

They locked us up and and alone, crying like



from
**Rebecca
Hardy**

IN MOTOL HOSPITAL, PRAGUE

ASHYA KING'S parents haven't left their precious little boy alone for a second in the past 26 days. His mother, Naghmeh, is forever kissing him or massaging his limbs, while his father, Brett, just thanks God their five-year-old son has been returned to them.

Little more than three weeks ago, the Kings were wrenched from their desperately sick child and thrown into prison for 72 hours after being arrested for child cruelty.

Ashya was placed under armed guard in a single bed ward in a Spanish hospital where not even his five brothers or sister were allowed to visit him. The Kings now know the poor little boy 'was crying like a wounded animal through the night'.

Their crime? To take their son out of Southampton General Hospital for fear the care he was about to receive for an aggressive brain tumour would at best plunge him into a semi-vegetative state, at worst kill him. Instead, they sought a pioneering proton therapy treatment in the Czech Republic that was not available to them on the NHS.

Upon discovering Ashya was missing, doctors said his life was in danger, so Hampshire Police issued an international arrest warrant and a 48-hour manhunt ensued. It ended in a Malaga hotel on August 30, when two policemen knocked on the Kings' bedroom door.

'I said to my family, "Don't worry, we'll sort this out. We don't want to run any more. Only bad people run." So I let the police in,' says Brett. 'I thought once the world saw Ashya was in good shape that everything would be OK. I didn't realise there was an arrest warrant. We had no idea what lay in store for us.'

'An ambulance arrived to take Ashya to hospital but when my wife tried to get in with him, the police wouldn't let her. Then they started arguing among themselves. One officer said: "What sort of world do we live in where you take a sick child away from his mother?"'

What sort of world indeed. Today, Ashya howls fit to break your heart if his parents so much as whisper 'goodbye' when one or the other of them leaves his hospital room. 'He's been scarred,' says Naghmeh. 'He thinks we're not coming back. So, we say: "I'm just going out. Try and get some sleep. I'll be back in a little while."

HE WAS on his own for three-and-a-half days. I said to the policeman arresting us: "From the day he was born he's been with his family — every day in the hospital in Southampton he's been with us. He's going to be confused. He's going to be scared. He's going to be worrying he's been abandoned."

'I was really panicking. At first they said I could go with him, then they said I wasn't allowed and they were going to arrest us. I got really, really upset. I just wanted somebody to be with him. That's why we wanted Danny, our eldest son to go with them. At the beginning they said yes, but then they changed their minds.'

'I didn't sleep in prison. I just kept praying and crying for Ashya. He's the one who was suffering the most. His health had been taken away from him. His mum and dad had been taken away from him. There wasn't one person he knew with him — not one voice.'

For Ashya, the separation from his

EXCLUSIVE

Starting today, the parents jailed for trying to save their little boy's life tell their story. It will move — and enrage you



Pictures: MARK LARGE

family was particularly traumatic. Following the removal of his brain tumour in Southampton, he suffers with a condition called posterior fossa syndrome, which initially reduced him to a vegetative state.

The syndrome affects as many as 40 per cent of children following similar surgery. Symptoms include problems with speech, language, motor skills and mood changes.

In time, he will recover, but how long it will take is rather like asking the length of a piece of string. Love and stimulation are crucial to early recovery.

Watching the huge strides he makes under his parents' steadfast care is a pure joy. But Brett continues to be deeply troubled by his son's pitiful state when they were finally reunited.

'I could see on his face the complete and utter shattering experience he'd been through,' says Brett.

'I went into his hospital room and he was so motionless, I said: "Ashya, it's Daddy." I got him in my arms. He opened his mouth as big as he could and said: "Ahhhhhhh, aaaaaah." Not crying, but pain. I was hugging him. I could feel the pain inside him.'

'I said: "Ashya I'm here now. I'm never going to leave you. I'm so sorry for what happened but we're here. We're going to be together for ever. You don't have to cry any more."

Today, he has come on leaps and bounds since that moment.

We delight when he sticks out his tongue for the first time. Marvel when he gains control of his head sufficiently to nod in response to my

questions. As his mum says: 'It's as if he's been a prisoner in his body. He knows everything that's going on around him.'

Which makes those bewildering days the poor little chap spent alone in the Spanish hospital all the worse to contemplate. 'If we'd been saying: "He doesn't need conventional treatment. We're going to stick green coffee beans up his bottom," then what happened might have been more understandable,' says Brett. 'But all we were trying to do was get him a recognised treatment that wouldn't fry his brain.'

Today, Ashya has completed his second week of proton therapy at the centre in Prague. Each daily session lasts for 30 minutes and requires a general anaesthetic to ensure he is completely still.

Despite this, he is emerging from his semi-vegetative state at astonishing speed. Yesterday, he stood for 60 seconds resting his hands on his dad's shoulders. The day before he said, 'Mum' for the first time since his brain surgery.

'That's what Naghmeh's been waiting for. She hadn't heard him call her that for nine weeks.'

Little more than two months ago, Ashya — one of seven children aged

between three and 23 years old from a particularly close-knit family of Jehovah's Witnesses — was, to all intents and purposes, a perfectly healthy child.

In mid-July, his mum noticed his left knee was slightly unstable. Fearing the juvenile arthritis he'd suffered as a two-and-a-half-year-old had returned, she booked an appointment at the GP surgery near their Portsmouth home for July 22.

'That day I took him to the park with his sister [three-year-old Sion]. He was playing with her but kept falling. Then he just said: "Mummy, can I have a lie down."

WHEN he lost his balance again in front of their GP he was immediately referred to Portsmouth's Queen Alexandra Hospital where Brett joined her.

'The doctor asked him to do several things including touching his nose,' says Brett. 'He kept missing it. I thought: "That's strange." Then he said: "Can you walk in a straight line?" He couldn't.'

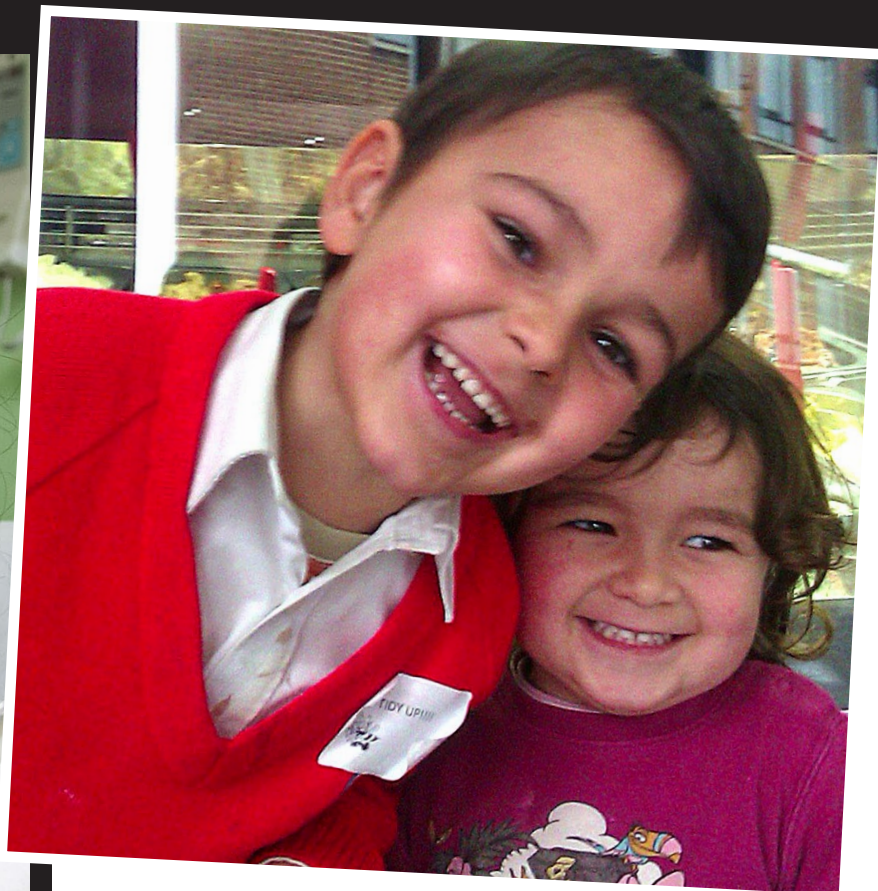
'They put him on a bed and another

'The doctor warned us: Stop asking questions — or we'll take Ashya away from you'

left Ashya frightened a wounded animal



Reunited: Brett, Naghmeh and Ashya, in hospital in the Czech Republic



Full of mischief: Ashya, with his sister Sion, a month before surgery

doctor asked: "Ashya, is your world spinning?" He said: "Yes." So I asked him if he knew what spinning meant. He said: "Yes, it's going round." "All this time his world had been spinning and I never knew. How can a father not know that?" An MRI scan and a CT scan followed. Several hours had passed when the doctor returned. "Ashya was sleeping. The doctor said: "Can you and your wife come over here? The images are showing he's got something in his head." I

said: "What do you mean? Please just tell me what it is." "She said: "He's got a brain tumour." They set up the images on the computer. There was a huge white thing the size of a satsuma. I said: "What am I looking at? It's massive." She said: "Yes, that's the tumour and it's very well advanced." "That's when our lives just crumbled. "You suddenly realise the most important thing you've got are your kids. Everything else — your house,

your car — is just rubbish. I got into bed with him because I felt I had to be close to him — to share this with him — but even though I was hugging him I just felt I couldn't get close enough. I said to him, "I'm not losing you now" and I said to my wife: "He's not going anywhere, he's staying with us." "Naghmeh was inconsolable. 'It felt like I was melting inside,' she says. 'You feel empty. I kept thinking: "How long has he got? We should have taken more pictures of him —

'We were just trying to get Ashya a treatment that wouldn't fry his brain'

done more with him. He's never been to Disneyland. Why didn't we do these things before he got sick?" "Ashya was transferred to the children's high dependency unit at Southampton Hospital in the early hours of the following morning, where surgeons operated immediately to relieve the fluid that had built up in his brain. "The doctor who operated on him said when he drilled through the skull to put a tube in there was a massive gush of water — like a volcano erupting. "All this time he'd been saying, "I

want to lie down" and all this time we had no idea what he'd been going through because he wasn't complaining. He never said: "Mum I've got a headache." "Ashya's emergency operation to have the tumour removed was scheduled for later that day. Doctors discussed with the Kings what would happen should Ashya require a blood transfusion, something Jehovah's Witnesses believe should be avoided. "Ashya isn't a baptised Jehovah's Witness," says Brett. Jehovah's Witnesses decide for themselves when or whether they wish to be baptised. "I said as a parent, I have my feelings, but ultimately in terms of whether he has blood or doesn't have blood, the doctors will decide what they think is best." "Would the Kings themselves have a blood transfusion in a medical emergency? Naghmeh is unequivocal: 'I wouldn't,' she says. And Brett? 'I can say I wouldn't standing here healthy and I hope I'd be that strong, but when you're faced with something like that, can you say how you are going to react?' "The doctor explained they only give blood in emergency situations. I shook his hand and there were never any arguments. We signed the consent form and he went into sur-

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Tomorrow: Our flight across Europe, arrest — and prison

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

gery.' Naghmeh stayed with her son while an anaesthetist administered the general anaesthetic. 'I kept saying: "Mummy's here, Mummy's here." We prayed together and Ashya said: "Amen."

That was the last intelligible word Ashya spoke until this weekend. For, while the neurosurgeon skilfully removed the entire tumour, Ashya awoke in a vegetative state. He was suffering with a particularly severe case of posterior fossa syndrome. For his parents, it was another truly dreadful shock.

'We had been told there might be some problems with his arm and leg movement and maybe his speech, but nothing like, he can't swallow, he can't eat, he can't move, he can't blink,' says Naghmeh. 'I kept thinking: "They've touched his brain, maybe they've taken a bit of it out."

'He was just like a vegetable with his eyes open...' Naghmeh is too upset by the memory to continue. Instead, she lifts Ashya onto her lap and drops kisses on his head.

Brett's eyes are wet with unshed tears.

'It was pretty tough to see him like that,' he says. 'But the main thing was he was alive. My wife said: "Why did we put him through this? Is it better to be alive and suffering so much or to be peaceful in death?"

'I said: "Even having a child this disabled is better than not having a child. He's still with us. The operation was successful. The doctors have said he will start improving in a few days or a week." I had to concentrate on the positives because there were a lot of negatives.'

ASHYA continued in this vegetative state for weeks. Naghmeh did not leave his side. Between them, she and Brett massaged his limbs, turned him every 15 minutes to avoid bedsores and held his eyelids shut so he could sleep at night.

At this point, the Kings were 'very happy' with Southampton General Hospital. An MRI scan showed the tumour in his brain had been completely removed and a lumbar puncture, 14 days following surgery, revealed there were no signs of cancer in his spinal fluid.

Ashya's parents were then told his case was being passed from the neurology department to oncology.

'We said: "Who are they?"' says Brett. 'I didn't even know what oncologists were. Here was my son. He was ill and I couldn't even pronounce the name of the brain tumour — medulloblastoma.'

'I said to myself: "This is really poor. I promised my son that I'd make sure he was alright and I don't even know the name of his illness." That night I went home, put the little kids to bed and said to my older sons: "Now we do research. We all have computers." I was hungry to know everything I could about Ashya's illness. What were the survival statistics? What would his life be like? What was next stage of his treatment?"

Brett began to understand that, in the case of his son's brain cancer, complete removal of the tumour followed by radiology within four to six weeks would offer him the best chance of survival.

He also kept coming across references to the cutting edge proton therapy in his research — a form of radiology, which causes less damage to healthy tissue.

'I asked the lady doctor: "What about proton?"' She said: "If your child qualifies for proton, we don't do it in this country but we send them abroad." Then she



Tender kiss: Naghmeh with Ashya in Prague

'A policeman said: What kind of world is it when you take a sick child away from his mum?'

said: "But it's too early to see if proton will benefit him."

'I said to my kids: "Let's get every possible piece of information. Let's look at their own radiology journals — not forums or blogs — because you can't speak to doctors and say: "I heard of this on a blog." We researched proton day and night.'

'I hadn't realised how damaging traditional radiology was. A lot of children vomit and can't keep food down for 30 days. My son was so ill I thought: "He will die if he starts throwing up. He needs to eat."

'The more I looked at the normal radiation and then the proton, the more convinced I was. At the beginning of August I started writing to various proton

clinics and got a response from the Czech Republic Proton Centre. They told me to get all the records to them — the CT scan, the MRI scan, the diagnosis, the prognosis.'

Brett began to feel confident there was a way forward for his son. Three weeks after the surgery, armed with his research, he had a meeting with the team of doctors at Southampton — two oncologists and a nurse — who would be looking after Ashya.

'We sat down and I asked them if they could recommend Ashya to the proton panel for the NHS to approve it. They told me it would be of no benefit to him with his tumour. I said: "I've spoken to the lady oncologist

who said we could discuss it later. I want to discuss it now."

'They said again: "It would have no benefit whatsoever for your child. Radiology and proton have the same survival rates with this tumour which are 70+ per cent."

'I asked about the side-effects. The doctor focused on the short-term effects — hair-loss, nausea, fatigue, numbness in the fingers and feet.'

'I said: "What about the long-term effects?" He suggested I spoke to the radiologist and continued to speak about his treatment plan for Ashya without even considering proton. He said: "We're going to give him a little bit of chemotherapy, radiotherapy and chemotherapy." I said: "What

do you mean, a little bit of chemo? You can't water it down. You'll knock out his immune system and my son is weak enough as it is. He'll die. Why won't you give him proton?"

'I remember the doctor saying: "If you continue with these questions, your rights to make decisions about Ashya will be taken away from you. We will apply to the Family Court to have your parental rights removed and then we can give him any treatment we want."

'I said: "I'm his father. I have to make sure when he's older and asks me why he's disabled, I can tell him I did everything possible. If my son dies will you go to his funeral? If he's disabled will you take him home?"

'Now, when he needs us most, you're threatening to take him away. I've been trying to stay strong. I can't listen to this. I have to go and be with my son.' I shook their hands and left.'

Later, when Brett had his meeting with the radiologist, he posed a 'theoretical question'.

'I said: "If you had a five-year-old boy who had a Grade 4 (the most aggressive grade) brain tumour and you loved that son, what would you choose — proton or normal radiotherapy?"

'He paused and scratched his head. I could see 1,000 things going through his mind. He said: "It's not that easy." I told him he'd answered my question.'

'He then told me that it was all about funding and that the proton panel would never approve it [Ashya's proton therapy will cost an estimated £65,000 — two-and-a-half times as much as traditional radiotherapy.]

'Medulloblastoma is not on the NHS list.' He handed the list to me: "You won't find your son's cancer there. They just look at survival statistics based upon three to five years after surgery."

'If, for example, radiotherapy has a 50 per cent survival rate for a particular cancer, but proton is 80 per cent, we would recommend it to the NHS panel. In your son's case the survival rates aren't that much different.'

'Then he said: "If you're asking me about quality of life, proton is superior. With radiotherapy, your son will get secondary tumours, have hearing problems, growth problems and special needs for the rest of his life. Children pay a heavy price for survival under normal radiotherapy."

WHILE such statements are rarely put to parents in such bald terms, the

risks of radiotherapy are there on the NHS website for all to see. Brett resolved there and then to take his son to Prague for treatment and fund it himself with money from the sale of their holiday flat near Malaga, Spain.

He was though, rightly or wrongly, terrified that if the doctors knew of his plans his son would be taken from him.

'I was scared stiff of that doctor so I said to my wife: "Don't ask any questions about the food or anything — nothing. They're just waiting in the shadows to take him away and give him this hard radiation."

'We can't have that happening. We have no options now. We can't stay in Southampton.'

Southampton General Hospital has denied that its doctors ever threatened to seek a court order to remove the Kings' rights to make decisions about Ashya's care.

It has defended its decision to recommend standard radiotherapy and chemotherapy and said its treatment plan for Ashya complied with NHS best practice guidelines for cancer care.

Ashya faced a further minor operation to have a shunt fitted in case of a further build up of liquid in his brain on August 20. His parents decided to give him a week to recover. Brett began to make their preparations to flee.

■ *IN RETURN for this interview, the Daily Mail has made a donation towards Ashya's ongoing care.*

Family's delight as NHS funds proton treatment

BRETT KING spoke yesterday of his delight that the NHS has agreed to fund Ashya's treatment in the Czech Republic.

'People thought we were rolling in money but the reality was we didn't have enough. The bills kept mounting up — for the lawyer, the proton centre, the Motol hospital where he's staying while he's having his treatment, the physiotherapy, the cost of transporting him out here — and we had no idea how we were going to pay them. All that mattered was making sure Ashya got better.'

'Such a weight lifted when the NHS called to say they were funding everything here. I don't

know if they've done this to try to salvage their reputation. They've certainly been pulling out the stops.'

'They've agreed to fund the proton treatment because, apparently, one of the oncologists at Southampton General recommended it. It is all rather strange.'

Strange indeed. This is the same oncologist who, Brett says, threatened to make Ashya a ward of court when he persistently challenged the hospital's treatment plan.

The funding came about because Brett filled out an NHS form to apply for state-funded treatment for Ashya's physiotherapy, occupa-

tional therapy and chemotherapy treatment in another European Economic Area country. He was knocked for six when he was told last week that the proton treatment, which costs £58,000, would be covered as well.

Today, the Kings still have to meet their legal bills, which are expected to be in excess of £25,000 and foot the £22,000 bill of flying Ashya from Malaga to Prague in a medically-equipped private jet.

Any surplus funds from generous donations to help Ashya will be used to support other parents wishing to seek proton treatment for their children with brain tumours.

YESTERDAY Ashya King's parents recounted the devastating impact of his brain tumour and emergency surgery. Today, they reveal how they secretly plotted to take their son from his hospital unnoticed, then raced him across Europe as police pursued them ...



from
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Hardy**

IN MOTOL HOSPITAL, PRAGUE

THE visceral wails from the next-door cell in the Spanish police station were like none Brett King had ever heard in his life. They were the cries of his wife, Naghmeh, who was half out of her mind with grief for their desperately sick son, Ashya.

The little boy had been taken from them just hours earlier and carted off in an ambulance following his parents' arrest in a Malaga hotel.

The couple are telling their story for the first time since they were arrested just over three weeks ago after an international manhunt, which started with the family being attacked for 'abducting' their sick son, but ended with widespread public outrage that they had been unfairly vilified for simply seeking the best treatment for their little boy.

After they were picked up by Spanish police, the couple pleaded to be allowed to go to the hospital with Ashya, but were refused.

This was the first night five-year-old Ashya had spent apart from his mother since the day he was born, and the decision to incarcerate her caused international outrage.

'She was crying: "Ashya, where is my Ashya?" On and on and on,' says Brett. 'She was saying: "Are you happy now? We should have stayed in England — this would never have happened." Suddenly it was my fault.'

'I said: "Please, if you carry on like this I will have to move cells. My heart is so high in my chest." I could feel it up here somewhere.' He thumps his sternum. 'I said: "Please stop, I can't take it any more." She didn't stop.'

Meanwhile, back in the UK, the story of Ashya's disappearance had reached fever pitch, with questions being asked over whether his parents had been unfairly demonised.

Much had previously been made of the Kings being Jehovah's Witnesses, who often decline blood transfusions for religious reasons. Many assumed they had interfered with their child's treatment because of their faith.

Nothing could be further from the truth and today, their son is safely with them in a hospital ward in Prague, finally receiving the proton therapy they hope will save his life, but was refused by the NHS.

ASHYA is a lovely little boy whose huge brown eyes shine with merriment when his parents kiss or cuddle him. Goodness only knows what was going through his mind when he was lying alone in that strange hospital bed — seemingly abandoned by those he loves most — for 84 hours after his parents' arrest on August 30.

'I wasn't crying for myself in prison, I was crying for Ashya,' says Naghmeh. 'I didn't want him to be alone in a foreign country not understanding the language. I was just praying the nurses would feel sorry for him, be with him, so he wasn't completely alone.'

The Kings subsequently learned their son was largely left by himself, and howled through the night like a wounded animal.

Every day now he is growing stronger as he emerges from the semi-vegetative state — posterior fossa syndrome — which was a temporary side-effect of the surgery he underwent on July 23 to remove his particularly aggressive brain tumour.

The syndrome prevented him being able to chew and swallow his food, so he was fed liquid shakes through a nasal tube. Yesterday, he ate a whole orange cut into pieces by his mum — another milestone.

Brett took the decision to flee with

EXCLUSIVE: ASHYA'S PARENTS TELL THEIR STORY

Ashya from Southampton General Hospital in late August when he says he was told, in no uncertain terms, that his son's cancer didn't qualify for proton treatment and, if he asked any more questions, Ashya would be taken from his parents — an allegation that Southampton Hospital has denied.

Certain that proton therapy in the Czech Republic would give his son a greater quality of life, he began to make preparations for the trip.

'Ashya needed to have the therapy four to six weeks after removal of the tumour for the best chance of survival, so time was running out. We had a buyer for our apartment in Spain, which we were selling to raise funds. I called the estate agent to tell him to sell, quickly.'

Ashya's welfare remained Brett's primary concern. First, he needed to stock up on the protein shakes his son depended upon. So, he went online to order two large boxes to pick up in Spain. Next, he needed to ensure the machine feeding his son

the liquid food could be powered on his car battery.

Next door to Ashya's ward was a room where they put all their old equipment. I found a spare cable there that fitted Ashya's machine so I took it home to test that it worked in the car.

'I bought an adapter for the cigarette lighter and, when I plugged it in, the green light showed immediately.'

Meanwhile, Brett renewed Ashya's passport, due to run out within weeks, and bought a rather snazzy wheelchair on eBay for £125 as well as some iron supplements.

'We were staying in a cancer charity house in the grounds of the hospital. All my children were there, so we started taking Ashya out in the wheelchair every possible minute. We'd take him for a little longer each day so eventually it was quite normal for us to be out for three hours or more.'

The day after Ashya's passport arrived, I said to my wife: "The

passport is here. We go ahead with it now. We've got no option."

It was August 28, five-and-a-half weeks after Ashya's surgery. He was due to start chemotherapy, but such was Brett's opposition to the treatment, he feared the oncologist would carry out his threat and make his son a ward of court.

'The doctor would come onto the ward and talk to the other patients but avoid us. I thought: "I don't like the feeling here any more. It's now or never. We can't just wait for the social workers to come."

BRETT booked the family onto a 4pm ferry from Portsmouth to Cherbourg.

'That afternoon, we take Ashya out as normal. We go down in the lift to the lower ground floor. There aren't many people there, so we go out through the door.'

'I put our wheelchair in the car, Ashya in his car seat and load up the other kids. Ashya's whole face lights up. He's euphoric to be in his car seat with his brothers and sister. When anyone asks me what I'll remember from all of this, it's that look on his face.'

Six hours later, doctors would discover that Ashya was missing. Fearing for his wellbeing, they contacted the police, who launched an appeal for information on the King family's whereabouts. A media storm erupted as they warned that

the child needed specialist equipment to keep him alive and that 'time was running out'. The hospital also threw into the mix the fact the family are Jehovah's Witnesses.

Suddenly, the impression was that the Kings were religious zealots putting their son's life at risk. An international manhunt began.

'I remember being a bit nervous driving away from the hospital,' Brett says. 'I kept looking in the rear-view mirror, thinking the whole world was looking at me.'

'The more distance I put between us and the hospital, the happier I was. My only worry was the ferry terminal. When we got there, one of the officials started referring to his computer. I thought: "Oh no, they're not going to let us on."

'Then he said: "Would you like to use your wheelchair or ours for the little boy?" Naghmeh went on foot with Ashya, and the kids came with me. We met up on the main deck. The ferry started, and we were off.'

The family arrived in Cherbourg at 8pm. They drove for 14 hours through the night to Madrid, unaware their photographs were being flashed up throughout Europe.

Portsmouth City Council had applied to the High Court for Ashya to be made a temporary ward of court on the grounds that he was in 'serious danger'.

'We had no idea,' says Naghmeh. 'Ashya just loved being in the car. It blew his mind after six weeks of just looking at the ceiling. He seemed to be coming out of his syndrome faster. His legs and arms were moving. Everything seemed to be speeding up.'

The first the family knew of the police hunt was when Brett Skyped his mother, Patricia, at her home in Southsea, Hants, from Madrid.

'She said: "It's terrible here. The police have been round searching

That first night in prison, Ashya's mother was crying so much I had to beg her to stop

The final insult: police chief who said WE were the biggest threat to Ashya



Devotion: Ashya King and his mother Naghmeh in Prague after the trauma of their separation in Spain

my house. They're looking for you. This message is probably being taped. You'd better go."

"When I told Naghmeh, she just wanted to get back into the car and drive."

They began the 280-mile journey from Madrid to their holiday apartment on the Spanish coast. During a petrol stop, they Googled the news headlines: the hunt had switched to Spain after it emerged the Kings owned an apartment in the Marbella area. A European Arrest Warrant had been issued on the grounds of neglect.

As the world's media ran pictures of Ashya with details of the arrest warrant, Brett and Naghmeh found they were increasingly perceived as cruel. Brett realised they were at the centre not only of an international search, but also increasingly critical news coverage.

"My son, Naveed, said: "There's so much about Ashya. Look, there's a picture of our apartment." Spanish police were standing outside — the ones wearing green uniforms. They're like soldiers. You don't want to mess with them. We knew we couldn't go there. We didn't know what to do."

"We couldn't believe it," says Naghmeh. "I started really worrying. There was a police constable from Hampshire saying Ashya's machine had run out. It hadn't — he was feeding 24 hours a day. I wanted to phone the hospital and say: "We've

got everything. He's safe. There's no need to worry."

Unable to make sense of what was happening, they checked into a hotel in Granada to collect their thoughts.

"When my son was giving our passport details, this Spanish guy came out and started looking at the car," says Brett.

"Our hearts were beating. We thought: "What's going to happen now?" But my Hyundai is a different model to the one they have in Spain. That's all he was interested in. We thought "Phew!" and drove the car into the garage."

The following morning, the Kings gave Ashya his first proper bath since his brain operation on July 23. "He was so relaxed," says

Naghmeh, her face softening at the memory. "We were splashing him and playing with him. He was in there for 20 minutes." Checkout time approached.

"We didn't know what to do," says Brett. "We couldn't go to the apartment, so my wife said: "Let's find somewhere that's close to a good hospital so we can take him there and show them he's OK."

"We knew there was a children's hospital in Malaga, so we found a hotel called Esperanza, which means hope in Spanish. That was what we needed."

It was here that Naveed, 20, suggested making a video and posting it on YouTube so the world could see his little brother was safe. "We thought it would

defuse the situation,' says Brett. "We felt the truth had to be told — that we had the feeding cable, the food and he wasn't dead, but doing very well."

Five minutes after the recording was made, their eldest son Danny, 23, returned to the room. He'd overheard the receptionist on the phone to her boss; they were calling the police.

"I wasn't nervous at all," says Brett. "I told my family that this was something we had to face. We'd been panicking all day and could not continue like that."

"I asked Naveed to take the little children to the beach, because I didn't want them to see this."

Ten minutes later, two police officers arrived and arrested the couple.

"They said: "Hi, how's everything?" I said: "Fine, no problem." I had no idea what lay in store."

Few of us would have. The Kings

'But the police chief had given the order. When we saw him I said: "Are we criminals for what we've done?"

"He said: "I have no knowledge of you or your son." I pleaded with him to let Danny see Ashya. I said: "He's a sick five-year-boy. He won't know what's happening. He'll be terrified. He'll think we've all abandoned him."

The police chief told Brett: "From what we've heard from England, your other son could go in there and cause him harm. He needs protection from you all."

Astonishingly, he believed the entire family was a risk to Ashya.

A few hours later, Brett repeated his plea to three officials from the British Embassy.

"I said: "Have you been to the hospital? How's Ashya?" They said they hadn't been allowed in."

"I asked them to go back, but they kept asking if I understood why we were here and showed me the arrest warrant."

"I told them I'd never been cruel to my children from the day they were born."

Later that day, the Kings were 'bundled into a car', taken to a small town on the outskirts of Malaga to appear before a court before being transferred to Madrid for an extradition hearing.

"My son arrived and handed me a note saying he had a solicitor called Juan Isidro Fernandez Diaz. He had filed for *habeas corpus* [unlawful detention] on our behalf."

Under Spanish law, any parent can take a child from hospital as they see fit. The solicitor was arguing the authorities were acting outside the law in arresting the Kings and demanded their release.

"Danny explained he was the best lawyer in Seville, who'd got in touch because he believed what was happening was terrible. He said: "He wants to help us. When you go before the judge say the accusations are false. Dad, trust me, Juan is going to sort this out."

Finally, there was a glimmer of hope ...

■ A SPOKESMAN for the British hospital involved said: "Southampton General Hospital has defended its decision to recommend standard radiotherapy and chemotherapy and said its treatment plan for Ashya complied with NHS best practice guidelines."

"The Trust was concerned for Ashya's safety because, among other reasons, Ashya was dependent on a tube for food and his parents are not trained to use it."

"The Trust contacted the police in line with Trust policy to alert them to the problem."

IN RETURN for this interview, the Daily Mail has made a donation towards Ashya's ongoing care.



Arrest: Naghmeh and Brett being led away by Spanish police

The more distance I put between us and the hospital, the happier I felt

were to spend the next 72 hours in prison, facing extradition to the UK to face charges under the 1933 Child Cruelty Act. The last they saw of their sick son was through the ambulance window as he lay on his back being driven away.

"We thought we'd be able to sort this out at the police station," says Brett. Instead, the Kings were fingerprinted and placed in adjoining tiled cells where they each had a thin plastic mattress and a quilt that stank of urine.

"That's when I started to feel badly in my heart for Ashya," says Brett. "I'd have felt worse if I'd realised no one was with him. I'd have done anything — tried to take the bars off, anything — if I'd known."

Ashya's discovery was reported all over the world on Saturday, August 30.

The following morning, Danny was permitted to see his parents for a few minutes. He told them he was being prevented from seeing his little brother.

"I knew Danny loved Ashya and wouldn't leave his bed," says Brett.

TOMORROW: 72 hours to stop them taking our son

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

bank. It was closed so she hammered on the door and said: "Quickly, I need to transfer some money immediately."

'In her panic, she sent me everything she had. A few days later, she had to ask if I could send her a couple of hundred pounds back.'

Finally, they had the funds, transportation and the treatment plan: 30 sessions of proton therapy, Monday to Friday, for six weeks.

On the Friday afternoon, the judge ruled the order would be lifted upon Ashya's arrival in Prague. They had until midday on the Monday to get him there. Brett was jubilant.

Then came another dreadful blow: Prague's Motol Hospital informed them it would take ten days to process Ashya's admission.

'I said: "That's too late. We have to be there for midday on Monday or we'll lose custody." My wife kept saying: "We're going to lose him... my Ashya, my Ashya."

'I was worried Ashya was picking up on her panic, so I said: "We're getting through this Ashya. You're going to get better. We're going to Prague. We're going to have a happy ending."

'He gave me a smile, then we played with the toy aeroplane he loves. I could see he was much better, lifting his legs and kicking them.

'Suddenly, everything became clearer. I knew we just had to get on a plane and get to the Motol. So we booked a private, medically-equipped plane. I figured they wouldn't refuse to treat a sick child once we were there.'

On the Monday morning, the Kings boarded the

I told Ashya: 'We are going to have a happy ending'

jet for the three-hour flight to Prague. 'We settled Ashya down, gave him some toys, and for the first time Naghmeh began to relax. She said: "We're going to get custody now?"

'I told her: "As long as this plane doesn't crash, we've got custody again."

Thankfully, Brett's gamble paid off and the hospital admitted his son. They had satisfied the judge's conditions: Ashya was theirs again.

Ashya has now been receiving treatment and responding well to it for two weeks and three days. The daily progress he makes borders on the miraculous and is testament to his parents' round-the-clock loving care. He is expected to make a full recovery.

He can now chew food and manages to speak a few words. 'Mummy' and 'Daddy' are the ones that delight his parents the most.

'It's all worked out fine,' says Brett, his eyes wet with tears. 'Actually, it's worked out better than fine. If the police hadn't followed us, if there was no media interest, Ashya would still be a sick little boy fighting cancer. Now he's known all over the world. We haven't just helped Ashya: we've helped other parents make informed decisions about the care for their children.'

For now, though, their priority is their own precious little boy. Brett tickles his son's right knee — a particularly sensitive spot — and Ashya's huge brown eyes dance with joy.

■ IN RETURN for this interview, the Daily Mail has made a donation towards Ashya's ongoing care.

Soccer star with two wives and a mistress: It's not unusual...



WIFE NO1

Madah Tioté: 'Fainted with shock'



WIFE NO2

Doukrou Laeticia: Married him in the Ivory Coast



Cheick Tioté: Earns £45,000 a week

By Mario Ledwith

A PREMIER League footballer has claimed it is 'perfectly acceptable' to have more than one wife after he married a second woman.

Newcastle United midfielder Cheick Tioté, who lives in England with his first wife and their two children, flew to his native Ivory Coast to marry for the second time this summer.

But the Muslim player has told friends that his faith means the second marriage is 'perfectly acceptable', while his agent said Tioté's personal situation was 'not unusual'.

The millionaire's complex love life has a further twist — an angry mistress with whom he has a 12-month-old child has accused him of breaking a promise to marry her.

Tioté's polygamy unravelled when pictures of the Ivory Coast wedding emerged online, to the surprise of his wife and mistress in the UK.

The first Mrs Tioté is understood to have fainted from shock when she found out.

Under Islamic law, men are allowed to marry up to four wives, but bigamy is prohibited in Britain and carries a potential prison sentence of seven years.

Bosses at Newcastle United have spoken to the player about the situation although it is understood that he will not face disciplinary action.

Tioté, who earns £45,000 a week, lives with his first wife Madah, 25, and their two children in a £1.5million farmhouse in Ponteland, a village outside Newcastle.

It is understood the 28-year-old wed his second wife, Doukrou Laeticia, this summer in the West African country's Abidjan region where he grew up.

Photographs show the footballer sitting beside his new bride during the ceremony.

He has reportedly told friends

that he does not believe there is an issue with his actions.

A source told The Sun: 'It's perfectly acceptable in his culture. He doesn't know what all the fuss is about.'

The footballer's family was left in even more turmoil when, shortly after the second marriage came to light, Tioté's mistress confronted his first wife at their home.

Nikki Mpofo, 33, who has been

'You clearly have a big family'

in a secret relationship with the footballer for three years, claimed that Tioté had promised to marry her. He is named as the father of her son Rafael on the child's birth certificate, with his occupation stated as 'professional footballer'.

She became infuriated after seeing pictures of the ceremony posted online by news websites in the Ivory Coast and is believed to have ended

the relationship. Miss Mpofo, who lives in a £500,000 house only two streets from the footballer's home, was aware that Tioté had one wife but was led to believe that she lived in Africa. She told a friend: 'I was stunned when I saw he had married a second wife. He told me he would marry me.'

'He met my mum and said he's permitted to have several wives. I was comfortable with that. I never thought he'd marry someone else behind my back.'

When Miss Mpofo took her young son to confront Tioté's first wife last week, his spouse immediately phoned the footballer and demanded he return home. According to the friend, she told him: 'You clearly have a big family. I don't think you can keep count of your wives any more.'

Tioté's agent Jean Musampa said: 'He did get married and that is his second marriage. This is nothing unusual. He is a Muslim.' Both Tioté and Newcastle United refused to comment yesterday.

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