

This is no average teenage romance

Megan Barber, 18, was devastated when boyfriend Daniel, 19, was diagnosed with cancer. But the pair kept their love alive...

They should have been hanging out with friends and enjoying the first flush of romance but instead, Megan Barber and boyfriend Dan were dealing with terrifying news.

Dan had visited his GP after his friend had a cyst removed – and doctors discovered five golf ball-sized lumps on his neck.

Megan says: 'My gut feeling told me it was serious but Dan told me not to worry.'

'I was at school and texted to see how he got on,' she says. 'When Dan said he'd tell me later my stomach churned. I knew it must be bad.'

It was November 2010 and Dan, now 18, went straight to Megan's house in Titchfield, Hampshire, after his appointment at Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth.

'I just asked, "Is it cancer?" and he said yes. I didn't cry, I just gave him a big hug,' she says.

Dan told her he had thyroid cancer. But it took a while to sink in.

'At first I was just trying to get my head around it. But later when I told my mum the tears started.'

The pair had been together only six months. Megan's cousin Brooklyn, 18, had introduced them

in December 2009. 'Most boys my age were obsessed with Xbox and football,' says Megan. 'But Dan was different. He was shy, sweet and passionate about music. We hit it off and our feelings developed.'

Dan's mum Karen McBride, 54, was with him when he was diagnosed. She says: 'It was a huge shock, but we just had to get on with it and be there for Dan.'

According to doctors, Dan's cancer was aggressive and rare in young men, affecting only about six in a million males under 21.

After his operation in December 2010, Dan had radioiodine therapy, which made him radioactive so he had to be isolated.

Treatment started in February 2011, after which Dan stayed at home in Gosport, Hampshire, with his mum, but she could only be near him for 15-minute intervals and contact was prohibited. She couldn't even give him a hug.

'I kept thinking, how can something I can't even see be so harmful to someone else?' he says. 'The thought of harming Megan or my family by giving them a hug was horrible.' Younger people are more susceptible to radiation so Dan couldn't go near anyone under 18. Megan would have been at risk of sickness or worse – infertility.

'I was told I wouldn't see him for two weeks,' says Megan. 'It meant we'd miss our first Valentine's Day.'

On Valentine's Day Dan asked his mum to drive him to Megan's house where he left chocolate brownies on her doorstep.

'I was so touched,' she says. 'He waved from the end of my drive but couldn't come any closer.' Dan

says: 'I wanted a hug from Megan but I couldn't. I felt lonely.'

He could use his phone and computer but only for half an hour a day while wearing thick rubber gloves. Megan says: 'He sent me lovely texts, saying he missed me.'

To avoid spreading radiation Dan used separate cutlery, he couldn't use the family bathroom and anything he touched needed to be scrubbed clean or thrown away.

Karen says: 'Daniel missed Megan when he was isolated, but we all just had to get on with it.'

'His Macmillan support nurse, Jude, was there if he needed to talk to someone outside the family.'

When they were reunited, the couple vowed they would never be apart again. But then the cancer returned. Dan went back into hospital in September 2011, on Megan's first day of college.

'Trying to find my classes and meet new people was hard when I was so worried,' says Megan. Dan

then went back to isolation. 'I wrote him a letter every day. I couldn't believe it was happening again.'

But they kept a sense of humour. 'I read once that burnt toast gives you cancer,' Megan recalls. 'When Dan told me one day he'd burnt his toast I joked: 'Careful you'll get cancer!' He replied: 'Oops, too late!'

Now Dan is in remission and will start at The Royal College of Music this year. Megan says: 'I wouldn't want to be separated again. I thought he was pretty great before – but now I know he's amazing.'

And Dan says: 'I want to make the most of life with Megan. I can't thank her enough,' he says. 'And Macmillan supported me with grants and helped me understand my cancer and how to deal with it.'

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WORDS: JUDY COGAN



Dan, Megan and Karen celebrate!

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