

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2003

I'm in the shower, letting the hot water run over my head and body, rinsing off the sweat from this morning's basketball workout. My showers are taking a little longer these days. I'm thinking more while I soak. Still trying to control the direction my thoughts want to run. I jump a little as the shower door swings open. It's Lana.

"Dr. Lung is on the phone."

"Already? It's so early. OK, I'll be right there."

I shut off the water and towel off as quickly as I can, jumping into my bathrobe. I run to the phone in our bedroom and sit on the edge of the bed. I hear them engaging in small talk and jump right in.

"OK, I'm here, sorry it took me a while."

"That's all right, John, sorry to get you out of a nice, warm shower. But I wanted to make sure I had you both on the phone."

Uh-oh, this can't be too good. But wait, he told us yesterday he always gets both on the phone—standard operating procedure after getting himself in trouble once with a divorcing couple . . .

"We have the results from your CT scan here . . ." He pauses just a little. My stomach tightens.

"The images show nodules on both your liver and your lungs. I really don't know what else to say to you other than to tell you just that."

"Wait, Dr. Lung, you're saying 'nodules,' are these nodules cancer? Is this positively cancer we are talking about?"

"That is very, very likely. Either a recurrence of the choriocarcinoma from a few years ago, or the breast cancer has spread. Either way, with the progression of the disease, I just have to turn you over to Dr. Montgomery and leave you in his hands. There's really nothing left for me to do for you other than to wish you well. I have enjoyed working with you, and I feel like the positive nature of your relationship with each other and your attitudes will be of great benefit to you as you start treatments. You'll be relying on chemotherapy and/or radiation from here on out. I've already scheduled you for an appointment with Dr. Montgomery at one forty-five this afternoon. So again, I wish you both the very best, and I'm sorry this news couldn't be better."

Lana is silent, but I hear her breathing on the other line. I manage to mumble out a “thanks for all you’ve done.”

“It’s been my pleasure working with you. Bye.”

I’m still sitting on the bed. My hair is dripping onto my bathrobe. I still have the phone in my hand. The bedroom door opens. It’s Lana. Her lips are stretched tightly into a thin, grim line. She walks over to where I’m sitting, kneels down on the floor, and gently places her head in my lap. Neither of us says a word. Instinctively, I reach down and start stroking her hair. I’m still gripping the phone in my other hand. Not until the off-the-hook signal starts screeching do I remember to hang it up. I keep stroking while my mind spins in uncontrollable circles. *He got us into Dr. Montgomery this very afternoon. That never happens, so this must be really serious—he must have told him that time was critical—they must be in a big hurry to get her started . . .* Familiar noises from the kitchen remind us that there is still work to be done. She raises her head, takes my hand in hers, and looks hard at me while she rises up. Still tight-lipped, she slowly shakes her head back and forth while letting out a long breath. Then she turns and walks out of the room, back toward the kitchen where kids are needing her direction. I remain on the edge of the bed for a long, long time, trying not to cry as I try to force back the nightmare scenarios that insistently press themselves into my thoughts. The icy fingers are back with a vengeance now. *I better get something out to the relatives . . .*

Lana Update 11-18-03 Tuesday

This morning at 7:45 I had just jumped into the shower after my regular morning basketball routine, when Lana came and grabbed me because Dr. Lung was on the phone and wanted to talk to both of us. This did not alarm me because just yesterday in the waiting room he had told us the story about why he always makes a point of getting both husband and wife on the phone. He had once called a lady about a diagnosis and had talked to the husband first, because the lady was detained. Later on he got an irate call from the lady who explained that the couple was in the middle of a nasty divorce, and the husband was trying to collect information to use against her in the proceedings, and he had no business giving out her private medical info to her no-good husband, etc. etc. So Dr. Lung told us that since that very pleasant experience he has been most careful about making sure both partners were on the line when he speaks. Hence, I was not alarmed by being yanked wet out of the shower. I feel a little alarmed now. All he told us was that the CT scan had revealed “nodules” on the liver and the lungs. His words, “I really don’t know what to say to you other than to tell you just that.” I asked him if these “nodules” were positively cancerous tumors? He replied that was very likely, and that it was either a recurrence of the cancer cells from the molar pregnancy of five years ago, or a spread of the breast cancer—most likely the breast cancer. In either case, not good news.

He told us he had taken the liberty of scheduling us in with Dr. Montgomery, the oncologist, for this very afternoon at 1:45. Being seen that quickly is very unusual and adds to the feeling that we have had that people in the know are trying hard to pull strings for us. At this point I could do a lot of guessing for you in terms of what all this means, but that’s all it would be. So I’ll do the semi

intelligent thing and just wait until after we talk to Dr. Montgomery to finish this up. So that's it for now.

I'm wandering around the house trying to busy myself, but I'm really just stunned. The 7:45 a.m. phone call from Dr. Lung was the first piece of news we've had that really hit me like a punch in the gut. And a sucker punch, at that. With the two positive signs from yesterday still echoing in our ears, the whiplash from this morning's phone call is that much more pronounced. Lana is somber. Not emotional, just somber, and going about her normal morning chores like she has for years, helping with lunches, fixing hair for the little girls, teaching piano to Bryson and Shannon—you know, the normal morning chores for a mother of nine. The kind of chore list that would scare the ovaries out of most mothers out there, potential or veteran, but the one she breezes through every day like it's nothing. I am in my study, trying to act like I'm working, But I'm not. My mind is a whirlwind. *Nodules on the liver and the lungs? What? This can't be happening. Not to Lana. She's always been strong as a horse. She delivered nine children—naturally. Never even took a painkiller until the last one.*