

The Model, Her Lover & THE KNIFE WIELDING NEIGHBOUR

A secret, sinister obsession and a random act of violence left Jasmia Robinson's once-perfect relationship in tatters and her boyfriend fighting for his life

As told to Lee Mannion

LOOKING AT MY BOYFRIEND, David Obanobi, lying on the hospital bed wired up to countless machines, I knew that even if he recovered fully from being stabbed five times in the back, things between us would never be the same again.

You never imagine that your life will become a statistic – one of those random acts of violence you read about in the newspaper. But three years ago Daniel Graham, a neighbour I barely knew, burst into the flat I shared with my mother in Highgate, north London, and attacked my boyfriend with a bread knife, leaving him for dead. Witnessing the attack was bad enough but, three years on, I'm still coming to terms with events and am anxious about Daniel's impending release from prison.

The attack happened in June 2007, one sunny afternoon while I was having lunch

with David. The doorbell rang. My mum answered it and came back smiling saying, 'It's only the boy from the flat downstairs. He wants to borrow something.' The next thing I remember was a loud bang as a man forced his way in, followed by the sound of Mum screaming. Daniel, my neighbour, had a bread knife in his hand and his face was contorted. Before I could comprehend what was happening, he began stabbing my boyfriend frantically in the back. 'You think you're such a big man with your nice girl and your posh car,' he was shouting. I was screaming and begging him to stop. There was

'There was blood all over the walls and my mum was covered in it'

blood all over the stairs and walls and my mum was covered in it. We tried to wrestle Daniel off. He was crazed and kept stabbing furiously again and again.

Eventually he ran out, leaving David in a pool of blood. By the time the ambulance and police arrived, David was on my bed lapsing in and out of consciousness.

David suffered five stab wounds in his back, with one close to his kidney. Watching him lying in hospital for two terrifying days, not knowing if he'd pull through, was devastating and surreal. I just couldn't come to grips with what had happened or how such a sudden violent episode had turned our normal lives upside down.

Daniel Graham was 21 at the time, three years older than me. He had been living with his sister in the flat below *{continued}*



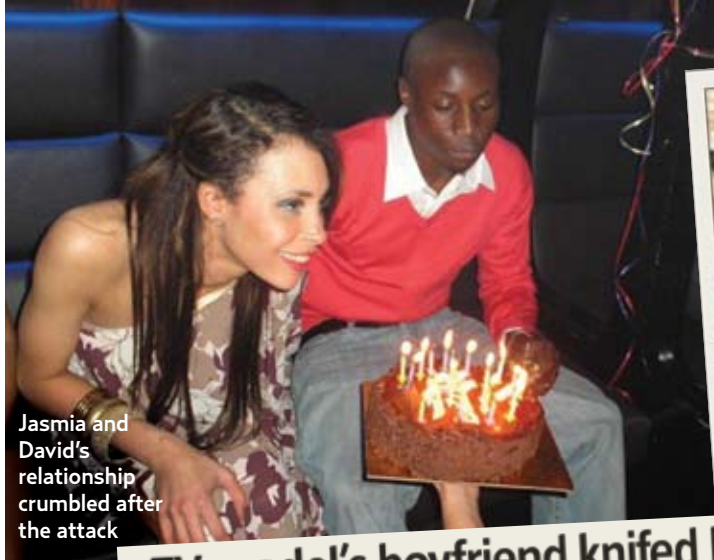
Surviving Crime

ours. He was an average-looking guy who seemed very normal and very friendly. There was nothing particularly unusual about him or his family – apart from something he said to me one evening six months before. During a perfectly polite conversation in the street, he suddenly asked, ‘Do you want to sleep with me?’ I said I wasn’t interested and he was apologetic. ‘I’m sorry,’ he explained. ‘I don’t know what came over me.’

I was taken aback at the time, but I had grown used to unwelcome attention from random men I didn’t know. I had just signed a contract with a leading modelling agency after making it into the final three of *Britain’s Next Top Model* on TV and strangers often approached me. I had no idea that the exchange that day might lead to something that would change my life forever or that he would develop some sort of silent obsession that would cause him to do something so drastic.

When David finally got the all-clear to go home from hospital and Daniel was charged with wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, we thought we could begin putting the ordeal behind us. But it was just the beginning of a new nightmare. David was no longer the man I knew but a vulnerable shadow of his former self. For two years, he’d been my best friend – witty, loving, supportive, athletic and hugely driven. He was at university studying computer programming and had big ideas for the future. But suddenly he was bedridden and depressed.

David couldn’t even leave the house for three months and was increasingly emotional. Before the attack I’d never seen him cry. Now he regularly wept into his



Jasmia and David’s relationship crumbled after the attack



hands and cried himself to sleep. I watched my self-reliant, outgoing and confident boyfriend become a nervous wreck and I felt powerless to help him.

What made it worse was there was no explanation for Daniel’s behaviour and we spent hours together going around in circles trying to figure out why he had done something so cruel. He had no defence and his mother and sister were equally bewildered and upset. He was sentenced to five years in jail, but that didn’t make it any easier.

The next few months were the hardest of my life. I moved into David’s house to look after him and struggled to keep my career on track while dealing with what I now know was post-traumatic stress disorder. I was unable to contemplate going back to my mother’s apartment, where she carried on living with my younger brother so as not to uproot him at school. Just thinking about them living there would bring me out in a cold sweat.

‘Before the attack I never saw him cry. Now he regularly wept into his hands’

If it wasn’t me who was in a state, it was David. We were stuck in this horrible nightmare together and gradually the relationship began to deteriorate. Each row would end with David looking at me and saying, ‘You’re the one that knew Daniel.’

Seven months later we broke up and I moved out.

For months afterwards I was angry, resentful and full of hatred for Daniel. I was depressed and jumpy and work soon dried up because I became too thin and anxious to get jobs. Gradually I came round to the idea of counselling. Through talking about my feelings I was able to move on and I’ve learned to leave my anger behind. Three years on, David and I are friends and I’m rebuilding my life. I’ve bought my own flat and the modelling jobs have started to come in again. I’m even training to be a singer.

Daniel is due to be released any day now. Knowing he will be out there again fills me with dread but all I can do is hope that prison has rehabilitated him. I want him and others like him to see the chaos they cause to people’s lives in the aftermath. I will never be the person I was before. I will never trust as easily and will always be more paranoid and suspicious of new friends. But, at 23, I’m more aware of how precious life is. And in some way I like to think that that is a positive thing. ■

Could your relationship survive trauma?

Sudden traumatic events such as the death of a parent, illness, redundancy or violent crime can be the ultimate relationship test. But you can prevent yours collapsing under the strain, says relationship therapist Mo Kurimbokus.

- 1 Don’t pretend it’s not happening. Seek help as a couple to share the burden.
- 2 Be frank: couples who don’t communicate with honesty will see their relationship quickly crumble.
- 3 Empathise with your partner and remember

- that the person outside the immediate trauma often needs support too.
- 4 Expect stress and change. Tackle them both as a team.
- 5 Remember, you will feel stronger and closer if you get through this.