

# 'Your whole YEAR just got RUINED'

## Holly thought Akim was a keeper – until he showed his true colours on screen...



I was at a low point



Akim and me



Akim Nicholson

couldn't have been happier and became a couple. 'You came into my life at the right time,' I said. 'I care about you,' he said, grinning at me. 'And I really see a future with you.'

finished the washing-up from dinner as my phone buzzed. *You're always safe with me*, a message read, and a huge smile broke out across my face. It was from Akim, a childhood friend I'd lost touch with. But when he'd messaged me out of the blue on Snapchat, we'd kept talking. Now, I'd confided in him about the trouble I was having with my ex, who wouldn't leave me alone. I was a single mum with two young girls and Akim offered me support. He was someone to lean on. And when we met up, he listened to me and felt like an escape from the chaos. I felt like I could be vulnerable around him, and really let him in. When feelings developed, we

seemed too quick. And then one day, he called me. 'I'm in some trouble,' he said. 'What is it?' I asked. 'Oh, nothing much, I've just been arrested for something,' he said sheepishly. 'What for?' I replied. He skirted around the question and didn't answer. Shortly after, I read in the local paper that Akim had been arrested for breaking into his mum's house after she'd changed the locks and put his belongings in the shed. In an angry rampage, he filmed himself trashing her house, smashing furniture and splashing bleach around. Akim was arrested and put on trial, where he was found guilty of burglary, criminal damage and sending an offensive message. He was sentenced to two years and nine months in prison. A restraining order was also granted, banning him from contact with his mother. 'I can't believe I trusted this man,' I said to Mum. I knew I had to end our

**'I really see a future with you'**

relationship. He was too volatile, and I didn't want him anywhere near me or my girls. Sitting down, I typed out a long email, explaining that it was best we no longer saw each other, then I blocked him and moved on. I felt instant relief. Carrying on life as normal, my confidence was returning. But a year later, I received a chilling message. *Please can we pick up where we left off?* it read. Akim had been released from prison but I didn't want to get involved again. I ignored him, and tried to put him out of my mind. But then the calls began, constantly. So I blocked him, and eventually he got bored, and I didn't hear from him again. Only then, a few days before Christmas, my phone buzzed as I was standing in my kitchen. It was an email from Akim that simply read, *Check your Snapchat*. A sinking feeling hit me in the pit of my stomach. My hands

trembled as I unlocked my phone and opened the app. What I saw made my blood run cold. On the screen was an intimate video of me with Akim. He had recorded me without my consent during an intimate moment between us. That pig had also tagged me in the video and encouraged others to share it. Once he saw I'd viewed it, he messaged me again. *You're finished, he wrote. Your whole year just got ruined*. I felt lightheaded and could barely breathe. Notifications started to come through thick and fast as more and more people saw the video and shared it. He'd shared it on TikTok and WhatsApp too, reaching tens of thousands of people. I watched in horror as my privacy was stripped away from me, frame by frame. My phone was constantly going off with notifications and each one sent a fresh

they put out an immediate arrest warrant for Akim. Once I hung up, a million thoughts flashed through my mind, landing on the worst one. *What if my two girls saw it?* At 14 and 16, they were always on social media. 'I need to take your phones for a bit,' I explained. I knew I had to be truthful so I told them exactly what had happened. It was horrific but they needed to know. Then I called Mum. 'Why is he doing this to me?' I cried. 'How am I going to tell people at work? I won't be able to look at anyone ever again.' Mum was really supportive and my friends and the rest of my family were there for me too. The police kept me updated on their search as Akim had gone on the run. And then, in mid-January, I got

the call to say they'd finally caught him. He'd been found at a pub in Birmingham and had had a stand-off on the roof. During that, he punched an officer, threatened them with a knife, and even threw bricks and a fire extinguisher from the roof in a last desperate attempt to avoid capture. But after six hours, they arrested him. In time, Akim Nicholson, 35, appeared at Birmingham Crown Court charged with disclosing a private sexual film.

**'Why is he doing this to me?'**

I went to court during the trial for cross examination. I felt sick at having to be there, but I knew I needed justice. Akim was found guilty. He also admitted affray, threatening another person with a knife, three counts of assaulting an emergency worker, causing racially aggravated harassment, alarm or distress and criminal damage and other charges. He was sentenced to four years in prison. I also received a 10-year restraining order against him. While part of me felt a sense of relief knowing he was behind bars, it wasn't enough. No sentence can truly undo what he did to me. I've been diagnosed with

PTSD, can rarely sleep through the night and struggle with anxiety. Even though I know now that none of it was my fault, the stigma of revenge porn still lingers – and it's something I'm determined to change. What Akim did to me was a gross violation of trust and privacy. I realise, looking back, that he was lovebombing me at a time when I was vulnerable. But I won't let him have the final say, so now I'm using my voice to help others. I've recently set up a charity to support victims of domestic violence and revenge porn, to let them know they are not alone and that the shame isn't theirs. I want people to understand that the perpetrators are the ones who should be shamed, not the victims. No one should have to suffer in silence or feel like they have to hide. If I can turn my experience into something positive, then maybe I can help someone else reclaim their life. I'm still healing, but I refuse to let Akim's actions define me. Instead, I am making sure that his behaviour is what gets exposed. He wanted everyone to see his horrid video, so I'm making sure his disgusting actions go viral instead. **Holly Whitmore, 37, Birmingham, W Mids** ● Holly has waived her right to anonymity. ● To find out more about the work Holly does, visit [powerwithoutlimits.co.uk](http://powerwithoutlimits.co.uk)



Me now

By Danielle Lett and Sara Linn. Pictures: West Midlands Police