

Good Housekeeping★

Less than a year later, we were on holiday in the South of France with the girls, practising our French and giggling



New love: 'Will is so kind and thoughtful,' says Karen



Sweet gites: 'I had a great time renovating them, mixing old and new styles'

'The whole village came to our wedding – it was like we'd found our happy ending'

over a croque monsieur, when something happened that would change the course of our lives for ever. We got chatting to an elderly French couple on the next table and they asked if we'd ever considered living there. Will and I explained that it was our dream to move for our retirement, once the girls had grown up and finished school. Before we had time to think about it, we were following them in our rented car to look around some houses – the woman was an estate agent, and thought maybe we were ready to move now!

As we drove up the drive of the third house, we all gasped. It was the most amazing old house that would make our perfect family home. I fell in love with it immediately, and could easily see us

living there. When Will looked around the three derelict barns in the grounds, he realised we could renovate them ourselves and rent them out to holiday makers, and suddenly it all fell into place.

We came back to England, our heads buzzing with plans for the future. We put our house in Sussex on the market, and found a buyer within the week. We took a deep breath and leapt into the unknown, sold our house and moved to the South of France. We enrolled the girls in the local French school, and started work refurbishing our new

house, the three upmarket holiday lets and their pool. Will learnt carpentry skills he never knew he was capable of and renovated everything with the help of a local craftsman, and I spent hours meandering through the flea markets of France. Although by then I'd had to sell Roddie's antiques shop, I'd kept some pieces and brought them to decorate

our new home, so the girls and I would always have a part of our old life with us.

Two years after the move, Maddie and Tilly speak fluent French, and all three holiday homes are very popular, thank heavens! You can find out more about them at gites-chateaudemontoussel.com.

Meanwhile, I'm still working in fashion in England and overseas, so some weeks I spend a few nights in London, keeping in touch via Skype. Every Saturday I'm back in France and we all go to the local market and have lunch in our local café, where there's usually a musician playing an accordion.

When Roddie was dying, he told me, 'Don't grieve for me for ever, you'll meet somebody, you have so much to give – that's why I married you, you're such a strong person.' I never believed I could love another man, or that I was strong enough to build a new life for me and the girls. I feel so blessed to have found two wonderful husbands, and that my girls have been loved by two brilliant fathers, and that we're having such fun in our new life together. □