



ABIGAIL'S SCARS ARE A CONSTANT REMINDER OF THE ATTACK, WHICH LEFT HER WITH A PUNCTURED LUNG, BROKEN RIBS AND FRACTURED VERTEBRAE AND CHEEKBONE

'HE BEAT ME AND LEFT ME FOR DEAD. NOW I'M THE ONE IN HIDING'

Abigail Blake suffered life-changing injuries at the hands of her violent husband. After a six-month prison stint, he is free and she lives in constant fear of him tracking her down. How is this justice?

AS TOLD TO LAURA SILVERMAN PHOTOGRAPHS: CLAIRE WOOD

This summer I spent 24 hours in hiding with my three-year-old son Thomas*, terrified that his father would come for us. That night, closeted in a hotel room, I couldn't sleep. Knowing my estranged husband was out of prison reignited all my fears and anger, and triggered memories of the attack that had happened almost two years ago to the day – the day when Thomas's father Sebastian Swamy beat me at our home and left me for dead. In June this year, I was told that Sebastian would be released from prison after just six months.

On 31 July he would be free to travel, unaccompanied and unmonitored, to Surrey, where he would then have to check in with his probation officer. He is monitored by a GPS tracker and has a curfew, but during his free hours he can do whatever he likes. Even now, despite a restraining order, I'm terrified he could come back and find me – there is nothing anyone can say to convince me that I am safe. He can live his life as a free man, whereas mine has changed for ever. He attacked me, and yet I'm the one on the run, constantly fearing for my life. It hadn't always been like this. When I met Sebastian in May 2014 through a mutual friend, he seemed charming. He drove to visit me in Cheshire from Berkshire, where he

had a flat, to take me out to an expensive restaurant for our first date. 'Treat yourself like a princess,' he said. 'You deserve to be taken care of and looked after.' At the end of the meal, he tapped down his pockets. He had forgotten his wallet. I thought nothing of it and picked up the bill. It should have been a warning sign. At the time, I had a great job as an operations manager at Manchester Airport, a lovely house and supportive friends. The only thing I lacked was a partner. My parents had just split up after 46 years and I was heartbroken. Then Sebastian appeared. Two months later, I was cooking dinner for us at his flat and opened what I thought was the cutlery drawer. I found bundles of letters

about arrears and debt collectors. I confided in a friend, who told me to run for the hills. But I felt sorry for him. He assured me that he was paying it all off. After five months together, we got married. But even when he sold his flat in Berkshire and moved in, he never offered to contribute to the running costs of the house. At least he got on well with my son Toby* and my friends found him fun and generous – he paid for their drinks with my card when we went out. However, when Sebastian drank, he became violent. He'd head-butt me like a bull and call me names. Once, when he offered to look after Toby, I came home to find him passed out on the sofa, empty wine bottles across the →

*CHILDREN'S NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED