

INTRODUCTION

When I began writing what has become this book, my intention was simply to write down all that I could remember about the time I shared with Daniel so that my sons and their sisters would know more about the man who would now always be their elusive father. I wanted to be able to give them an honest account and explanation of the illness that changed and ultimately killed him. And I wanted them to understand how much Daniel loved each of them. More than they will ever know.

Suicide is a word that carries a huge stigma and the bereavement process for anyone who has lost a loved one in this way is extremely complex. I don't want Daniel's children to have to grapple with the extra burden of dealing with the social taboo and cultural unease associated with their father's death, or to feel ashamed of the way he died. I want them to know that their dad was a unique and amazing man with wonderful strengths and talents and an incredibly bright and sharp mind. His memory should not be defined by his death.

The sense of shame and self-blame that historically and culturally accompanies suicide not only adds to the pain of the bereaved but also prevents people who are feeling suicidal from accessing help. I believe that the only way to tackle the taboo of suicide is to talk about it openly. We

need to dispel the fears and myths that surround this topic and it is this strong belief that has led me to publish my story.

As a therapist, I am used to being a blank screen, never disclosing anything personal, and I am aware that making my story public may compromise that role. However, I believe that acknowledging that therapists are human too, experiencing their own vulnerabilities and struggles in life, is ultimately healing and does not make them any less professional.

Daniel was a self-confessed rebel and he used to rib me about my straight-laced, goody, goody lifestyle. He was a non-conformer in every sense and would say to me, 'you have to rebel at least once in your life'. Releasing this story is my way of not conforming to the silence and shame that surrounds suicide. This book is my way of rebelling, in Daniel's honour.

While everything in this book is true, some names have been changed in order to protect the privacy of those individuals.

CHAPTER ONE

We were in the sea. We'd been shipwrecked in the middle of a storm and we were all struggling to keep our heads above water. The waves were fierce, rain was lashing down and thunder crashed overhead. I was holding both the boys, one under each arm. I could see Daniel a few feet away, grappling for something to hold onto and I knew that he was battling to survive. In the distance there was an island. I felt quite confident that I could swim there and get the boys to safety. I kept looking at Daniel, wanting to take him too but I knew that we would all go under if I tried to support all three of them. Daniel could see that too and he was shouting at me to get the boys to the island. But I hesitated.

That was the point where I woke, frozen with panic.

I had been having the nightmare over and over again, for weeks.



It was early on Friday afternoon when I put Milo in his car seat in the back of the car, hugged Daniel and said 'see you on Sunday'.

I knew he was very low. The previous day I had tried once again to persuade him to go into hospital. I'd taken

the softly, softly approach and got nowhere, so that morning I tried a different tack. He was still in bed and I went in and told him that enough was enough, he needed to go into hospital to get help and he couldn't expect everyone else's help if he wasn't going to help himself. I told him if he'd broken his leg he'd get it treated and this was no different.

He began to barter with me. He said he would consider it in a week's time because he needed to be at home to sell some items he'd put on eBay. Of course he was fobbing me off, but he wasn't going to give in so I backed down and took Milo out to the park.

I got home at lunchtime and Daniel had got up and vacuumed the house. He felt guilty and was trying to please me; he said that he didn't want me to be angry with him. I hugged him and cried and begged him again to go into hospital.

He'd been detached and had barely reciprocated the hug. Daniel used to give wonderful, warm, enveloping bear-hugs. But this time he'd put limp arms round me before turning back to the computer. He told me he was looking for work. I hoped that was a good thing.

I was about to set off for my parents' home, a couple of hours away, but I felt torn. My instinct was telling me to stay with Daniel but I needed to be with Mum at her hospital appointment the next morning. And then there was Theo. I'd been away from him for two nights, long enough for a four year-old.

I'd lost one of Milo's shoes and was searching all over the house. I found it behind a box in the utility room along with about ten other items that had gone missing, including a spare set of car keys. Milo was going through a phase where he loved 'posting' objects into small spaces. He'd found a

little opening between two stacked boxes and pushed anything that would fit through the gap.

Daniel overheard me talking to Milo about what I'd found and he came to see. He chuckled affectionately at the thought of our 19 month-old going into the utility room to hide all his treasures. It was good to see him smile. His eyes were so often blank these days, but when he smiled they lit up, just for a moment, with the old sparkle. I reassured myself that he wasn't as low as I thought.

I loaded the car and got Milo strapped in. Daniel always helped me to the car and waved me off for long journeys, but today he was still at his computer. I went back to the front door and called him and he came to the door. I asked him to promise me that he would look after himself and not do anything stupid. For a split second his eyes darted away from mine, before he looked at me and said 'I promise'. I hugged him and said, 'remember there are a lot of people who love you'.

'I know,' he said, 'but I can't love myself'. There were tears in his eyes.

As I drove away I phoned his younger brother Adam, who lived a few miles away. I told him I would be away for the weekend and that I was worried about Daniel. 'Mum's here,' Adam told me. 'We'll call Daniel, get him to come over.'

I was relieved to think that Daniel wouldn't be alone. He was due to visit the local day hospital that afternoon and then he could go over to see Adam and his mum the next day. The estate agent would be coming in at two o'clock to show people round the house, but Daniel didn't have to be back for that, the agent had a key. Five years after we'd bought it, we were selling our dream home; we could no longer pay the mortgage.

I didn't mind about that. What did it matter, really, where we lived, as long as Daniel got better? I longed to see him back to his old self, striding across the road to the beach to kite surf, swinging a shrieking Theo onto his shoulders, sweeping Milo into his arms, serenading me loudly with a love song. He was so full of passion and ideas, so unstoppable. And he loved us, his family; me, the boys and his two beautiful girls, Ella and Hannah, more than anything. Looking after all of us was what made his world turn.

Daniel would get better; he just needed the right help. I'd be back on Sunday, and then perhaps he would agree to go into hospital, just for a few weeks, just until they could stabilise his moods. He'd been in hospital a few months earlier and the break from responsibilities, with the regular, monitored medication really did help. But he saw going back as an admission of failure.

As I drove up the motorway I couldn't shake my nagging sense of dread. What was it that made me feel so afraid? He'd been low for a few weeks now, after plunging from the high of the previous months into a bleak state of depression. He'd been horrified by the trail of emotional and financial destruction he'd wrought when he was high, it had left him ashamed and embarrassed. Now he spent his days in bed and his evenings in front of the television, only very occasionally rallying to help me with the boys or the house.

An hour later I stopped at Reading services. Milo had a biscuit, I had a coffee and when we got back into the car I phoned Daniel. He said he was cycling back from the day hospital. They had offered him an art class but there was nothing else suitable. He was making an effort to sound upbeat, but I could hear the disappointment.

I told him that I was at the services and it was full of families. I said that I missed us being a family and wanted

us to get back to the way we were. I wanted to give him hope. 'We can do it Daniel, I know we can.' But he seemed in a hurry. As he hung up I said, 'I'll call you tonight'.

When I arrived at my parents' house in Wiltshire, I scooped an excited Theo into my arms. It was so good to see him. Theo needed me, he'd been having a hard time understanding why the daddy who had been his hero, always ready for an adventure, was suddenly distant and withdrawn. Theo had lost so much; I didn't want him to feel he was losing me too.

Mum put the kettle on. She and Dad had been absolute rocks over the past year. They loved Daniel and they felt desperately sad about what had happened to us. Even after Mum's diagnosis two months earlier, she'd continued to look after the boys and help out as much as she could. They'd found an aneurysm in her brain, a swelling in an artery that was a ticking bomb. The only symptoms she had were an increasing squint in her right eye, double vision and headaches, but if it ruptured it could be fatal.

After dinner I put the boys to bed. They were a boisterous pair, up at five in the morning and running around all day, so bedtime at seven was set in stone and I looked forward to a bit of peace afterwards. I wanted to ring Daniel once the boys were asleep; I always rang him at seven if I was away so he'd be expecting my call, but that evening Milo wouldn't settle. Perhaps he was picking up on my anxiety, but it took me an hour to get him to sleep, so it was eight when I phoned Daniel. There was no answer from his mobile or the landline. I felt alarmed, that was so unlike him. I rang Adam and Daniel's mum, Maggie, answered. She reassured me that she had spoken to him at seven and he had agreed to go over for lunch the next day. That eased my worry, I told myself that after being up

all day he had probably just gone to bed early. I would call first thing.

That night I managed to get to sleep but Theo woke me in the early hours, crying and complaining of growing pains. He often had night pains and tummy aches; he was such a sensitive little barometer of all the worry and distress in our family. I got into bed with him and rubbed his legs. He seemed frightened, he kept saying, 'it's not alright Mummy'. I tried to soothe him. 'Everything's going to be OK' I whispered, but I felt unable to believe my own words. I had a sudden, fleeting feeling of panic and impending doom, but I rationalised it with thoughts of phoning Daniel in the morning.

I finally managed to snatch a couple of hours sleep, wedged alongside Theo in his single bed, but I woke exhausted and strained, my eyes red and stinging. I rushed about getting the children fed and ready. We had to leave at eight for the drive to the hospital in Oxford. Dad had agreed to look after the boys, but I was concerned about leaving him to cope with them for too long, so we'd agreed that he would drive us all there and take the boys to a cafe for brunch while Mum and I went to her appointment. The consultant was going to explain the surgery options. Mum got nervous at these meetings and found it hard to take the information in, so whenever possible I went with her.

It was a beautiful, sunny, blue-sky morning, the first real day of spring. As we were setting off, I called Daniel. No answer, but I wasn't surprised, he was usually asleep at that time. I called again just before nine; again no answer. I called Adam and spoke to Maggie again. She seemed sure he would come for lunch, but I felt increasingly anxious.

I put thoughts of Daniel aside for the meeting with the consultant. He was a kind and thoughtful man, but he had bad news; a scan had revealed a second aneurysm. He

suggested monitoring it, while he carried out surgery for the first, bigger one. Thankfully the surgery sounded less invasive and risky than we had expected. He would operate as soon as possible, he said.

When we came out of the meeting I phoned Daniel again; still no answer on either phone.

My mind started racing. His depression was always worse in the morning. Had he got up early and gone to Beachy Head? He'd more than once threatened to throw himself off, was he actually going to do it this time?

After trying his phone every twenty minutes on the way home, I phoned his mum again. She told me she had rung Daniel's psychiatric nurse, Nathan, the day before after I told her I was worried. Nathan had alerted the crisis team and a member of the team had visited him in our home at six the previous evening.

I hadn't known this until now. I phoned and spoke to one of the crisis team and said I was worried about Daniel and thought he might have gone to Beachy Head. She reassured me that the team member who saw Daniel felt that, although he was low, he had fixed plans for the weekend and did not have suicidal intent. She repeated it a couple of times.

It was now almost midday. She suggested we wait until one, when Daniel was due at Adam's. If he didn't show up, they would act. Everyone seemed calm, they weren't worried; to them it was just another day of managing Daniel. Yet I felt so sure something was wrong. Had I lost all perspective? Was I just being dramatic?

There was nothing to do but wait. I was beginning to feel panicky, but for the boys' sake I did my best to appear calm. Mum and I decided to go to the park to meet my brother Sam, and his girlfriend Katie. They were in the middle of moving house and were glad of an excuse to take a break.

The park was full of families. I wanted to be part of that, to enjoy the warmth of the sun on my back, to feel carefree and play with my boys, but I was consumed by the feeling that something terrible had happened. We waited for Sam and Katie at a table outside the kiosk. The boys had ice-creams and I had coffee in an attempt to ward off my tiredness. When Sam arrived I told him I was worried. He put his arm round me and said he was sure Daniel would be fine.

We all walked down to the play area where Sam helped Theo on the zip wire and Katie followed Milo, who walked up to a little girl of about the same age, lifted up her skirt, took a good look at what was underneath and then casually strolled off. It was impossible not to laugh. How could I be laughing at my toddler's antics while imagining my husband lying dead at the bottom of a cliff? It felt completely surreal.

As I paced around the edge of the play area I thought about the last couple of days. The night before I left, Daniel and I had spent the evening watching TV together on the sofa. We'd both felt hungry, so I made us peanut butter on toast. We shared a plate and watched *Grand Designs*. Daniel was very quiet, but it had felt nice to have that time together.

On the Friday morning he'd actually done more than he did most days. But there was something about him; the half hug, the averted eyes that bothered me. Had he given up? Was that it? I knew him so well, sensed his mood changes. Something had shifted.

My phone rang, making me jump. It was the estate agent, calling to let me know there had been an offer on the house from someone who had viewed it a couple of days earlier. I should have been pleased, but I just wanted to get her off the line. After the call I couldn't even remember how much had been offered.

At one o'clock I phoned Daniel's mum. He hadn't arrived. She said he might still be in bed. I spoke to Adam and asked him to go round to our house and check on Daniel. He said he thought Daniel might have gone out and forgotten the lunch. He wanted to give it a bit longer. They seemed so calm and reasonable, but I needed to know where Daniel was. I phoned the crisis team who agreed to call the police and go round to the house. They asked if anybody could open the door, otherwise they would have to break in. I phoned Adam back and he said he would go over and meet them.

I didn't think Daniel would be there, I was afraid that he was already lying at the bottom of the cliff at Beachy Head. I felt very shaky. I phoned the estate agent to cancel the afternoon viewings.

As we were loading the boys into the car my phone rang. It was Adam. Daniel had been found at the house. He had taken an overdose. He was babbling and angry that he had been found, but he had walked to the ambulance.

I burst into tears of relief. He was alive.

I'd walked away from the car to talk to Adam. I walked back, wiping away my tears, and told Mum and Sam what had happened. Sam offered to take the boys and let me go straight to see Daniel. But Mum suggested she and the boys come back home with me, so that she could look after them while I went to the hospital over the next few days. It seemed like the best plan, I didn't want to leave the boys; I'd had to do that too much lately. So we drove back to my parents' house and while Mum and Dad fed Theo and Milo, Adam gave me the number for the doctor treating Daniel.

The doctor told me he was stable and comfortable. He said they were awaiting blood results and planning dialysis to clean out his kidneys. I asked if Daniel's life was in

danger. The doctor sounded reassuring. 'No, he'll need dialysis tonight and we expect him to be with us in intensive care for a few days.'

I wanted to sit on the floor and weep. Everything would be alright. It had all been so hard, so painful, so lonely, but at least now Daniel would get the help he desperately needed.

I packed our things and with the boys in the back of the car, Mum and I set off back to Sussex.

Half an hour into the journey my phone pinged. It was a text from Imogen, Adam's wife. Mum read it. 'Daniel had twice the toxic level in his blood.' I didn't really understand what that meant but it didn't sound good, I worried that the dialysis would be painful for him.

Fifteen minutes later Adam rang. He asked if I was driving. I told him I had my hands-free set on. He hesitated. 'Louise, Daniel has passed away. I'm sorry.'

I couldn't stop and I couldn't speak, I felt paralysed. Mum asked me what was wrong and I shook my head. I managed to pull off at the next exit. Mum was ashen. We both tried to sound normal for the boys, strapped into their seats chattering in the back, unaware that their world had just changed forever.

I got out of the car, walked a few yards away and phoned Adam. He told me that Daniel's heart had stopped when they started the dialysis. They'd tried for ten minutes to resuscitate him. I slumped to the pavement, shaking uncontrollably. How could this have happened? He had walked to the ambulance. They had said he would be alright.

He was the love of my life.

He couldn't be dead.

This wasn't how it was meant to be.

CHAPTER TWO

I spotted him the moment I walked into the bar.

Wearing a khaki surfer shirt and jeans, he was stocky, with broad, powerful shoulders and shaved dark hair, sprinkled with grey. Nothing like the type I normally went for.

Oh well, I told myself. I've only come for an hour. Then I can slip off home and curl up on the sofa with the telly and a cup of tea. Chalk this date up to experience. I took a deep breath and headed over.

'Hi, I'm Louise, you must be Daniel.'

His smile was warm and endearing.

'Nice to meet you.'

I sat down while he ordered drinks. He might not be my type, but there was something about him that I liked, his easy-going confidence and charm were infectious.

Five minutes in and I'd forgotten all about leaving after an hour.

I'm a cautious person; thoughtful and fairly serious. I'm slightly wary of first impressions; I like to get to know someone well before I let them get close and I tend to observe people before opening up. But that evening with Daniel I felt drawn to him in a way that took me by surprise. He talked non-stop, but he was never boring. He asked me all about myself and he was intelligent, insightful, amusing, opinionated without being pompous, and often extremely funny.

He appeared to be a man of many aspects. He had a senior managerial job in IT, yet he said he loved to skateboard, sail and kite-surf. He was crazy about the sea and he was doing up a camper van that he'd named Betty. He also loved to cook, sing opera and play the saxophone.

As we stepped out into the cool night air at the end of the evening, he turned to me. 'Would you like to meet Betty?' he said. 'I'll walk you to your car, she's on our way.' A few minutes later he opened a garage door to reveal Betty in all her shabby, lilac-painted glory. He beamed like a proud dad, and I couldn't help smiling too. I'd always wanted a VW camper van.

Back at my car, I thanked him for a lovely evening. It really had been. He kissed me on the cheek and I drove home to my flat.

As I got ready for bed, I thought about him. I'd enjoyed his company and decided I would be open to another date. That night, I dreamt that he was in my bed. It wasn't a sexual dream, he was simply sleeping beside me, and I felt comfortable with him there. When I woke I felt surprised that he had, metaphorically, got into bed with me after one date. He'd obviously made a bigger impression than I realised.

I went to work with a spring in my step. I worked as an art therapist, two days a week in a child and adolescent mental health unit and three days in a medium secure forensic unit for adults who had committed crimes and needed psychiatric treatment. It was a career that I loved; absorbing, demanding and fascinating.

When I was working there was little time to think about anything else, so it wasn't until my lunch break that I checked my phone and found a text from Daniel:

I really enjoyed meeting you and it would fascinate me to spend more time with you. I have often looked enviably at some couples

who seem to have an amazing chemistry that has led them to build a beautiful relationship with longevity. I always thought that was unattainable for me but meeting you has made me feel it is possible. I would really like to see you again very soon xx

I could have dismissed it as cheesy or too forward, but I actually found it refreshingly open and straightforward. I wasn't interested in playing games or in fragile egos and clearly neither was he. I sent a text back to say I'd be happy to see him again, and we arranged to meet in a seafood restaurant later that week.

'How was your date?' asked Tania as I passed her in the corridor a few minutes later.

'Oh, you know nothing special, not really my type.'

She raised an eyebrow. 'So what's that grin about then? I'm coming over tonight, eight o'clock, no arguing. I want details.'

I smiled, Tania and I were absolute opposites; she was as outspoken and disorganised as I was reserved and ordered, but she was an amazing friend. We'd met at work and it was Tania who had persuaded me to join the online dating agency in the first place. I'd never have done it on my own, but she helped me with the profile, took a terrible photo of me and, despite my reluctance and protestations that this wasn't the kind of thing I felt comfortable doing, generated so much enthusiasm that some of it actually did rub off on me.

Despite the dismal photo I received hundreds of responses. Too many to sift through, so in the end I decided to keep my profile hidden and to browse through the men on the site and choose who to contact.

The first person I emailed was James. We met and I liked him enormously, but there was no spark of attraction. James was easy going, empathetic and a good runner and

he quickly became my good friend and running partner. I had been marathon running for a few years, so we'd meet for long runs almost daily, and talk about anything and everything as we pounded the streets.

James filled a gap in my life, but a platonic male friend, lovely as that was, wasn't what I was after. I was almost 33 and although I had a nice life, with a beautiful flat that my Dad and I had lovingly renovated, a good job and great friends, my biological clock was ticking; I was broody and I wanted to meet someone, settle down and start a family.

It was early in 2005 when I joined the dating agency. A year earlier I had finally freed myself from a relationship that was going nowhere, with a man who just didn't want to commit. He wanted me in his life, and made it difficult for me to leave him, but he didn't share my vision of long term commitment and children. After it ended I felt almost ashamed that I'd wasted so much time and emotional energy on him.

In the months that followed the break-up I sorted myself out, went travelling to all kinds of wonderful and exotic places with Tania, who brought out the thirst for adventure in me, and reached a point where I felt content with myself and my life. I'd worked hard to achieve a career in art therapy and I was earning enough money to pay for my flat, my travels and clothes and shoes in abundance.

As I trawled through the profiles again, something drew me to Daniel's photo. It wasn't really flattering, but I was drawn to his warm eyes. I contacted him, he emailed back and for a month we swapped news, chat and bits of information. Daniel told me that he was 35, Irish, worked in IT and was divorced with two young daughters. I hadn't imagined getting involved with someone who already had children, but I enjoyed our emails and decided to keep an open mind.

After these online exchanges we agreed to talk over the phone. His voice was rich, deep and confident, with an accent that I couldn't place but which turned out to be Irish tinged with American – he'd spent a lot of time in the States. He told me he was about to fly to New York on business and that he'd ring me when he got back the following week so that we could arrange to meet.

I took it all very lightly; I wasn't expecting anything to come of it. But a week later, true to his word, he called. He said he was in London with his daughters; they had been to see his father, who was an actor, in a play. We arranged to meet a couple of days later on the late May bank holiday.

I was having a busy weekend too. It was the Brighton Festival and I'd been immersed in the buzz of it, meeting up with friends and going to dance performances, art shows and concerts. On the Sunday I went out with a group of friends to the firework display marking the festival's finale, before deciding it was time to head home. But when I got to the car park I couldn't find my car. It took a while for it to dawn on me that it was gone – my little silver convertible MX5, my pride and joy, with my belongings inside it, had been stolen.

I was shocked. I'd had such a lovely, friendly night out, the whole of Brighton seemed to be celebrating, but my happy bubble had well and truly popped. And, quite apart from my sense of loss, how was I going to manage without a car? Both my work venues were hard to reach using public transport.

I hardly slept that night, but the next morning I went out for my usual run with James and he offered to lend me his car for a week, insisting he wouldn't need it as he commuted to work in London by train. I was truly grateful.

I was still feeling a bit low and a bit tired when Stevie popped round to commiserate. Prone to emotional outbursts and drama, Stevie was also utterly endearing and impossible to dislike. He made me laugh until my sides hurt and listened patiently to my woes. He was the kind of friend every single girl needs.

I told him I was feeling a bit half-hearted about my blind date that night, after losing my car. Stevie insisted I show him Daniel's profile on the website. 'He's hot, you have to go,' he said. I was glad I'd taken his advice. As the week passed I found myself looking forward to seeing Daniel again.

After a very busy day at work I made my way to the restaurant Daniel had chosen, an upmarket seafood place where he insisted on ordering a whole lobster. I had never actually eaten lobster before, but I agreed to share it with him and as we tucked in, the conversation flowed. As before, I felt he was something of a paradox; he had strong opinions on serious matters, but he could be hilariously flippant and witty, he was bold and brash and at the same time extremely sensitive.

After our meal, we moved on to a bar and settled into an alcove. Here, the discussion became a bit more serious as I grilled Daniel about his failed marriage. I wanted to know what had gone wrong. Daniel later referred to this as 'the interrogation', but he didn't object and he was open and honest. He told me that his relationship with his ex-wife was acrimonious and gave me details about his marriage that set off my inner alarm bells, so my guard remained firmly up. He was refreshingly honest about the fact that he had not been a great husband and while I didn't like what I was hearing, I was impressed by his insight and ability to own his mistakes. And I was moved by the way he spoke about his

daughters, he was deeply troubled and full of regret about the way his marriage breakup had affected them. I could see that they were his world.

When Daniel asked me about my relationship history and future hopes I was equally honest. I told him that I wanted to settle down with somebody special and that I wanted a family, although marriage itself was never really high on my agenda. In response to this Daniel dropped a bombshell by telling me that he'd had a vasectomy.

I was lost for words. He took my hand and told me that he regretted having it now that his circumstances had changed, that a vasectomy was reversible and that he would love to have more children with the right person. The evening ended abruptly after that and I drove back to my flat feeling deflated. This man had too many complications in his life that I didn't want to be a part of. I felt disappointed, I was drawn to him but he was not the right man for me.

I didn't plan to see him again – but Daniel had other ideas. Over the next few days, he sent texts, asking to meet again and I was unable to shut the door on him. In truth, I didn't want to, so I told him that I was open to a platonic friendship, but nothing more. Daniel said that was fine, so we continued to meet a couple of times a week.

I felt very at ease with him, I really enjoyed his company and, despite the platonic boundary that I had set, Daniel didn't hold back in expressing his feelings for me. He let me know that he thought that I was the best thing since sliced bread, without putting any pressure on me to reciprocate his feelings.

Meanwhile, a work colleague had been doing a bit of matchmaking and she sent me on a date with an osteopath friend who she had decided was a catch for me. We went on a few dates and he was a thoroughly nice chap, but I was

a little bored in his company and I found myself thinking about Daniel.

Over the next few weeks, I realised that my heart really wasn't in the courtship with the osteopath and I spent more time with Daniel. We went to restaurants, walked on the beach together, went on spur-of-the-moment outings in Betty and he cycled alongside me on my runs. The more time I spent with him, the more I liked him, but I remained wary because of his vasectomy and his acrimonious relationship with his ex-wife and my guard remained firmly in place until life intervened.

My mum had slipped a disc in her spine. After years of caring for her family she had been able to put her skills to good use once we had all flown the nest, as a carer for elderly and disabled people in their homes. She loved the job, but it involved a lot of lifting and inevitably that led to injury. She had been in discomfort for a good month before her doctor suggested that she try an epidural in her spine to reduce the pain. Dad had set up health insurance for them both some years earlier so she booked into a private hospital for the procedure. She expected to be out within a few hours.

I was at work when I got the call from Dad to say that something had gone wrong. Mum had had an adverse reaction to the epidural, she was very sick and the numbness in her lower body had not worn off. He sounded extremely worried.

I left work early and it was Daniel I phoned. I had decided to drive to Wiltshire to see mum that evening. I knew I would have to drive back for work the next day, which meant a five to six hour round trip, so when Daniel offered to do the driving I accepted gratefully. We set off in my new black MX5, bought the previous week to replace my

stolen silver one, and arrived at the hospital at about 10pm. Daniel stayed in the waiting area and met Dad for the first time while I went in to Mum.

I could see that she was very ill, she couldn't stop vomiting and she looked dreadful. I stayed for about an hour and then we had to leave again. I felt awful, I kept telling Daniel I should have stayed, but we both needed to be at work the next day and I thought that Mum was in good hands. But the next morning, before leaving for work, I rang Dad who told me that she had suffered three massive seizures during the night and was in a bad way. She was being transferred from the small, private hospital to a larger general hospital and Dad was on his way there.

I phoned work to tell them I wouldn't be in, packed a small bag and got straight back on the motorway. I felt really afraid that I was going to lose her. To add to my turmoil, an accident detour meant that I had to take an unfamiliar route and I was in such a daze that I drove 50 miles out of my way. When I eventually arrived it was early afternoon and Mum was in the intensive care unit. Dad and my brothers, Tom and Sam, were sitting next to her with ashen faces. Mum didn't know who I was; she thought I was a nurse. She was barely able to talk as she had bitten her tongue during a seizure and she was being prepared for a lumbar puncture. As she was rolled onto her side she yelped in pain and Dad told me that her shoulder had been broken during a seizure. An X-ray later confirmed that her shoulder bone had completely shattered. It was harrowing for us to see her like that, she had gone into hospital for what we thought was a routine procedure and was now terribly ill and injured.

She spent three weeks in intensive care and never really made a full recovery. I took those three weeks off work and,

with Dad and my two brothers took shifts to ensure that she had one of us with her day and night. It was a horrible time.

I turned to Daniel for support and he was an absolute rock. He phoned me regularly throughout the day, researched her condition, offered to pay for alternative treatments and travelled down to see me at weekends. He would drive down in rusty old Betty, pick me up from the hospital, take me out and then drop me back at Mum's bedside a few hours later. He provided me with much-needed respite during that dreadful time, his kindness won me over and my reservations about him began to disappear.

By the time Mum was moved from intensive care and I returned to Brighton, my relationship with Daniel was on a different footing. We were a couple, and despite my earlier doubts, I knew I was falling for him.