



I'll never forget the date, 20 October 2019, as my friend, Sarah*, came to visit me in a dream. She looked beautiful – her face glowing with health, her brown, corkscrew curls shiny and full. She was smiling at me and I awoke with a jolt, missing her terribly. It had been four years since we'd last spoken, which wasn't to say I didn't think of her often, and a part of me had always held onto the hope we would make amends one day. But after a quick search online later that day, I learnt that Sarah had passed away just 10 days prior. She was 50 years old.

Sarah and I met at a spa on the Thai island of Koh Samui in 2013. It was Christmas and we were both treating ourselves after a tumultuous year. I was devastated from my father's death, failed IVF, and the end of my relationship, while Sarah was struggling to come to terms with her brother's passing after a long illness. In the midst of her divorce, she told me, she'd been diagnosed with breast cancer and had a double mastectomy, followed by reconstructive surgery. We became close, bonding over tears and our stories of heartache.

Sharing ups and downs

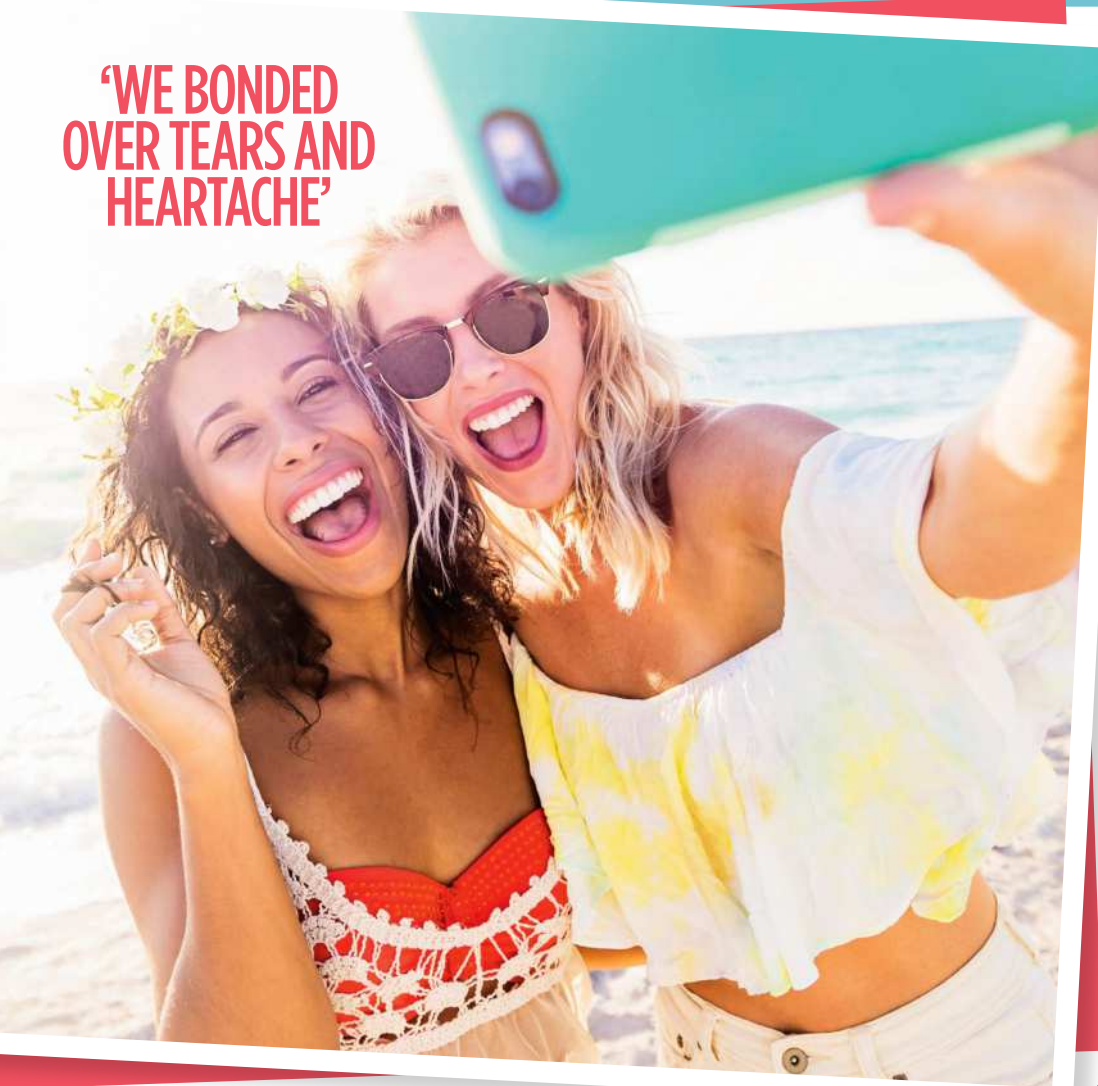
I'd frequently visit Sarah in London, where we'd get dressed up and go out for nice meals. As Sarah was an avid cyclist, we signed up for a spinning class. Twice, we went on holiday together to Luxor, Egypt, and then to Dubai, where we went

up the Burj Khalifa to take in the spectacular view. Both single, we'd divulge intimate details of our Tinder trysts and dating disasters. One

My friend cut me out of her life...then SHE DIED

Katreen Hardt never got the chance to make amends

'WE BONDED OVER TEARS AND HEARTACHE'



day in 2015, I introduced Sarah to Albert*, a man I'd dated for three months before and I'd remained friends with.

Their casual get-togethers for coffee and conversation quickly blossomed into a relationship. She'd been hesitant to tell me, given that Albert and I had met up for drinks the last time I was in town before I'd introduced them. But although he'd tried to kiss me then, I wasn't interested. When Sarah told me they were now a couple, I was thrilled and let her know I was fine with their new relationship. Both of them had been in search of a serious partner and I was happy that I'd been able to set them up.

Shocking rejection

A few days later, Sarah and I were on the phone making plans for another one of my visits. I was excited, as the three of us had tickets to a play in the West End. I commented on how funny life was considering it felt like only yesterday that she and I had spent the day at Selfridges shopping for lingerie for a date I had planned with Albert (on the off-chance we might end up in bed) and now the two of them were a couple. There was an

awkward silence. Then she suggested that maybe Albert still fancied me. I tried to laugh it off, but she wasted no time in hanging up.

A flurry of messages ensued. Knowing I'd offended her, I profusely apologised, but the next day Sarah wrote to say I was no longer welcome to stay with her. I was shocked and immediately I picked up the phone, but she refused to answer my call.

For weeks, I sent messages, saying how sorry I was and that I wished to speak, so that we could put this misunderstanding behind us. But despite the fact I could see that she'd read the messages, she never responded. She'd unfriended me on Facebook. It was then that I realised. I was being ghosted, she was cutting me out of her life.

We'd been close friends for two years, which is why I found it puzzling that Sarah could just turn her back on our friendship so easily. I felt like I'd been made to suffer unfairly. Had my comment really been that awful? It had been said in jest, and as far as I was concerned, didn't warrant this treatment. Not only was

I hurt, but I was surprised by what I considered to be immature behaviour. Surely we were old enough to confront the truth and talk like adults, however painful that might be. I wondered if she saw me as a threat. Whatever the truth, I had no other choice but to move on.

Moving on

The following summer Albert texted me to say that Sarah's cancer had returned and spread to her lungs. I felt terrible for her and I thought of sending her a card – I'd even gone out and bought one – but changed my mind. I didn't think she'd want to hear from me and imagined her tossing the envelope in the bin unopened. Albert and I were no longer speaking, either, after he'd accused me of being 'mischievous' toward Sarah, so as time passed, I never asked him how she was doing. Unbeknown to me, she would only live another three and a half years.

Coming across Sarah's death notice that day in October 2019, I felt the tears welling up in my eyes. It said that she'd passed away peacefully at her home and the notice was accompanied by a lovely black and white photograph

of her looking radiant. I asked myself if we'd only been able to put our grievances aside, might we have been able to patch things up? South Africa had been on our bucket list and we'd fantasised about going on holiday there. But, apparently, neither of us had felt the urge to reach out and make amends. Do I regret not having done so? Yes – and no.

Sarah was an amazing woman and I loved having her as a friend. Yet after she ghosted me, I'd accepted that our friendship had run its course. People come into our lives for a reason. I'd like to think that Sarah and I met so that we could provide guidance and support for each other.

Having her appear in my dream after she died was such a gift. In hindsight, I believe Sarah was signalling to me that everything was OK between us and that there were no hard feelings. It's a comforting thought and one that reassures me that our friendship, albeit brief, meant as much to her as it did to me.

'I WAS BEING GHOSTED'