

title: Exhale

author name: A. Upton

blurb:

Alice has been in an abusive relationship with her boyfriend Ron. How will she get free? Can she save her son and herself? Will she survive another episode? ~~This is a~~ short story about Alice's need to fight and survive in order to breathe again.

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full story:

Alice was struggling to breathe.

Her hands were trembling. She noticed the sweat each time she touched her phone.

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She dropped the phone as he banged against the door again. She pushed the knuckle of her thumb into ~~the palm of her other hand,~~ trying to somehow massage everything better.

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She was walking in a circle in the tiny bathroom she had locked herself in, going nowhere. Her heart felt like a massive bomb ready to explode, with mini bombs ticking away inside her ears, her neck, and her stomach.

~~Her,~~ breathing ~~was~~ so shallow and fast her brain was barely registering the oxygen. She could taste salt.

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*Think, think, focus, breathe and follow the plan.* The phone wouldn't keep still while she tried to select the right phone number.

“Help, this time he will kill me.” The words whispered into the phone were, almost unrecognisable and got lost in shallow gasping, and tears.

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“Alice, hiding will get you nowhere. I’m getting in one way or another.” Ron mocked her. Alice dropped the phone without clicking the end button.

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*Should I open the door? Will it hurt less? Where did he go, the charming Ron, I met a year ago? He was confident in his beliefs, loyal to his family, and his dreams for the future were exciting and grandiose. What happened to us? To the man who gave me compliments, not bruises.*

Commented [SH1]: Changed sentence structure for readability

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She had been living in a fantasy world of couple's activities and quiet movie nights until six months ago when he hit her for the first time. She wasn't sure it even happened after he pretended it didn't. She did the same. He said he loved her.

*I think he just broke the TV or maybe kicked over the bookshelf. He's mumbling and yelling about the waste of space and time I am. No more nice gifts, just nasty words and threats these days.*

“If you do not come out of that room, I will drive all the way to your sister's, pick up your damn son, your precious little Jamie, and show him what a coward he has for a mother.”

*Breathe, focus, you only need to be brave for three more minutes.* With both butterflies and razor blades in her stomach, she pulled the sound out from deep inside her core and morphed it into calm words.

“Ron, please. I need you to calm down.”

That set him off even more. He hated when Alice made suggestions, he saw them as her trying to humiliate him. He never was one for communicating, he was better at guilt trips and put-downs.

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She sat down on the white tiled floor with her back against the cold glass shower door, her head hanging heavy in her vibrating hands. It hurt to breathe and she felt her head pulsating with pain. Alice couldn't believe that, as a full-time human resources manager, a single mum, a widowed woman who had survived the loss of the love of her life only six months after getting married, she didn't see how bad things had gotten until it was too late for an easy exit.

Commented [SH2]: Do you mean vibrating as in shaking, hands? Maybe use shaking, or trembling.

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*I am strong, I might be shaking like a tree in a crazy wind-storm, but I can do this. What is he hitting the door with? Is it a golf club? Is he trying to break the lock and door handle now? Focus, breathe, stay safe for only two more minutes.*

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Alice thought it hard to believe it was only fifteen minutes ago they sat down to have dinner. She had made his favourite pasta. Ron did not take it well when she told him it was over, and she wanted him to pick up all his stuff and leave her house for good this time. Things had turned bad quickly. He had grabbed her by the shoulders, pushed her back against the wall and kneed her in the stomach. She doubled over as the air left her body.

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"Please Ron, stop, please, please," she repeatedly pleaded, with tears running down her pale face.

Commented [SH3]: Changed 'pled' to 'pleaded' as it is more commonly accepted in writing. Pled is an Americanism.

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He had pulled her up by the hair with his left hand, so she was facing him, and hit her across the face with his right fist. She collapsed to the floor like a worn tea towel.

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“You bitch, I will tell you when this is over.” Towering over her and satisfied that he had made his point, he went to the kitchen to get a drink. He came back, probably to give her a few more kicks while she was down, but she had slipped into the bathroom and locked the door. That was only four minutes ago.

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*One more minute, but I think it might be sixty seconds too long.*

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He smashed the lock one more time; it broke off, and the sound of the door handle parts smashing to the floor echoed through the bathroom. Alice jumped up. Even though she could feel the tender bruises on various parts on her body thumping and her muscles starting to stiffen, she readied herself. Ron fiddled with the latch of the broken handle and kicked the door open so hard it smashed against the wall.

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“What are you doing Alice? Let’s finish that amazing dinner you made.” Tossing the golf club into the room with such force and frustration all the toiletries crashed onto the floor. Ron saw the phone. He yelled, “Who did you ring?” so loudly Alice flinched. He tried to grab the phone, but Alice held on to it so tight, like it was her most precious possession. Instead, Ron grabbed her by the wrists, and threw her against the bathroom wall.

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Commented [SH6]: Changed wording slightly for easier flow.

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Enraged by the loss of air, energy, and control, without sound or thought, Alice tried to run past him. He grabbed her by the waist,

picked her up, spun her around and then smashed her face into the wall of the lounge just outside the bathroom.

*Time's up.* She felt a warm liquid drip down the side of her face and then her neck, then the whole world went dark.

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**Commented [SH9]:** Changed sentence structure to make it clear it is the end of a scene.

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Alice woke up a few hours later in an unknown room with a tiny soft hand holding her fingers. Without opening her eyes, she knew it was Jamie's.

**Commented [SH10]:** Added a scene break here to make it clear time has passed and characters have moved on.

A familiar and relieved-sounding voice spoke in a slow and calm father-tone. "It's over Alice, it worked. I was almost too late, but I made it just in time. I tasered him, called it in and had that bastard officially arrested. You do still wanna press charges, don't you?" Jett asked tentatively, knowing Alice had changed her mind in the past.

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Without waiting for an answer, he continued. "The police will come by tomorrow morning to make it all official."

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Alice relaxed, and reflected on how far she had come. She had committed to this relationship through pure will of wanting to move on and become settled. She wanted a family; a father for her son. At first, she'd convinced herself this relationship was what she needed. Then she'd convinced herself it was worth the occasional abuse for the stability of a relationship. Eventually, some days it became easier just to give up and stay in bed.

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Alice remembered the moment a week ago she realised Ron's apologies no longer meant anything, never had and never would. She had watched him slap Jamie and saw the truth in his wide eyes.

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In that moment, her whole being heated up, her skin turned a bright red and her stomach felt like someone left a boat anchor in it. Later that night after throwing up and crying, she had slept in her son's room, hugging him all night long while coming up with a plan.

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The plan was easy in theory, like a to-do list to freedom, only four steps and four minutes. Step one was to make sure Jamie was safe at her sister's house for a sleepover. Step two was to invite Ron over for dinner and break up with him. If he left, great, and if he didn't, which was the expected result, then she'd take one more hit and hide. Step three was to ring Jett. He was her sister's husband and a police officer. He was to be ready and awaiting the call down the street. Step four, Jett would arrive in four minutes, have Ron arrested and take him away. The four minutes were needed to avoid the plan looking like a set-up and instead have the appearance of a weak woman ringing her family for help. Alice would finally press charges and get a restraining order until he was sentenced and completely removed from their lives.

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No longer struggling to breathe, Alice felt her broken ribs bandaged tight and lightly touched the stitches on her face. She opened her eyes and smiled at her two-year-old boy to try and diminish the worry in his eyes. Alice looked around the bright white room and saw her family, her sister, Esther, her brother-in-law, Jett and her son, Jamie, all there waiting for her to wake up and to support her. She inhaled the freest, clearest and deepest of breaths, exhaled, and stated with confidence, "Yes, I will give my statement tomorrow."

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