

Shining light

One thing could help me survive my grief, but was it too late?

Carolyn Mayling, 68, Maidenhead

Dressed in her Edwardian white dress with a floppy hat pinned over her brown curls, my daughter Rosie, then 5, looked angelic.

'Ready,' she beamed, hopscooting over to her scene in the period drama.

It was 1996, and Rosie was used to being on TV and film sets.

It ran in the family.

Her big sister Ellie, then 8, already attended Redroofs, the performing arts school my mum June started way back in 1947.

I'd grown up feeling passionate about coaching young performers.

So when Ellie arrived in 1988, then Rosie in 1991, they naturally shone on stage.

Performing in TV dramas since they

were tots, Ellie was my graceful ballet dancer, Rosie stood out, always dressed in her stripes and rainbows.

Aged 8, Rosie joined Ellie at 'Grandma's school', impressing the teachers with her comedic timing and imagination.

Our home buzzed with laughter and show tunes.

In September 2002, Ellie, then 13, and Rosie, 10, even wrote and starred in their own musical fairy tale.

'Panto next,' grinned Rosie.

She'd won a role in *Puss in Boots* at the Novello Theatre in Ascot.

But as the frosty weather settled in, Rosie got a cough.

Her throat sore, she seemed breathless.

The GP tried her on an inhaler, antibiotics. Nothing worked.

At rehearsals, she'd struggle through her lines

before gasping in the wings.

'No way! I have a show to do,' she insisted when I suggested she stay home.

Rosie made it through a few performances, but by Christmas she was too unwell and handed the part to her understudy.

Despite frequent GP visits, by February 2003, her weight had plummeted, she was pale, her eyes circled in black.

I pleaded for a CT scan, and 20 minutes after it, Rosie was blue-lighted to John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford.

The scan showed multiple pulmonary embolisms.

'Clots on the main arteries going into Rosie's lungs,' the consultant explained.

As Rosie was poked and prodded in paediatric intensive care, dread lodged in my gut.

But does couldn't work out what

It couldn't be cured. 'But it's

treatable,' the specialist reassured me.

In April 2003 Rosie was discharged with meds, in a wheelchair and on oxygen.

Docs promised she'd be back at school soon.

'I can't wait,' Rosie said. She missed her friends and performing so much.

Yet, six days later, the sound of her coughing woke me with a jolt.

Downstairs, I found Rosie, looking horrified, her hand cupping blood.

'I'm scared, Mummy,' she said.

'Terrified too, her dad and I raced her back to John Radcliffe.

'I can't breathe,' she gasped, as I held her.

At hospital, docs rushed her away.

'Be brave, I love you,' I said, kissing her.

But Rosie had suffered a massive pulmonary haemorrhage, went into cardiac arrest, was ventilated, unconscious.

For nine days we waited,

was causing the problem.

Weeks passed, and I stayed with Rosie, swapping with her dad occasionally so I could go home and shower.

Ellie visited, but struggled seeing Rosie so poorly.

Fear paralysed me, and I was prescribed medication to help me cope.

Yet my creative girl, even lying in hospital, bubbled with ideas.

'When I'm better, I'll put on shows to raise money for children in hospital,' she said. I didn't doubt her.

After five weeks, Rosie had a six-hour operation to remove the clots.

Yet within 24 hours, scans showed the embolisms had already returned.

Rosie was turned into a pin-cushion through a barrage of more tests.

But finally, a diagnosis. Rosie had vasculitis, an autoimmune disease causing inflammation of the blood vessels.

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My Rosie was born a star



Dominic gave me new hope

sister, a void in all our lives.

Then I read about a grieving mum who'd gone on to have another baby.

Not to replace the one she lost, but to give herself a tomorrow.

That's what I need, I thought, feeling a bubble of hope for the first time.

But I was 48.

Was I being delusional? My menopause hadn't started yet, but it couldn't be far off.

Still, I couldn't shift the thought and told my husband, who was sceptical but supportive.

'Make a doctor's appointment,' he said.

My GP agreed the chances of conceiving naturally were slim.

IVF was our best option. Ellie worried I was trying to replace her sister.

'There'll never be another Rosie,' I promised, and in time she came around.

It was a long and tough process.

Tests showed I had a low egg supply, and using donor eggs was my best shot.

A friend recommended a clinic in London, where we began treatment.

Because of a three-year waiting list, they transferred us to their sister clinic in Cyprus for the embryo transfer.

After two failed attempts, in April 2008... 'I'm pregnant,' I gasped.

In December 2008,

aged 54, I had Dominic by planned caesarean.

Five years after his big sister passed away.

'We've done it, he's really here,' I wept.

It was magic watching a besotted Ellie, then 20, peek into this crib.

For the first time in years, I felt excited for the future.

Dominic was a calm, happy baby, and as he grew we told him about his sister, why he was special.

He helped mend part of our broken hearts.

Our rainbow baby, born after the storm.

Despite the happiness Dominic brought, in 2013, after 26 years, I split with my husband.

We'd drifted apart in our grief until we almost lived separate lives.

Now Ellie, 35, is a married mum-of-two. She still loves performing, went on to teach musical theatre.

Dominic, now 14, is bright, popular and loves animals – when he isn't on his games console.

He signified a new era for us, but 20 years on I still ache for Rosie every day.

She was born to be a star, and continues to shine.

The Future is Rosie by Carolyn Mayling (Alliance Publishing Press, £11.99) is out now

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WORDS: FRANCESCA WOODSTOCK



Both Rosie (left) and Ellie loved to perform



Me with Rosie, aged 7