

# It was me who was doing her the favour

I knew Danielle was my cousin but we'd never, you know, mixed. Something to do with something her father said to my mother about a will and then thirty years go by, don't they? So I'd never known her. Anyway, she was 17 years younger than me as well so she was a different generation. Then out of the blue her mother died and she invited me to the funeral. Well, I couldn't say no, could I?

So I got to know her. We went for 'coffee' and 'lunches.' She heard about my difficulties - which were nothing to do with my judgment, I might add, I just went into business with a maniac and ended up losing everything - and she offered me a job. She was kicking me when I was down if I'm quite honest. She only did it so she'd look good and anyway it was pin money she was paying. But I took it and because of me her business skyrocketed.

It was me who was doing her the favour.

I never saw an extra penny, obviously. I mean, she gave me a Christmas bonus but it was more of an insult really. She's works in Public Relations. Public Relations! Makes you laugh, doesn't it. Signed her name Dani with an 'i.' That kind of woman, you know. Pretentious. Or 'affected.' That's what my friend Linda calls her. I mean, she's not met her but she knows the type.

And then Danielle announced she was getting divorced. Said he hit her. Said he raped her. Blubbered and wailed when she told me. I went along with it because you do, don't you?

Why didn't you say anything, I said. And she said nothing. Just looked at me with her face. I didn't think anyone would believe me, she said later. Yes, I thought.

Anyway. I became indispensable. Without me she wouldn't have been able to go off 'on business' to wherever she went off gadding with God knows who - she wasn't behind the door with moving on with her life, put it that way - and I offered to look after her children sometimes - paid, obviously. I mean, my time's valuable and I'm no mug.

She had two children under five so you can imagine how hard it was for me. One was autistic and didn't speak so it was easier actually. I used to take them when I did my shopping and to see my mother to save me having to go at weekend. She gave me a car because I said I didn't want to put the miles on mine. They used to watch the television while I did the ironing. They had a whale of a time with me.

Danielle was always on at me to meet up with the rest of the family. Mithering. She wasn't in our circle and she didn't know any of the others and I said they were busy in any case. Asked me for their phone numbers. Asked if they were on Facebook.

She was needy, you know. Went to 'counselling.' Said she meditated to 'breathe through the moment.' I mean, I ask you. But a job's a job, isn't it?

And then Graham, my husband died. He was my second husband but he was a nice man. I got my sister-in-law to ring Danielle to tell her. I didn't want to speak to her and deal with her questions. And then there were flowers. And texts. And cards and letters. She bombarded me. I didn't respond.

I was obviously going to take time off work. Anybody would. And then one day about two weeks later she caught me on the hop when the rest of the family were round and rang me. Asking how I was doing, if I needed anything. No, everyone's been fantastic, I said, looking after me. I don't need anything. Then she said I didn't need to rush back to work, to take all the time I needed. 'Oh no,' I said. 'Work's the last thing on my mind, Danielle. I can't even think about coming back to work. It's too soon.' And I put the phone down.

Of course, the rest of the family heard what I'd said to her.

'She wants you back at work before the funeral?' said my brother.

'That's terrible,' said my sister.

'Well I won't be having anything to do with her,' said my other sister, who, frankly, has always been a pain in the arse but on this I had to agree with her.

But Danielle came to the funeral, didn't she. Rocked up in a hat. A hat! I didn't speak to her. I didn't look at her. Nobody really spoke to her. But at the wake my friend Audrey gave her a piece of her mind and without even saying goodbye, Danielle swanned off. It was my husband's funeral.

After another couple of weeks or so I went back to work. I just turned up one day - I didn't need her approval. And then everything carried on but we weren't pally.

She moved house. Invited me round. Wanted to know what I thought of her new furniture. That was her, always showing off. 'I hate nests of tables,' I said. That shut her up.

Anyway sixteen years had gone by and I was still working for her. By then her kids had grown up - the other one had learned to talk and was actually reasonably bright - and she'd 'restructured the business' and then she announced she didn't need me any more. I just got up and walked out. I never heard from her again.

But then my mother died - she was 93 with a filthy flat and a lot of clutter so you can imagine what I had to deal with - and there was going to be a funeral that needed sorting, obviously.

We all got together at a convenient pub to arrange everything and I'd booked a table for six, when out of the blue my other brother turned up. (We're not in contact. He has a wife who's a model). And suddenly we had to find a seventh chair. You can imagine the uproar. Said he'd seen we were meeting up on WhatsApp.

So he sits down.

'Have you told Danielle about mum?' he said. 'Mum was her godmother.'

Nobody said anything. Eventually my youngest sister said 'we don't speak to her. She's been horrible.'

'Why?' he said.

And then it all came out.

I said 'she wanted me back at work straight after Graham died. Demanded it. With me in a state on tablets and everything. She was cruel and thoughtless and very very inappropriate and we are all in agreement.'

He leaned forward on the table and I could have hit him. He put his hands in a steeple and if there's one thing I can't stand it's that.

'That's not how I heard it,' he said. 'I was there when she spoke to you on the phone. I was with her in the room. I heard exactly what she said. And she didn't say that. In fact, quite the opposite.' And then he said: 'As you well know.'

Fancy saying that to me in front of everybody, with my mother fresh dead and not yet buried?

'She should be included,' he said. 'She was good to you.' I laughed at that. 'And now she's very seriously ill.'

'What's wrong with her this time?' I said.

He said she's got Stage 4 breast cancer. But I think she's only saying that for attention. Couldn't be Stage 2 or 3, could it? Couldn't be six months to live, could it? No. It always has to be worse. She was always dramatic. And if there's one thing I know about her, it's that she is a liar.