

## SURVIVOR

From Grace:

JASMINE: You know, it was really easy to get caught up in the fact that he was so handsome and funny and popular... Everyone loved him at school, didn't they? And I felt so lucky that he had chosen me...

The warning signs were always there. We moved into together about six months after high school finished, my mum was moving interstate, and I want to stay and work and save money to travel. That was our dream, to travel. We stayed with his parents to save up, but things got bad pretty quick. He used to fight with his mum, there was lots of yelling; she'd really lay into him, nag him, insult him, push him too far. Then he punched a hole in the wall. His mum said he had anger issues, so we had to move out, which meant the money we wanted for travelling became our rent, our living. It was hard, but we had each other. We were really in love, spent every minute together. It was a blissful time after the chaos of his mother's house. I loved that he was so into me, so interested in everything I was doing, so protective. But after a while I started to realise that he wasn't being protective, he was being controlling. Checking my phone all the time, not letting me go out, questioning me about other guys. It didn't take much for the fighting to start again, but this time it was with me. I would justify his outbursts to the fact that he had 'anger issues' and you just don't poke the bear. So, I tried not to. I mean all couples argue, right?

The first time hit me, I felt like I had brought it on myself. We were having an argument about cleaning, or bills, or something stupid, and I was yelling at him. I think I pushed him away from me, and he just back handed my face. I was so shocked. I mean he'd smashed stuff before, stuff that I loved, and he pushed me a couple of times, but up until then he hadn't actually hit me. He looked horrified at what he'd done. He was so sorry. I felt like it was my fault too, for pushing him. We cried together. He promised me that it would never happen again, and I believed him... Until it happened again, and again... I mean it wasn't really bad stuff, it's not like he beat me up or anything... But you know, grabbing the back of my head and smashing it into the dashboard on the car, pushing me up against the wall, backhanded my face. He spat on me once. Awful stuff done in the heat of the moment. But he was always so, so sorry, begged for my forgiveness and promised it was the last time. He'd never do it again. I loved him, so I believed him.... But sometimes the love wasn't enough... There were times that I decided I was going to leave... So many times, but I couldn't. I didn't know where I could go, I didn't have anyone I could tell. On the outside my life looked so together. I had everything, a nice apartment, a decent job, a gorgeous boyfriend, who loved

me more than anything, but it was all lies. I couldn't leave my job; we had clocked up so many debts moving out like we did. I didn't tell my mum; she was already worried about me being so far away, and she didn't have the money to help me anyway. I couldn't tell my friends; I was so embarrassed, and I hardly saw them anymore because Simon didn't get along with them.

And then a few months ago, Grace came over. Do you remember her from school? She was visiting from out of town and looked me up. Anyway, we were sitting on the deck having a glass of wine and she noticed these bruises under my arm, and I just blurted it all out. (*cries*) Everything.... And it was ok!... It was ok to tell her. I didn't need to be ashamed... I just needed to know that it was time to ask for help.

So right there and then she stood up, went to my room, got me a bag and started packing. That was all I needed... I didn't ask any questions. I just started packing too. I left Simon a note. I felt terrible, but I knew that if I stayed and talked to him about it, I would have never left. Grace was renting this apartment in town while she was here and somehow organised it for me to take over her lease with rental assistance, after she went home. Before she left, she made sure we went out and connected with my old friends. She broke down the barriers for me, and she got me back my life...