



Aby is now trying to rebuild her life

found on Bisley shooting range in Surrey. His driving licence identified him as Mark. In that moment, the whole world stopped. I couldn't believe that Mark could have done this." Mark had left suicide notes for several loved ones, one explaining that he hadn't wanted Aby to be liable for his debts after they married. His note to Aby read simply: *'My darling Aby. What can I tell you that you don't know already? I'm sorry, M.'*

The irony was especially painful because Aby barely knew anything. She'd known business was bad, but not that it had

collapsed. She knew money was tight, but not that they had debts running into tens of thousands. "I trusted him – it will take me a long time to trust again," she says now.

## THE POWER OF MONEY

Although Aby's example is extreme, she's not the only one to live in ignorance of her partner's debts. According to a study by insurance group Axa, as many as one in three people admit to having misled their partner about the state of their finances, and another by the Halifax bank says that

more than 217,000 of the credit cards in this country are hidden away from partners.

"In many relationships, money represents power and control," says Karen Pine, psychologist and co-author of female finance bible *Sheconomics*. "It could be that you were brought up to think about every penny, or that your parents rewarded you with money or gifts, which makes it an emotionally charged subject. It's no wonder many couples find it difficult to discuss."

In pre-recession times, a spot of financial infidelity, like hiding a few shopping bags at the back of the wardrobe, wasn't seen as too serious. But now times are tougher and debts can easily get out of control, which can make it all the harder to tell the truth.

## DESCENT INTO DEBT

A few weeks ago, Dawn\*, from West Yorkshire, got a County Court Judgement (CCJ) ordering her to pay her store card debt, but she still hasn't told her husband, Graeme\*. "Eighteen months ago, everything was going well," says Dawn. "We were running a pub and enjoying life. I'm not a big shopper but I had a couple of store cards and would treat myself occasionally.

"We didn't talk about money, apart from discussing the pub's takings. When it comes to cash, he wears the trousers. Not in a nasty way, but I'd been in debt before so we thought it was best for him to sort the bills. Then the pub failed. Suddenly we were living in a rented house – Graeme had to take casual bar work and I found a part-time temp job doing data entry.

"Before, I could have paid off the £337 on my store card in one month; now I can't even afford the minimum repayments, even though they're only about £20. But I can't tell Graeme – I'd hate to see him upset. It'd make him feel like he can't look after us."

The fact that Dawn is more worried about what her CCJ will do to Graeme than what it'll do to her financial future is natural, says Karen. "Women can often have an emotional relationship with money. We spend to make ourselves happy, but we're sometimes also frightened of money. We're not taught how to manage it in school, and many of us saw our mothers leave it all >