The result: the municipality would have to pay for a lawyer for me (and I could choose who), they were obliged to send us the case documents, and a hearing would have to be scheduled with the juvenile court present. Of course the children would not return. And of course the municipality would keep playing dirty.

As if the affronts weren't enough, the municipality made a point of telling us that the children were doing great. They were happy, eating well, sleeping well, and behaving well. It wasn't as if the municipality wanted to turn parents against their children and vice-versa. It was blatantly obvious that that was exactly what they wanted. When they showed us the supposedly joyful photo of them dressed in the *Fastelavn* costumes we had sent through the municipality, the sadness was clear on each face. No one can deceive a parent when it comes to their children. Especially the mother, who could practically read in their traumatized little eyes everything they wanted to tell us.

The unpronounceable Danish carnival, *Fastelavn*, apparently marked the start of the whole nightmare. Our little girl wanted a cat costume, but it was sold out at the store. On December 4th, 2024, she told us she had told her Danish teacher that mommy hit her. According to our daughter, this was her way of punishing us for not buying the costume. She also said a friend had encouraged her to do this, since it was common for children to tell certain things to teachers so the parents would receive a scolding from the supposed defenders of childhood.

According to the documents, the school filed a complaint with the municipality that same day, but the municipality only decided to act on February 25th of the following year. The supposedly extremely urgent case didn't seem so urgent after all. And everything only got worse because we had concrete, official evidence that both the school and the municipality had been negligent in responding to our requests for help. After seeing my wife unable to walk, after taking her to the psychiatric hospital to get something to help her sleep rather than simply vegetate, I was more than willing to go to war.

Of course I couldn't do it all alone. The social worker we hired was a marvelous fighter at our side. Our angelic Danish couple, once again, saved us with that referral. Ever since we arrived in Denmark they brought us relief: from housing and donations to get our life started here, to professional help to confront the

municipality.

My mother, as soon as she heard, materialized here in a couple of days in the hope of at least obtaining custody of the children, something almost guaranteed in Brazil, but probably not in Denmark. Unless, of course, it has financial consequences. And that was the key point of our counterattack: to return the psychological blow economically.

With the indispensable support of our social worker, we managed to remove the custody from the teacher. The children would then be transferred to one of those professional families. Armed with the two autism diagnoses, we forced the municipality to impose a restriction: the children must be housed together in a home that provided support for their condition. All of this costs the state money. And, as an aggravating factor, that money would be used to cover expenses for foreigners.

In parallel, I began gathering all the evidence against the municipality and the school to send to the lawyer, who built the defense based on that material. Meanwhile, we prepared ourselves psychologically for the day of the hearing.

Great wars are won by strategists. In our case it would be no different. We began preparing a request for support to the embassy and to Brazil's child protection council. The idea was to request that the case be transferred to the Brazilian child protection authority, where we would likely be judged by people with real common sense. Practically every move was validated or even initiated by our infallible social worker. She knew the municipality extremely well and had several strategies for us to follow. I only had to keep my composure and decide the path for us to cut.

## Chapter 6: The Theatrical Hearing

And so the day of the hearing arrived, March 6th, 2025. To our surprise, the dubious translator had been replaced by a real one. Over the phone, she patiently relayed, sentence by sentence, what was being said to us and what we were saying to that whole theatrical court. We asked her not to translate what our lawyer would say, since we had already discussed the defense. The jury asked me only one single question, which I took as an omen of what was to come.

There is a famous, perhaps anonymous, phrase that goes around like this: “the fault is mine and I will place it on whoever I wish.” That summed up the hearing. The municipality acknowledged that four serious failures had been committed against us (as reported by our lawyer), yet still decided to take custody of the children.

At the end of the hearing, I clearly heard the translator’s voice on the phone, disbelieving. She was a different translator. Her voice was calmer, yet firm, and she sounded older. She told me that the municipality was scheming, playing dirty, and that I should seek help as soon as possible. The municipality was committing serious crimes against us. They hung up on her, but her message was unmistakable. Her last words were: “contact the embassy.”

Another smile from that same carbon-based trash project was flashed in our direction as we left the room. I had to restrain my mother, although I felt otherwise.

We returned to the holding room and shared the terrible news with my wife’s Red Cross colleagues. She had begun volunteering there about a year before these events. She had learned a small but meaningful amount of Danish and had made dear friends among the elderly who, once they learned about the situation, spared no effort to help us.

One of them took the bus to municipality that day, newly operated on her knees. We learned that another one had also had custody taken in the past and spent years

without knowing her child's whereabouts. Another had worked at the municipality for more than 40 years and had never witnessed a case as malevolent as ours.

Amid the tears, my wife and I were called to an extraordinary meeting. Apparently, my mother's presence proved to be a way for the municipality to save the costs of caring for the children, since it was not possible for the municipality to undo the monumental mess for one simple reason: contrary to protocol, the municipality had formally reported us to the police at the very beginning. And to make matters worse, the children's bystander was, illegally, the Danish teacher. Yes, the same one who filed the complaint, held temporary custody, manipulated my daughter, and has earned her place in hell alongside the hyena defending the questionable interests of the Danish system.

According to the municipality, the children could return home under one irrefutable condition: the parents would have to move away from there. Moreover, we would have to gather five to eight people and draw up an action plan, something that was actually the municipality's responsibility. We accepted all the conditions, and we knew it would be quite easy to assemble those people. The municipality let slip that they believed we had no support network in Denmark. That explained the inversion of responsibilities.

At the end of the meeting, we asked what should be told to the children. The answer was foolish enough to astonish us: we should tell them an adapted truth. Yes, they used that exact term.

We considered asking for the case to be transferred to Brazil, but learned that the municipality did not want my father in Denmark, as they believed he hit the children. It is not uncommon for foreigners to request transfer of the case to their countries of origin, and the municipality's belief seemed to fuel a nefarious desire to keep the children in Denmark. When we combined that information with earlier facts, we got fearful: my daughter's Danish teacher harbored a strong feeling for her.

Requesting the transfer could jeopardize everything, since the municipality could deny the request and take permanent custody of the children.

We returned to the room, and a meeting was requested with my mother alone. Since she would be taking care of the children, the municipality wanted to be sure she was up to the task. But they simply forgot to ask relevant questions. She was asked why she would trust my word over the supposed word of my children, why she had never been to Denmark before, and what would happen if she fell down the stairs. If I had had doubts about the municipality's competence before, by then those doubts were resounding.

The children would leave their professional captivity the next day, March 7th, 2025, in the early afternoon. It was a long-awaited, hectic Friday. We left home early, heading to a small town across the fjord: *Kirke Hyllinge*. Our friend was living in a little house there and alternated weeks between Denmark and Sweden. The week she would spend in Sweden matched our forced departure from the house. Money was already running out, and this solution was essential to preserve what little financial foundation we had left.

## Chapter 7: The Two Homes

As soon as the children returned, my mother realized something deeply troubling: my daughter hadn't taken a single bath. Her hair and smell pointed to more than a week without one. At the professional family's house, their "baths" consisted of using the leftover water from the family's own children. My son, on the other hand, had only been bathed once during his stay. To make matters worse, my daughter told us she slept on a mattress on the floor, while her brother slept in the bed with the naked woman.

The house was filthy, and fleas took the opportunity to leave dozens of marks over my daughter's body. She also wasn't using the bathroom because no one helped her overcome her fear of it. As a result, she had a severe bout of diarrhea the moment she finally went to the bathroom at our place. She urgently needed a bath and a doctor.

Luckily, in the previous afternoon, we had received a visit from another family consultant hired by the municipality. She worked for the same company as the previous consultant who had been dismissed and was in charge of extreme cases. Upon arrival, she immediately warned us to cooperate, otherwise, we would never see our children again.

Once we explained the situation, showed her our home, and the children's drawings, she quickly said she would help us fix the mistake. It was clear in her eyes and in her words how much she disapproved the municipality's conduct. She was there again the next day, beside my mother, joining a video call with the on-call doctor.

There is a very specific window of time to need a doctor in Denmark, and it's a narrow one. Any medical issue after noon already makes it difficult to get an appointment. After 5 p.m., the only option is the regional emergency line, where it's nearly impossible to get an in-person doctor, whether at home or in a hospital. School vacation weeks are also problematic, because doctors go on vacation too.

Weekends are equally challenging. In fact, it's likely you'll never get care when you truly need it. And "care" doesn't mean "treatment".

Anyway, the doctor confirmed that my daughter had been bitten by numerous fleas and had severe diarrhea due to not using the bathroom. But all of that, by Danish standards, was "no big deal". Paracetamol cures everything, it heals, regenerates, revitalizes, wards off bad energy, boosts libido, and, best of all, is easy to pronounce at the pharmacy.

In the following week, my mother was in charge of taking the children to school. Lunchboxes packed, route planned, everything in order. Except for one detail: the Danish teacher. She didn't like seeing Brazilian food in their lunchboxes. Said it wasn't healthy and demanded that they bring two Danish-style lunchboxes instead. Naturally, she filed another complaint with the municipality.

I already knew the school would conspire with the municipality again. So, when my mother told me about the teacher's first complaint, I told her to take photos of the lunchboxes. Every time, the school would come up with some new complaint about my mother, who stayed calm and handled the situation beautifully in the following days. She had dealt with a terrible child before. She could surely handle that crazy teacher.

It was a wonderful moment when I got to show the photos of the lunchboxes after the municipality accused us of not sending enough food to school. I asked for the municipality's opinion about the photos. After a brief facial contortion, the caseworker said she was only repeating what the school had reported, and that she wouldn't do it again. That was the last time they ever mentioned the school in a meeting.

## Chapter 8: The Counterattack

On March 12th, we gathered our battle squad at the municipality for the long-awaited action plan. The municipality, however, hadn't counted on one particular participant: the Brazilian Embassy. The embassy attended the meeting representing the children's interests on behalf of the child protection council. The representative acted only as an observer and spoke in English. I had mentioned the translation problem to the embassy beforehand, which is why the representative didn't let the municipality know he was fluent in Danish.

It was a wise choice. Once again, it became clear that the translator wasn't doing her job, hiding crucial information from us and seasoning our words to taste.

The setting was almost the same, except for the new social worker assigned to the case. Since the children had been returned home, the case was transferred to another department, requiring a new person in charge from the municipality. She didn't smile, but carried the same bias, as if she were in a desperate race to prove that we were the monsters in the surreal narrative her colleague had pulled straight from the end of her digestive tract. She didn't even bother drafting the so-called action plan. But that wasn't a problem, our social worker knew exactly what to do.

She crafted a plan based on strategies that had worked with municipalities in similar cases. The plan involved supervised visits, monitored by each of the soldiers we had recruited. We would get to see the children, but under psychologically unfavorable conditions. Well, that's how the municipality's game works: psychological and financial attacks. At the slightest sign that parents seem emotionally or financially incapable of caring for their own children, the state conveniently invites someone else to take over. All "in the best interest of the child," they say. There's even a test called the *Forældrekompetenceundersøgelse* – FKU – to assess parental competence. If parents fail it, they lose custody. One of the test's main criteria is fluency in Danish. I affectionately nicknamed it Fuck U. The municipality called the action plan the

Safety Network.

The Safety Network's visitation plan was perfect, for them. It placed their interests at the center and left us in a vulnerable position. At least the children were safe with grandma, and the municipality still felt in control of the situation. And that, for the moment, was what mattered most. They needed to feel in control, and to believe we were cooperating with whatever nonsense they came up with.

The visits were far from easy. The pain of loss deepened with every opening and closing of the door. The assistants, though not strangers to us, were visibly uncomfortable being part of something so delicate, having to report in detail how each visit unfolded.

Days passed amid visits, tears, sleepless nights, and hopes rising and falling in an emotional sine wave.

I might have endured the visits if not for an unexpected incident: my daughter's mouth was badly inflamed. She needed dental treatment because of a root canal that hadn't been done correctly. The municipality had said she couldn't go to the dentist because we were forbidden to take her out of the house. As her condition worsened, one of our allies accompanied me to the dentist after we finally secured the benevolent municipality's blessing. It was agonizing to see my little girl screaming in pain as they extracted two still-rigid premolars to contain the infection.

Even worse was coming home knowing I couldn't stay with her. Our colleague was, once again, incredibly kind and stayed with me for a couple of hours. I left when my princess finally fell asleep on the couch. Completely shattered, I crossed the fjord and returned to our base in *Kirke Hyllinge*. I don't know which was stronger: my anger or my anguish. I opened the door and collapsed emotionally in front of my wife.

Couples need balance. If both are strong, that's good, but they can't both be weak at

the same time. My wife somehow gathered her strength after seeing me beaten up. We managed to keep our psychological front stable, and I found the space I needed to recover from that trauma.

I still can't imagine how she managed to rise like that. She had spent her birthday there, far from home and the kids, fighting not to depend on sleeping pills. Maybe that's exactly what "for better or for worse" really means. It's about balance. She kept the balance. She stood tall when I fell.

## Chapter 9: Synergy

On March 19th, we were once again sitting in a meeting with the municipality. The theater was the same, and so were the threats. Though I was quieter, almost apathetic, my wife was calm, collected, and more than ready to maintain the *status quo*.

According to the new caseworker, the police had confirmed the alleged abuse. Which was very strange, since there was nothing in our records, not a single official communication from the police. Unfortunately, any attempt at conversation would somehow get twisted into something related to the police.

Then things got even crazier: apparently, the municipality believed that our children weren't autistic, they claimed the kids had acquired autistic behavior after being beaten daily for years. The condition for getting them back was that they must show no more autistic behavior. We would return home, with my mother, and the children would have to transform according to the municipality's rules, otherwise, we'd lose custody permanently. After a heated discussion between our social worker and the municipality, the autism issue was conveniently set aside. We went home that same day, under supervision, of course, but the feeling was different this time. It was a day of relief. Whoever came by the house wouldn't feel discomfort; they'd see the fruit of the synergy that had cost us so much sweat to cultivate.

It was the day of my wife's "Danish grandma" as she liked to call herself. What a sweet old lady, and what a comforting hug! The Red Cross had helped us in many ways during our stay, and this time the help came in the most personal and loving form. In truth, everyone present that day played an enormous role in our journey and reminded us that, amid all the injustice and bias of that system, there were still good people, kind, friendly, and willing to fight for what's right. In the end, power always corrupts the weaks.

Along with our return came a new plan involving the Family Support Department.

A team of two municipal psychologists was assigned to our case. We had already dealt with this department before, and the psychologist we met at that time was an angel. I felt confident that we would finally get support from strong professionals.

The department functioned as a sort of annex, located elsewhere, loosely tied to the municipality and not as directly influenced by its biased politics. These psychologists wouldn't have access to our case through the same distorted lens as the others.

The first interaction took place at our home. The first psychologist arrived and, to our surprise, told us she had even lived in southern Brazil for a few months. She knew a bit about our culture and our food. Needless to say, she was in shock by the school's stance toward the children's meals.

As we told her everything and showed her the evidence, a tear welled in her eye. She could hardly believe what was happening. She also noticed a crucial point. Something both the school and the municipality had claimed was a lie: our children were not proficient in Danish.

Many of the municipality's accusations were based on stories the children supposedly told them. The problem is: our kids couldn't communicate well in Danish. My daughter could manage basic daily things, but she struggles with communication in general, regardless of the language. Add to that a language made mostly of drowning sounds, and you get extreme communication barriers. My son mostly guessed what people were saying and just replied "yes" to everything.

At the end of the visit, the psychologist told us she would do everything she could to help. She believed the supervised visits were hindering the family's recovery and that the Safety Network should be dissolved as soon as possible. Perfect! Finally there's someone inside the system who shared our view.

When the second psychologist visited, the children had fought a lot and were on the

edge. In a way, it was good. She got to see how much a disruption in their school routine threw them off balance. My son was especially agitated because the school, without consulting us, had canceled his gym classes in favor of Danish lessons at the same time. Gym classes were his favorite, and he was devastated by the change. The psychologist was in disbelief. The school had no right to make such a unilateral decision.

The cherry on top came when my son asked to speak with her. He picked up the tablet, opened Google Translate, and slowly said in Portuguese:

“When I’m at school, sometimes I feel good, sometimes I feel sad, and sometimes I feel tired. But I always feel more tired than good or sad.”

The school had claimed our children didn’t eat or sleep, and that they didn’t even have beds at home. That’s why every visitor was stunned when they saw our home: the kids had their own rooms, their own beds, and an entire house filled with toys and colorful drawings. They even slept in our room because that’s where they felt safest, and it allowed us to help them quickly during the night, which happened often.

My wife brought a folder full of drawings. She’s always kept everything our children have ever made. From our daughter’s cat sketches to elaborate diagrams of how to jump from the sofa to the beanbag, complete with realistically drawn parabolic trajectories. If the kids ever drew it, she still has it.

One drawing she showed was from the day our boy peed on the bathroom thermostat, strategically installed just 15 cm above the floor, right beside the toilet. The drawing showed, step by step, how he did it, how I went to calm them down (since the thermostat caught fire), how our amazing neighbor helped isolate the issue, how I replaced the blown fuse, and how I took my daughter to buy a new thermostat. The final drawing showed everyone happy at home. Sadly, he hadn’t

drawn the replacement part of the story because he wasn't with us at the time.

The psychologist tried calling the school to ask why they had canceled his favorite classes. No one answered, as usual. She was outraged by his statement, because both the school and the municipality were adamant that the children didn't sleep and were, therefore, sleepy. My son had just proven it wasn't sleepiness, it was fatigue. The exhaustion of his social battery. And no amount of tapioca or raw cucumber can recharge that.

Things worsened when we cross-checked that information with some messages I had exchanged with the school principal. In Denmark, there's a school program called SFO — *Skolefritidsordning* — where children stay at school all day, at a steep cost, of course. It's necessary for families where both parents need to work, which is almost the norm. The school constantly criticized us for not enrolling our children in the SFO program. They could barely handle our kids during regular hours. Imagine all day! And our children simply didn't have the social battery for such long time away from home. Both psychologists agreed with us.

The school loved to attack us for anything. They even complained that I was the one who most often picked up and dropped off the kids. In their view, such tasks should be equally divided between mother and father. To hell with what the school thinks! My wife already spent nearly all her available time with the kids. What was wrong with me doing the pickups and drop-offs? The psychologists saw no problem with that either. The persecution was clear. And even clearer was the school's lack of respect for our culture. The municipality was also as good at that. They even accused us of feeding our children with baby food. The baby food in question? Açaí with powdered milk. The first psychologist was visibly shocked.

We had wonderful moments with both the psychologists. The first focused on the emotional side, while the second, on the rational. We took full advantage of every session, sometimes at our place, sometimes at the municipal annex. We learned a lot

about our children and about ourselves. I dare say it was exactly the kind of help we had needed five years earlier, but which only came after senseless punishment. After all the trauma, it was too little. Too late.

## Chapter 10: The Last Hope

March 27th began with a glimmer of hope, one that didn't last long. The caseworker entered the meeting prepared for battle, determined to prove that we not only had beaten our children, but were still doing so every day. The embassy was still attending the meetings as an observer, representing the child protection council. We had decided not to reveal the council's letter (the one requesting transfer of the case to Brazil) but I was prepared to use it that day, depending on how things unfolded.

This time, the pseudo-translator didn't show up. To our surprise, the same translator from the infamous hearing appeared, but now, in person, and even more resolute. She did an exceptional job, demanding that the municipality explain every ambiguous or manipulative phrase. The caseworker was clearly unhappy with the situation.

If the caseworker never smiled, she also didn't show a single drop joy in good moments. When we had been allowed to return home, everyone in the room had cheered in unison. Everyone except her.

As soon as she launched into her usual police-themed tirade, I interrupted:

"There was no accusation from the police."

When she questioned me, I strongly replied:

"I know because I called both the police and my criminal lawyer. The case is on hold. There hasn't even been an investigation because they're waiting for a translator for the interrogation. Nothing will happen until that takes place."

To my surprise, my wife stood up and delivered the final blow, with that quiet fury only she can express:

"And we would like you to stop speaking on behalf of the police. You are not the

police!”

It was almost funny to watch the depraved caseworker’s expression while the translator rendered my wife’s words faithfully. This time, the hit landed hard. The woman deflated, apologized, and changed the subject. We celebrated silently.

At the end of the session, it was the emotional psychologist’s turn. She represented the Family Assistance Department. She spoke firmly, emphasizing that the children, contrary to what had been reported, were not proficient in Danish. She added that if the municipality truly wanted to observe the family, then it needed to allow the family to be a family. The so-called Safety Network made no sense and needed to be dismantled.

When she finished, the caseworker gathered all municipal staff for deliberation. Everyone except the psychologist. I felt a chill.

In truth, the psychologist was the only one with her eyes open to reality. She was the only strong person in that building. So strong that she wasn’t intimidated when excluded. She simply stood up and went with them anyway.

I can’t recall exactly how long that endless wait lasted. I was already thinking about using the letter, wondering if this case would drag on for another year, not uncommon in similar cases. When the municipal team returned, their superior took the baton.

Because of the case’s criticality, a more senior figure had become involved. She was older, calmer, and though her occasional cheerful tone annoyed me (there was nothing cheerful about this situation), she at least seemed intent on untangling the mess. Our social worker had managed to build a good rapport with her, earning us some small but vital victories. It was a strategic game, and, incredibly, we were playing it well. While I managed our side, our social worker was softening relations

with the municipality. We made a good team, no doubt about that.

At one point, our social worker had to step back a bit. It was expensive to keep her involved full-time, and as the case began to ease, she thought she could slow down. The new caseworker quickly changed her mind. But, not wanting to increase our financial burden, she waived her fees for the extra hours. "Let's just pretend the hours multiplied miraculously," she said. From then on, I would only pay for her physical attendance at municipal meetings.

Then, a near-unanimous wave of relief filled the room: the Safety Network was dissolved. The case was reclassified as a normal family support case, now under the psychologists' supervision only. Our chance had arrived.

"From now on, nothing prevents you from leaving," said our social worker.

We went home, relieved and ready for the next phase of our plan.

Easter in Denmark is like a tumbleweed rolling down an empty street: everything stops for an entire week, including the municipality.

We bought plane tickets for May 14th. I would take the family to Brazil and then return to Denmark to handle the remaining fiscal matters. The children had no idea about the plan. For them, we were going to Portugal for a short vacation, and from there grandma would return to Brazil. We packed our bags and went on with our normal-ish life. We told no one about our plan. Even though there was no legal barrier preventing us from leaving the country, we already understood: the municipality always finds legal support, even for acting illegally.

Only the Danish couple who had helped us from the very beginning knew about our departure. Farewells are always hard, but it felt good to say goodbye as a family. I would return shortly after, but that family farewell was comforting.

On the last day of school, my daughter mentioned she was going off for a few days in Portugal. Her Danish teacher came over to hug her. We noticed a very sad look on the teacher's face, the hug tighter than usual, her eyes on the verge of tears. I think she already knew it would be the last time she'd see my daughter.

We'll never know for sure. But one can't deny there was something very strong in her feelings.

## Chapter 11: Departure and Farewell

Everything that needed to go right actually went right when we left the country. We departed before dawn, and I believe it was an especially hard moment for my wife. She didn't get to say goodbye to anyone else. Not her wonderful Red Cross colleagues, her amazing physiotherapist, our dear Brazilian friends, our beloved family consultant (who, though dismissed early in the process, stayed in touch with me the whole time), or our kind neighbors. Everyone who had been part of our story was completely unaware of our plan. I would soon return to speak with them, but she wouldn't. We got in the car and headed for the airport, tense but determined to leave for good.

Everything went as perfectly as it possibly could, even though we forgot my son's sneakers, he didn't mind, delighted to be carried through the airport instead. My mother rescheduled her return ticket to match our flight, and the four tickets for us cost less than my upcoming solo return ticket to Denmark. The connection was extremely tight, but everything worked out thanks to a towering airport officer who spotted my son and ushered us into an empty priority line at passport control in Lisbon. The kids thought it strange that we were boarding in Lisbon. That's when we finally told them the truth. They cheered.

Just before the plane took off for Brasília, I received an official message in my Danish digital mailbox, the e-Boks. It was from a regional orphanage, notifying me of an investigation to assess my parental capabilities. It was likely a redirected case from the police, which happens when a complaint isn't critical or lacks solid evidence. Though the letter referred to an investigation, it didn't appear to be the dreaded parental competence test. Whatever it was, I didn't care in the slightest. I was taking my family home, and once I returned, there would be nothing left for the municipality to take from me. Except, perhaps, my pet mouse, who couldn't travel with us anyway.

Coming back alone was hard. Leaving them there, even knowing they were safe,

was painful. The process of moving out was simple but wrenching: I had to choose just a few things to pack and ship to Brazil. Everything else would be abandoned, sold, or donated. I contacted the Red Cross so they could come by after I left to collect whatever could be reused. I hoped to sell a few things before departure. One lady came by and marked the items she wanted to buy with sticky notes. She would return in early August to pick them up and pay. Since I had to keep paying rent until the end of August anyway, I saw no problem. I informed the neighbors and felt at peace with that plan.

Packing only a handful of our belongings was incredibly painful. Watching everything we had built be left behind was not easy, especially because it had all come from such an undeserved punishment. We would have to start over again. For the second time.

While handling the logistics, I went to the municipality for my next appointment with the emotional psychologist. I told her everything. She said the municipality was completely bewildered by how we behaved in meetings. They couldn't understand why we didn't get angry, why we didn't demand more rights, why we weren't aggressive like some parents, and especially why we cooperated with every request without resistance. She also told me that, during her first visit to our home, the municipality had instructed her to search everywhere. The school had reported that we were planning to flee the country and had already sold all our furniture. That was when she realized just how much the school had been lying.

She told me she had worked to persuade the municipality to close the case at that meeting. She said I had done the right thing by taking my family away, and once again, tears welled up in her eyes as I thanked her for everything she'd done for us.

I did the same at my session with the rational psychologist. It was wonderful to have one last conversation about how my body reacts to things that hurt me. I showed her a little waltz I had composed before selling my guitar, and she asked me what I felt

as I listened to it. It's amazing to see the effects of writing in the mind. Whether written in words, lights, or sounds.

As for the rest of the municipality, I sent them an email informing that my family was no longer in Denmark and that the upcoming meeting with the school would no longer be necessary. They never replied.

At the school, I went there to thank my son's teacher. She wasn't a specialist in autism, but she did everything she could to make my son's experience better. The assistant had been wonderful with him too, always trying to make him feel safe and welcome. It was a pity I didn't get to see her there one last time.

# Part III - The Reflection

## Chapter 12: The Other Side of the Fjords

My children were fortunate to always have good people around them. They first attended a private kindergarten, ironically cheaper than the public one (or less expensive, depending on how you look at it). There, the teachers were warm and attentive, regardless of diagnosis, culture, native language, or what was in their lunchboxes. Later, my son went to a public kindergarten, and things turned awful. Only one educator truly helped him, while the principal even demanded payment for food he wouldn't eat. She claimed that until his diagnosis was confirmed, he would be treated like any normal child. He even got hit by other kids normally with tree branches. I still remember what one principal said to me on the first day:

"Your son is such a sweet boy! I just wonder what will happen when the other kids start hitting him."

As for my daughter, she was enrolled in a school in *Roskilde* after the municipality administered a Danish exam right under my nose, without telling me it was a test and without informing me that they had no legal authority to place her in any school without my consent. Apparently, consent is optional when the end justifies the means.

It was a mix of emotions. Many teachers didn't understand my daughter's needs. They forced her to take a shower with the other kids and take part in games she didn't enjoy. But one teacher welcomed her like no one else ever had. He even accompanied her on her first day at the new school in *Jyllinge*, after a hard-won transfer. A truly incredible human being, a real teacher. I wish him nothing but the best.

We were surrounded by good people. Unfortunately, it took only a few bad ones, in

both school and municipality, for everything we had built to crumble before our eyes. The lonely days that followed played like a film reel of our time there, in that quiet place we once called home.

My daughter's Danish teacher wrote to me on the school system, Aula. She asked why my daughter hadn't come to school. I replied that she no longer lived in Denmark. The teacher asked me to stop by the school, she wanted to give my daughter some mementos. I told her my address was still the same and that she could leave whatever she wished there. She never replied, nor did anything arrive in the mailbox.

One day, I went to *Roskilde* to buy some new pans to take to Brazil. I had already sold the car, so I took the bus. Just like in the beginning, when I used to ride around looking for banana baby food with the old label for my son. Back then, he bit his lips to avoid eating. His mouth bled while I listened to the doctor over the phone saying, "Just keep trying; there's nothing else I can do."

The days went by, but it felt like I was rewinding the tape. I don't even remember what time I went to bed or woke up. Some nights I didn't sleep at all. I had no appetite and didn't want to leave the room. I just wanted to sleep and wait for the day I could go to Brazil again. I still had one more round trip ahead before leaving for good.

Things became clearer when I had to go to Copenhagen. The moment I stepped outside, I felt immediate relief. I realized I'd been like a frog in a pressure cooker. When I came back home, I decided: the next trip to Brazil would be the final one.

Returning to Denmark would cost me dearly, and I'd only do it to try to sell whatever I could from the house. I had just one month to manage it. Given my psychological state and the amount of work it would take just to cover the travel expenses, I decided it wasn't worth it. I told the neighbors to take whatever they

wanted from the house.

As I suspected, the real estate agency demanded that I remove the wall. According to them, anything I had installed had to be taken down. After failed attempts to negotiate, I told them the wall had been built before the lease began, therefore, it would stay. I added that I will no longer live in Denmark, and that if they didn't accept my move-out notice, I'd leave anyway. If the agency doesn't approve your departure, you can't rent another property there. As if I needed one more reason not to care.

They also insisted that my wife sign the move-out documents in person, even though she had officially left the country. They said they wanted to ensure she wouldn't come back to Denmark and find an empty house. I reiterated that she and the children had left, no longer had residence permits, nor valid social security numbers. Of course, that didn't help. When they went further and said that everyone on the lease had to sign the termination, I asked what they do when one of the tenants dies. After a brief silence, they said she could sign and send a scanned image instead.

Renting a house in Denmark is an achievement in itself. By law, landlords can demand up to seven months' rent upfront:

- Up to three months as a repair deposit;
- Up to three months as notice payment;
- And the first month's rent.

You pay first and live later. It's even common for tenants to take loans to cover the seven upfront months. And it's equally common for landlords to do everything possible not to return the deposit. In our first house, the landlord forged an invoice of more than 30,000 Danish kroner (about 4,000 euros) to paint one square meter of

the wall.

But this real estate agency wasn't going to come in second place in the scam race. They went further: they didn't cancel rent charges after I gave official notice. They took four months' rent for three months' notice. Buy three, pay four. Like certain supermarkets with sneaky price tags. Must be cultural.

On one hand, I was relieved to be leaving the house. The stress of moving out had pushed me to my limit. Dealing with Danes was manageable, as long as money wasn't involved. Once, they even forged a contract for horseback riding lessons for my children without telling me. When I asked to cancel, I was told I'd have to pay a penalty fee of about 8,000 kroner (roughly 1,000 euros) for terminating a signed contract. The reality? I had only gone there to visit the farm.

Our family consultant, with the best of intentions, had been researching equine therapy for the kids. She arranged for us to visit the stables one day. We left with a trial class scheduled, and an undisclosed unilateral agreement. We later decided it wasn't worth it, both for the high cost and the logistics, and informed them we wouldn't attend the trial class. That's when the blow came.

Looking deeper, I realized why: the municipality subsidizes such programs. That's why the setup worked that way. No one worries about contracts or fees, because in the end, the municipality pays for everything.

But I didn't qualify due to my higher income bracket. In Denmark, once you reach a certain tax level — *topskat* — the government assumes you have enough money not to need benefits. But it just forgets to consider that, after deductions, your net income can be lower than that of a middle-income worker who receives those very benefits. Someone has to foot the bill, right?

A special school costs around 400,000 Danish kroner per child per year. My two children would cost the state far more than they collected from me. The process also

includes operational costs that must be paid by the children's current school. Since schools receive funding per enrolled student, they wouldn't just lose the money from my kids, they'd also have to pay the transfer costs. Of course, that was never going to happen. Especially after Denmark introduced a law allowing regular schools to admit special-needs children, even when medical assessments recommend special education. Private schools, meanwhile, lack specialists in neurodivergence and are unaffordable for normal-working families.

In the end, Denmark is not for the middle class. Nor for the neurodivergent. A middle-class family in which the father and both children are autistic doesn't have much of a future there. Add to that a state-municipality alliance that holds full legal power over your children and no sensitivity to handle neurodivergence, and the size of the trap becomes clear.

Healthcare issues were another sad variable in this equation. It was always difficult to solve any medical problem: migraines, sinusitis, pneumonia, oral inflammation, early puberty, nodules, eating selectivity... it seemed like any condition that couldn't be treated with paracetamol was either ignored or forced to be treated with the holy Graal of all prescriptions.

When we all got pneumonia during the winter, with extreme high fever, the emergency doctor said over the phone that we should all just rest and take paracetamol. A fantastic colleague from work brought us food, delicious food, which he himself has cooked. He drove with his wife from a relatively distant city just to ensure we could have something to eat. At least the taxes were used to pave the road.

And yet, the fact that I loved that country puts me in a very delicate position.

## Chapter 13: The Distance and the Echo

Some say the opposite of love is hate. In truth, the opposite of love is apathy.

Love is a little engine that keeps you moving. Whether toward good or bad things. Those who do not love don't move, don't act, don't live. They stand still, indifferent. Perhaps our greatest act of movement was crossing the Atlantic. The love we shared brought us to those frozen lands, warmed up only by the heat of our family. It was never easy, not even close. We sacrificed so much in the hope of a better future, especially for our children. Always moving, always propelled by that same small motor called love.

When I look back on our story, I think of everything we did for one another. Always driven by love, always trying to do the right thing. In the end, where we're going matters less than getting there together.

Thinking about all this made me realize that the pressure cooker had been hissing long before I ever noticed it. As much as I still hold deep affection for Denmark, it simply doesn't offer what my family needs. I had to leave. I checked, for the billionth time, everything I would take on that final trip, then went to bed. That day had been particularly sad: I'd said goodbye to a Brazilian friend who had been with us through all those years. Watching him board the train, carrying a shared sadness in his eyes, broke me. Yet I felt immense gratitude for all the good moments we'd shared. I felt asleep hearing the song Saudosa Maloca, not before washing my eyes from the inside out.

Early in the morning, I had coffee with my neighbor, a dear friend. We talked as always, laughed, lamented, and hugged goodbye. I decided to stay out of the house and leave my luggage there as it was. I sat on the couch and waited for my ride to the airport.

The one picking me up was the wife of my Danish colleague. The same woman who

had referred us the extraordinary social worker, who had picked us up from the hotel when we first arrived, who had offered us her home while we searched for ours, who had been with us from the very beginning, and who stayed by my side while I watched over my little girl sleeping on the couch. Her husband, the colleague who helped me open a bank account, rent our house, and fill our days with his kindness and contagious positivity. I began my journey in Denmark with them, and I ended it with them. Our Danish angels.

I loaded my bags into the car, and we set off for the airport. That same feeling of relief flooded me again. The pressure lifted. I was leaving a life behind, but another one awaited me.

I said goodbye at the airport and moved forward. Everything went smoothly. I passed through security, and here I am, waiting for my first flight home. I'll pass through Lisbon once more, and I'm certain I'll sleep well this time. I board the plane and pull my phone from my pouch, searching for something to listen to during the flight. One song catches my eye, and I press play immediately. I've always loved video game soundtracks, and this one carries a special meaning.

When I first flew to Denmark, these very notes were touching my soul as the plane touched the land. It's a song that reminds me of the dreams I once had.

Now, six years later, I leave that gentle little place behind. The good memories are carefully packed away. The bad ones, I left locked inside what was once my home, but became my prison.

I take off to the sound of those same notes. Not to remember the dreams I once lived, nor the ones abruptly stolen, but to remind myself that I don't need wings, because I still have so many other dreams left to fly.

I glance at my watch. It's Friday, June 13th, 2025. What a memorable day to finally

wake up from a nightmare.

# Epilogue

The children are doing relatively well. After returning to Brazil, they were finally enrolled in a school equipped to meet their needs. My daughter began the treatment that had been so tenderly denied to her countless times in Denmark. My son said he's happy here because he no longer has to guess what people are saying to him.

Of course, not everything is joy. They both still carry the weight of trauma, especially my daughter. Every now and then she tells us a new piece of some cruelty she endured, and I wonder if we'll ever truly know everything that happened to them. The municipality even told her that all of it, everything, was her fault. That was in the very first days, when they asked us to tell the so-called adapted truth.

Throughout the process, the municipality managed to have several conversations with my daughter. She told them she had bad thoughts and didn't want to talk about them. They decided those thoughts must be about her family, when in reality, they were born of the guilt she'd been forced to swallow. All in the name of her safety, of course.

The municipality not only said, but also wrote, on a whiteboard I photographed, that the children would develop mental problems if the observed situation continued. What they failed to grasp was that their own inhuman actions were precisely the observed situation. It was March 12th. The children hadn't even returned home yet. They were still trapped in the cycle of supervised visits and the school's willful blindness. Naturally, they were emotionally shattered. But it was already clear that neither the municipality nor the school would ever admit fault. This wasn't about professionalism, it was about character.

The worst part was constantly hearing the municipality and the school insist that the children were better off without us. When I later told the psychologists about it, they

were horrified. It was obvious, they said, that the kids had entered what they called defense mode: a state in which even their emotions shut down. The kids confirmed that they had spent their days crying, fighting, and begging to come home.

My children were punished from start to finish. By the school, by the municipality, by the teacher's home, and by the so-called professional family. The warden of that house yelled at them repeatedly, saying that she was in charge now, and they would obey. What a professionalism! Almost as fine as the municipality's.

But it's pointless to extract details from the children without the purpose of helping them heal. If anyone needs those details, it will be a therapist. I just need them to be well. I have no intention of pursuing legal action. Pursuing our way out of Denmark was enough.

Even after our definitive return to Brazil, I was still surprised by unimaginable situations. The real estate agency, for instance, decided it would be helpful to enter our home during the paid rental period to "dispose" of everything inside. One of the neighbors called to warn me of their little plan, complete with a generous invoice for their noble effort. At least I managed to formally authorize the neighbors, through the agency, to go in and take whatever they could. In the end, I still received an extravagant bill, which found its natural home in the virtual trash of my inbox.

I don't know whether everything in the house was actually donated and, to be honest, I don't even want to know. Considering I couldn't sell half the items that were already set aside, because the agency was in such a hurry to clear the house with two full months of rent already paid, I was furious enough. They recently threatened to send a collection agency after me, and even sent another smaller invoice that I didn't even bother to translate in full.

The bank also pulled the rug from under me. They decided I was conducting illegal financial operations in Denmark and closed my account. The illegal operation, according to them, was registering my bank account as the payment receiver for my

wife's benefits. The government uses bank account links for that. Since she couldn't open an account herself, I registered mine for both of us, otherwise, we'd lose the small family benefit the state paid for the kids.

It wasn't even the first time. Once, they froze my account, claiming money laundering, because the company I worked for paid me from its bank in Ireland into my Danish account. They said that, since I'm from a corrupt country, this was suspicious and that I had to prove the company's finance department had chosen that route. I decided then to prove just how filthy their opinions, pulled straight from their own asses, really were.

Another time, I tried switching banks. A major Danish bank told me that it would be very difficult for a Brazilian who receives income from outside Denmark to open an account, echoing the same argument I'd already heard. The irony? The largest money-laundering scandal in European history, around 800 million euros laundered between 2007 and 2015, was orchestrated through a Danish bank: *Danske Bank*. But I digress.

The problem with the account closure was the domino effect it caused, starting with refunds. In Denmark, you prepay for months of many services, so when you cancel, you're owed reimbursement.

Of course, I didn't receive a single krone back from the internet provider, though at least they canceled the service. The mobile company didn't cancel my line at all; instead, they kept sending me invoices, each kindly handled by my digital flush. The electric company was the only one that contacted me and refunded me without bureaucracy. The water company, on the other hand, decided to bill me for an additional period. They haven't threatened me yet, but my toilet awaits eagerly.

Despite trying not to care about these things anymore, I'll admit there's still one mystery I can't help but wonder about:

What the hell happened to my wall?