



# FLESH AND BLOOD

DIANE BLOOD

TRANSWORLD  
BOOKS

## About the Book

Diane Blood first hit the headlines in 1996 when she went to court to fight for the right to use her late husband's sperm to try for the child they had planned together before his sudden death from meningitis. Diane's case caused an ethical storm and was debated in the courts, in Parliament and in the media. With huge public support, yet against almost impossible odds, she won on appeal and went on to have two miraculous little boys.

The legal battles were not over, however, as the law still prevented Diane from naming the boys' father on their birth certificates. After many hurdles and stumbling blocks, she triumphed again and made constitutional history when the Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Deceased Fathers) Act finally came into force on 1 December 2003 and she was allowed to re-register her children's births.

Flesh and Blood asks many important questions and helps provide some of the answers. It shows how controversial policies are made that affect all our lives. Beyond that, it is a simple story of life, death and procreation: an incredibly vivid account written by the woman who lived through the despair and jubilation.

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FMedSci

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Copyright

# Flesh and Blood

The Harrowing and Moving Story of a  
Mother's Fight to Bear Her Late Husband's  
Children

Diane Blood

Books are frequently dedicated to the memory of a loved  
one.

I dedicate mine to the living:

the dreams and inspiration of my late husband,  
Stephen Brian Blood 1965-1995

and our wonderful children,  
Liam Stephen Blood born 1998

and

Joel Michael Blood born 2002

## FOREWORD

This is a story of a very brave woman. But it is a story that should really never have needed to be told, about a bitter battle that should never have taken place. It is a story about the inflexibility of some powerful people who felt they were serving some public purpose, and the remarkable persistence of a solitary widow who simply sought justice after the tragic premature death of her husband. This grieving woman, poignantly and against the odds, stood against the mighty British Establishment and persisted in a fight to have her husband's child - a child that both she and her husband, Stephen, had long planned.

It all started with meningitis. After a sudden, brutally short illness, Stephen Blood died. During his last few days in Intensive Care, sperm was taken from him for frozen preservation. It had always been his express wish that Diane should have his child in the event of his death, and, as a religious individual, Diane gave approval for his sperm to be stored. She wanted to fulfil what she was certain was Stephen's dying resolve. And the British regulatory body, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), established by the Government to supervise embryo research and various aspects of fertility treatment, gave their authorisation so that sperm storage could take place.

But months later, when it came to the crunch, the HFEA suddenly seemed to change course. They refused permission for Diane Blood to use the stored sperm taken from her dead husband. They invoked the precise wording of the law, arguing that, because Stephen was too ill to have actually physically signed consent for sperm storage and

insemination, Diane could not have his child. Ironically, she could try for a baby using donated sperm from any individual anonymously chosen from a sperm bank. But even with the full support of her dead husband's family, Diane could not carry out what she believed to be Stephen's dearest wish.

What followed is, in my view, a blot on the history of the Government's regulatory authority. When Diane's expensive and lengthy legal action to get permission to use the semen failed, the HFEA seemed almost vindictive. They justified their actions in the broadcast media and even pursued Diane for the HFEA's legal costs. With the frenzy in the newspapers that inevitably followed, some members of the HFEA clearly took the view that Diane was simply doing all this for the publicity. In fact, all she wanted was a just settlement with personal privacy. Some of the regulators stated privately that they were upholding an important principle against somebody who, to some of them, appeared somewhat deranged. But what public good could possibly be served by refusing Diane Blood treatment remained obscure.

Diane Blood, her family and her legal advisers remained steadfast. After a lengthy and costly process in the Court of Appeal, a legal ruling gave Diane a tiny loophole - whilst saving the face of the HFEA. Diane Blood could legally export her husband's frozen semen samples to a country in the European Union, providing the HFEA approved. After a little further negotiation, the HFEA backed down, and it was agreed that the best place for Diane's treatment would be Brussels in Belgium. There the doctors had an excellent track record using IVF with stored sperm samples.

The Belgian treatment (which could so easily have been carried out without charge in the UK) was successful. Liam Blood, a delightful little boy, is now six years old. And his younger brother Joel was born just three years ago in July 2002, after Diane went through a further course of

treatment. Nobody now can doubt the wonder of the existence of these children, nor the delight they give to Stephen Blood's whole family. Very few people now feel that Diane's resolve to pursue treatment was other than totally justified. It is clear to all that it has ended entirely happily.

Diane's story is most moving. But it also raises some very important social questions, particularly about the way modern society is often regulated. Our society is increasingly tightly controlled, and sometimes huge power is given to those who are appointed to enforce the regulations. Why should 'consent for treatment' necessarily always be in writing, as the HFEA in obeying the letter of the law was required to rule? To what extent should 'right-thinking' people decide what Diane and her husband had personally agreed? And how can the 'Establishment' determine what is in the best interests of an unborn child? Should private individuals be able to decide what is right for them when their decision cannot threaten the moral structure of our society in any way?

Apart from highlighting concerns that are increasingly important for the whole of our society, this book describes a gripping emotional journey. It is testament to a remarkable woman with a wonderfully steadfast, loving and supportive family. Diane Blood, with her determination, love and courage, touched and enriched the lives of many people - many of whom she never even came into contact with. I am very glad that her important story can now be told and that I, in a very small way, was associated with it.

*Robert Winston*

## PROLOGUE

At 28 I had lived more than most. I had felt true love, happiness, hope, sorrow, grief, fear - a whole gamut of emotions that I cannot even begin to describe. I experienced them all in just one week - the week my husband died. On the Sunday morning of 26 February 1995, he had been a perfectly fit, healthy 30 year old, well enough to go to work. By that evening, he was too ill to communicate. Four days later, he was dead. I had watched him deteriorate through one of the most rapid and agonisingly painful diseases that one can possibly imagine.

People usually strive to describe death in comforting terms. When we pass on, we are supposed to just slip quietly away, but this pleasant piece of propaganda rarely holds out in truth. There was certainly nothing very serene about my husband's departure from this world, and I realise that this makes some uneasy. They said I should have let him die in peace, but this was never a possibility. It was not the fault of any medical procedure, but the ravages of the disease itself. Naturally, I was devastated. I don't like to see anyone suffer, but this was the man I would have gladly given my own life to save. By the evening of Thursday, 2 March, he was gone, but maybe I could still save our dreams.

By amazing coincidence, just a few months earlier we'd read about a widow who wished to have a baby by her deceased husband using his frozen semen. We commended her decision and concluded that, if we were ever in that situation, it was something that we would also wish to pursue. Against all the odds, it had been possible to extract

some of my husband's sperm whilst he lay in a coma. My parents and my husband's family had all been consulted at the time. Everyone had agreed that the sperm should be taken, but it was also emphasised that no pressure would be put on me to go ahead with an attempted pregnancy if I later changed my mind. For the next 18 months the possibility that I could still have my late husband's child was a closely kept family secret. I had no idea at the time of his death that this simple, private matter would subsequently lead to controversy and an extremely public High Court battle purely because I did not have his consent in writing.

In spite of losing my husband, I still considered myself very lucky, not just because our hope of a family was still alive but also because I was so incredibly grateful for the time we had shared together. I am painfully aware that some people never experience the warmth and intimacy of such a relationship. Perhaps that's why they didn't seem to have any true sympathy for how I felt. Many commented that I was lucky for entirely different reasons. They said that I was still young. That I'd find someone else.

The same had been said 12 years earlier when we'd first fallen in love. I was 16 years old. My husband had just turned 18. Young enough to be influenced by those who advised against rushing into anything, we'd waited over eight years before we married. Then the voices of authority had told me to study hard, to build a career before I started a family, to plan for the future and look ahead. Later I was to be questioned damningly for having done precisely that.

Forgive me if, given what I've been through, I am a little sceptical of other people's opinions. At times it seemed like I could not win, but I knew also that I could not lose. What I fought for was an issue of such central importance both to my life and to that of my late husband that my greatest loss would always have been to walk away. For that, I would never have forgiven myself. I even feared the enormous pressure on both my own and my husband's family might

drive a wedge between us all that would have defeated what I had wanted to achieve. It would be no use winning the right to try for my husband's child if I lost the love and support of the caring extended family within which I had hoped to raise that child. This was just one of many seemingly impossible dilemmas I was to face. I wanted the rest of my life back. I fought for it at huge emotional and financial risk, but to have given in would have cost me my soul.

I am eternally grateful to all those who eased the burden along the way, to those who battled alongside me and, of course, to those who ultimately decided in my favour. In part, this story is a debt of gratitude to them and to the clinicians who treated me. My gynaecologist, Professor Paul Devroey, and my fertility counsellor Jan Evenepoel, in Belgium, both deserve a special mention. It is easy to say thank you, but the words mean very little without explaining the difference their actions made. I can't do it in a letter. Perhaps in a book I can get somewhere close.

To some, this may be a love story; to others, a nightmare – but for me, for the man I will always love, it is a plea that cold bureaucracy should never again be allowed to override raw human emotion.

I would like you to understand me and my late husband a little better. Perhaps by reading my story you can get beneath our skin, feel our blood flowing through your veins and begin to understand a little of what drives us and makes us who we are. We are all different. I recognise that the choices my late husband and I made may not be desirable to many, but this misses the point. You are not us. If you were, you would not question our wishes. If you were me, your heart would bleed as mine did. And you would ask that laws you'd always believed were set in stone, whether those of man or nature, be overturned.

# CHAPTER 1

## **An ominous conversation**

THE PHONE RANG. I was seized by a momentary rush of panic. There were deadlines to be met and still so much to do. It was a bit like the closing seconds of a school exam, when the teacher's voice first breaks the silence and you know your time is up. Mercifully, Tim, my colleague, answered quickly and the disturbing ringing stopped.

'Is t'other 'un there?' I could imagine my husband's cheery voice on the other end, even though I was out of earshot. The call came from the office downstairs. Stephen, or Steph (pronounced Steff) as I'd always known him, worked for my father's company in the same building as us, so his calls were a familiar ritual. He needed a lift home. Tim handed over the receiver on his way out the door, without ever having to explain who the caller was.

'Are we goin' 'ome tonight?'

'I'll not be long, I just want to finish off what I'm doing,' I remonstrated.

I hated home time, not because I disliked going home but because it meant that yet another day had passed in which I'd failed to achieve all that I'd hoped.

It had been two years since I'd set up Pseudonym Advertising. We had some tasty accounts and a portfolio of work which an agency ten times our size would be proud of, but there were still only two of us working there and time was ticking on. I'd ideally have liked to have taken on a few

more employees before I contemplated starting a family, but we'd now been married for almost four years. Steph, who adored children, was beginning to get impatient and I, too, had started reading the agency's voucher copies of childcare magazines with more than just a professional interest. Finally recognising that life is never quite ideal, I'd given in to the constant requests and thrown away my diaphragm and half-finished tubes of spermicide. Now, a couple of months later with my period just overdue, I was more excited than Steph.

'Come upstairs and see me,' I invited. 'I'm waiting for the computer to print.'

Stephen plodded up the uncarpeted wooden stairs and plonked himself down on the chair beside the computer with the resigned air of one who knows that 'not long' could mean anything between five minutes and three hours but was more likely to be the latter.

'Has everyone else gone?'

He nodded, and for a second I caught a glimpse of weariness in his deep blue eyes.

'It'll not be long now, love, I promise.' I stepped one leg over his lap, sat on his knee facing him and began to gently kiss his forehead. I moved down to his eyes, closing them and kissing his long dark lashes as I went. 'It'll not be long until we have a family like everyone else and then I'll not work so hard, I promise.'

He smiled, hopefully, and squeezed my hand. I was so lucky to have such an understanding husband. At times I barely understood myself, but I had to be independent. I had lost my job four times. I'd been made redundant twice since we'd been married, so I felt the need to prove to myself that I could be successful. To be honest, I had finally started to believe in myself. We'd just produced our first agency brochure and Steph had been so proud of the finished result. It almost made it all seem worth it.

I glanced back at the computer. It was still barely halfway through processing the print information. I silenced Stephen's sighs by quickly moving my kisses down past his cheeks and onto his lips. As I absorbed his breath, I drew closer into him, wrapping my feet around the back legs of the chair and pulling myself tight against him so that in the heat of the moment we might melt into one.

The computer beeped and for a second I was propelled back to reality. I leant back to press the return key, but Steph was hooked and caught hold of a few strands of my long fair hair, reeling me back towards him with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

I giggled like a nervous teenager. When you've been together for as long as we had, it is easy to allow familiarity to dull the edge, but in many ways our relationship was brand new. Trying for a family added fresh excitement.

The printer finally whirred into action. The spell was temporarily broken.

'Does that mean we can go now?'

'Yes,' I smiled.

We arrived home five minutes later and a good two and a half hours later than the average nine-to-five office worker. A quick look in the kitchen cupboards soon confirmed what I already knew. Last weekend had been one of the many when I hadn't had a chance to get to the supermarket.

'Do you fancy going for a pub meal?' I enquired, checking the cupboards for a second time, just to see if I could find anything more inspiring if I looked properly.

'Yeahhh,' Steph grinned enthusiastically, eager to avoid the wait even more than the washing up.

Luckily for Steph, I'd learnt not to be one of those women who take ages to get ready. I dashed into the bedroom and in a few seconds I made myself presentable.

We piled into the car and headed back down the road to our local. During the week, it served two two-course meals for a fiver, so eating out wasn't really an extravagance.

Steph couldn't have enjoyed it if it was. He was always very cautious with money.

We quickly ordered our meals and sat down at the only dining table left - in a dimmed corner right next to the serving area. The smells drifted past temptingly as the waitresses flopped in and out of the kitchen with everyone else's meals. Thankfully it wasn't long before two large plates were placed on our table and we tucked in eagerly.

'Do you think we should tell my mum we're trying for a family?' I enquired.

'I think she already knows - or at least suspects. She doesn't miss a lot, your mam.'

'Maybe.'

'I think your parents'd love it if they had grandkids, although I don't think they'd cope too well running round after them.'

'No. I wish we were all a lot younger. Time just creeps up on you, doesn't it?'

'I was going to have paid off the mortgage and made my first million by the time I was 30,' sighed Steph wistfully.

'I know. But we're still doing better than most people our age.' It was a feeble attempt at cheering him up.

'Did I tell you I'd been to see the building society about our finances yesterday?' Steph leant forward slightly as the pace of his conversation quickened.

He had told me several times, but he continued before I could reply. 'We're five grand in front on our mortgage repayments.'

I smiled. I was so proud of him, mainly for being proud of himself. Trying to get rich never made him too busy to earn a living, and it was nice that he had something to show for all those years of cramming in the overtime. I leant over and squeezed his hand.

'Di,' he said, taking advantage of the moment of intimacy, 'is our marriage everything you hoped for?'

I pondered for a moment, not wanting to give a flippant answer. 'I'm happy enough, but I wish we'd married sooner. I think we missed a lot.'

Thankfully the sentiment didn't need further explanation. 'I do too in some ways. Do you know there was one point when I just couldn't get you out my mind, but I couldn't carry on like that. It was too intense. You'd burn yourself out.'

'I know. I used to feel like that too.' The memory brought a smile to my face.

I'd met my husband at a party or, to be more accurate, a series of parties, when I was still in the sixth form at school. It wasn't one of those grown-up type of introductions where you meet someone, get talking and find out you have a lot in common. In fact, I don't think we held a proper conversation until our first date. There was a definite magnetism, but initially it wasn't really to do with looks either. At least not on my part, and the first time we met, Steph had had so much to drink that I would have been surprised if he could see straight. Strictly speaking, we didn't even meet at the party, but at its exit. Steph had positioned himself just outside the door so he could collect a goodbye kiss from all the girls on their way home and beg them not to leave him. So that was our first kiss. A quick peck on the lips, which didn't really impress Steph. He couldn't even remember it. He was more taken with my friend, who gave him a nice big snog. But there was something about his eyes that I'd never forget.

It was his eyes I recognised when a mutual friend first introduced us a couple of months later at an organised bonfire and firework party. No fireworks for us, though, just a quick exchange of names and then we parted company. At least I remembered his name, which was more than could be said for him. He was never good with names, which was why he called everyone 'Duck'.

The next time we met was at another party just after Christmas. Steph was on a mission. One of those 'my mate fancies your mate' efforts. My friend wasn't interested and to be honest neither was I. This whole issue of teenage dating and the angst of who fancied who left me rather cold. I did envy those who genuinely seemed in love, but it always seemed to end in tears. A couple of guys asked me out that night. I declined. Steph asked for my phone number. I mumbled something about him being able to get it from the friend who'd introduced us at the bonfire and then left. I'd figured he'd never ask for it. He didn't. Still, at least I had something vaguely interesting to write about in my diary.

I wrote in it every night. It was probably no different from that of the average 16 year old. On most days, if I was being factually honest, it read something along the lines of 'Got up. Went to school. Walked home. Did my homework. Washed my hair. Went to bed.' Life, however hectic, can sound unbelievably banal when you commit it to paper. At times I got tired of writing the same old garbage, but I thought my diaries might be useful if I ever had a teenage daughter - just to remind me what it felt like - so I kept writing. It was a bit of a ritual and, besides, it was good practice. I wanted to be a writer when I left school.

I was especially annoyed at myself for not having anything very exciting to write on Valentine's Day. It's not that I didn't get any cards - just that I knew who they were from and I'd rather they hadn't bothered. Maybe it was time for me to fall in love, so I prayed that I would meet someone very special at the birthday party I was going to the evening after next. I prayed that this person would be so special that it would be the man I would eventually marry. I didn't want to go through all this heartache nonsense.

At the party on 16 February 1983, Steph asked me out. We didn't really spend the evening together. In fact, I think that one question was the sum total of our conversation. He

asked if I would like to go out on the Saturday evening. I wasn't convinced he was the answer to my prayers, so I gave him my phone number on the tiniest scrap of paper you could possibly imagine and I deliberately didn't write my name. I was sure he'd never remember and I figured he'd need divine intervention not to lose a piece of paper so small before the weekend.

On Saturday, he called. I answered the phone, so he didn't need to know my name, which was fortunate for him because he later confessed to me that he had forgotten and wasn't quite sure how to ask for me if someone else had answered. I couldn't go out, as my parents were going out and I'd already invited my friend Helen round for a girls' night in. I suppose I could have changed my plans. Apparently he thought so too, but at the time he just suggested he'd call me the following night instead. I agreed. If this was the man I was destined to marry, I was sure he wouldn't let a little thing like my apparent indifference put him off. Later I learnt that it almost did, but something told him that he had to ring me, so, still without knowing my name, he called again on Sunday lunchtime.

Our first date was a Sunday afternoon stroll and that was when I fell in love. I couldn't believe I had been so careless as to almost miss this guy. We didn't part company until late that night. It felt as though we'd known each other for eternity. We talked endlessly. We walked for miles. And somewhere in those deep blue eyes I got hopelessly lost. They say that the eyes are the windows to the soul. Perhaps that was why Steph's eyes had haunted me since I'd first looked into them all those months ago. I was looking at my soulmate. We never looked back.

My prayer was answered. Our relationship stood the test of time and endured spending time apart when I went away to study copywriting at a college in London in 1984-5. We missed each other terribly at that time, even though I travelled home to Nottinghamshire most weekends.

We married on 11 May 1991. It was a big church wedding with all the trimmings. We used the traditional Anglican 1662 Book of Common Prayer service. Steph insisted. It placed greater emphasis on procreation and meant I had to answer that I would 'obey' him. Most brides preferred the more modern version because it omitted that particular phrase and didn't place so much importance on raising children. I happily agreed with Steph.

He looked so handsome and wore a big grin as I walked up the aisle to join him. Afterwards, we held a reception in a marquee on the lawn of my parents' bungalow. It was very pretty, draped in peach, with pale blue and peach flowers hanging from the poles and decorating each table. In the evening we had a disco. Our first dance was to 'Endless Love'. Weddings pass so quickly, but a friend gave me a good piece of advice, 'Take time out to be alone and tell each other how special the day is, even if it is only for a few seconds.'

Steph and I sneaked around the back of the marquee. We held hands, looked at one another and soaked up the atmosphere of the occasion. I treasure those few moments we spent together away from our guests, but it was also nice to be able to share our happiness with friends and family. It couldn't have been more perfect. Now all we had to do was make the rest of our dreams come true.

We had let almost four years pass us by. They were comfortable years, despite the upheavals with my career. Steph had changed jobs, too. He left the galvanising company, where he had worked ever since I met him, and began working for my father's kitchen and bathroom installation company shortly after our marriage. Even so, I think that Steph, in particular, having just turned 30 a couple of weeks before, was beginning to suffer an early mid-life crisis. We wanted more out of life and we were looking forward to the excitement and challenges of raising a family. It was time to move on with our plans.

The sound of Steph's voice brought me back to the present. 'Do you know, there was so much I wanted to achieve in my life and there's so little time to do it?'

'I know, I feel like I'm getting old too.'

'You should write that book you used to go on about.'

'No, I haven't experienced enough to write about. Besides, I'm happy writing advertisements. It's more fun.'

'That's it, you see, at least you've got your company. If I died, I'd want to be remembered for something. I'd want the name "Blood" to go down in history, to have invented something or been the first to do something, to have contributed - made the world a better place.'

'When we have kids, you'll be remembered by them. That's all most people get,' I ventured.

'I know, and I know they'd have the family name, but I want more than most people. When I die, I'd hope to have a church full of people all saying what a great guy I was.'

'You are a great guy. Does it matter what anyone thinks or says when you're dead?'

The question remained unanswered. Instead he pondered for a moment. 'What would you do if owt ever 'appened to me? Could you cope now?' He took it for granted that, like him, during that earlier intensity in our relationship the pain of losing him would have been too much to even contemplate, let alone bear.

Even so, the thought still stabbed at my heart. A brief frown flickered across my forehead. 'Yes, I think I'd survive - I wouldn't remarry, though. There'd be no point.'

'No, I wouldn't either if owt happened to you. What would you do? Would you keep the house?'

I swallowed hard. We'd worked hard on our bungalow, taking three years to lovingly do it all up before we married and moved in. 'Yes. I'd carry on.'

Steph nodded his approval.

Thankfully, the waitress arrived with the sweets and the conversation ended. It was becoming too painful for both of

us. We ate our dessert in silence.

'Ready?' Steph tried to strike a more cheery note as I swallowed my last mouthful. Without having to give a verbal response, I picked up the car keys and led the way out into the cold, still night air.

The car park was flanked by open fields and was lit by a single white streetlight to whose feeble warmth the mist clung for dear life. On this dank February evening, every breath hung in the air and every utterance left its trail. We walked quickly for fear the words we had exchanged would stay with us forever.

Little did I realise that by the same time next week my husband would be dead.

## CHAPTER 2

### Stephen becomes unwell

THE WEEKEND STEPH fell terminally ill began inconspicuously enough. I awoke on Saturday morning to the sensation of gentle kisses being planted on my naked skin. Steph had obviously been awake for some time and was bored. As soon as I opened my eyes, he stopped and grinned, looking rather pleased with himself. I didn't like being woken up, but he knew that this way I couldn't be mad at him.

'It's your turn to make coffee.'

'No,' I moaned. 'You were awake first, you should bring me a drink.'

'I make it all week. It's only fair you make it at weekends.'

It was an argument I couldn't win, so I promised to make it when I'd had time to come to. I turned over and snuggled back down to catch a few precious extra seconds of relaxation.

The peace was broken. 'A few seconds is up.'

'No-o-o.'

'Ye-e-es.'

It was in danger of turning into the familiar pantomime we played every weekend. *Oh, no it isn't - oh, yes it is.* So this time I decided to give in gracefully and go and make the coffee. Besides, today I had reason to get up. He'd promised we could go and fetch the last bedroom unit for the spare bedroom he'd been fitting out. We needed more storage space for when we had our baby. It wasn't really nursery

furniture, but we'd picked it because we thought it would look nice in a kid's bedroom. I reminded Steph about going to fetch the unit, whilst wafting the coffee teasingly under his nose. Bribery seemed as good a way as any to ensure he hadn't changed his mind.

We were soon on our way to the furniture store. It was a good half-hour journey, so we passed the time cheerfully discussing our favourite topic of the moment: babies. No, Steph would prefer not to be present at the birth. No, he didn't think he'd want to know the baby's sex before it was born. He'd probably prefer a girl, but a son would be nice too.

Names? Well, we'd chosen the name if it was a girl. We'd decided on Shannon. Steph had first suggested the name. We'd enjoyed a few precious days' break in Limerick when we'd attended my cousin's wedding last summer, and he claimed to have been influenced by the beautiful Shannon River. I rather thought he'd been more influenced by the beautiful Nicole Kidman who played Shannon in *Far and Away*, a film we'd recently watched together on TV, but what the heck, it was a nice-sounding name - and I had enjoyed the film too.

We arrived at the retail park and went in to fetch the unit. It took a while to arrive at the collection point, so I waited for it while Steph popped into Texas Homecare, which was next door. My father's company, where Steph worked, organised their kitchen and bathroom installations. Steph wanted to call in and see someone while he was there. Like me, he was always working even on his days off.

Eventually the unit arrived and I happily scrawled my signature across the bottom of the paperwork. It still gave me a thrill to sign my husband's surname, even though we'd been married for nearly four years. As the company I was working for went into receivership whilst I was on honeymoon and I needed to rely on my former reputation for freelance assignments, I'd chosen to stick to my maiden

name for work. Somehow that made it even more special when I could use my married name.

On the way home we considered going to Sheffield to do a spot of clothes shopping. Steph needed some new stuff for work, but I moaned that I needed to get some work done. The decision to leave the shopping expedition till next week was swayed by the fact that Steph also felt a bit under the weather. We went home.

The folder and leaflet I was working on took most of the weekend to write, although I did allow myself a break to watch a film on TV with Steph on the Saturday evening. We thought Steph must be coming down with flu because his limbs ached and he felt pretty lousy, but he didn't have the accompanying sniffles. I teased that I thought it was really an excuse to get him out of fitting the bedroom. It was a long-standing joke that my husband was very good at starting jobs but always seemed to lose interest when they were 95 per cent complete. The problem was, he always had to do everything himself. No one else came up to his exacting standards. There was another reason too. He was proud that, in years to come, he'd be able to stand back and say, 'I did that!', and he looked forward to the day he could tell our children. We liked our home and didn't plan on moving, so he even had plans to extend.

On Saturday night, we went to bed at the usual time. Steph seemed very hot. I thought he must have a temperature and I was a bit concerned. Perhaps he'd be better in the morning.

I woke reasonably early on Sunday morning and resolved to go and make the coffee without a fight. I turned over and my heart leapt into my mouth. I fervently patted the empty space at the side of me. Nothing. Steph never got up without waking me first.

'Steph, Steph,' I cried at the top of my voice.

'It's OK, I'm here.' His voice was encouragingly calm as he walked into the bedroom.

'Oh-h,' I sank back into the pillow, as the pounding in my heart slowed to its usual rhythm. 'I didn't know where you were. I was worried you'd gone.'

'I couldn't sleep, so I got up early,' he explained. 'I've got to go and meet someone at work in a few minutes. They're coming to collect a bathroom and I said I'd be there.'

'Oh. Will you be long?'

'No, I shouldn't be.'

I relaxed. How stupid of me to panic. I hated not knowing where he was. That's what was so reassuring about being married. No matter what he'd been doing or what the day brought, each evening he was there lying by my side and I knew he was safe.

When we were first courting, Steph had a motorbike. We lived a couple of miles apart and it was useful as he could get up and see me easily, but whenever he was late or if he'd been out for a ride, my nerves were on edge until he called or I heard the delightful roar of the 250cc engine as it mounted the little hill into our drive.

I'd been relieved when he'd finally got rid of it. Not because I didn't like motorbikes. If I'd been riding pillion, I wouldn't have worried in the slightest - at least if anything happened we'd have been together - but he'd had more than his fair share of accidents and every time I feared the worst. Once he'd fallen off and dislocated his shoulder. He'd had to be taken to hospital so his sister called me to explain why he hadn't arrived to see me when he was supposed to. I'd almost worn the carpet out pacing up and down all afternoon, and when the phone finally rang, I could have cried with sheer relief that someone knew where he was. He was injured, but at least he was safe.

After all these years knowing that disaster didn't strike at every turn, I was learning to be less paranoid, but I would still have the occasional panic. I'd once temporarily lost

Stephen on a beach. He'd been for a swim and had lost his bearings when he'd returned to the shore. He was missing for ages and I'd really started to worry for his safety. When he eventually found me, I was so relieved, but I also felt slightly foolish that I had panicked so much.

By the time Steph returned from work, I'd almost finished writing the leaflets. He sat quietly on the settee and said he was feeling a little better. I made some dinner, an abridged version of the usual mammoth Sunday lunch (without the Yorkshire puddings). Steph made a valiant attempt to eat it and complimented my cooking. He wished he'd been able to enjoy it more. After clearing up, it was my turn to go to work.

'I want to go in and typeset this copy, so it's all done and out of the way for Monday morning. I've got three ads to write, too, so if I get this done it'll be one less to worry about. I shouldn't be long.'

The famous last words. We both knew everything always took longer than I expected, but Steph encouraged me to go and get it over with. He knew I wouldn't rest, leaving the job only half done.

It could be quite lonely at work, upstairs in my little office, so I was happy when I heard my father's footsteps enter the building. Besides, I'd almost finished and it meant I wouldn't have to lock up on my own, a tedious process at the best of times but even more annoying after a hard weekend's slog, when all you wanted to do was get home for a nice relaxing evening.

'Dad?'

'Yeah,' came the confirmation.

'Oh, hi. I was just about to go home.'

'Stephen rang your mum. He's feeling worse and he wanted to know if she knew where he could get any antibiotics. I'll bring the thermometer and come up and have a look at him later.'

I left immediately and in reality my dad arrived at my house only a few minutes behind me. Steph's temperature was a little high, so, after my father had left, I tried to cool him down with a cold flannel.

'I don't know, fancy going and getting sick, especially when it's been such a lovely sunny day.' I was talking rubbish, as if being ill was somehow easier if it was slinging it down with rain. 'Don't go and give it to me. I don't want your germs.'

'I tell you what, Di,' Steph responded after some delay, 'I really do hope you don't get this. It's terrible.'

I continued to apply the cold flannel to his now boiling forehead. 'There, does that feel any better?' I soothed, kneeling down beside him.

'No.'

I obviously wasn't doing it right, so I got some more cold water and tried again. I took his temperature. It was higher. More cold water. Still he felt worse. I was doing my best. Why wasn't it working? Perhaps the big electric fan from work would help. I phoned my dad to say I was going to fetch it, but he volunteered to go instead. He dropped it off shortly afterwards, just in time to empty the bucket which Stephen had filled with vomit a few minutes earlier, which was fortunate as I am very squeamish.

I'd tried to get him to clean it up himself, but he'd looked at me with big pitiful eyes. 'Di, I can't. I'm too ill.'

I couldn't deal with it, as I knew that if I caught the smell, I'd join in.

Once again we were left alone, the fan positioned on the table at one end of the settee, the sick bucket at the other and Stephen laid out between them, complaining that I was trying to freeze him to death with the fan. He wouldn't believe me that he was really hot and fought like hell when I tried to take his T-shirt off. He was so annoyed, he decided to go to bed. Good. I could turn the radiator off in the room, put the fan on, shut the door and let him rest. I couldn't

understand why his temperature wasn't coming down. I was shivering like mad.

I soon warmed up, but I couldn't relax. I was in and out of the room like a yo-yo. He kept turning the fan off and pleaded with me not to turn it on again. I called the doctor, who confirmed he probably had flu and I was doing the right thing, although he said that he had to come out later anyway, so he would call round before going to bed.

I tried writing my advertisements. I made some herbal tea. I turned the fan back on and made some more herbal tea, but I didn't drink it. I went back into the room and cradled Stephen in my arms as he was sick once again. Strangely enough, the smell of regurgitated dinner festering in the bucket no longer bothered me, and I was quite proud of myself for coping. I wondered if that's what would happen when we had kids. It often amazed me how friends who had been just as squeamish as me never even flinched when having to deal with their children's smelly mess. When someone we love cannot help themselves, maybe that's what happens, I thought - we just get on with doing what has to be done.

'It'll be all right. You'll be OK.'

Stephen no longer responded. Where was that doctor?

Eventually my impatience was rewarded and a torch light flashed past the kitchen window. We didn't have a number on the house, so I knew the search was fruitless. I ran a few paces down the drive and then remembered to walk.

I sounded quite collected as I enquired, 'Are you the doctor?', and directed him to the bedroom.

'Stephen, sit up. The doctor's here to see you.' I tried to sound authoritative and was embarrassed by his lack of cooperation.

'Does that hurt?' the doctor asked as he tried to straighten Stephen's legs.

'Aaah-ah-ah,' was the only response we could get.

‘I think that means it hurts,’ I translated. ‘He’s not usually like this. He’s not a bad patient. He doesn’t normally complain.’

‘Can you try and bend your head?’ the doctor asked.

No response.

The doctor tried again in a louder voice, ‘Can you get your chin to touch your chest?’ He forced Stephen’s head forwards.

This time I also winced with pain. ‘You’re hurting him.’

‘It’s probably flu,’ the doctor pronounced. ‘A temperature can cause those kind of reactions, but I think we’d better have him in hospital – just to be sure.’

‘What else could it be?’

‘Well, there’s a slim chance it could be meningitis.’

I’d heard of meningitis and knew that it was something to do with the brain. I also knew that it was a serious disease but had thought that it normally affected small children. I didn’t really understand the implications of what the doctor had said. I wanted to ask more, but we were still in the bedroom and I didn’t want my questions to frighten Stephen. I didn’t know if he could hear or not.

I’d vaguely imagined that I would have to drive him to the hospital, but the doctor went into the lounge to use the phone to book him into the ward and call the ambulance. No, it wasn’t that urgent, but an ambulance some time in the next half-hour would be nice. The doctor left. I called my parents, who lived only two minutes away. My father came straight away, whilst my mother packed some toiletries. The ambulance arrived before him.

‘I don’t know how you’re going to get him into the ambulance. He’s not being too cooperative.’

‘We’ll manage,’ the two ambulance men reassured me.

They quickly decided that our home had too many tight corners for a stretcher and settled on a chair lift.

I coaxed Stephen into a sitting position on the edge of the bed. The ambulance men needed me to hold the doors