Ingrid and Scott met overseas in Ingrid’s home city. Scott was taking a break from a job that he said had caused him post-traumatic stress disorder and a persistent back injury, for which he received benefits and self-medicated using marijuana and medicinal painkillers. Ingrid has post-graduate qualifications and was working in a well-paid position at the time. The relationship developed quickly and Ingrid was soon pregnant.

During the pregnancy Scott resigned from his job while Ingrid continued to work. Ingrid found that she often had to ask Scott and his friends not to smoke marijuana near her. After the birth, they lived with Ingrid’s mother who helped with the baby. Ingrid received part-paid maternity leave, which she used to support the family. Scott refused to make any contribution to rent or other living expenses and, when asked, would angrily yell and throw things, including a computer on one occasion. Ingrid felt fearful of these early behaviours, but didn’t react, trying not to hurt Scott’s pride or add to the damaging effects of his job.

Scott persuaded Ingrid to move to Australia where he grew up. He went ahead alone to prepare for the family’s arrival, and Ingrid and the baby were to follow when Ingrid’s visa issued, and the baby was around nine months old. Scott did very little in that time: he lived off friends, failed to look for a job and eventually sought help from his father to find accommodation. Scott then insisted on returning overseas to collect Ingrid and the baby.

Once back in Australia, Scott pressured Ingrid into paying off his credit card debt, which she was not liable for. Ingrid’s maternity leave money soon ran out. Ingrid also understood that Scott had or was due to receive a significant lump-sum compensation payment from his employer for his post-traumatic stress disorder but he kept the detail from Ingrid. One day Scott fell in the kitchen, further injuring himself, resulting in his increased use of marijuana and painkillers, which Ingrid observed made him angry and depressed.

Increasingly, Scott would verbally and emotionally abuse Ingrid and damage household property. Ingrid felt isolated with a very young child, no family or friends nearby, and no car licence. Scott made frequent sexual demands of her that she found distressing and painful.

In time, Ingrid was employed again, Scott enrolled in a university course, and the child went to day care. Scott also began rehabilitation for his injury and psychologist appointments for his post-traumatic stress disorder. Ingrid felt that life had become more normal and bearable until one day Scott threw a piece of furniture around the kitchen in a rage about medical expenses that had to be paid to treat a condition Ingrid had developed. Ingrid took the child into the bedroom and locked the door. Scott never struck Ingrid or the child, but would raise his hand menacingly in anger. Scott was well over double Ingrid’s weight.

When not at university, Scott spent more and more time during the day and night drinking and taking drugs with his friends while Ingrid worked and cared for the child. Without asking Ingrid, Scott invited a female friend to stay because she needed somewhere to live. Scott’s drug taking made his behaviour more abusive and irrational. He would accuse Ingrid of lying about her whereabouts, and, despite her resistance, his sexual violence towards her escalated. He wrote her a letter complaining that the child was taking up too much time and that she was not paying him enough money.

Ingrid reached emotional breaking point and sought psychological help through her employer. She moved into another bedroom and they began living separately under the one roof. Scott discovered from reading Ingrid’s emails that she had made a male acquaintance. He became very aggressive, repeatedly texting her (and the male friend), demanding that she leave without the child, reminding her of his weapons licence, and threatening suicide. Ingrid could not afford other accommodation and refused to leave the child in Scott’s care. While she had no intention of leaving her job and uprooting the child from day care – and in any event had no funds – to return overseas, Scott had hidden her passport, which she managed to retrieve before finally leaving.

With the help of support services, Ingrid and the child were housed temporarily in a motel then moved to a shelter. Inevitably this caused upheaval with work and day care, but Ingrid was grateful for the assistance she received with visa matters and an application for a protection order. Initially acting for herself (while Scott had a lawyer), Ingrid was unable to obtain a temporary order and the matter went to trial, for which she was granted Legal Aid. Ingrid describes an intimidating courtroom experience where: during cross-examination, she was yelled at by Scott’s barrister, and the Magistrate was unable to respond effectively; she was not allowed to give evidence of the sexual violence because she was told it could no longer occur due to separation; and she was told that because there was no physical violence or harm, the texting, suicide threats and reference to a weapons licence were minimised and not considered sufficiently abusive to establish domestic and family violence. The court dismissed Ingrid’s application and she was denied a protection order.

Despite strict security controls, Scott was able to locate the shelter where Ingrid and the child were living. Concerned about the risk to the shelter and its other residents, and the complications associated with moving to another shelter, Ingrid decided to stay with friends. Again, Scott revealed to Ingrid an address in the vicinity. Distraught, Ingrid searched for an explanation, and then discovered Scott had sewn a GPS tracking device in the back of a doll that he’d insisted Ingrid take for the child. Ingrid went immediately to the police and gave a statement. Initially police told her she couldn’t get a protection order because there was no physical violence, but she persisted and the court granted a temporary protection order. At the final hearing, Ingrid was unrepresented and Scott’s lawyer offered a protection order without any admission of facts. Ingrid resisted because she knew that Scott’s behaviour was abusive and he should be held responsible. The Magistrate declined to make a final decision on the basis that Family Court matters were pending; and instead extended the temporary order. While an interim parenting order was put in place for shared care, there are multiple problems regarding changeover and other arrangements and Scott flouting the order. The matter was referred to mediation, however precluded from proceeding due to risk of domestic and family violence.

Scott soon sought a cross order against Ingrid fabricating evidence of her beating and raping him, which at the final hearing she was able to resist using audio and social media records she had diligently gathered, and ultimately was granted a final protection order, however the child and others are not listed as protected parties. Before the hearing, Scott had also tried to run Ingrid over in his car. Scott continues to breach the good behaviour provision of the protection order and the terms of the parenting order. Scott has never been charged with breach, or with any criminal offences relating to the stalking and monitoring, attempting to run over Ingrid, or the false affidavit evidence.

Ingrid agreed to settle final parenting orders with Scott, avoiding a trial. Ingrid finds changeovers distressing and demeaning: Scott yells commands at her. She is concerned about how they will jointly manage ongoing parenting decisions and arrangements in the best interests of the child while she endures ongoing abuse. Scott is still unemployed and demands that Ingrid pay him child support. Ingrid would like to visit her home city with the child, but expects that Scott will take any steps to prevent them from going. They were together for only three years, and yet Ingrid feels she and the child will live with Scott’s abuse and its harmful consequences for many years yet.