

SOULMATES

We were meant to be together forever

Michaela Dunphy, 33, Dublin

As the door swung open, in walked a tall, slim boy with a cheeky smile and a confident swagger.

Dean, 18, was a lad I'd been chatting to online.

It was March 2011 and we'd arranged to meet for the first time at a mutual friend's party.

As he strolled in, he was more gorgeous than in his pics.

Funny too. Just my type.

Later, he walked me home and we shared our first kiss.

After that, we never stopped laughing together.

Early on, we knew it was serious between us.

'You're my soulmate,' Dean told me.

'I feel the same,' I replied.

Eventually, he moved in with me at my mum's house and we started saving for a house deposit.

Then, in October 2020...

'I'm pregnant,' I grinned.

We'd previously suffered a miscarriage so we were both so overjoyed when our little girl arrived safely in July 2021.

'Hello, Sloane,' Dean whispered, cradling her.

He'd chosen her name, which I loved.

From the start, they were a double act.

Her arms always reached for a cuddle with Daddy, and as she learnt to crawl, then toddle, she always made a beeline for him.

Unpacking boxes in our first family home in January 2023, I laughed as Dean

carried Sloane, 18 months, on his shoulders.

Sparky and funny like him, they loved making up dances to his favourite R & B tracks.

'No Baa Baa Black Sheep in this house,' Dean would joke.

We often talked about getting married but for now, life was busy enough with us both working at the same pharmaceutical company, me in admin, him as a driver.

Only, in July 2023, Dean had a funny turn at work.

'I feel like I have no control over my body. My

neck and head are twitching,' he said when I went to see him in the canteen.

He'd been having nasty headaches recently too.

I drove him to A&E.

That's when I noticed that his neck and head had started jerking



Me and Dean at our baby shower



Already an item, on my 18th birthday

uncontrollably.

Terrifying.

In hospital, scans detected a mass on his brain.

Within days, Dean was having surgery to remove a section of the mass to send for a biopsy.

It happened to be on my 30th birthday.

After nine hours, I was allowed in the recovery room.

Dean squeezed my hand, then started to sing *Happy Birthday*.

'Best present ever,' I whispered, so relieved.

A week later, after he'd recovered a little, we were shown into a specialist's office for the biopsy results.

I noticed the tissue box on the table and gulped.

I noticed the tissue box on the table and gulped



Sloane was a real Daddy's girl



'Dean has stage 4 glioblastoma,' the consultant began.

An aggressive brain cancer. Dean was pale, quiet.

Trying to stay strong, I grabbed his hand.

The specialist explained that his cancer was treatable, but not curable.

Devastating, but we focused on the 'treatable' part.

Within days, Dean had a five-hour op to remove more of the tumour.

'I'll fight this,' he promised when he came round.

More treatment followed – two months of daily radiotherapy, along with daily chemo at the same time.

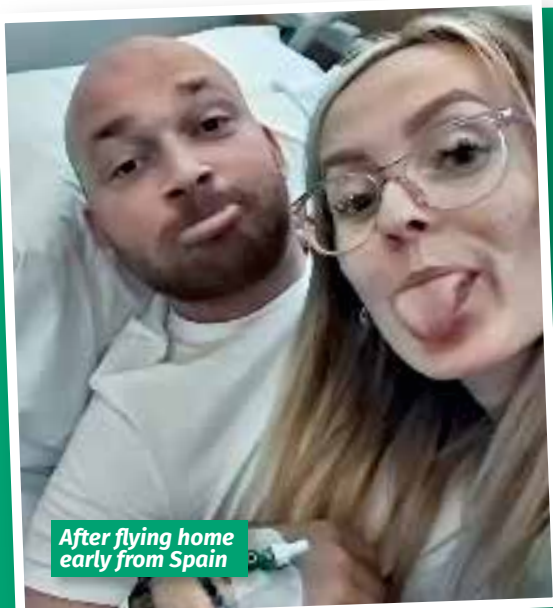
It left him exhausted, but after a scan in late 2023 we were reassured that the tumour was now stable and not growing at this stage.

We knew that the tumour was incurable but we held on to hope.

'You'll be the one to beat medical history,' I smiled.

We were both convinced. If anyone could, Dean could.

Turn over for more



After flying home early from Spain

A PROM I'LL KEEP

We tried to carry on as normal. When he felt well, Dean would snuggle on the sofa with Sloane, but there was no more kitchen dancing.

Then, on a holiday in Spain in August 2024, he was too unwell to get out of bed.

'My head is in agony,' he groaned, his speech slurred.

We flew home early and Dean was admitted to hospital.

He needed a course of steroids for swelling on his brain.

Sadly, days later, Dean's dad Nick suffered a fatal heart attack, aged 65.

Dean insisted on being discharged for the funeral.

He was adamant that he'd overcome the odds when it came to his diagnosis too.

'I want to see Sloane grow up,' he said, determined.

But his speech became unclear – a condition called aphasia, linked to his brain tumour.

And he couldn't walk without a stick.

As I sat on the sofa on 1 January 2025, Sloane, then 3, came rushing in.

Dean followed, leaning on his stick.

'Daddy said to give this to you,' Sloane said, throwing a little box into my lap.

Inside was a beautiful diamond engagement ring.

Despite his aphasia, Dean managed to say, 'Marry me.'

'After 14 years, it's about time,' I laughed.

Wedding planning was a great distraction.

We booked a small ceremony and meal at a beautiful place with a botanical garden for 18 May.

I chose a stunning ivory lace

gown then picked out a sage-green flower girl dress for Sloane.

'I can't wait to be your wife,' I told Dean, as we sent out invites that March.

But on

5 May, he suffered a huge full-body seizure as he got out of bed.

At the hospital, the specialist told us what I'd feared.

The cancer was progressing.

He came home five days later, in a wheelchair and so tired.

Dreams of our wedding began to fade.

Dean won't cope with such a long day, I realised.

Then I had an idea.

'Let's move the wedding to Mum's garden,' I said.

'What about your special day?' Dean murmured, looking worried.

Despite how ill he was, his only concern was

making me happy.

'My day will be special because of the man waiting for me when I walk up the aisle,' I smiled.

We applied for permission to get legally married in my parents' garden.

Then, two days before the wedding ceremony, Dean's specialist called.

Surgeons wanted to operate, to reduce the growing tumour.

'We can do the surgery next Wednesday,' the doctor said.

Four days after the wedding.

Hardly a honeymoon but the news gave us fresh hope.

On the morning of Sunday 18 May, Mum and my five bridesmaids helped me and Sloane into our dresses.

'You're a princess,' I told our little girl.

Downstairs, our guests were waiting but it was Dean I couldn't take my eyes off.

Waiting for me at the end of the aisle, as handsome as I'd ever seen him in his smart tux.

His eyes filled as I walked towards him, behind Sloane.

Exchanging vows, sitting opposite one another, there were some funny moments.

'In sickness and in health,' our celebrant said, and asked us to repeat it.

Dean grinned and shook his head and everyone laughed.

We were already living our vows.

When the celebrant pronounced us husband and wife, everyone was in tears.

'I'm so lucky,' I told Dean, as we posed for photos.

A perfect day.

But he was struggling and



Feeling positive in late 2023



Our wedding day was perfect

Despite how ill he was, his only concern was making me happy

RISE UP

I had to tickle his hand to keep him awake.

Later, his mates carried his wheelchair to Mum's spare bedroom.

Slipping into my PJs, I curled up beside my new hubby as he slept and drifted off, feeling so happy.

But in the early hours, I woke as the bed shook.

'Dean's having another seizure,' I cried.

The house sprang into action and we rushed him to hospital, barely conscious.

'We need to move Dean to the end-of-life care ward,' a doctor told me, after examining him.

'He can't be dying, we've just got married,' I said.

It was less than 24 hours since we'd said our vows.

Now there was no more the doctors could do.

He was too weak for the surgery they'd planned.



In hospital the day after we said our vows



Dean looked so handsome in his smart tux

Devastating.

I had to call round to our wedding guests and break the dreadful news.

And taking Sloane into hospital to say goodbye almost broke me.

'Does this mean I won't have a daddy any more?' she asked quietly.

'You'll always have a daddy,' I explained. 'But he's not going to live with us,

he's going to live with his daddy and the angels.'

She nodded and cried, then went in for one last Daddy cuddle.

Over the next few days, family looked after her while I stayed by Dean's side.

At 4.35am on 21 May 2025, I lay my head

on my husband's chest.

I heard his heart slow...then stop.

It was 36 hours after our wedding day.

Now Dean was gone.

'Is Daddy with the angels?' Sloane sobbed, when I collected her from my cousin's house.

'Yes, baby,' I nodded, hugging her.

Days later, we held Dean's funeral.

Back home, I just felt numb looking at my wedding dress hanging in the wardrobe alongside Dean's tux.

We'd never had a chance to open our gifts or see our wedding photos together.

When I first looked through them, it was bittersweet.

But in time, the love that shone from those photos gave me so much comfort.

So does Sloane, now 5.

Seeing her cheeky smile

and bright eyes, it's like Dean's back with us.

Now me and our extended family are determined to raise awareness and money for research into glioblastoma brain tumours in the hope it will somehow spare another family this heartache.

Between us, we've had fundraising events including sky dives, a sponsored walk, marathons, a raffle and a football match in Dean's name.

Dean's memory will always live on.

I vowed to spend a lifetime loving him. And I'm not one to break a promise.

To learn more about Michaela and Dean's story and the family's fundraising efforts, follow Michaela on TikTok @michaela.dunphy and Instagram @deandunphyfund.

