

'Why doesn't she want us?'

I felt lucky to be so close to my mum, and when that suddenly changed, I felt confused and hurt. But an even bigger betrayal was to come. By Gemma Thomas, 26

Sitting in the kitchen, I turned up the music and poured my mates a drink.

'Gemma, your mum is so chill,' one said.

'She always lets us hang out here,' another added.

'Oh, I know how lucky I am,' I replied.

I was just 15, but my mum Katherine treated me and my sister Jessica, 12, like we were her friends.

'You're always welcome to have pals over for a few drinks,' she'd say with a wink.

And I felt so proud of my cool mum.

I could talk to her like a friend too, nothing was off limits. I'd even confided in her when I'd lost my virginity, something my mates would never have done with their mums.

In fact, if they needed advice or wanted a gossip, it was my mum they went to.

'Strict parents make for sneaky children,' Mum always told me and Jessica. 'You can tell me anything and everything.'

Growing up, her relationship with her own mother, Margaret, had been difficult, so I think she was trying to be the mum she'd never had.

'You girls mean the world

to me,' she'd tell us.

Even as an adult, Mum, who was an only child, was always falling out with Nan.

They'd sometimes go months without talking before making up again.

Then Nan fell ill and, after visiting her in hospital, Mum said, 'I don't think she has long left.'

Despite their difficulties, we could tell she was upset.

As Nan's health deteriorated, she mentioned her will.

'I'll get her house and you'll both get some money,' she said. 'But it's not for holidays or cars, it'll be for a house when you're 25.'

That all felt a long way off, so I didn't give it

another thought as Nan passed away, leaving Mum devastated.

Then soon after the funeral, Mum dropped a bombshell, telling us she was divorcing our dad.

'It's for the best,' she said. 'We've been arguing.'

But they'd been together since they were 17 and, as Dad moved out the day before my 16th birthday, we felt confused and upset.

'You should invite your mates over,' Mum insisted after he'd gone.

But I wasn't in the mood to party.

While we struggled to get our heads around everything, Mum seemed to have a new zest for life. She treated herself to a tummy tuck,

took us to Center Parcs for a treat, and started going out all the time.

'Don't wait up!' she'd say, heading out all dolled up.

At first, Jessica and I found it exciting having the house to ourselves.

But it quickly lost its charm as Mum began staying out all night.

'Please stay in with us,' I begged one weekend.

But she had a new boyfriend and they'd made plans.

'I won't be back for a few days,' she said.

As Jessica was still only 12, it was up to me to take care of her.

Having felt like Mum's best mates, we now felt a burden.

When Dad discovered what was happening, he



'You girls mean the world to me'

The MOTHER of all BETRAYALS



Mum and me



Mum

what Mum had done with the money, so a month on we were back in court for a proceeds of crime hearing, where it was agreed that with inflation, our inheritance would now be worth £65,000.

During this, Mum continued to deny that she'd ever had the £50,000.

But the judge said he was satisfied that she had £50,000 that she'd taken from us, but wasn't prepared to tell the court what she'd done with it.

He gave Mum three months to pay us £50,000, or she'd face a further six months in jail, while Grandpa had to pay us £6000 in that time, or spend three months in jail.

Those three months aren't up yet, so we're still waiting for our money.

But still, the hardest thing for us is the betrayal.

To this day, Mum has never shown any remorse or said sorry to us – her daughters.

Jessica and I are completely estranged from her now.

There's no going back after what she's done.

I've since had my own child, and Mum will never get to meet her beautiful new grandson.

I'll never forgive her for what she did to us.

But after everything she's put us through, it's made me determined to be the mother I thought my mum was.

I refuse to let history repeat itself.



Me now

wondered.

Mum worked in customer services in a bank and didn't earn a huge amount. But she seemed to be treating herself all the time.

Then one day, we tried to reach out to Mum and realised she'd blocked our numbers.

'It's like she's washed her hands of us,' I said to Jessica.

As time went on, she'd periodically unblock us, then stop talking to us again.

It felt like the relationship she'd had with her own mum, the one she'd railed against when we were younger.

All we could do was try to get on with our own lives.

Over the next years, I got a job in insurance and met my then partner. When we began talking about buying a house together, I remembered the inheritance money Nan had left for me.

As Mum was the trustee of the money, it meant getting in touch with her.

Knowing she still had me blocked, I borrowed my partner's phone to call her.

'Take a deep breath,' he soothed. 'You've got this.'

I dialled the number and anxiously waited as it rang. 'Hello,' Mum answered.

'Hi, it's me,' I said. 'Gemma.' She paused before coldly asking, 'Who's Gemma?'

'Who's Gemma?' I thought.

But I tried to push down the hurt and carry on.

'I'm just ringing to see if you can help me access the

money Nan left me,' I explained. 'I know it's a bit early but I'm ready to put a deposit down on a house.'

'It's not your money!' she ranted. 'And, anyway, you are far too young to buy a house!'

Then she hung up, and I thought, *Well, that went well.*

It was clear Mum wasn't going to be co-operative, so I told Dad what had happened and we got in touch with the solicitor who'd looked after Nan's will.

When we met him, he showed us a copy of the will, which said Nan had left us £25,000 each. We'd had no idea it was so much.

But the solicitor had an even bigger bombshell.

'Unfortunately, all the money is gone,' he said solemnly.

Mum had spent the lot.

I struggled to fight back the tears threatening to spill over.

I didn't want to believe our own mum would take our money like that, but it certainly explained the lavish lifestyle she'd boasted about.

It seemed like a storyline straight out of a soap opera, but it was real.

'How could she?' I said to Jessica. 'How could a mother do something so cruel?'

Once we'd calmed down, we came to the conclusion we'd never see that money.

'It's money we never had, so I guess we can't miss it,' I tried to reason.

But the more I thought about it, the angrier I became.

Nan wanted us to have that money, to help set us up in life, and we were owed it.

'I think we should go to the

police,' I told Jessica, defiantly.

But it seemed like such a big step, that we decided to mull it over for a bit before we did it.

'Let's speak to Mum first and give her one last chance,' Jessica suggested a few days later.

So we rang her again.

'Where's our money gone, Mum?' I asked.

There was silence, then Mum quickly hung up.

'That's it,' I said to Jessica. 'We're going to the police.'

Mum had left us with no choice. We'd given her ample opportunity to do the right thing and come clean.

But when police interviewed her, she spouted a pack of lies.

She claimed our grandpa Gerald, Nan's ex-husband, had posted the £50,000 cash through our letterbox.

'That's an absurd lie!' I seethed.

Mum and Grandpa were both charged with taking our inheritance.

But as they were denying it, there'd be a trial – and Jessica and I would have to give evidence against them.

In time, Mum, Katherine Hill, 53, and Grandpa, Gerald Hill, 93, appeared at Swansea Crown Court and denied fraud by abuse of power.

The court heard our mother had been the sole trustee of our inheritance, and despite being advised to put the

£50,000 in a trust account, she'd put it into a normal savings account, that both she and Grandpa had bank cards for.

Bank statements proved that in just one year, they'd

emptied the account in just 10 withdrawals, with £35,000 withdrawn in three transactions alone.

The prosecution said that Mum had asked Grandpa to help her take the money, and that he'd been 'recruited and exploited by her for purposes of carrying out the fraud'.

Testifying against my own mother was horrible and, as I spoke, she just sat there shaking her head in disgust

at me, as if I was lying and she was the wronged party.

Grandpa again claimed he'd withdrawn the money and put it through our letterbox in envelopes, and Mum, who didn't take the stand herself, swore in an affidavit that is what had happened.

Jessica and I were worried the jury might believe her instead of us. But thankfully, they took just a few hours to find them both guilty.

Jessica and I held hands and sobbed as the verdict and sentencing was read out.

We'd been powerless kids when Nan had left us the money, so it meant a lot to now be heard and believed.

At their sentencing hearing

soon after, the judge, Recorder Greg Bull KC, told Mum and Grandpa they were 'thoroughly dishonest people' who'd betrayed the trust that had been placed in them.

He said Mum had been the driving force behind the

fraud, and that she'd done it out of 'greed and spite' because of the money we'd been left, and because we'd chosen to live with Dad.

Jailing Mum for 30 months, he told her she'd used the money as a 'weapon' against us, which was 'disgraceful'.

As Grandpa had been 'recruited and exploited' by Mum he was less culpable, so he was given a 12-month sentence, suspended for 18 months.

We hoped for some repentance, but there was none.

Mum showed no emotion and just kissed Grandpa before she was taken down to go to prison.

It wasn't clear

'We should go to the police'

'She's washed her hands of us'

big moments, like my school prom, mine was nowhere to be seen.

Humiliation burned as people asked, 'Where's your mum, Gemma?'

And when she did manage to pop in on Jessica's birthday, she was itching to leave from the moment she arrived.

'I'm going out with Phil and his family, so I'll be off in a bit,' she said, and my little sister's face fell.

Our cool mum had become an ice-cold mum, freezing us out of her life.

Whenever I spoke to her on the phone, she was always boasting about her holidays abroad, the bar she and Phil had built in their garden, or the new hot tub she'd bought.

How can she afford that? I

tried to talk to Mum.

But when that failed, he said, 'You're coming to live with me.'

Mum didn't fight for us. She didn't seem to care and, after we'd moved in with Dad, we heard from her less and less.

During the divorce, Mum fought Dad for custody of our family dog Oscar and the hot tub – but not for us.

The rejection was devastating.

'How can she not want us?' I asked Dad.

But he was as baffled by this change in Mum as we were.

As Dad moved back into the family home with us, Mum went to live with her boyfriend.

Sometimes she'd take us for a McDonald's at the weekend, but it always felt like she'd rather be anywhere else.

And while my friends' mums were around for the