

WHEN HIS PAST HAUNTS YOUR PRESENT

More than a million men in the UK have a shocking secret they don't want to share with anyone. So what happens when you become part of his life and that secret's begging to be told?

We all know that boyfriends come with secrets – an eye-watering credit-card debt, a clingy ex who still texts him, or a past history with your best friend. When you start a new relationship you don't expect to know *everything*. But what if he had a secret that was so painful he couldn't talk to anyone about it? Something he'd buried away for years, but was slowly eating away at him – and your relationship.

It's a painful reality for thousands of young women every year whose boyfriends or husbands have been the victims of sexual abuse. And

sadly it's more common than you might think. It's estimated that around 3.5% of UK men are sexually assaulted in their lifetime. That's more than a million of the current UK male population. And police believe that only one in 10 assaults is actually reported, so the figure could be much higher.

Katherine Blankley, 29, knows this only too well. She adored her boyfriend Chris, 28, but sometimes he'd go quiet, or there'd be a look in his eyes, as if he had some kind of secret. "In the beginning it was so good," she remembers. "I met Chris at a party when I was 15, and from that first moment I felt able to tell him anything. The next day we went for a walk on the beach and I found myself

talking about how ill my nan was, and the difficult relationship I'd just been in. He was thoughtful and such a good listener. I knew I'd met someone really special."

As the couple grew closer – and eventually married – Katherine continued to rely on Chris. But at times he'd act strangely. "His moods were unpredictable. Sometimes he'd be snappy, or he'd just withdraw," she recalls. When they'd been together for 10 years, the problem seemed to be getting worse. "He kept reassuring me he was OK, but still I knew something was wrong – I just didn't know what."

A painful secret

What Katherine didn't realise was that Chris was struggling with problems that began years before, when he was just six years old. "I was abused for nine years by one



Katherine
stood by
Chris