

Grace
for the
Broken

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

PHILIPPA CLEALL

CHAPTER 1

*H*is alarm sounded, and Jesse rolled out of bed. It was the beginning of autumn, and the early morning air flowing through the open window was cold enough to bite. But he didn't close it. Jesse liked the sharpness. It reminded him that he was somewhere safe, not lying in a concrete cell, awake on a metal bunk under fluorescent lights.

He went out to the yard and quickly fed his red kelpie, Rusty.

"Settle down, girl. I'll come back for you later," he murmured, crouching to scratch her neck.

She licked his hand affectionately and danced about, wanting to play, her paws skittering on the path. He threw a ball for her to fetch, then stood.

"Guard the place, alright?"

She gave a short, responsive bark as he closed the gate on the fenced yard he had recently built.

Outside, the mist clung low over the fields, curling around fence posts like smoke. His Pop's old Holden ute, faded green with one mismatched door, almost felt like it was his own now. He tossed his apron onto the cracked vinyl passenger seat, which still smelled faintly of Pop's old tobacco.

Jesse slowed the ute as he rolled past the old gate, sagging on its hinges like it always had. Pop had meant to fix that. He cut the engine and sat for a moment, his hands resting on the steering wheel.

The house in his rear-view mirror looked the same as the day he'd arrived, old weatherboards, with verandah posts worn smooth by time and use. Solid. Patient. Like the man who'd lived there for sixty-five years and was suddenly gone.

Jesse had not planned on staying here.

He had come to Wombat Valley after being released from jail to move in with his Pop. He stayed because he had nowhere else to go.

As Jesse started the engine again and passed farms in the now familiar landscape, his mind flickered back over the past few months. Pop had not asked questions when Jesse arrived last winter. He hadn't offered advice or forgiveness either. Just a room, a meal, and work around the farm to be done. As if Jesse were someone who had simply been away too long, not someone returning damaged.

He had been surprised to find out his Pop had left him the farm. While he'd been locked up, Pop had reached out to connect through letters and phone calls. Jesse had not known what to say. He'd had plenty of time on the inside to reflect on his life and how he had wasted it. Years ago, before his parents died in the car accident, Pop had been someone who always had time for him. But when Jesse started living on the streets, they lost touch.

After serving his time, Jesse knew he'd not deserved Pop's trust or kindness. The farm felt borrowed, like he'd been given a responsibility he had not deserved or earned. Either way, it was his, left to him in a way that still sat wrong in his chest. Some days it felt like an IOU he would never finish paying off.

"Didn't see that coming," he muttered to himself, adjusting the rearview mirror.

He was not sure if staying in the valley was the right place for him. It was so hard starting again. He was only twenty-five and still wrestling with temptations he'd had before being locked up. Still, the farm held family

memories. It was the only place that felt even a little like home. The property did not ask who he had been before. It just waited for him to show up. There was more fencing to fix. Timbers to straighten. Things that needed building. For now, it was a safe shelter for him and Rusty.

A few minutes later, when he arrived at the café, the lights were already on. Hope now opened *The Hearth* early on weekend mornings. She had started this after pressure from customers driving through town en route from the Southern Highlands to the coast, and from local Wombat Valley cyclists and walkers who liked a morning coffee.

He parked out the front, grabbed his apron, and took a deep breath before stepping inside.

The warmth hit him first, then the scents of baking bread and coffee. Although it was early, there was already a queue near the counter.

His eyes were drawn to Ruby.

She was behind the till, her dark hair tied up in a loose knot, and baby Sam tucked into the sling she had strapped to her chest like an African mama.

She was beautiful in a way that made him feel things he did not deserve anymore. Her chocolate-coloured eyes met his, just for a second, then glanced away as she greeted a customer.

“Morning. Long black, right?” she said to the bloke in hi-vis.

Her voice with male customers was not cold. Not warm, either. Just careful.

He got started on coffees. Grinding, tamping, and steaming. His hands were steady, the routine like a rhythm he could trust. For a few minutes, he stayed under the radar. No one said anything about him. Then someone did.

Old Mick Roberts was muttering, loud as ever, near the front door. “Shame they’re hiring ex-cons here. Town’s standards are slipping.”

Robbo from the mechanic's shop turned to Mick, "Talk around town says he was four years inside."

Mick raised his bushy eyebrows, "Thought it was longer."

"Nah. Got lucky." Robbo's comment drifted out the front door with him.

Hope was walking out of the kitchen. She set down a cake she had been about to put in the fridge, then walked to the counter.

"Mick, your flat white's ready. And Jesse makes a better one than you do."

Jesse did not look up, but something unknotted in his chest. Not gratitude, exactly. Just space. It gave him enough room to breathe.

No one needed to watch him anymore. In prison, the days had been counted for him. But he had served his full term. Out here, no one marked time but himself.

Later, when the morning rush had passed, Jesse sat outside in the café's back courtyard, cradling a coffee and watching a pair of kookaburras argue in a nearby gum tree.

Ruby's dog, Asha, came over to greet him. Like most Australian shepherds, she was affectionate, wagging her tail and collapsing against his legs, as if to show Jesse he was part of her pack.

He had been working here three months. Long enough to know which dogs belonged to which customers. Long enough to know who smiled with their mouth and who smiled with their eyes. But still not long enough to be trusted.

He didn't blame them.

Sipping his coffee slowly, he told himself again that building something takes time, even when you are not sure what it is you're building.

Later, Hope sat rocking gently in the cane chair on the cottage verandah. She glanced at Tiger, her tabby cat, warning him with a look not to pounce on the blue wren nearby in the butterfly bush. Sam slept against her shoulder, one hand curled like a shell beneath his chin. His tiny breath was warm against her neck.

The café had thinned out after ten, and Ruby had insisted that Hope take a break to “go and breathe for a bit,” so she had, with baby Sam. She had not gone far. Just up the path to her cottage, nestled under the gum trees, a place that smelled faintly of woodsmoke and lemons.

Sam stirred, making that soft snuffling sound babies make when they are waking lightly before drifting back to sleep. She adjusted the muslin cloth wrap across his back and exhaled slowly, as if her own body needed reminding to let go.

He was not hers. She knew that, and she had never once wished he was. But still.

Some days, when she held him like this, safe and small, something inside her tightened. A longing she thought had long since packed up and moved on. She had made peace with her childlessness, hadn't she? She was thirty-six now and knew that motherhood was not the only calling.

And it wasn't.

But here, in the hush of a Saturday morning, she wondered if peace and longing could learn to live side by side.

She looked out to where Joe and Craig had arrived and were unloading timber from the ute for the café and cottage. They worked in the easy

rhythm of mates who only filled silences when they needed to. Joe caught her eye and lifted his hand in a wave.

“Might have a few big leeches under the woodpile,” he called. “Come and help if we start screaming.”

Hope smiled and murmured to herself, “You’re on your own, sweetheart. Snakes aren’t my specialty.”

She offered him an air kiss as he ducked his head and turned back to the timber, Craig already laughing beside him. Something in her chest fluttered.

They were getting married this year. Two people with enough stories between them to fill a small library. She loved Joe and felt deep respect for the man he was.

But sometimes at night, she lay awake and asked herself what kind of wife she would be now, after everything. Could you build a whole new life when memories of the old one still sometimes sat in fearful corners of your mind?

The café back door opened, and Ruby appeared, wiping her hands on a tea towel. Her eyes softened when she saw Hope and Sam. She walked up through the yard and crouched beside them.

“He loves it up here,” Ruby whispered.

Hope smiled. “When I’m with him, so do I.”

They sat in silence for a moment, listening to the breeze in the trees.

Ruby placed a hand on Hope’s knee, gentle but sure. “You’d be a good mum, you know.”

Hope didn’t answer at first. She swallowed and kept her gaze on the hills.

“I’m not sure that season’s still open.”

“Maybe,” Ruby said. “But grace doesn’t come in predictable seasons. Sometimes it just ... shows up when it’s time.”

Hope looked down at Sam's tiny face, so peaceful, so unaware of all the ways the world can break you and put you back together.

For a moment, she reflected on the grace and restoration God had poured out on her over the past year. She gently stroked Sam's cheek.

"You might be right," she said. Faith involved choosing trust instead of worry.

Ruby rinsed the last dish from the lunch crowd and looked across at Sam, who was now lying on a playmat in the café storeroom. She smiled, watching his kicking legs and waving arms. At four months old, he was growing and changing so quickly.

She switched off the water and leaned back against the sink. The café had quieted. A couple of tradies lingered over pizza and coffee at the front tables. Hope was chatting with them, and Jesse had gone out back to split firewood for the pizza oven. The rhythm of the place hummed on.

She loved it here. The wooden counters, the scuffed floorboards, and the way early morning sunlight filtered in to warm the tables. This café had held her when she had nowhere else to land. It still did.

She and Sam had three homes: their café storeroom hideaway with a bed and ensuite, Hope's cottage where they mostly lived, and Row's cottage, where Sam had an extra crib. So many willing hands and hearts loving them.

But something in her ached for more.

Not just for Sam's sake, though that was part of it, but for her own as well. She had started researching late at night when Sam fed: short courses, TAFE certificates, even university entry requirements. The idea of studying

did not scare her anymore. What scared her was the thought that she might not try.

She checked that Sam was settled in his playpen, then walked out into the back garden, blinking in the afternoon sunlight. Jesse was cutting firewood, sleeves rolled up, apron off, strong tattooed forearms swinging the axe with ease. He worked like he had something to prove, though he never said what.

She hesitated, then stepped off the path toward him.

“You’re going to split that stump in two if you keep going like that,” she said, stopping a few metres back.

He paused, leaning on the handle, breath visible in the cool afternoon air. “Better than splitting something else, I figure.”

Ruby raised an eyebrow. “That your version of therapy?”

“Cheaper than court-mandated,” he said, half-smiling.

She did not reply, but she didn’t walk away either.

Out of the corner of her eye, Ruby saw Ethan’s ute pull up across the road. He was not really *the new vet* anymore. He had been around for a few months now. Usually, country folk were wary of city slickers, but that had not stopped half the town from lining up to welcome him.

These days, he seemed to be lining up for her.

Ethan waved, easy and confident, as he crossed the street towards the café with a paper bag in hand.

Ruby smiled without thinking, then turned away and went back inside the café kitchen.

She did not yet know if either of them, the quiet man chopping wood with something buried behind his eyes, or the charming one with clean hands and easy conversation, would come to matter.

For now, *Sam* was what mattered.

GRACE FOR THE BROKEN – PHILIPPA CLEALL

CHAPTER 3

She was finishing up in the Rectory kitchen, humming faintly as she wiped the bench clean. It had been Tom's turn to cook tonight, his take on risotto was simple but hearty. After the meal, she had insisted he go and catch up on church emails while she tidied.

In the study, Tom sat with the lamplight pooling softly over his desk. Most of the day's correspondence was routine, checking upcoming church meeting reminders and responding to requests for parish support. He was just about to close the laptop when a new email appeared in his inbox.

Subject: CBARI Pilot – Invitation to Participate

Tom paused, his brow furrowed. CBARI. The acronym meant nothing to him. He clicked to open.

As he began reading, something in him stirred. It was not often that a simple email carried this kind of weight. By the time Tom had reached the third paragraph, he sat back in his chair and started reading from the beginning again more slowly.

This ... could be an answer.

An answer to the knot that had been sitting in his chest since last year, after the situation with Mark and Hope, and the faces in his congregation who carried wounds in silence. It could help address things they didn't talk about enough.

He was nearly finished reading the attached overview when Eve appeared in the doorway, carrying a small plate of tiramisu in each hand.

“I come bearing gifts,” she announced lightly, setting a plate down beside him.

Tom looked up, his eyes warm. “Perfect timing. Do you have a moment to listen to an idea for a new community program we could run here? It’s aimed at men like Evan ... and maybe even Steve.”

That caught her attention. She eased into the tub chair opposite him with her legs curled under her, the plate balanced on her knee.

Tom turned the laptop slightly toward her and started walking her through the email. “It’s called the Community-Based Accountability and Restoration Initiative. CBARI. It’s part of a three-year national pilot, backed by the Federal Government and rolled out through selected regional community centres and churches.”

Eve listened quietly, chewing slowly as Tom continued summarising what he had read.

“It’s specialist-led work with men who use violence or control. The focus is on behaviour change, not patching up relationships. It’s trauma-informed and professionally facilitated ...”

His voice drifted slightly as he scanned another line.

“They’ve got strong boundaries built in. It’s evidence-based. And sounds very survivor-conscious.”

Eve raised an eyebrow. “That sounds promising.” She set down her plate. “Would you have a direct role in running it?”

“Not in the group itself. It says that an external clinical facilitator leads the sessions. I think I would be the community partner. Someone participants can speak to about pastoral matters on the outside. Not part of the group process, and definitely not their spiritual shortcut to forgiveness.”

Eve exhaled softly and leaned back. “Good. Because this kind of work ... it’s messy. And if it’s not handled properly, it could re-traumatise women or put them in greater danger.”

Tom nodded, his tone growing more thoughtful. “I know. That’s been sitting heavily on me for months now. What happened with Hope ... it lifted a lid off relational issues we haven’t addressed. We can’t also forget that in some cases women can be abusers in relationships. It’s so important that we start understanding what the abuse cycle looks like, how to carefully discern accounts of harm, and know how to effectively support people with issues earlier.”

Eve studied his face, seeing the interest in his eyes. “I agree. But it has to be safe, transparent, and accountable from every angle.”

He glanced at the screen again. “If you don’t have any objections, I’d like to reach out to the coordinator to see what it would look like for our community in Wombat Valley to be involved.”

Eve hesitated for a moment, then nodded. “With the right people contributing, this could be deeply important work. But I’d want Dave, with all his years of policing experience, looped in from the start. If he’s part of the group structure, even in the room with the facilitator, I’d feel a lot more at ease.”

Tom’s lips curved and he nodded. “That was my thought too. When we both feel convicted about something, it’s often God talking.”

Eve gave him a playful nudge as she stood. “We don’t always follow His nudges though,” she said, gathering their empty plates.

At the door, she turned back. “Tom ... if you do this, do it with open eyes. You’re not just dealing with hard stories. You’re dealing with people who are scared to admit what they’ve become and might be too invested in the control they have to make changes.”

He nodded slowly, her words settling in his chest.

“I know,” he said softly. “That’s why I think we need to try.”

The river was slow and wide at this time of year. It was the kind of flow that didn’t rush you but carried you along if you trusted it enough to stop paddling.

Hope dipped her paddle into the water, watching the small whirlpool it made before lifting it out again. “I forgot how heavy these things feel at first.”

Joe, who was in his own kayak ahead of her, glanced over his shoulder. “That’s because you’re trying to muscle it. The trick is to work with the water, not argue with it.”

She gave an exaggerated sigh. “You say that about everything ... well, mainly my coffee machine.”

“And yet,” he said mildly, “you keep asking for my advice.”

“That’s because you look very calm while you’re saying it.”

He laughed, the sound carrying easily over the water. “That’s just years of practice pretending that I know what I’m doing.”

They drifted together for a moment beneath a canopy of gums leaning low over the riverbank, their leaves whispering together like a private conversation. Sunlight flickered through the branches, dappling Joe’s shoulders and the back of his neck.

Hope let her paddle rest across her lap and felt the kayak steady beneath her. She trusted it now.

“You alright back there?” Joe asked, not turning, just checking in the way he always did, quietly and without fuss.

“I am,” she said. And realised it was true in more than one way.

They rounded a bend where the water widened, smooth as glass. A pair of ducks startled at their approach, skimming across the surface in a scatter of wings.

Joe slowed his stroke, letting their kayaks drift side by side. “You know,” he said, “Craig reckons this stretch of the river is where he flipped his canoe when he was seventeen.”

Hope raised an eyebrow. “That’s not reassuring.”

“Oh, he was doing something stupid. Standing up, I think.”

“Ah. The wisdom of youth.”

Joe grinned. “Exactly. We’re much more sensible now.”

She watched the way his hands moved on the paddle. They were confident. He was a man who didn’t need to prove anything.

Hope leaned her head back for a moment and closed her eyes. The sun was warm on her face. There was a time when being this exposed out on open water, reliant on a partner, would have tightened something in her chest.

Now, it didn’t.

“Race you to that bend,” she said suddenly, pointing ahead.

Joe, who had been drifting nearby, blinked. “What?”

Too late. She dug her paddle into the water and surged forward, laughing as the kayak lurched slightly under her sudden effort.

“You could have given me a moment’s warning,” he called, already paddling hard to catch up.

She glanced back, breathless and grinning. “You said work with the water!”

“That wasn’t permission to cheat!”

They reached the bend almost together, Hope only just ahead. She let out a triumphant whoop, then immediately wobbled as her kayak tipped precariously.

Joe was beside her in seconds, his hand steadying the side of her boat. “Easy. I’ve got you.”

She froze, then laughed, the adrenaline spilling out of her in a rush. “Okay. Maybe I pushed it a bit hard.”

He held her kayak a moment longer than strictly necessary, making sure she was balanced before letting go. “I don’t mind you being brave,” he said gently. “Just don’t disappear on me, alright?”

She met his eyes. There was no reprimand there. Just care.

“I won’t,” she said. And meant it.

They drifted again, breath slowing, the river taking over. A kingfisher flashed past in a streak of blue and copper, settling on a low branch ahead.

Hope pointed at it. “Look.”

Joe followed her gaze, his face softening. “Azure kingfishers are such beautiful creatures. Worth the paddle, eh?”

She nodded. “Everything feels clearer out here.”

“Funny how that happens,” he said. “Water does that. It makes room for the thoughts you’ve been avoiding.”

She smiled faintly. “Or the ones you don’t want to rush.”

They paddled on together quietly, their movements falling into an easy rhythm. Hope became aware, not for the first time, of how different this was from what she had known before. There was no need to anticipate moods. No careful measuring of words. Just safety and shared space.

She felt it then—a deep gratitude. She was thankful for this man beside her and the life they were building together.

Joe glanced back again, catching her watching him. “What?”

“Nothing,” she said, smiling. “Just ... I’m glad it’s you.”

He didn’t joke this time. Just nodded once, his expression warm and sure. “Me too.”

They let the river slowly carry them the rest of the way, unaware, as people are in good seasons of life, of the harder currents still waiting downstream.

END OF THIS PDF SAMPLE OF ***GRACE FOR THE BROKEN***

THIS BOOK WILL BE AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK AND EBOOK VERSIONS ON

1ST AUGUST 2026