

Alice # 85

It started as just one night.

The universe had other plans for us though. A little being had been created. Motherhood hadn't been on my agenda. I wanted a career and travel. I believed that the universe worked in mysterious ways to make sure we ended up just where we needed to be. When he begged me to keep it, when his mother begged me to keep it - how could I not?

I was 19 and he was 12 years my senior. He had been told he would never be a father when he had gone through IVF with a previous partner. We were having a miracle baby.

He was very charismatic but the reality of it was I barely knew him. My family were supportive but sceptical. My mother had heard stories about him but I was too head strong too listen. I didn't know how much he drank or how many bongs he went through each day. I was working. I was going to uni.

It slowly just became my life. It snuck up on me really. How angry he would get. When he was on his way home and obviously on a war path his friends would text me a warning. I would delete and go to bed.

He would come home with a torn shirt or a bloody face. He was always in fights. He would always come home and want to fight with me. Things would be thrown, words would be said. Things would get worse. I was two days from giving birth to our second daughter when he held me by throat. Pushed up against the wall. Struggling to breathe.

There were times I tried to leave. Sometimes I believed his apologies and desperately wanted to have a normal family. Other times I remembered his compound bow he kept below our bed. The bow he told me he would shoot me with if I ever left and tried to take his kids away from him. "You'll never walk away from me." A threat I had heard so many times.

Finally it came. The last night. The night the neighbour who lived behind us would save me. She rang my mother. She was scared that this would be the night he would kill me. He was screaming that he was going to. My babies were screaming. I just wanted to leave.

My mother arrived. There was no hiding it now. The bag I had packed to escape was strewn across the lawn. The back door had been kicked in by him and the house looked as though a gang had gone through and ransacked the place. He had thrown a tackle box at me and it was strewn across the house. He had taken my phones and smashed them against walls so I couldn't call for help. He took my keys so I couldn't drive the car. He had smashed chairs on walls. He had kicked in an internal door as well as the outside door. That was his level of intent to get me as he screamed he would kill me. Somehow my mother got me and the babies into the car. He followed us.

For hours we waited for the police to arrive as he pounded on doors and windows. He wanted to kill me. He wanted his children. There was a whole lot of F's and C's in everything he screamed.

The police came. He stared in the window the whole time they took my statement. I have no words to describe the wild look of intent in his eyes. How I could be honest?

"No, this doesn't happen all the time," I muttered.

"No, I don't want him charged," I whispered.

"I just want him to leave me alone," I quietly pleaded.

How could I? He is the father of my children. I didn't want to be a victim. They asked me to take out an AVO and I said no. I continued to say no for weeks after. He would come to my house and cry. He was worried he would go to jail because of past convictions. I refused to turn up to court. I begged the police not to pursue it. I didn't want an AVO. I didn't want to be one of those women. I didn't want to be one of those families. I was embarrassed. But everyone had seen now so I wasn't going back.

The matter was dropped. As soon as that happened things ramped back up again. He knew where I lived. He would come over and just walk straight in if I didn't lock the doors. It wasn't unusual for him to call me 20 times a day or more. If my car was not in my driveway the phone calls would not stop. I would get friends to pick me up so I could leave my car there. I wasn't safe in my own home so would stay with friends.

I had an AVO for three years and then the court refused to extend it even though there had been breaches they were minor and never prosecuted.

We have children so this is never over. The Family Court has made sure of that by granting him shared custody with me even though the report by the court's independent psychologist determined he should only have supervised access.

But I am stronger now and can realise how I was gaslighted for the four years we were together. He had filled with me so much self-doubt. Now I have a new partner and we are building a life together. We are raising strong and resilient children who we love and protect, who now get to see a healthy loving relationship based on mutual respect.