

Monster in the mirror

I'd never worried about my looks, then everything changed

Lisa Mann, 27

Pulling my hair into a ponytail, I checked my reflection in the mirror. *That'll do, I thought.* When it came to getting ready, I was pretty low maintenance. I preferred the natural look to layers of foundation. It was August 2017, and I was training to be a physiotherapist. When not studying, I was doing something active, from yoga to triathlons. Today, I was going cycling with my friends.

No need to get dolled up for that. By 6pm, we set off home down a long, windy road. 'Meet you at the bottom,' I yelled, whizzing off. I got stuck behind a car. The road was narrow, I couldn't overtake. I tried to keep my distance. But the car pulled to one side and slowed down. *Brilliant, he's letting me overtake, I thought.* I pulled out and sped up,

then immediately realised my mistake.

The car wasn't letting me overtake. He'd pulled to the side to make room for a bus to pass on the other side of the road.

It was heading straight for me. Swearing, I didn't have time to think.

Pulling at my brakes, I skidded and slammed into the back of the car. Pain seared through me as I smashed into the rear windahield.

The force rolled me over and I landed on the side of the road. 'Are you OK?' the elderly driver yelled, rushing to my side. 'I'm sorry,'

I screamed. Blood was streaming from my face, clouding my eyes. Moments later, my friends caught up. 'Oh God, Lisa, sit down so I can put pressure on the



My flesh was ripped apart, cheekbone shattered



Before: natural and carefree

blow had destroyed the left side of my face. Glass from the windscreen had cut the tissue from top to bottom. It had ripped my tear duct, severing my facial nerve and shattering my cheekbone.

Thankfully, my eyeball hadn't been affected. But the flesh around it had been ripped away. I tried to remain calm. That evening, doctors took me into surgery, fitted a metal plate into my cheek, stitching me up.

Next day, a nurse let me see myself in the mirror. I gasped.

A huge line of stitches snaked across my face. *I look like Frankenstein's monster, I thought.* 'It's OK, I'm alive,' I told my mum Irena, 54. But I was devastated. I'd never been bothered by my looks before. Now, it seemed they'd been ripped away forever.

wound,' one said. Losing blood, I started feeling dizzy. My friends kept talking to me to keep me awake. Twenty minutes later, paramedics arrived, hurried me to hospital. There, doctors gave me pain relief. 'Can I have a mirror?' I asked weakly. My face was throbbing. I knew it was damaged. 'Your injuries are very severe and you need surgery,' the consultant explained, suggesting I avoid looking at my reflection. He explained the force of

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Life keeps getting better

Doctors said I needed to let my injuries heal. 'You'll have scars and your face won't be symmetrical,' they warned. Friends came to visit, tried to keep my spirits up.

After 10 days, doctors took out some of the stitches. Finally, the swelling started to go down.

'It looks a bit better already,' I managed to smile to the nurse. She nodded in agreement, and I felt a wave of hope wash over me.

Needing something to focus on, I started a journal. And made a list of all the goals I wanted to achieve. I'd finish my

physiotherapy training and train as a yoga teacher. 'I could have died, so now it's my duty to live my life to the fullest,' I decided. Ten days after my accident, my mum arrived to collect me. Back home, I took things easy. The swelling kept going down and my doctor removed the last stitches. But my face was still

covered in a huge scar. Worst of all, the left side was paralysed and I couldn't feel it. Only one side of my face moved when I laughed.

I worried about going out, didn't want anyone staring. *I'd scare children, I thought.* So, I covered up in floppy hats and sunglasses. As the weeks passed, I gained confidence.

Friends encouraged me to meet for coffee. In time, I got used to people looking at me. No one ever made cruel comments.

So I tried to smile and brush off the stares. A few months after my accident, I went for a short bike ride.

This time, I wore a helmet. Terrified at first, I soon relaxed into it. After that, I started running and doing yoga.

Went back to my physio training, too. And, in February 2018, I was in the supermarket when I spotted a



At the Taj Mahal: my smile says it all



Alex loves triathlons, too

man in a triathlon top. 'I do triathlons, too,' I smiled. 'Only, I can't right now as I'm recovering from an accident.'

The man introduced himself as Alex, then 25, and as we got chatting, it felt natural.

We swapped numbers and, days later, he asked me out.

I've never been happier and it's written all over my face.

on a date. I never felt self-conscious around him. 'You're cute and beautiful,' he'd say. In December 2018, I had another operation to take out the metal plate. Doctors tried to reposition my eye, too. But my face is still wonky. My scars, although faded, are still visible. But I've learned to love what I see in the mirror. It's a miracle I wasn't killed that day. I'm always laughing, never letting anything get me down. I'm not the same girl I was before. I'm stronger. And life just keeps getting better.



We just clicked!

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