Dear Gillian,

This is the story of my MS diagnosis. I'm a 33 year-old woman, no children, one cat.

I believe my first symptom was an unexplained episode of tingling skin in 2005. I ignored eye pain a few years later, but in 2010, numb legs and toppling over for no reason was a bit more concerning. My GP dismissed the symptoms on the Friday as 'possibly neurological'. By the Monday I couldn't walk.

It was a Bank Holiday, so I was referred to an out-of-hours GP by NHS24. He gave me no suggestion of the cause, just a letter in an envelope to take to hospital. Still blissfully ignorant, my boyfriend drove me to the hospital and I handed over the envelope. I was poked and prodded by multiple doctors and asked the same questions over and over. Someone told me I needed an MRI, and that the quickest route was as an in-patient so I'd have to stay the night. Around teatime, a very kind consultant came to see me. He was reassuring; I remember the words 'inflammation' and 'spinal cord' being used a lot but it seemed straightforward, like something that would go away. I wanted to know if I would be well enough to attend a wedding in New Zealand in five weeks and he seemed positive.

The doctors I'd seen during the day went home. They'd given me a bed, which had no buzzer to call for help, which is not ideal when you can't walk. I was surrounded by strangers, including a woman who barked like a dog when she snored, and the constant beeping plague of drip alarms. The nurses initially seemed sympathetic and said they'd find me a side room if I really couldn't sleep but then they disappeared. I hauled myself to the nurses' station and asked for the side room, and then I begged, and then I fell over on the ward floor and cried. They let me move.

Next morning, a consultant, whose 'bedside manner' was truly appalling, appeared at my bed. He said (to his students, not to me) that I needed an MRI and a lumbar puncture and a number of other tests. I freaked out when he said 'lumbar puncture' and asked why, when yesterday's consultant hadn't mentioned it. He mumbled something incoherent and walked away. I launched myself off the bed and lolloped across the ward after him. I managed to stay upright as far as the corridor and fell over whilst shouting questions at him about how long it would be until someone actually told me something. I was escorted back to bed by a busy nurse, who pulled the curtains round me as I sobbed. She turned away the hovering bunch of medical students primed for more poking and prodding. One came in and held my hand for a bit; I was grateful for his time.

I went for my MRI a few hours later, where the radiologist was brusque and unsympathetic. Later, the nice consultant, accompanied by the awful one, came back and said they had my MRI results. He said that it showed some areas of inflammation. Great, I thought, that's what you said yesterday. What does it mean? The consultant took a deep breath. He said that if this sort of thing happened as a one-off, which it often does, then no more would ever be said about it. But what if it happens again? Another deep breath. Then we would call it multiple sclerosis, he said.

I don't remember too much about my reaction except that it required a sick bowl, and that the words 'Jacqueline du Pre' kept going through my head. My boyfriend arrived at some point, and rather bizarrely suggested that we immediately get married and have children. (I think it was the shock. It hasn't been mentioned since.) The best news they gave me was that there was now no need to stay in the hospital, as long as I came back the following day to collect a prescription for steroids. My boyfriend phoned my sister and she arranged to meet us at home. Someone phoned my mum and she booked herself on a plane to come and look after me and soon, I was tucked up at home with loving family and friends for a few weeks while I recovered.

I never made it to New Zealand and the rescheduled trip to visit the bride and groom in Australia six months later was canned due to a relapse. A proper diagnosis, by a specialist consultant, who is incredible in her kindness, empathy and general brilliance, followed soon after, along with disease modifying drugs. I've not had another relapse but nor have I planned any more trips Down Under.

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