Lie that raped my reputation
by TESSA CUNNINGHAM Daily Mail

The story is common enough: young man from a respectable family falls for a girl whose background is, to put it kindly, somewhat less salubrious than his own.

When his worried parents refuse to condone the relationship, he, perhaps unwisely, moves in with his girlfriend's family. They welcome him with open arms. And who can blame them?

After all, this is a young man with an impeccable background and excellent prospects. However, it's not long before he realises his mistake. Ending the relationship as kindly as he can, he moves back home. Everyone breathes a huge sigh of relief and prepares to put the whole sorry episode down to experience. And there the story would normally end. Certainly, that's what Shaun Howes was expecting.

But in this case, events took a very different and terrifying turn — he was accused of raping his ex-girlfriend, who claimed to have been a virgin at the time of the alleged attack. It was to be more than two horrendous years before the truth finally came out.

In that time, Shaun faced the ruin of his reputation, a new relationship came under intense pressure and he became so haunted by the shame of the accusation that he even contemplated suicide. After all, what more grievous charge could be thrown at an innocent young man? His nightmare finally came to an end in April, when Ada Brazil, now 19, and her mother, Louise, 47, who cooked up the plot, were jailed for perverting the course of justice.

Sentencing the pair at Lewes Crown Court, the judge made no secret of his abhorrence. 'A false accusation of rape is a very serious matter,' he announced.

'Your accusations may have led to the imprisonment of a young man who had done nothing wrong.' Even now, Shaun, 21, is baffled by how a simple teenage romance lasting a matter of months led to his girlfriend and her mother attempting such a devastating revenge.
'I feel sick with shame at being labelled a rapist,' says Shaun. 'I was an idiot for getting involved with Ada and her family. But I was young and immature. 'They would have happily sent me to prison simply for ending the relationship. They are consummate actresses — and their spite nearly saw me jailed in shame.' It all started in early 2003. Shaun, then 17, was living at his parents' comfortable £420,000 four-bedroom home in Newark, near Burgess Hill, West Sussex.

At a party, he met Ada Brazil, then 16. With her dark hair and sparkling eyes, she immediately took Shaun's fancy. And she made no secret of her interest in him. Naively, he was flattered and the pair began a relationship.

When his parents learned of the budding romance a few weeks later, they were far from happy. Peter, 50, director of a building company, and Donna, 46, a teacher, had always prided themselves on setting their family — they have three other children — high standards.

'My parents have always instilled in me the virtues of hard work and family values,' says Shaun.

'Dad is terribly proud of all he's achieved. Our lovely home is a testament to that.

'We've always been very close. He's captain of our local rugby club and I loved playing rugby and basketball with him. We have a real bond.'

But all that was about to change when his parents learned from Shaun that his new relationship had become sexual. Given the couple's youth, they suggested that Shaun should end the relationship.

However, like thousands of teenagers before him, Shaun was convinced he knew best. It's a mistake he now bitterly regrets. While Shaun's parents were rightly concerned, Ada's mother took a very different stand — most ironic in light of what was about to unfold.

She was only too eager to encourage the relationship, and even suggested Shaun move in with her and her daughter. 'She made a fuss of me,' says Shaun.

'I really took to her. She kept telling me: "I know what it's like to be young and in love."' And so, a few weeks later, Shaun moved into Ada's three-bedroom council house. His parents simply hoped he'd come to his senses soon enough.

If only things had been that simple. For Shaun it was a culture shock. Louise Brazil, a widow, lived on benefits. And, of course, there was the little matter of her eagerly encouraging her daughter's sexual relationship. 'I was amazed,' says Shaun.

'My mother would never have condoned my sisters sleeping with their boyfriends. 'However, at the time I thought I was in love and, selfishly, I was delighted to be able to have sex with Ada.'
However, as the weeks passed, Shaun began to feel increasingly uneasy about his new 'family'. Far from being the cuddly figure he'd taken her for at first, Louise Brazil could switch from one mood to another in an instant. 'I'd thought her kind and easygoing. But I was horrified to discover that it was all an act,' says Shaun.

'On the surface she could be sweet and sympathetic — underneath she was spiteful. 'When her friends called around, she'd sympathise with all their troubles then bad-mouth them the second they left.

Lying was an art form with her, and she loved trouble-making. Of course, Shaun wasn't to know that he himself was about to become the subject of Louise's utterly callous wickedness and evil scheming. Louise wasn't simply a liar. She was also a foul-mouthed bully who ruled her family of six children with a mixture of fear and threats. 'Three children still lived at home — Ada, her elder sister Rose, and elder brother Edward,' explains Shaun. 'Louise is a control freak. They were all terrified of her. 'After a few weeks, she started bullying me, too. I had a car and she insisted I run endless errands for her. If I demurred, she swore at me.'

But then the scales well and truly dropped from Shaun's eyes. He'd been living with Ada for around three months when she let slip the real reason why her mother had been so keen on Shaun.

Ada admitted her mother had effectively said to her: 'He's rich so get what you can from him — then dump him.'

'It was laughable,' says Shaun. 'True, my parents live in a lovely home, but they've worked for every penny. I'm hardly a millionaire's son.

'At the time I had a temporary job at a local store just to get some pocket money, and up until that point I'd been happy enough to hand over all my earnings to Louise — around £100 a week — for rent and food.

'But when I discovered what she had said about me, I finally understood just how much I was being exploited.'

Shaun decided to call it a day. While Louise was out, he packed his belongings and moved back home, where his parents welcomed him with open arms.

'I felt terrible because Ada was in tears,' says Shaun. 'But I knew she'd find another boyfriend. However, I made sure I left when her mother was out. It may sound cowardly but I couldn't face a confrontation.'

But Shaun could never have suspected the horror that was about to engulf him.

By November, 2003 — several weeks after he'd left Ada — he met a woman named Tammy Chapman, a childcare worker, now 25, and felt his troubled relationship with Ada was behind
him. He fell for Tammy and began to think they had a future together.

They had been dating for three months when Shaun, by then 18, got a most unwelcome visitor at work. It was Louise.

Thrusting a hospital scan into his hands, she announced that Ada was pregnant and Shaun was the father.

'I was shellshocked,' says Shaun. 'I felt tricked. Ada had always assured me she was on the Pill. We were far too young to be parents. I had a new girlfriend. The last thing I wanted was a baby. It was all part of Louise's plan to trap me — I remembered her telling Ada she should have a baby. I was so angry that I made it crystal clear I wasn't returning. However, I offered to pay maintenance if the baby proved to be mine.

'I then had to tell Tammy. I felt a total rat. I thought she'd leave me. It was a sordid mess — and all because I had been so stupid.'

To her credit, Tammy was very understanding. 'I was horrified to discover that Ada was pregnant,' she says. 'Shaun had been a total idiot but I saw no point punishing him about what happened before Howes he met me.

'If the baby did prove to be his — and there was no proof of that — he assured me he'd support the child financially. I hoped we would be strong enough to move on together.'

But Ada and Louise weren't about to let Shaun off the hook. Furious that Shaun was refusing to return to Ada, Louise decided to get her revenge — in the most sickening way imaginable.

On March 2, 2004, Shaun was at work at a garage in Burgess Hill where he was starting an apprenticeship as a mechanic. Two CID officers arrived and in front of his colleagues they took him into a side room where they announced that Ada had accused him of raping her.

'At first I thought it was a joke,' says Shaun. But there was no doubting the seriousness of the charge.

Shaun was summoned to appear at Crawley Police Station that evening where he was charged with raping Ada Brazil in October 2003. The attack, it was claimed, had resulted in her pregnancy.

Shaun, of course, had to break the news to his parents. 'They were horrified when I told them,' he says. 'They said they were desperately sorry for me. But they never doubted me.

'Louise and Ada had appeared at the station in tears,' recalls Shaun. 'Louise said her daughter was a virgin. They claimed I was a family friend she had taken pity on and allowed to sleep in the sitting room.
They said that one night when Ada was having a bath, I had crept into her bedroom. I had dragged the towel from her, pinned her on the floor and raped her.

'I wanted to be sick. Why had they made up these evil lies? What had I done other than end a relationship?'

Telling Tammy he had been accused of rape was the hardest thing he had ever had to do.

'Shaun was convinced I'd leave, but I believed in him right from the start,' she says. 'This was an act of revenge.'

The next few months were a living hell. 'To my face my friends were supportive, but I was racked with terror. Did they think I was a rapist?

'I had nightmares that I was behind bars and couldn't escape. I knew I was facing a long jail sentence.'

Three months after Shaun was charged with rape, Ada gave birth to her daughter, Kathleen. The date tallied with Shaun's alleged rape.

'When I heard, I was physically sick,' says Shaun. 'Now it looked as though I hadn't just raped a virgin — I'd left her carrying my baby. What jury would believe me now?'

Shaun was so desperate he even contemplated suicide.

'I was worried sick for him,' says Tammy. 'He lost a stone because he wasn't eating. He was so worried about shaming me and his family, he talked about killing himself.'

But then, that Christmas, Ada and Louise made a mistake. They sent Shaun a card. When he opened it, he heard the recording of a baby crying.

Inside was a photo of the daughter Ada claimed was his. His father received a similar tasteless card, addressed to 'Grandfather'.

Shaun was so angry he wanted to tear them up. But Tammy had other ideas. She took them straight to the police station.

'I wanted to punch the air. I knew instantly we had our proof,' says Tammy. 'Would a rape victim really send her rapist and his father Christmas cards?'

It was a turning point. After considerable questioning, Ada confessed her guilt to the police and the charges against Shaun were dropped.

At that point, the police took the unusual step of charging Ada and Louise with perverting the course of justice, even though Ada's mother stuck to her story until the bitter end.

After a three-day trial at Lewes Crown Court in April, she was found guilty and jailed for six months. Ada was sent to a young offenders' institution for three months.
'I was so relieved that it was all over, but the toll has been terrible,' says Shaun. 'I had a brief teenage fling with Ada. The backlash has dominated my life for two years.

'I can never forgive Ada. But it's Louise I blame. What mother would set her child up for a sexual relationship and then cry rape out of spite?'

'I'll probably never know whether Kathleen is mine. If she is, I'll pay maintenance although all I want to do is forget I ever met Ada Brazil.'

Tammy and Shaun now have a five-month-old daughter, Jessica. 'Our baby is proof that even a rape charge wasn't going to come between us,' says Tammy. 'In fact, the ordeal has brought us even closer.'

For Shaun, it seems, there may yet be a happy ending against all the odds.