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Getting Away

by Jess

He came on strong at first. Our relationship developed at a fast pace, faster than any of my other relationships and friendships. The compliments seemed excessive and premature. I even questioned his sincerity and instant adoration. He idealized me. I could do no wrong. I was unlike any other woman he'd ever known. I was better, kinder, smarter, more talented and more loving. Only I could truly understand his pain (which was caused by his family and Ex's) and see into his misunderstood heart. I was his hero - not like all his past lovers who were so nasty and abusive to him.

His previous girlfriend was crazy and had a restraining order on him for no reason, so he said. She was a drug addict, he told me. I heard all about her, but he claimed he was the victim and I believed him. I ignored the inexplicable rage episode that came out of nowhere on our 2nd date. In the beginning, I ignored all the episodes of rage. He always managed to explain them away or pretend they never happened. It all seemed like too much, but I ignored that gut feeling and continued to be lured by his charisma. At first he would say these tantrums were triggered by one of his many terrible past experiences, and then they became my fault. Soon he blamed me for everything and forgot most of the things I remember happening, which made me feel crazy. He denied things I remember well, such as when he told my parents I was a drug addict, and that I threatened to kill him with a knife. Nothing even close to this ever happened. Nor was I a drug addict. At first he stood by these stories, and eventually claimed he never said it. He was delusional, and tried to turn everyone against me with lies.

He was not my friend. There was no conversation. No affection, no appreciation, no attention, no honesty on his part. He said I contributed nothing and had nothing to offer. But I owned 86% of our house - cash, I am an accomplished athlete, well educated, involved in the community, and hold a steady job. He never supported anything I did or cared about, and tried to control everything about me. He wouldn't let me eat when I was hungry, drink when I was thirsty, or sleep when I was tired. He would get mad if I texted my mom, checked the weather, used saline for my contact lenses, or got up from a movie we were watching to refill my tea. He said I sucked at everything I liked to do. He told me not to do the things I enjoyed. He wouldn't commit to doing anything with me. He'd say, "you just do the same stuff over and over which is boring". He told me I was too stupid to handle the demands at work. But I was doing great at work - It was the only thing I had to look forward to because he had no part in it. He sent me emails at work to tell me that my friends and family didn't like me. Sam, Emily, Lindsay, Liz, Erin, Seth, my parents, my brother, the entire town didn't like me. He actually said the entire town didn't like me. All the people whom he knew I care about most didn't like me, so he said. He told me it was my fault the dog had died. The truth is, the dog was hit by a car and I wasn't even there. He demanded to go through my emails and phone. But where was he out into all hours of the night? I don't dare ask. He suffocated me with neediness or was completely shut off, cold, and distant. There was no middle ground; no stability. Sex was one-

sided; I gave everything. He even convinced himself I cheated on him when I didn't. He told me I came from a family of mental illness - which is not true. He told me it was my fault, because of the things I said and did, that he treated me the way he did. He blamed me for having anger issues. He told me I would be better off if the rest of my life was spent alone in the middle of nowhere because I didn't know how to be a friend. Anytime I tried to say anything about how I felt he just blew up and started rambling what I called "verbal diarrhea". He just yelled at and blamed me, and then threatened me with things like "I can't wait to tell everyone all about you".

I couldn't count on him for anything. He never would show up when he said he would, and if he did he would likely throw a tantrum. Every plan, event, gathering, I was worried he'd have a meltdown just before and I wouldn't get to go. This happened nearly every time I had plans with friends or family. What was supposed to be fun became ridden with anxiety for me. He was always late to our short-lived counseling sessions; he quit as soon as she told him we wouldn't get anywhere until he stopped being so controlling and aggressive towards me. He quit because he said he couldn't "trust" her anymore after that. A few more months passed after he quit counseling, and I ended up in the Emergency Room with heart problems. The doctors asked me if there was anyone around who could come be with me. Our house was 5 miles down the road, and he was home. I called him and asked him to come be with me, but he didn't. So I told the doctors that I didn't know anyone in the area. I didn't tell my parents I was in the hospital because I didn't want them to worry. They were already worried about me enough. He knew where I was, but he called my parents and frantically asked them where I was, told them I was missing. So of course they called me, asking where I was, and I told them I was in the hospital with heart problems. I spent 7 hours in the ER getting all sorts of scary tests run only to find nothing wrong. When I got home he was in bed, had made himself dinner, and left nothing for me but the dirty dishes. The lights were off throughout the entire house, he didn't even bother to open his eyes to ask me if I was ok. A few days later, my dad asked me if I thought it might be stress. That is when I decided to leave.

I spent the following year with a counselor coming up with a plan to leave. When the day came, the plan backfired and I needed help. Jake had never been physically violent with me before so it wasn't anticipated, but as I was getting in my fully packed car he grabbed me and threw me against the car, and we got into a fist fight. I had never been in a physical fight before. I managed to get myself into the car and lock the doors, and all I could think to do was call 9-1-1. When I called 9-1-1 I remember shaking so much that it was hard to get my finger to line up with the numbers on the phone to actually dial the 3 digits 9-1-1. I just kept saying to the woman on the phone, "I need help... I need help". And she would say OK, what's wrong. All I could say was "I need help". Finally I got the words out "for domestic violence". When the police showed up, they arrested me because I appeared to be the aggressor. The police were not able to evaluate the scene. My car was packed, my glasses were broken on the ground, and I was locked in the car. I was hysterical, in a way I have never in my life experienced. They placed a restraining order on me, and charged me with simple assault. I should have been taken to the hospital based on my emotional state. In fact, I took myself to the hospital the next morning. But instead, after being returned to the house from the police station, the cop stood on the front step with Jake and waited

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for me to drive away. The police did not ask me if I had any place to go. Thank god I had my parents 1.5 hours away, but I shouldn't have been left to drive a car. I had major bruising on my arms that night from where Jake had grabbed me and thrown me against the car. My mother took photos. In court, Jake was full of stipulations to the judge. "If she's on her best behavior for 2 weeks, then I will consider letting her come home part time for a few months. If she's still on her best behavior during that time we can reevaluate letting her come home permanently." The judge laughed. The charges were dropped. The thing was... I didn't want to go back to that house. The reason we were in court in the first place was because he got physically violent with me when I tried to leave. He used the arrest to make me out to be a huge monster. He told everyone he was abused which was why I was arrested. His friends and family believed him, and I was abandoned. I never heard from any of them again. Not once. He told me over and over I called the police on myself. The experience of being arrested was surreal.

The police gave Jake all the power that day and turned my life into a living hell. He thrived on that power and the situation became exponentially worse. The mistake of arresting me was dangerous because I then had to sneak out of that house under even worse circumstances. The 2nd attempt to leave ended up being dangerous, and my family and I were scared of what could happen if he found us moving my belongings out. I called my lawyer from the arrest to ask him if we should notify the police that we would be in the house. There would be a large Uhaul in the driveway, along with 3 big trucks. We were scared that if someone saw and asked Jake about it or worse yet, if he saw himself, things could escalate very quickly. The lawyer said not to notify the police because he didn't trust them based on the previous arrest. So we went through with moving out, scared that he would show up and hurt us. Because I had to sneak out, I didn't pack a thing before he left for work that day. All my clothes, kitchen stuff, wall hangings, everything was still in its place. I waited until he left for work before I began packing anything. My dad and his three brothers pulled in the driveway as soon as he was gone. Thankfully we were able to get out while he was at work and without him knowing.

The scariest part was how much he exploded once I left. I was living in fear. I did not trust him. He was threatening me that he was going to show up at my parent's house to "see" me and take the dog. We had the police phone number by the phone. We spent the entire summer with the doors and windows locked, and my car hidden so that if he did show up he wouldn't know if I was there or not. He continued threatening me, so I had to call the police again (the same ones who arrested me - in the town I had left) to ask them for help getting him under control.

Thankfully they were able to help me that time because the threats stopped then. He immediately jumped into another fast paced relationship, and acted as though I had no ownership in the house; ignoring requests from my lawyer to sign paperwork to sell the house for more than a year. I had to sue him because he refused to cooperate in the sale of the house. I was 86% cash owner. I offered him 50% cash to settle so I could be done with him, but he refused the offer. We went to trial where he demanded in writing that he get 97% of the money. He lost big-time, getting a mere 10% back. The judge told him he needed a guardian. The realtor and lawyers saw enough

tantrums that I didn't have to say a word. When he got the court order he emailed me to tell me that "its people like you that are wrong with this world".

It was a painful experience to accept who he truly is. It really fucked me up for a while. I felt crazy and sick for several years. He made me believe that I was so alone because I was a terrible person. Thankfully, I left him. My friends and family rallied to help, support, and love me. I am free now. I am safe now.