

Singer Elle knew
that she'd have
to get over her
ordeal before
she could get
back on stage

I won't
my n

At 3am, my friend Emma and I were dawdling along the main road from the bars in Moraira, Spain, to our family holiday villa a mile away. 'Come on, I want to get home,' I whinged. I'd been keen to leave hours earlier, but my friends wouldn't let me. I'm the singer in a band and had a gig coming up, so I was worried all the late nights were ruining my voice. 'You'll be fine,' Emma insisted. 'Whatever,' I snapped.

We were still arguing when I noticed two men walking towards us on the other side of the road. I'd walked down the same stretch of road hundreds of times without worrying, but now I felt my pace quicken and my fingers tightened around my handbag.

When I looked back, my fears were confirmed. They'd crossed

'Suddenly, he tried to pull the bag out of my hand'

the four-lane highway and were walking behind us, blocking the path back into town. 'Keep walking,' I muttered to Emma.

'Hola señoras!' one of the men called out, meaning: 'Hello girls' in Spanish. We ignored him, but he repeated it. It sounded so sleazy. 'Good night. We're going home,' I shouted, but they kept following us. Suddenly, the shorter of the two, who was wearing a ghastly orange shirt, stepped on to the road, passed us and turned to face us. We were blocked in.

A moment later, the taller man grabbed my arm and tried pulling my bag out of my hand. 'Get off!' I said and screamed for help. 'La bolsa! La bolsa!' he shouted, meaning: 'The bag.'

All I could think about was the empty building site to our left. It wouldn't take much for the men to drag us off the road. I was

petrified that we'd be raped. I clung to the bag until the strap broke, forcing me and my attacker apart. I looked him straight in the eye, then he and his mate ran back towards town.

The chase

Adrenaline kicked in and, without thinking, I found myself chasing them. 'Come back!'

I shouted. They looked back, realised I was following them and sprinted through a fairground. It was closed and shrouded in darkness. I'd lost them.

'Run, Emma!' I cried, beckoning her to follow me into town. I sprinted back to the bar where my friends were and breathlessly

explained what had happened. 'Where's Emma?' one of the boys asked. 'Behind me,' I panted. 'No, she isn't,' he replied.

The words cut me like a knife. I hadn't looked back to check! I started shaking, scared that something had happened to Emma. But after 45 minutes, our friends found her. She didn't remember much - she'd run off into a car park to hide. She was delirious and her skirt had been ripped.

My parents were called and Dad drove into town to take us back to the villa. We gave a statement to the police and a doctor checked our bruises. I felt so guilty that I'd run off, but Emma told me not to be stupid.

The two muggers were caught a few hours later with the mobile phone and digital camera they'd taken from my bag.



After the mugging, Elle says she felt paranoid and had a panic attack

Going home

I flew home to Bath a few days later and tried to put it all behind me. But I was overcome with paranoia one day while out walking. I saw two men behind me and had a panic attack. It got worse. I couldn't go out on Friday nights because I felt people were looking at me. Crowds made me anxious, but I didn't want to be on my own. I couldn't walk from my car to the front door at night and always

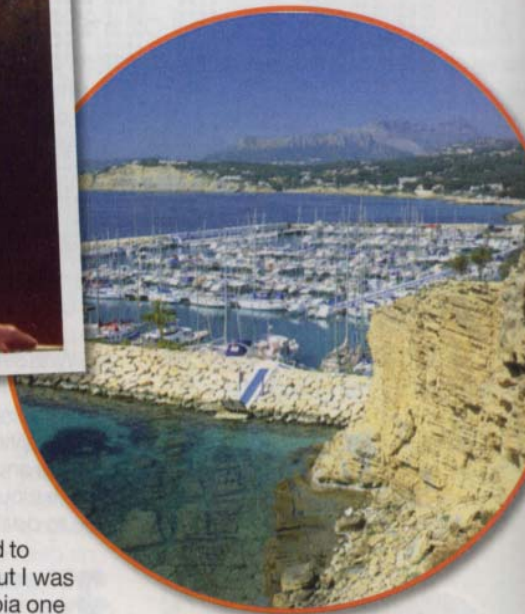
'I kept rewinding the night in my head, over and over again'

double-checked that doors were locked. I felt like a prisoner.

Then a friend put me in touch with confidence coach Kevin Burch. He runs a practice called Sky High Confidence and offered me something called visualisation therapy. I was sceptical, but my band Hifyler had a gig coming up and I knew that I had to get back on stage.

I closed my eyes and Kevin told me to rewind the night in Spain in my head, over and over again until I saw myself walking

Despite the idyllic surroundings, the holiday turned into a nightmare



backwards. I laughed and it felt good. For the first time, I was able to discuss my fears of the dark.

Next, he asked me to imagine I was stepping off a boat on to a beautiful island. In my mind I walked across the sand and towards a girl. It was me in the future. 'Don't be afraid,' she said. 'I've been through the same experience and I've got over the fear. You'll be fine. Now go back to your boat and sail away.'

Opening my eyes an hour later, I instantly felt relaxed. When I went outside, I realised my fears had disappeared. I felt confident in the dark and told myself that what happened was a one-off. It was like a huge weight had been lifted. When I next went on stage, I was even able to work the crowd harder than ever before.

Less than two months after my attack, I went back to Spain and walked along the road where we'd been mugged without flinching. At last, I felt free. ■

If you're affected by crime and want to speak to someone in confidence, call the Victim Supportline on 0845 3030900 or visit www.victimsupport.org.uk

A serious mugging left Elle Williams, 17, paranoid, panicked and scared of the dark. Could a confidence coach finally help her come to terms with her fears?

Let muggers beat me