

I've always wondered whether their love story wasn't all just in my mum's head, because to be totally frank, there really wasn't anything special or irresistible about Giles. He didn't even have an English sense of humour. When mum told her girlfriends she'd was marrying an Englishman, they'd all imagined someone like Hugh Grant or Colin Firth, or at least like Ozzy Osbourne, but when she showed them the photos they were so disappointed that they'd ordered another round of prosecco, raised a glass to friendship and secretly hoped that he was at least a bit of an animal in the bedroom.

How he managed to get two women to fall in love with him I will never know: he was a boring old duffer in a beige cardigan, already balding at twenty, with his nose constantly stuck in the Guardian.

And as for him being a bit of an animal in the bedroom – well, I really don't want to know, to be honest.

Less than a year after they married he began to insist on going back to live in England, and sent off hundreds of resumes begging for a job at any bank in the City. One letter from my mother was enough to secure her a place as an Italian teacher at the University of Leicester, the homeland of Kasabian, and they moved there six months later. Mum was already pregnant with me.

Leicester was not Florence, but it wasn't London either, and Dad still wasn't happy. It didn't take long for him to fall for a fellow stockbroker. And so, just as suddenly as I woke up one morning and found myself in the body of a teenager, one day six years earlier I had woken up to find that my family had split apart.

And it was then that I realised what my chemistry teacher meant by 'irreversible reactions', like when you burn something or cook an egg. No matter how hard I tried to pretend, I knew that my life would never be the

same, and that my time from now on would be spent trying to convince other people that I was okay so they didn't worry too much or feel obliged to try and help.

Until the day of my metamorphosis into a teenager, my life had been one long and boring rainy day, divided between school and dance lessons. I spent most of my time writing bad poetry and rewatching the DVD my mother gave me of Sylvie Guillem dancing Prokofiev's *Cinderella*. I would practice in front of the mirror for hours, dreaming of being able to dance like that, of being chosen prima ballerina at only nineteen, just like Sylvie.

To do that I had to get into the Royal Ballet School as soon as I'd finished my GCSEs. The entrance exam looked tough, and although their website told students not to be discouraged by any financial difficulties, when I saw what it cost I was *very* discouraged indeed.

While my schoolmates spent their time hanging around outside KFC and stealing lipsticks from Boots, I dreamed of finding a way to move to London, paying for my studies and becoming a ballerina. I think my mother would secretly have preferred it if I was stealing lipsticks from Boots. I'm sure she wanted me to fulfil my dreams and everything, but I knew we couldn't really afford it, and Dad had the twins to think about, so we mostly tried to avoid talking about it.

I knew I wasn't the kind of teenager that every parent dreams of (assuming there is such a thing as the perfect teenager anyway). Not because I was out of control. I just wasn't great company. I hadn't really smiled much since my father had left. Mum sometimes said that I made her feel lonely, especially when we were driving around together.

I used to go for long bike rides by myself, listening to Pearl Jam, and thinking about my

future on the stage. I'd been taking lessons at the local dance school for years, but they were no longer enough. It was time to take the leap or give up forever. It didn't help that my body felt like it no longer belonged to me.

The only person who could make me smile was Nina, the best friend a girl could ever wish for. We had been inseparable since playgroup, and we liked to tell people that we were sisters, even though we couldn't have looked more different. I had short dark hair, hazel eyes, pale skin dotted with freckles, and a gloomy disposition, while she had long honey-blonde hair and grey eyes and was always in a good mood.

And why not? Her family were amazing. She had a cool older brother who was an officer in the Royal Navy, a mum who was always cheerful and made the *best* chocolate cake, and a dad who wouldn't even pop out to buy cigarettes without letting you know, and who