

Emma\* is a 32-year-old woman living in a small regional town in Western Australia, hours from the nearest city. Emma met her partner, Mark\*, through mutual friends. Early in the relationship, Mark overwhelmed Emma with affection, grand gestures, and declarations of love, pressuring her to move in with him away from her family and friends. Cut off from her own support networks, she quickly became reliant on Mark for transport, finances, and connection to the wider world.

The abuse began subtly. Mark would shout and slam doors, progressing to punching walls when angry. Over time, his outbursts became more frequent and violent. During one incident, Mark grabbed Emma's mobile phone and smashed it on the kitchen tiles, accusing her of "texting behind his back." This left her without a way to call for help or even contact her family, reinforcing her isolation.

On another occasion, after Emma returned home later than expected from a grocery run in town, Mark shoved her against the pantry door and punched the wall next to her face, leaving a deep hole in the plaster. Another time, when she hesitated to agree with him during a conversation about money, he threw a mug at her, leaving her with some cuts. She didn't seek medical help, afraid of the questions and of who might find out. The children were initially not present during these incidents. Over time, Mark's violence escalated, and he would yell aggressively and throw objects around the room regardless of whether the children were there or not. Eventually, they witnessed him physically assaulting Emma.

The physical abuse continued to escalate, with Mark frequently striking Emma across the face and pushing her to the floor. Following the violence, Emma would wear sunglasses to hide the bruising and make up stories to explain the injuries. Her isolation was compounded by the fact that guns were stored on the property, legally owned, but easily accessible to Mark. He once threatened to shoot Emma for intervening when he was physically disciplining the children.

The only medical professional nearby was the town's GP, who was close with Mark's mother. Emma didn't feel safe disclosing the abuse, and when she came in with bruised ribs, she said she'd fallen while carrying washing down the back steps. Living remotely, Emma had few other options. The community upheld a strong "what happens at home stays at home" attitude. She feared being judged or labelled a troublemaker if she spoke out, and she worried that Mark's well-connected family would turn people against her.

\*Names have been changed to protect identity.