

A TRUE STORY. A BROKEN BRAIN. AN UNBREAKABLE WILL.

AFTER THE **IMPACT**

CONFUSION
LOSS
ANXIETY
FEAR
FORGOTTEN
LONELY

**SURVIVING
AND RECLAIMING
LIFE AFTER
TRAUMATIC
BRAIN INJURY**

STRENGTH
HOPE
HEALING
PURPOSE
FREEDOM
ME
♥

KRIS PICKER

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY SURVIVOR. COACH. SPEAKER.

FREE PREVIEW



AFTER THE IMPACT

PROLOGUE

A FREE PREVIEW OF MY MEMOIR: THE DAY EVERYTHING CHANGED

by Kris Picker
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Prologue

After two months living abroad in England, I finally feel settled. Work is flowing, the staff house has a good rhythm, I've made a great friend in Claire, and I've started secretly dating Dan, the assistant manager at The Griffin where I work.

It is my day off, and I am buzzing with excitement as I plan my outfit for our date. We are meeting Dan's friends at a pub about 20 minutes away. It is still early days for us. It has only been a few weeks of stolen glances and secret catch-ups, and we haven't even slept together yet.

I hop into England's "version" of a shower, which is essentially a bathtub with a plastic hose connected to the tap. Hard to believe it is 2004. I pull on a sexy baby-pink lace thong and matching bra, feeling confident. Maybe today is the day? I throw on jeans and a Bonds singlet. My wardrobe is limited to whatever fit under the 25kg luggage limit when I moved from Australia. It is a warm July day, but since we are taking Dan's road bike, I grab my thick Billabong jacket on the way out.

I walk through Caversham thinking about Dan. I wonder if his friends will judge me for being two years older since I am 23 and he is 21. I brush the thought aside and think of Mum. It is strange she hasn't messaged in a few days. As I cross Caversham Bridge, looking down at the grotty water, I shoot her a quick text asking, "Are you alive?"



I think it is hilarious. She has texted me daily for two months, and now suddenly crickets. Had I known the events of the next few hours would turn that light-hearted joke into a message I would never wish to send again.

Dan is waiting at our discreet spot so the managers don't see us. We kiss hello, and he clips my helmet up for me. I always get butterflies when I get on the bike. It is a mix of excitement and fear.

We beat his friends to the pub, and Dan grabs us beers. It took me weeks to learn to tolerate the stuff. Spirits are too expensive on my wage, so I tried every beer available before settling on Fosters. It is the "Australian" beer no Australian actually drinks.

Dan's friends Hannah, Tom, and Scott arrive. Hannah and Tom have been together since they were kids, and they look effortless in their love. I find myself wishing for that kind of timeless romance. I am internally freaking out because I worry they won't like me, but they are warm and inclusive.

After a pleasant few hours, we agree to head back to Dan's family house to watch a movie. As we leave, Hannah yells across the car park, "Kris, would you like to come with us in the car?"

"Thanks, but I'm okay!" I yell back.

The truth is that I did want to go in the car. But a car means conversation, and conversation means twenty minutes of them realising I am not as fun, interesting or likeable as they'd expected. The bike is easier. On the bike, I didn't have to say a word.



We take off, and Dan's friends fall away behind us. I wrap my arms around Dan and tuck in close to him, my hair is coming loose and blowing across my face so I move it back by rubbing it away with Dan's shoulder and leave my face against his back. The butterflies come, that familiar mix of excitement and fear, but today excitement wins.

The road opens and Dan picks up speed. Then the traffic thickens and he starts ducking and weaving through it. We are moving so fast. It is scary, but exhilarating.

The cars are so close I'm freaking out my legs will get bumped so I try to make myself as small as possible. I hold on tighter and close my eyes until the traffic thins out. When I open them again, the road ahead has cleared and Dan pushes the speed up even more, until there is a slow car in front of us, without slowing down Dan swerves into the bus lane to undertake the car.

Then, I see it. A red car is turning right in front of us. I tense my body in panic but my thoughts start racing in the millisecond.

Oh fuck, we're going to hit. Don't scream, it will be okay. Don't scream, it will be okay. Don't scream, it will be okay.

Impact.

Suddenly, I have nobody. I am all alone in the world. There are feet everywhere, and lips moving as if people are talking to me, but I hear nothing. Just earth-shattering isolation. I am trapped in my own head watching a silent movie. I am in a bubble, unable to move, detached from the chaos around me. I am not even sure if I exist. It's so quiet. There are so many feet, so much movement, but I am alone.



Then, the silence shatters.

Suddenly I'm back in my body and the pain pulses through it, it's unbearable. I open my eyes having no idea what's happening to me, where the hell am I? Why all these people are around me? but it is so blindly bright I squeeze my eyes shut quickly but it doesn't stop the torturous pain and the what the fuck is happening to me confusion. There are hands all over me, touching and poking, which multiplies the pain by a billion. Ripples of agony shoot through my whole body. People are rushing around, but I can't hear anything but blood-curdling screaming.

Where is the screaming coming from? Oh, it's me. I'm screaming and screaming. Why won't they just leave me alone? People poking at me is making it hurt worse. I just want to go back to that peaceful blackness of not existing. I don't know where I am or what's going on. Is this real, or am I dreaming? Nobody is explaining anything. Nobody is talking to me.

I hear a familiar voice, Dan is stroking my shoulder, telling me, "You're going to have to calm down." And I turn towards him, Dan comes into focus after blinking a few times and anger explodes through my body. I cannot get the words out to scream at him to "get fucked" through my screaming and overwhelming pain.

And then there's nothing. No pain, no screaming, just blissful darkness.