

Vignette—Alice

Alice is a 32-year-old African-American woman who is employed as a family physician in a large family practice in a medium-sized city in New Jersey. She was raised Protestant and still attends church on Sundays with one of her sisters. Mike is a 27-year-old African-American man who is employed as a pharmaceutical representative. Alice and Mike met at a medical conference where Mike's employer was a major sponsor. They sat next to each other at a dinner and started dating soon after that. Alice does not have children and Mike has two children from a previous relationship.

"Mike and I had been dating for about four months. He was the greatest thing that had come into my life. I hadn't been with a man for so many years, I had forgotten what it was like, how much fun it was to be in love, how happy it was to have someone make you smile, and someone you could smile with. I guess I was so busy being in love that I didn't see some of the little incidents that were happening. I guess maybe if I would have opened my eyes, what happened the other night wouldn't have happened. I just don't now. I just don't understand it all.

Mike had come over at about four in the afternoon, and we were going out to dinner and then to a game. I was excited. I had never been to a basketball game. Mike was going to explain everything that happened for me, so that I would understand what was going on. We were supposed to go with a couple of his friends. I had a patient, and I didn't get home until close to 4:30. Mike was pacing up and down the floor when I walked in. I apologized for being late and told him that I was sorry but I could not leave this patient. We had had little incidents before, but this was the first time I really began to be fearful. Mike's face started to get red, and I looked in his eyes and I became frightened. His eyes just looked like they belonged to someone else. His whole body began to change. It became more rigid, and he started to yell at me. At first, his abusiveness was really only putting me down for only caring about my patients and not caring about him. When I protested and tried to calm him down, he only seemed to get angrier. Before I knew it, he was shaking me and slapping me, as well as screaming at me. I screamed back at him to stop, but he wouldn't listen. In fact, he reminded me of patients I have had who have gone into psychomotor seizures. At that point, I started pushing away from him and attempted to flee, but he caught me and started swinging me around in the kitchen. All of a sudden, he took me and flung me across the room, and I felt myself crashing into the stove. That was the last thing I knew. I feel on the floor, and I could feel somebody stomping and kicking me as I lay there. I sort of felt like I was drifting in and out of consciousness.

"I don't know how long I lay there on the floor, but when I woke up, Mike was gone. The house was dark. The pain was so bad I could barely move. I knew that I had to have been seriously injured. From the pain, I thought maybe I had some internal bruises. Thank God there's a phone in the kitchen. I crawled and barely made it to the phone. I pulled on the cord so that I could knock it down to the floor, because I could not stand. I called my partner and just told him that I was physically injured. I didn't tell him what happened to me but just told him to send an ambulance. The next thing I knew, I was there in this hospital bed. I don't know what happened. I don't know how I got here. All I know is what they had told me the next morning.

"Apparently, when Mike pushed me into the stove and maybe when he was stomping on me with his feet, my kidneys were damaged. As soon as they got me to the hospital, they could barely find my pulse, and they knew there was internal bleeding. They rushed me into the emergency surgery and had to remove one kidney. My second kidney was badly damaged, but they think they can save it. I don't know what happened. I don't know how it got so bad. It just seems like it's all one great big nightmare. I just don't know what I'll

do. How can anyone so kind and gentle like Mike, that I could love so much and who could love me so much, do this to me? I just don't understand."

(Two days after the surgery, she was asked how she felt about being in the hospital. Afterward, she said that she and Mike were going off on this wonderful cruise as soon as she got out of the hospital.)

"I'm really not sure how the whole incident happened. Perhaps it was my fault. Mike says he really didn't throw me against the stove. He just pushed me and I fell and hit the stove. I really believe him. He couldn't have wanted to hurt me as badly as I was hurt. It really must have been an accident."