

2022-20-Thompson

He toa taumata rau

A hand traveled down her back and a defeated sigh slipped from her lips. Caught in self conflict as she battled the instinct to blame herself for dropping her shoulders in compliance the minute he began to insist.

If anything, he deserved to be praised for putting up with her at all let alone all throughout this quarantine. She wasn't desirable, she wasn't wanted. When they first met she was an insecure girl, too skinny and following a passion that wasn't her own. He was much too good for her. A med student with a life plan, top of his class, so wise, so put together.

He was a good man, she knew he was. She remembered the first few dates, the flowers, the text just to say he was thinking about her. The I love you's... that seemed to have slipped away, like the sleeve of her shirt as she stood in a daze, a blank expression painted across her face, unable to move, unable to speak. Just stuck.

Some days, just after his anger boiled over onto her, a dam would burst inside of him and the apologies would come rushing out like the water crashing through its broken barricade. 'It will never happen again... I promise'. A promise so empty then why so convincing?. He was trying to do better, he was... wasn't he?

Those words, the if's and the buts, were powerful. 'If you didn't have me you would be a failure'. 'But you're nothing special, I deserve the world for putting up with you. This is the least you can do for me in return'. He was aware that if he used his words in just the right way he could truly convince her that she was making up each and every problem in her head. With nowhere to escape to in the clutch of lockdown she began to let go. His words had such a grasp over her, they took her and held her against her will. Trapped her in a glass cage, able to see the world around her, yet blocked by a transparent barrier from experiencing it for herself.

She had lots of time to observe the things around her. To become aware of patterns. She found comfort in searching for specific moments. Small capsules of time that hold a turning point.

Like the moment they were at the breakfast table, a simple morning, a breeze flowing through the open window that sat over the stove. In one moment it all changed. An accidental knock and

the coffee took its path, down his jeans onto the floor. The screams began. She felt like they never really stopped from that morning on. It was only one moment. Like the moment in one split second she made one decision, she said no, she said no and it happened anyway, if she had only said yes. She did, from then on, she never refused him again. An overwhelming feeling of ownership flushed over her as she watched the crystal clear drops spread across the pillow that supported her head. Then there was the moment she looked in the mirror and didn't recognise her reflection. She saw only those words of his. They had become her, they had become her worth and from that moment that's all she ever saw in herself. It's these little moments that add up over time to become a woman's life.

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1 in 3 women in New Zealand have experienced a form of physical or sexual violence at the hands of a romantic partner. 55% have experienced psychological or emotional abuse also via a romantic partner.

New Zealand has the highest rate of Domestic Abuse in the OECD and what's more is **80%** of these cases go unreported. The Covid19 lockdown saw an increase in Domestic Abuse. Giving women nowhere to escape to.

As a country we need to look at how we are approaching the topic of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against women. Are there enough resources out there to guide and help women in this situation? Are we spreading a vast amount of awareness about IPV? Listening to and validating those who feel their story isn't enough to be cared about? Emotional abuse is still abuse.

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Bravery has many resting places.

By Lucy Thompson

Resources

New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse:

<https://nzfvc.org.nz/frequently-asked-questions>

Ideas Room:

<https://www.newsroom.co.nz/ideasroom/the-hierarchies-in-nzs-domestic-violence-problem>

NZ Herald:

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/family-violence-525000-new-zealanders-harmed-every-year/LFZAMQ5JZKUV4O3PG7MWWUEUKY/>