

Relationship Summary

Partners: Elena Ortiz (pronouns: she/her/hers) and Ian McMullen (pronouns: he/him/his)

Overview: Elena and Ian are students at Texas A&M who have been dating since the start of their freshmen year. Elena is attracted to Ian's intelligence and enjoys how overly romantic he is, but over time it becomes clear that Ian does not respect Elena's independence and wants to have control over all her decisions. He is often rude, threatening, and violent when Elena doesn't do what he wants. The relationship ends after Ian's verbal, emotional, and physical abuse escalates.

Starter Card

Elena Ortiz (*pronouns: she, her, hers*)

Meet Elena. Elena is the loudest and proudest member of the Fighting Texas Aggie Class of 2027, majoring in Community Health. She and Ian met during Chemistry class and started dating a few months later. Elena easily fell in love with Ian. At the beginning of the relationship, he was so attentive: he would always check up on her in person or through texts & DMs, and encouraged them to share everything including locations, passwords, and apartment keys. He regularly gave her gifts, took her out to get some new clothes, and even made her a few appointments at the salon to get her hair and nails done. Over the past few weeks though, the relationship began to feel different¹. Elena applied for an internship and Ian discouraged her from even considering it. Elena was confused when Ian said: *"I am not worried about you leaving me, because there are probably several applicants way more qualified than you."* When Elena became upset at Ian for saying this and tried to leave his apartment, he ran in front of her and blocked the door. The last thing he said to her was *"So what? Are you just going to run away? You can't stay mad at me forever. You know I am right about this whole thing."* Since then, things have been awkward between the two of them, but Elena remains committed to making the relationship work.

Ian McMullen (*pronouns: he, him, his*)

Meet Ian. Ian is also a proud member of the Fighting Texas Aggie Class of 2027 who is studying pre-med, with plans to go to a top-tier medical school. Ian has always been encouraged to strive for perfection and taught that hard work entitles him to the best of everything. Everything was going well for Ian until his girlfriend, Amber, broke up with him right before high school graduation. It was a blow to his ego to hear after four years, that Amber felt like she "outgrew him." When he met Elena, it was like redemption. She fell for him immediately, and he loves the way she worships the ground he walks on. Lately though, Ian feels like he is losing control when it comes to Elena. He does not want to fail in another relationship, so he will do and say what he needs to avoid rejection².

Go to Friend Card #1

¹ This is an example of **love bombing**.

What appears to be romantic gestures from Ian are tactics to manipulate and isolate Elena. There is nothing out of the ordinary about wanting to know about someone, especially when a relationship is new. However, it is suggested here that Ian did not genuinely care about who Elena was as a person. Instead, he used that to make Elena develop an emotional connection to him quickly, while simultaneously veiling his obsessive check-ins, lack of respect for her privacy, and manipulation of her appearance, to seem "romantic", "protective", and "normal". Elena acknowledges the increasing concern with Ian's behavior and strain on their relationship. Yet, a hallmark of love bombing in an abusive relationship is making another person feel obligated emotionally, physically, and/or materially. This often causes someone who is being targeted to also feel guilt when thinking about leaving the relationship.

² This is an example of **power and control**.

Ian acknowledges that he will take any measure to avoid rejection. Elena's emotions are used by Ian to bolster his own ego and sense of entitlement to a relationship. He uses love bombing to make Elena feel like she's respected and cared for, while his true intention is to make her feel obligated to the relationship while taking increasing control of her whereabouts, communications, social networks, and appearance: all of which are emotionally and psychologically abusive behaviors. When Elena shows desire for independence by expressing interest in an internship, he mocks her chances of qualifying, and subsequently mocks her frustration to his response. This behavior escalates into physical forms of violence & abuse as the scenario progresses.

Friend Card #1

Elena Ortiz

Elena, Jen, and Alex have been friends since middle school. Elena considers them to be like family. Both were incredibly supportive when Elena heard about an internship opportunity.

While studying, Elena receives an email.

Elena: *"Y'all, I just got an email about the internship!"*

Elena reads the email aloud:

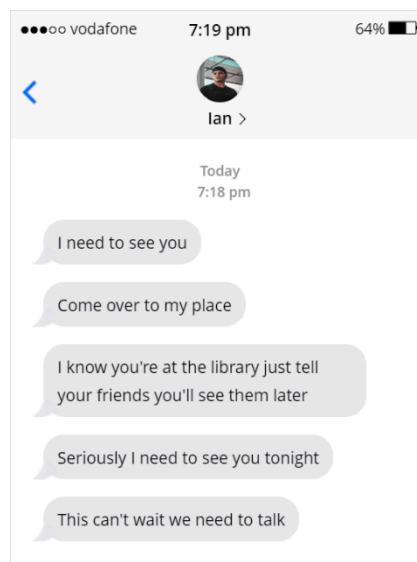
Dear Elena, thank you for applying for an internship with the Texas Department of State Health Services. We are pleased to offer you an internship position with our Community Health Department this summer. This will start May 23 and continue through August 12. The position is 30 hours per week. Please reply by April 8 to let us know if you accept."

Alex: *"I had no doubts, congratulations!"*

Jen: *"This is such a great opportunity for you! Please tell me you are going to accept it."*

Elena: *"Of course I am! This is going to be so amazing, thank you both for keeping me on track."*

As Elena goes to send the acceptance email, her phone buzzes with multiple messages. All are from Ian³:

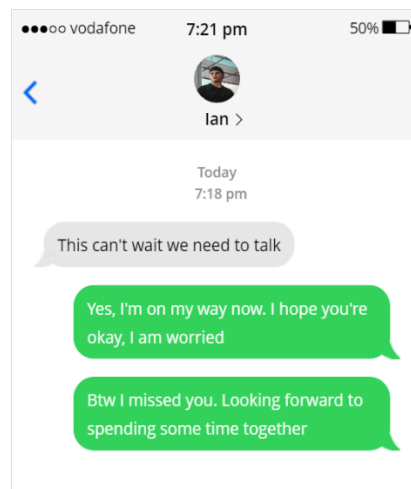


If you want Elena to stay and study with Jen & Alex, go to Friend Card #2
If you want Elena to leave and meet up with Ian, go to Together Card #1
Friend Card #2

³ This is an example of **power and control**.

Ian's constant texts have an undertone of expectation: that Elena reply immediately and come over to his apartment.

Elena texts Ian back:



Jen notices that Elena's distracted and asks her: *"Hey....is everything okay?"*

Elena: *"Yeah. I haven't talked to Ian in a few weeks, and he just sent me a bunch of texts wanting me to come over."*

Jen: *"I was going to ask if something happened, but I didn't want to pry or anything."*

Elena: *"Everything was great. Then he just started to change. He really wants to spend the summer with me, so he was upset when I told him I wanted to apply for the internship. Maybe I owe it to him to just stay here."*

Alex: *"Why do you owe him that? Plans change and it's not like you didn't tell him about it and just left."*

Elena: *"I am taking the internship for sure. But I want to keep my relationship with Ian. He is just working through some issues, and I know I can help him."⁴*

Elena starts packing her things, and she lets Jen and Alex know that she is going over to Ian's place to see what he needs.

Jen: *"You spend so much time with him. I really want to see you more outside of class."*

Elena: *"Ian feels like I spend all my time with you. You know, you might like Ian – I think you should try to hang out with us more."*

Go to Together Card #1

Together Card #1

⁴ This is an example of **power and control**.

Ian's constant texts have an undertone of expectation: that Elena reply immediately and come over to his apartment. Elena's friends identify and attempt to discuss problematic behaviors they notice from Ian: that he appears to distrust Elena; he has made Elena feel like she owes him her time, or is indebted to him in some way; that he has commanded all of her time, isolating her from her existing friendship circle.

Elena Ortiz

Even though things have been awkward between Elena and Ian, she's excited to see him. He wasn't thrilled about the internship, but that was a few weeks ago and he has probably had a change of heart.

Elena: *"Hey, Ian. I'm here now. Is everything okay?"*

Ian: *"For being so worried, it took you long enough to get here. Was something more important?"*

Elena: *"Well, I have exciting news! I was offered the internship."*

Ian: *"Yeah, I know. I saw the email come through in your account today. You probably wouldn't have said a thing to me about it if I hadn't texted you! It was already decided, you can't go."*

Elena: *"This is a great opportunity and others like this aren't going to keep coming up. I want to accept it."*

Ian: *"Didn't you hear me before? I told you that we are going to spend the summer together. You have no right to leave me, especially after how you made me feel a few weeks ago. I thought you were a nice girl, not a selfish bitch who only thinks of herself all the time."*

Annoyed at what Ian just said, Elena turns to leave. As she gets to the door, Ian grabs her arm and tries to pull her towards him.

Ian: *"Don't walk away from me, Elena!"*

Elena resists, and Ian pushes her to the ground. He refuses to let Elena get up, and uses his forearm against her neck to keep her pinned down. Elena can hear Ian yelling things like *"this is all your fault"* but cannot make out all the words. She is having a hard time breathing and just wants Ian to get off her. Overhearing the assault, Ian's roommate, Jake, comes into the living room and pulls Ian off Elena. Elena runs out the door to her car and leaves for her apartment. Elena gets home and is in a state of disbelief. She feels like *"did this really just happen? Why would Ian do this to me?"*⁵

Go to Together Card #2

Together Card #2

⁵ This is an example of **escalation**.

After months of engaging in emotionally, psychologically, and verbally abusive behaviors, Ian escalates to using physical violence against Elena when she expresses her independence and attempts to honor her own boundaries during a disagreement. Abusive individuals will escalate to using physical and sexual violence to affirm their power and control over another individual. They also will threaten and increase the severity of physical and sexual violence should their partner (or friend, roommate, family member, etc.) attempt to leave the relationship or exercise any independent actions or decisions.

A week has passed since Elena was assaulted by Ian. Even though she decided to have her apartment keylock changed to keep Ian out, she is afraid to leave because she doesn't want to run into him. Elena hasn't been to class all week, and now she's starting to get stressed about whether she can even catch up on her work or if the internship opportunity is ruined.

Elena has so many texts from Jen. Elena is worried about Jen making her feel like the assault wouldn't have happened if she had just listened. She puts the phone down and says to herself *"I'll respond later."*

Elena hears someone outside her door. Unfortunately, it's Ian, who starts knocking loudly after he realizes his key no longer works. Elena panics, and tries to pretend she isn't home, but Ian says through the door, *"Elena, I know you're home. I can hear your tv and your car is outside."*

Elena responds through the door: *"Go away! I don't want to see or talk to you anymore."*

Ian: *"Elena, please! I came all the way over here because I wanted to say I am sorry. You didn't deserve it, and I promise if you would just talk to me, this would never happen again."*

Elena: *"Ian, I just can't do this right now..."*

Ian, interrupting Elena: *"Look, I am here with these flowers, some candy, this teddy bear. I just want you to see that I was wrong. Can you please just let me in so we can talk this through?"*⁶

Elena is now even more confused. She is so angry at Ian, and now he shows up at her apartment and doesn't even ask how she is doing? Yet, Elena feels obligated to him. It sounds like he is really trying and wants to change. Elena thinks: *"What good would come of turning her back on him, anyway?"*

Should Elena let Ian in to Talk? Go to Together Card #3
Should Elena tell Ian to leave? Go to Together Card #4

Together Card #3

⁶ This is an example of **love bombing**.

Ian uses gifts and apologies to make Elena feel like he will change, when the true intent of his behavior is to keep her feeling obligated to the relationship and to him. He shows up at Elena's apartment unannounced and tries to gain entry. Since he does not live there with her and he recently assaulted her, that demonstrates complete disregard for her boundaries, privacy, and independence. Ian also professes to want to talk about what happened, but as the scenario progresses, he never has that conversation with Elena. He never even asks her how she is feeling, considering he physically harmed her. Ian does not wish to take true accountability for his actions.

Elena opens the door, just enough to see Ian: *"Ian, if I let you in, you must promise never to act like that again."*

Ian: *"I won't, Elena. I promise. Now will you please let me inside?"*

Elena lets Ian come into her apartment. Things are a bit awkward, but once they start watching some tv and start laughing together Ian puts his arm around Elena, and she feels hopeful.

Over the next few weeks, Ian and Elena become inseparable. Ian is attentive, and Elena loves that he has been driving her to and from campus, walks her to classes, and takes her to lunch. Elena has caught up with most of the class assignments she missed. She doesn't feel that her internship is in jeopardy, but doesn't bring it up because she knows Ian still isn't thrilled about the idea of her leaving this summer⁷.

After class, Elena is waiting for Ian. Seeing that Elena is by herself, Jen and Alex come up to her.

Jen: *"I'm glad to see you've been back in class. I've texted you a few times, have you been okay? I was really worried about you."*

Alex: *"Same, Elena. We weren't sure if you were mad at us or if we did something wrong?"*

Elena has been trying to avoid Jen and Alex. She doesn't want them to know about what Ian did because she's afraid they won't accept him as a part of her life.

Elena: *"No, you didn't do anything. It's not like that. Ian and I, we are just trying to focus on our relationship a bit more. But I miss you both. Maybe we could all hang out soon?"*

Jen and Alex agree, and they all start catching up a bit as they're walking out of the building. Alex mentions: *"Elena. You missed it! I also got an internship in Austin this summer. Won't that be fun, you and I being close?"* Elena is so excited for Alex and gives him a hug. Just then, Ian shows up.

Ian: *"What's all this excitement about? Clearly, I missed something."*

Elena: *"It's really nothing Ian, it's just that Alex got an internship in Austin over the summer and...isn't that great?"*

Ian: *"Let's go, Elena."* Elena hesitates, and Ian says again: *"Elena, I said let's go."* Elena's hands start to shake. Seeing Elena is uncomfortable, Jen speaks up: *"Hey Ian, we actually invited Elena to come walk with us and she accepted so we are going to this way, and you should like, go the other way."*

Ian avoids responding to Jen. He grabs Elena's forearm and whispers in her ear *"last chance, Elena."* Elena panics, and Ian realizes other people besides Jen and Alex are now staring at him. Embarrassed, Ian leaves, saying to Alex on the way out *"you can have her if you want her, I'm done."*⁸

⁷ This is an example of **love bombing** as well as **power and control**.

To make Elena minimize and excuse his behaviors, Ian uses the same tactics from the start of their relationship to woo Elena. He never engages in a conversation with Elena about the assault, and the steps he should be taking to explore the root of his actions with, for example, a therapist or counselor. He makes Elena feel like she has independence because she is reattending classes, all the while he is monitoring where she is at and who she is with for most of the day.

⁸ This is an example of **power and control** and **escalation**.

Ian leaves the building and Elena breaks down in tears. Jen and Alex come to her aid to support.
Jen: *"Elena, let's get you out of here. Would my dorm be okay?"*

Go to Resource Card #2

Together Card #4

Elena shakes her head, thinking *"No, I need him to understand that I need my space to think..."* She says through the door, *"Ian, this is really sweet but I'm not so sure..."*

Ian's behavior quickly escalates from confrontation to physically putting himself between Elena and her friends and grabbing her arm. Given that Ian had previously assaulted Elena, her physiological response to his tone, physical aggression, and threat, which signals that the impacts from her trauma are likely becoming more compounded or severe. The entire situation also demonstrates an outward display of power and control, through the way he verbally and physically threatened Elena in a public setting.

Before she can finish her sentence, Ian bangs on the door. His voice gets louder as he says, *“Doesn’t what I’m doing mean anything to you?”*

Elena’s hands start to shake. She shouts back *“Ian, I want you to leave!”*

After a brief pause, there is another bang on the door followed by Ian screaming *“I hate you, Elena! This isn’t over, do you understand me. You’re going to be sorry for what happens next.”*

Elena hears a concerned neighbor confront Ian and after that, hears Ian walk away. There is silence for about an hour. Elena thinks about what Ian said to her and becomes increasingly worried about her safety. She has difficulty sleeping that night and every noise she hears outside or in her apartment startles her. She thinks to herself: *“What did Ian mean when he said, ‘I will be sorry for what happens next’? Why won’t he leave me alone?”*⁹

Go to Resource Card #1

Resource Card #1

Elena’s still figuring out how to get around campus and town, and she’s hours away from her family. Elena hasn’t talked to Jen or Alex in weeks, and they were the only friends she had here. She’s afraid to

⁹ This is an example of **escalation** and **power and control**.

Ian uses an apology to manipulate Elena’s emotions toward him and their relationship. Within seconds, Ian escalates from a veiled apology to beating on her door, and threatening either his own wellbeing, her wellbeing, or the wellbeing of them both. This instance, along with the previous assault, has caused Elena to experience sleep disturbances as well as an increased startle response, which both signal that the impacts from her trauma are likely becoming more compounded and severe. The threat Ian makes is a power and control tactic, since Elena is emotionally terrorized by the ambiguity of it while also fearing for her safety.

leave her place because she doesn't want to run into Ian, but she also has to keep her grades up so she can do her internship this summer. She just wants to feel safe and for Ian to leave her alone.

Elena remembers that there is a list of resources online, which she learned about in her first-year course during the Healthy Relationships lesson. After looking at the list, Elena thinks Twin City Mission Domestic Violence Services is a good place to contact, especially since it's confidential. The advocate on the hotline listens to Elena while she tells them everything that happened. They provide guidance on what options are available. Since Elena is in pain and has injuries from her assault, the counselor advises her to go to Baylor Scott and White medical center for treatment. An advocate on call is dispatched to the hospital, where they meet with Elena for support. They let Elena know that she can choose to report what happened to the university through the Title IX office, and they can help make accommodations for Elena to get to and from her classes and from home safely.

End of Scenario

Your scenario depicted an abusive relationship. The evidence-based characteristics were:

1. **Love bombing:** excessive attention, admiration, and affection with the goal of making the recipient feel dependent on and obligated to that person.
2. **Escalation:** unhealthy behaviors elevate to threats and/or use of physical violence
3. **Power and Control:** A pattern of actions that an individual uses to intentionally dominate another person, group, or community.

Where did each of these characteristics present in the path you took through the scenario? There might be one example or multiple examples of each characteristic.

Jen gets Elena to her dorm, and she tells Alex that they will call later.

Jen: *"Elena, could you please tell me what has been going on? I want to help you. We have been friends forever, and you know you can trust me with anything."*

Elena tells Jen about what happened over the past few weeks, even the details of the assault. Elena also tells Jen that she is still having headaches from the assault and doesn't know what to do.

Elena: *"Jen, I don't want to make a big deal out of this. I don't want my mom to know. If I go to the hospital, she's going to start asking all sorts of questions and I don't want her to worry or look at me differently."*

Jen: *"I understand Elena, and this needs to be your decision. I am worried about your headaches, though. I mean, you could always tell your mom it was because of something else. I don't want you to lie to her, but I would rather you see a doctor."*

Since Elena is in pain and possibly has injuries from her assault, Jen thinks it would be an option for Elena to go to Baylor Scott and White medical center for treatment. An advocate on call is dispatched to the hospital, where they meet with Elena for further guidance and support. They let Elena know that she can choose to report what happened to the university through the Title IX office, and they can help make accommodations for Elena to get to and from her classes and from home safely.

End of Scenario

Your scenario depicted an abusive relationship. The evidence-based characteristics were:

1. **Love bombing:** excessive attention, admiration, and affection with the goal of making the recipient feel dependent on and obligated to that person.
2. **Escalation:** non-physical abuses elevate to threats and/or use of physical or sexual violence.
3. **Power and Control:** A pattern of actions that an individual uses to intentionally dominate another person, group, or community.

Where did each of these present in the path you took through the scenario? There might be one example or multiple examples of each characteristic.