

Praise for
90
Days
to Live

Alternative Cancer Treatments have been stymied for far too long by a myriad of regulatory, financial, and political issues blocking patients from getting the full spectrum of healthcare options available to them. This brave book is the compelling story of one couple who dared to go ‘outside the box,’ and after embarking on a remarkable journey, were able to beat the odds through a combination of sheer determination, persistence and hope as they integrated little-known approaches. A must-read for anyone feeling trapped by their choices and thinking there’s no hope.”

—**Dr. Eric Wood, ND**

www.drericwoodnd.com

“Rodney and his wife Paige take us on their challenging personal journey to discovering a more natural way to conquer Rodney’s Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. In the face of an alarming prognosis from the doctor (summed up in the book’s title), this couple forged ahead in their decision to take an alternative route rather than go with traditional chemo and radiation treatments. Their story takes us through the day-to-day experience of holding onto hope as they change their lifestyle through nutrition and cleanses. An inspirational story for anyone facing a critical health condition. A hearty round of applause for this couple’s perseverance, strength and bravery!”

—**Cynthia Olsen Author**

Essiac: A Native Herbal Cancer Remedy

Gold Medal Small Press Book Award

<http://www.cynthiaolsenauthor.com>

“*90 Days to Live* is the refreshing, encouraging, inspiring true story of an American couple Rodney and Paige Stamps. Rodney was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, a deadly form of cancer. Without chemotherapy, the oncologist’s prognosis for Rodney was 90 days left on this Earth. (Statistically, chemotherapy procedures yield a 2.1% cure rate, i.e. five years. Translation? Out of one hundred treated individuals, two will make it to five years, and 98 won’t.)

In plain language, the book recounts Rodney and Paige’s efforts to beat the odds by successfully avoiding the toxic route, and combatting cancer naturally. In vivid fashion, the book highlights the couple’s determination to save Rodney’s life through alternative methods that they disciplined themselves to follow. The book also tells the successful story of a *loving, understanding* joint venture. I recommend the book to anyone seeking a *natural and safe* approach to survival.”

—**Dr. E.K. Schandl**

Director, American Metabolic Laboratories

<https://www.americanmetaboliclaboratories.net>

90 Days *to* Live

*Beating Cancer
When Modern Medicine
Offers No Hope*

One Couple's Incredible *Alternative* Journey
to Curing the "Incurable"

Rodney
& Paige STAMPS

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90 Days to Live: Beating Cancer When Modern Medicine Offers No Hope—One Couple's Incredible Alternative Journey to Curing the “Incurable”

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Disclaimer

We have tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from our memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances we have changed the names of individuals and places. We may have changed some identifying characteristics and details such as physical properties, occupations and places of residence.

The authors are not health care providers or doctors and are not qualified to dispense medical advice. This book is for informational and educational purposes only! Much of the book is a statement of opinion in areas where the facts are controversial or do not exist. This book is not intended to prevent, diagnose, treat, or cure disease. This book is not a substitute for consultation with a physician. If you are seeking medical advice consult a licensed physician. The authors are not qualified to prescribe medical treatments or to recommend any form of health care. The reader should regularly consult a physician or other licensed health care practitioner in matters relating to his/her health and particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention.



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Foreword

NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION. Out of necessity, Rodney and wife Paige, overcame his lymphoma cancer (for 13+ years now!) while simultaneously building a booming fire-safety business. It was their “Staying Power” (a term coined by UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden, the winningest coach in college basketball history) that carried them through some very dark days.

Rodney and Paige are part of the newer “wired” generation, who, while they respect professional advice, don’t put it on a pedestal to the exclusion of all else.

With resourcefulness, commitment and discipline, they chose to proactively search the Internet for professional and lay information about Rodney’s condition, and had the courage to buck conventional wisdom and follow their belief. They represent a trend I’m seeing more and more in my professional life.

Rituxan chemotherapy is a relatively successful conventional treatment for Lymphoma cancers, but Rodney chose a “road less taken”—one which required more courage, discipline and commitment than most human beings have. This was especially true when, after months of enzyme treatment, the cancer increased in size before its final decline.

I have known Pamela McDougale for all 35 years of my career as a urological and pelvic cancer surgeon. Pamela, a nutritionist, along with Nicholas Gonzales, an immunologist medical doctor, trained under Dr. William Donald Kelly, the original creator of the enzyme protocol Rodney used for treating his cancer.

Nick Gonzales trained under the famous Robert Good at Sloan Kettering (New York City) and showed that high-dose enzyme treatment could control pancreatic cancer growth. Meanwhile, with a modest practice in Boise, Idaho, Pamela has treated over 5000 patients with impressive success.

The program uses up to 70 capsules of enzymes daily between meals for at least eight months duration. Why so many? Because less than 10% of those ingested make their way into the bloodstream to affect the cancers. My professor at Harvard—Kurt Isselbacher in the department of Gastroenterology—demonstrated this effect many years ago studying the enzyme peroxidase.

The accepted scientific confirmation of the protease enzymes attaching to alpha Macroglobin and then affecting the Transforming Growth Factor thus allowing optimal host immune function may be an explanation for us professional researchers and medical doctors (*J. Immunotherapy* 21(2)85, 1998). One aspect well known, is that the Chymotrypsin protease is the most important enzyme for destruction of cancer growths as noted by Kelly, Gonzales and McDougale.

Enzyme therapy is just one part of McDougale's arsenal. Additionally, she not only attacks the cancer nutritionally—eliminating all sugar and refined carbohydrate intake—she also advocates for decreasing “body burdens” through colon cleansing with coffee enemas.

That's why Rodney lost thirty pounds (30+ lbs.) when he changed his diet. Today we know from PET scans that 90% of all cancers feed on sugars and carbohydrates. The scans show high sugar isotope

uptake in breast cancers and Lymphoma. As such, avoiding these foods literally starves cancer cells to death.

After 35 years of managing cancer as a surgeon, my focus today is on how to use metabolic interventions in dealing with cancers with “abnormal fuel or energy systems.” It’s not my original work; credit goes to researchers like Otto Warburg, pioneer of cancer metabolism; along with my teachers, Albert Lehninger and Peter Pedersen of Johns Hopkins University Medical Center; and Tom Seyfried, author of *Cancer As A Metabolic Disease*.

Are cases like Rodney’s lymphoma a fluke or just an anecdotal happening of chance? Definitely not! Thousands of people have benefited from Pamela McDougale’s work in Boise, and Nicholas Gonzales’ clinic in New York City. During my years performing cancer surgery, and in conjunction with the National Cancer Institute in the *Best Case Series* under the leadership of Dr. Jeff White, I volunteered to audit institutions like Kushi and Hippocrates Institutes—which claim success with nutritional interventions for terminal cancer patients. To my surprise, we did see about one-third of the cases end up with impressive outcomes—a significantly higher success rate than that found with most conventional approaches.

To make further advances into formal clinical research is costly. As such, foundations like ours (YuFoundation.org) and others are working hard to raise enough money to make this happen.

It is not necessary, in order to make great progress in the cure of cancer, for us to have the full solution of all the problems of basic science research. . . . The history of medicine is replete with examples of the cures obtained years, decades and even centuries before the mechanism of the action was understood for these cures—Sidney Farber, the father of American Oncology, United States Congress 1971.

Why is this book so important? Because, as a reader, and possible cancer sufferer, you need to know that you CAN make a difference

with your cancer. Nutritional and metabolic interventions are viable, and are forms of intervention that can be used alone or in conjunction with traditional treatments. Most importantly, there is plenty of good science behind these approaches.

Read this book. It will open your eyes to options you may be unaware of, and give you the power to actually do something about your cancer!

—**George Yu, MD**

Aegis Medical & Research Associates, YuFoundation.org,
Clinical Professor of Urological Cancer Surgery, George
Washington University Medical Center



Out of the Blue

RODNEY

LIKE A BOLT OF LIGHTNING, Dr. A's words hit me. "I'm sorry, Mr. Stamps, but unless you start treatment immediately, about ninety days is all you can expect." I was alarmed and bewildered to think that my life could be over, when I wasn't even sick.

Rewind to six weeks earlier.

I woke up early, as usual, and it seemed like just another summer morning. I wasted no time because there were bridges to cross and mountains to climb and not enough hours in the day. How great to own my own business, call the shots, and let the buck stop here. Stampsco Fire and Security was taking off, and the future looked promising.

I hummed the melody to "Old Time Rock 'n' Roll" as I walked over to the closet. Traces of my distant past barely penetrated my present. I had given up that life as a drummer with a heavy metal band shortly after I met Paige, the love of my life. We were both smitten; I mean we fell hard. There was no question that we fit together like hand in glove, and, more than a decade later, our devotion was stronger than ever. Little did we know how that bond would be tested in the near future.

I carried my red shirt out of the bedroom, on my way to the kitchen. Pausing in front of the mirror in the dining room, I intended to put it on but stopped short. There was something above my left collarbone, something I hadn't noticed before. I moved closer, inspecting it with my fingertips.

It was a lump.

A large one.

I froze, with my arms suspended in midair before slowly lowering them. "Paige!" I realized I sounded more than a bit panicked, so I cleared my throat and reduced my volume a few decibels.

"Can you come here?"

She came running in. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"What do you make of this?" I asked, indicating the lump. "It's about the size of an almond."

"That's huge! How long has that been there?"

"No clue."

"How could you miss something like that?" she asked. Pausing a moment, she muttered, "How could *I* miss something like that?"

She stared at the bulge and told me I should go to the doctor again. Not my favorite thing to do. I had been to the walk-in clinic just a couple of weeks before; I was prescribed antibiotics and received a steroid shot for bronchitis, but a cough still lingered. Even so, I saw no need to go running back there, even if the lump was kind of scary looking.

I put on my shirt and headed to the garage to load up the truck, grabbing a chocolate-peanut-butter breakfast bar on the way out. Since the lump didn't hurt, I didn't worry too much about it. I figured it might go away if I just ignored it. No clinic for me that day. I was just too busy.

Several weeks went by, and life continued as normal. It was only when Paige and I were installing a fire alarm system at a high school with Tony, our lone employee, that I began to feel fatigued. The job

required climbing up and down a few flights of stairs and oddly, I felt drained after just one climb. Come to think of it, I hadn't had much energy lately, maybe for several months.

"Looks like we need to invest in a treadmill," I told Paige, breathing hard as I closed my eyes against the stream of stars that fogged my vision. Maybe it was time to face the fact that I was pushing forty.

This day was like most others when you could find us, side by side, hard at work, blazing new trails and forging relationships with various clients to provide fire and life-safety systems.

Paige couldn't help but put in a little dig about all the cheeseburgers I ate and suggested that cutting back might be a good idea. My forehead was sweaty, my legs were rubbery, and Paige thought I needed medical attention. She thought I might be developing acute bronchitis.

I don't know why I resisted going to the doctor. I just didn't want to take the time. Paige thought it might be fear of the unknown or possibly had to do with the fact that they usually asked me to drop my drawers for a shot in the butt. Either way, it took some convincing to get me there.

I started to feel limp and wasted, so, within thirty minutes, I realized I needed to call it quits. I went out to our red truck and gave instructions to Tony, requesting that he wrap things up for the day.

Paige suggested that we go to the walk-in clinic where she had taken Jessika the previous week. Our fourteen-year-old daughter liked Dr. M. She had caught a bug and needed antibiotics. Since she'd recovered fairly quickly under his care, I nodded in agreement.

PAIGE

THE TRAFFIC WASN'T BAD ON THE WAY TO THE CLINIC. Rodney drove, and I rolled down the window, letting the cool

breeze wash over my face, thinking about our family dog, a German Shepherd named Konan. His head would be hanging out the car window every chance he got. Though tempting, I didn't hang my tongue out, and I did my best not to bark incessantly at the people and dogs on the street.

When we pulled up to the clinic, the parking lot was fairly vacant, and hardly anybody was in the waiting room. They had tried to make the place as homey as they could, adding a few knickknacks here and there. Popular magazines lay on end tables with decorative lamps, and a few paintings hung meticulously on the almond-colored walls. I was glad that they hadn't chosen the bleak white color you normally see in medical facilities.

We signed Rodney in and awaited our turn on the cushioned chairs. I think it's accurate to say "our" turn, because I'm always there to see the doctor with my husband. If he went by himself, he might neglect to mention a symptom in order for the doctor to properly diagnose his ailment. Going to the doctor with a man is sort of like taking the dog to the vet. They seem to expect the doctor to make a diagnosis with little or no input from them.

When a nurse called us back, we stopped at the weighing station. I glared at the scale, thinking about how I never enjoyed standing on one. I would yank my shoes off, place my purse on the floor, and hope it didn't hit a new all-time high.

Rodney didn't seem to have any such qualms, though. Men. He plopped himself on the scale, boots and all, and watched the arrow hit 194 pounds.

He laughed and said, "Wow! I need to quit eating so much!"

I shook my head at him. "I'm sure those steel-toed boots you have on are adding a good eight pounds at least!"

No way would I have gotten up there with those boots on!

A few minutes later, Dr. M. came in. When he saw me, he gave a big smile.

“Hello, again! How’s Jessika doing?”

“She’s doing well,” I said with a nod. “Pretty much fully recovered.”

“That’s good to hear,” he said. “And you, Rodney? What brings you here?”

RODNEY

“I HAVE THIS LUMP above my collar bone.”

Dr. M. raised his hands to my neck and felt around.

“That’s an impressive lump. How long has it been there?”

“Not sure. I noticed it about two or three weeks ago.”

Dr. M. continued to feel around, checking my neck, chest, and under my arms. Suddenly his hand stopped moving under my left armpit. “What’s this?”

“What’s what?” I asked.

“There’s a huge lump in your armpit.”

I heard Paige gasp as I quickly pushed his hand aside to feel the second lump. The thing was bigger than a golf ball!

How am I missing these things on my body?

Dr. M. began asking a barrage of questions.

“Have you had a fever?”

“No.”

“Do you have a cough?”

“Yes. All I ever have is bronchitis. That’s it.”

I’m not the healthiest of specimens, but certainly not the sickliest, either.

I took a deep breath, trying to steady my nerves.

“Do you have any cats?”

Perplexed by his question I answered, “No. Why?”

“Your symptoms might line up with something called Cat Scratch Fever.”

Great! A Doctor and a Ted Nugent fan!

“It’s not uncommon for a person’s lymph nodes to swell up from a cat scratch,” he said.

“That would be a great answer, but we don’t own a cat.”

“Have you come across any cats lately?”

“No,” I said, glancing over at Paige, who was pale and trembling. Turning back to the doctor, I asked, “What else do you think it could be?”

“I’m not sure.” His calm exterior started to crumble, his eyes looking anywhere but at mine. “I’d like to run some tests to rule out certain scenarios.”

“Okay,” I said and then looked at Paige, who nodded.

He drew a blood sample and then walked out of the room.

PAIGE

STANDING UP, I WALKED OVER TO THE BLEAK TABLE where Rodney was sitting. Looking down at him, I kissed him on the forehead and rubbed the back of his neck. He was staring off into space and lost in thought; a deep furrow creased his forehead. I traced my finger across his brow and asked,

“What are you thinking about?”

“I don’t know how I missed it. I take showers every day, and I’ve never felt it. Never! How could I miss something like this? It’s not like it’s smaller than the other one, either. It’s huge! Feel it.”

I lifted my hand up and felt it. He was right. It was huge, something he really should have detected earlier.

“I wonder what it could be?” he said.

The last thing I wanted to do was to share my worst fears with the love of my life, so I eluded the question.

One lump was startling, but two was terrifying. Entering the room, Dr. M. stated, “The lab is a little backed up, so I’ll need to get back to you later this evening with the results of the blood test.”

As Rodney and I walked out of the clinic hand in hand, I mumbled, “That’s just great. I hate waiting! How long does it take to get blood results back?”

“I don’t know.”

I looked down at Rodney’s hand entwined with mine.

I’ve always loved these hands.

Rodney would tell you that he’s a leg person, but I’m definitely a hand person. You can tell a lot about a person by their hands, and my husband’s hands are perfect. They were the first things I noticed about Rodney when we met.

Actually, the first time our paths crossed, I didn’t even really see him. My friend, Sarah, and I were just hanging out in her cute little electric blue car with no real plans for the evening.

We howled along with a song playing on the radio, as we sped down the street, our long hair flying out the window, tangling in the wind. As soon as Sarah pulled into a gravel driveway, I pulled down the visor mirror to check out my makeup.

It was common for me to have lipstick streaks across my face after an exhilarating drive, because the wind would drag strands of hair across my lips, wisping them across my face.

Busy wiping my face, I briefly glanced over when Sarah’s friend Johnny leaned down to talk to her through her window. I noticed someone with him, but all I could see were male legs, so I went back to touching up my makeup, vaguely wondering who he was.

Sarah finished her conversation, said goodbye, and threw the car into reverse. As she pulled out onto the quiet street, she looked at me and said, “He sure was cute!”

“Who?”

“Rodney. You know—the guy standing next to Johnny.”

I shrugged. “All I saw were his jeans.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“How about the pool hall?”

She rolled her eyes dramatically. “You know, you really should get a life.”

“Just because I don’t chase boys around like you do doesn’t mean I don’t have a life.”

I was used to having this conversation with my friend. I’m not sure why I felt compelled to try to explain myself each time, because it never seemed to make a difference to her. She thought I was some recluse—a loner, I think.

Sarah finally shrugged her shoulders and sped to Pool Sharks, where I was a regular. She never minded the experience, because it gave her a chance to flirt with the boys, while I took their money. It was a symbiotic relationship.

A few days later, Sarah called me up.

“Rodney’s playing the drums tonight. Want to go hear him?”

“I can’t. I have something of a date tonight.”

She laughed. “What’s that mean?”

“A guy from the pool hall is going to teach me some shooting techniques.”

“Sounds romantic.”

“I did say, ‘something of a date.’”

She shook her head. “Yeah, I’ll give you that. So, when’s this Casanova picking you up?”

“About seven.”

She thought for a moment and then said, “How about I pick you up now, and you come with me until your date? I’ll have you back before he arrives.”

“I guess that will work.”

Ten minutes later, she was standing on my doorstep. I opened the door dressed in a pair of holey jeans and a comfortable T-shirt. She was decked out to the hilt, with a cute blouse and miniskirt, her hair flowing around her shoulders.

“Wow, you look great!” I said.

“Thanks!”

We drove over to Rodney’s house and knocked on the door. Johnny answered, inviting us to come in. Sarah and Johnny started talking, so I sat down on the brown sofa in the corner of the room.

As I waited for Sarah to finish her conversation, a guy with long, brown hair and forest-green eyes came out of the hallway. He was wearing black leather pants with a silver belt buckle, a black heavy metal T-shirt with the sleeves torn off, and black cowboy boots. I think I stopped breathing for a moment.

Hello, gorgeous!

He never even glanced my way, so I sat there and watched him get ready, kicking myself for having made plans with the other guy. I’d much rather watch this beauty play the drums. My eyes dropped to his hands. Tan, strong, and manly!

Oh, wow! He’s one fine specimen!

A pothole in the road ripped me away from my daydream, hurtling me back to the present. I glanced over at Rodney, who was also lost in thought. Nearly home from the clinic, I looked around, wondering how the rest of the world could look so calm when my insides were churning like I was on some roller coaster that wouldn’t end. My head and heart raced, in what could only be described as a panic attack.

I hate those things. They always strike at the most inopportune times.

As Rodney maneuvered through our neighborhood, I tried to give myself a pep talk. I didn’t want anyone to guess what was going on inside my head, especially not Rodney. I had to stay calm and

just get through it. By the time Rodney pulled into the driveway, I hoped I was prepared to face the world.

I saw our girls playing in the front yard. A friend had been watching them, and they looked so happy and carefree. Little did they know . . .

Just take a deep breath.

Rodney hopped out of the truck, and I slowly followed. Our girls are pretty bright, so they immediately looked concerned when they saw my face. Neither could read their dad's expressions, but I was an open book.

So much for my preparations.

They ran up, staring at us with their big, questioning eyes.

There was no way I was going to tell them anything until we knew for sure what was wrong. No sense in giving them the same scare I'd just experienced. Although I knew deep down that my beloved had cancer, I clung to any hope I could that I was wrong. It wasn't cancer until the last lab result confirmed it.

"I haven't been feeling well, so I went to the doctor," Rodney said. "Hey, Jessika, Dr. M. says, 'Hi!'"

"Oh, you saw him, too?"

"Yeah. He's a nice guy."

The girls ran off to play again, content that nothing could be too bad if their dad had just seen the same doctor as Jessika. After all, Jessika was back to normal, so he would soon be, too—right?

RODNEY

WHEN THE DOCTOR CALLED ME BACK THAT EVENING, he let me know that the blood tests were all normal. I turned to Paige and gave her a thumbs-up, which made her smile.

"That's awesome!" I said. I thought I had just dodged a bullet. I don't know why I had been so worried. I took pretty good care

of myself. I was only in my late thirties and didn't smoke, drink, or abuse my body.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Stamps," Dr. M. said, pausing a beat. "I didn't mean to imply that you're out of the woods yet. I was just checking for a few of the basic illnesses, but the lumps still trouble me."

Dr. M. recommended that I follow up with a specialist as soon as possible to run more tests. When I asked what kind of specialist and he said, "oncologist," I was taken aback. It felt like someone had yanked my beating heart from my chest and handed it to me. My whole world was caving in on me.

Is difficulty breathing a symptom of cancer?

I muttered a thank-you and then hung up. Looking over at Paige, her stricken expression reminded me that I didn't have the luxury of self-pity. Her look indicated that she feared the worst.

I had to be strong for her. And if I were to have any hope of defeating whatever was growing in my system, I would have to stay positive.

"He says I should see an oncologist," I said, struggling to keep my voice from sounding as terrified as I felt.

It didn't work.

Paige immediately burst into tears. I pulled her into my arms and whispered soothing words, waiting for her sobs to cease and her body to finally relax against me.

"Sweetie, please look at me," I said.

Reluctantly, she complied, her eyes bloodshot, filled with more soon-to-be-shed tears. My heart went out to her, and I became even more resolved to beat whatever was wrong with me. I had a responsibility to my family to survive.

"I'm not going anywhere," I reassured her.

"You've always been my rock," she said, the color finally coming back into her cheeks. "If anyone can beat cancer, it's you."

“Hey,” I said with a chuckle, “we don’t know that I have cancer yet. Let’s not jump the gun.”

I felt so bad for putting her through what I feared was to come.

PAIGE

THE LAST THING I WANTED TO DO was leave Rodney’s side, but I needed to check on dinner. Since nothing was on fire, I turned the heat to low, and we stepped outside on the back porch. We wrapped our arms around each other and were comforted, each by the presence of the other. The low light from the porch lamps spilled onto the concrete, saturating the night. Soon, moths fluttered in, encircling the ambient glow. They looked so peaceful and carefree as they danced around the blaze.

I wish I could stop time at this moment.

The girls were in their rooms, quietly reading and doing homework. I glanced inside and sighed. It suddenly hit me: *What are we going to tell the girls?* I had a sudden urge to run to them and give them each a hug. However, Jessika and Jade were both very astute and would immediately know that something was up. If they asked me a direct question, I’d be forced to tell them.

We decided to hold off telling the girls until we knew something more definitive. We hoped beyond hope that we never had to have that conversation.

I called the girls, asking them to set the table. Somehow, we managed to get through dinner.

Afterwards, I took a deep breath and then grabbed Rodney’s hand, pulling him toward the living room. “Let’s curl up on the sofa and watch something.”

“How about a Disney movie with the kids?” he said with a sideways glance.

“Sure,” I said. “Tonight you get to choose whatever you want.”

Rodney threw in a movie, and I did my best to focus on the animated characters. I kept glancing over at him, trying not to be too obvious.

Are you as scared as I am?

I couldn't tell if he was or not, to be honest. He was good at hiding his emotions. Maybe some of his internal strength would rub off onto me.

I looked back at the television and tried to focus, but it was no use. My mind kept drifting back to our early years, to the moment I fell in love with him.

I was sitting at the house on a Saturday night, with Fleetwood Mac blaring from the stereo, waiting for a pizza to arrive, when the doorbell chimed.

I wasn't expecting anyone else that night, but, out of habit, I pressed my eye to the peephole to be sure there wasn't some masked murderer waiting on the other side of the door. I was a little surprised to see Sarah, and she wasn't alone.

I quickly opened the door. “Hey there! What brings you by?”

I looked past her, seeing Johnny, along with a few other people. One I knew, but the other man caused my breath to catch sharply. It was the gorgeous guy with the unforgettable hands. I could get lost in his twinkling eyes, but I found my gaze lingering on his lips. I couldn't seem to take my eyes off them.

I groaned internally when I suddenly realized I was sporting cut-off Levi's and a worn out T-shirt.

That's just great!

Sarah apologized for showing up unannounced.

Confusion caused her brow to wrinkle slightly. “What are you doing at home on a Saturday night by yourself?”

“I didn't feel like going out.”

Sarah shrugged and motioned to the guy with the sensual lips and amazing hands. “Have you met the drummer from Johnny’s band, Rodney?”

“No.” I felt my face heat up, as I began to desperately wish that I had fixed myself up a little more before answering the door. Something I’d never bothered to do before.

“Rodney, this is Paige. Paige, Rodney.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” I said, tilting my head in a way I hoped he’d think was cute, possibly even making up for my grungy clothes. I flashed him a smile for good measure.

He smiled back. “It’s nice to meet you, too.”

And just like that, I was smitten.

Since I’d ordered pizza, they all decided to stay and help me eat it.

Fine by me!

I couldn’t take my eyes off Rodney the entire time they were there. Unfortunately, he seemed to come with an attachment—Sarah’s clingy sister, Stacy, who didn’t seem interested in sharing.

Brokenhearted, I found a quiet corner of the living room where I could ponder my plight in peace, without having to watch Stacy hang all over Rodney. Here I’d found the love of my life, and he’d brought a date to my house!

My heart skipped a beat when he walked over to me, alone. I smiled broadly as he sat next to me on the love seat. We talked easily about various subjects, like pool and music. The chemistry was definitely there, and I could tell it wasn’t just on my side. However, I didn’t want to offend Sarah or Stacy, so I asked him if he was on a date that night.

“No,” he said, looking over his shoulder. “Johnny just asked me to tag along and entertain his girlfriend’s sister. It’s really not a date or anything.”

Good, because you’re going to be mine.

It felt like we'd been friends for years, talking and laughing. I was having the time of my life when Stacy found us. She plopped herself onto Rodney's lap like a Pomeranian puppy and threw her arms around his neck. It took superhuman strength on my part not to reach out and smack her.

But when she put her slobbery lips on his, I lost it. I saw red and needed to put some distance between us. I stood up abruptly and said, "I think I'll leave you two alone!" before I walked out of the room.

I went into the kitchen to fume. It was hard to get away from them in my small home, but I did the best I could. A wave of loneliness threatened to engulf me as I stood alone in my kitchen.

How much longer will these people be here?

I turned around to get myself a glass of water when a breathless, disheveled Rodney came bursting into the room.

"There you are!" he said, looking greatly relieved. "Look, I'm not interested in her at all." He waved his hands in front of himself wildly, perhaps trying to erase the picture of their kiss from my mind.

It didn't work.

"Could have fooled me," I said, tapping my foot on the floor. I had intended the words to come out calm and cool, but I was too angry.

His lips formed a slight smile, and I melted.

Those lips.

He said something about trying to help his friend's girlfriend's sister, that there was nothing more to it, but I didn't know whether I bought it or not. I just nodded and left the kitchen.

Over the course of the evening, various male friends of Sarah came by, trying to entice me to go to the pool hall with them. Normally, I would've jumped at the chance to play, but I was too smitten with Rodney to even consider doing anything but staying home.

When I caught wind that Sarah was actually trying to get Rodney to leave, I shoo'd all the unwanted guests out. Rodney stayed another

few hours, and we talked the entire time. He was and has always been a true gentleman. I was thrilled to find out later that he was equally attracted to me.

And now, this perfect man sitting next to me, watching a fairy tale with our two beautiful girls, might be ripped from my life in the most final way. I couldn't bear it. I snuggled even closer to him, laying my head on his shoulder and holding his hand as tightly as I could.

RODNEY

THE NEXT DAY, I WOKE UP FEELING HORRIBLE. I forced my body into a standing position and then pulled off my nightshirt, and Paige gasped. Alarmed, I went to the mirror and saw that my chest had swollen dramatically.

"I look like Arnold Schwarzenegger!" I said, flabbergasted. "But just on the left. I'm still Rodney on the right side."

My attempt at levity didn't have the desired effect. Paige glared at me. "Not funny! You're going to the ER right now!"

Smart enough to recognize that my sweet little wife had just given me a direct order, I knew better than to argue.

"I'm sure any doctor would know what to do," I said. "They've probably seen this before."

"What are you talking about? This isn't a sore throat or a light cough. Your left side is twice the size of the right! Maybe something's wrong with your heart? I'm taking you to the hospital right now."

We called a family friend to come watch the girls. As Paige drove me to the hospital, I could see that she was valiantly trying to stifle her sobs, but tears still streamed down her face, her body convulsing periodically.

"It'll be okay," I said, reaching over to pat her shoulder. "Just calm down. We'll get to the hospital, and everything will be fine."

She nodded and increased her speed. When we got to the ER, we had to wait about an hour to see a doctor. Paige and I tried to focus on the magazines strewn around the waiting room, choosing to put off the discussion of my health until a doctor could look at me.

Finally, we were escorted to one examination table among many in a large room. The nurse pulled a curtain around the small area to give us some semblance of privacy. Then we waited another twenty minutes for her to return to draw blood and take my vital signs. She wrapped up by telling us that the doctor would be in to see us shortly.

When he arrived, I did a double take. He was a dead ringer for the lead singer of the heavy metal band System of a Down. I looked over at Paige, and she was struggling to keep her shock from showing.

It's not just me, then.

The ER doctor was heavy set, with an unkempt beard, which looked like a wad of rusted steel wool had been glued to his chin. If that wasn't bad enough, he had huge, bulging eyes that made him look terminally surprised. What he didn't look like was someone with a degree in medicine. It only got worse when he started talking. His eyes bulged out even farther, while his fingers fidgeted with his white coat.

“The tests are inconclusive, but these symptoms are definitely indicative of something serious.”

As he continued to speak, his face paled noticeably and mirrored the way I felt—frantic and terrified. I always imagined that doctors took a special course to train them on how to deliver horrible news to patients, learning to keep perfect composure. This doctor must have missed class that day.

I must admit, though, I could barely understand his words, because I was too absorbed in his facial expression. It seemed like he was trying his best to stay somewhat vague and objective but failing miserably. He obviously thought I had cancer.

Maybe I'd been dropped in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, starring a far-out singer who was acting the role of doctor in this bizarre scene. Wouldn't it be great if I could just wake up?

Finally, Dr. Heavy Metal crumbled right before our eyes, completely derailed, and left the room, mumbling something about sending in another doctor to see us shortly.

Paige and I looked at each other, utterly baffled. Were we living in a twisted version of reality, or had that really just happened? It wasn't long before a more-traditional-looking doctor, a seasoned medical professional, walked in. No doubt, he'd been asked to try to salvage the botched conversation.

Although one might think that having an old pro take over where the foreboding, freaky doctor had left off might help ease the impact of the blow, it didn't. Once I saw how smoothly the new doctor went through his spiel, I realized the hospital staff had sent in their best, which meant there was something seriously wrong. You don't hire Michelangelo to paint a living room, and you don't send in a top-notch doctor to break the news that someone has tonsillitis.

I wish Dr. Heavy Metal would come back, tripping his way through his terrifying sentences and blinking his huge eyes way too much.

The seasoned doctor seconded Dr. M.'s assessment that I shouldn't have swollen lymph nodes and that I needed to see a specialist immediately.

When we got home, we tried to behave as normally as possible. For Paige, it was too much. Though she did her best to control her emotions, the lack of sleep and being super-charged on adrenaline made it impossible. Unfortunately, she ran out of the room crying at least three times during the course of the evening.

Our girls were perplexed at this uncharacteristic behavior, so I explained to them that Mom wasn't feeling well, combined with a poor night's rest.

The next day, I called the oncologist's office but couldn't get through. I figured they were just busy, so I left a message. Paige didn't approve of playing the waiting game, went straight to the phone, and called them herself. Getting the same recorded greeting that I had, she hung up, went into the kitchen, cleaned a few dishes, and tried again.

"You're going to see a specialist if I have to drive down there and pencil you in for an appointment myself!" she muttered as she hung up for the third time.

After about thirty minutes, she finally got through to the receptionist. I marveled at Paige's ability to get any task done.

That's my wife!

After she hung up, she smiled. "We have an appointment at two o'clock."

"Today?" I asked in disbelief.

"Of course."

I suppressed a grin.

"Wow. Nice work, Sweetie."



The waiting room was filled with a variety of people. Some had full heads of hair, some didn't. Some were thin and frail, and most had a pale complexion. When we walked in, many heads turned to size us up. I felt a bit like a green-skinned alien with purple polka dots.

We were definitely the youngest and healthiest-looking people there, for now. They probably wondered which one of us was going to see the oncologist. Their unspoken question was answered when I approached the receptionist's counter.

Paige sat toward the back of the waiting room while I got my blood work done. Afterward, she admired the fluorescent pink wrap around my arm. I plunked myself down next to her and waited.

Not having much else to say, we just sat in silence, holding hands. It wasn't long before a nurse with red hair, freckles, and pale skin peeked her head out of the door and called, "Rodney Stamps!"

When we stood up and walked toward the open door, I noticed the nurse was a good eight inches shorter than Paige. Despite her short stature, she held herself with a quiet confidence. Flashing us a bright smile, I couldn't help but wonder, *How does she do that, when all she sees is cancer patients all day?*

After we walked through the door, I glanced to the left, down a narrow hallway, where patients sat in lounge chairs with IV bags dripping slowly into their arms.

That's probably where they administer the chemo.

"This way," the nurse said, heading down the hallway to the right.

She placed us in a freezing-cold white room that had a few well-read magazines thrown on a small table. Talk about sterile. The room was horrible. I climbed up onto the crinkly paper, feeling like a piece of meat ready to be wrapped and have a sticker slapped on stating how much I weighed and the cost. I looked around, half expecting to see white fitted jackets with the sleeves that strap around the back.

When we met Dr. A., Paige and I both liked him immediately. He was a tall man with a friendly face. I felt at ease with him. His questions were very familiar, so much so that I began to wonder if I should just carry transcripts from previous doctors' visits to hand to the current one. However, after we discussed the basic symptoms, the conversation diverged quite a bit from the norm.

"It sounds like Hodgkin's Lymphoma," Dr. A. said.

My heart sank. I was very familiar with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. An old business associate of mine had been diagnosed with that form of cancer when he was a young boy.

He had confided in me how, during his rounds of chemo and radiation in the hospital, he would befriend his roommates, other children who also had cancer. Sometimes he'd come back to his room after a treatment and find the neighboring bed empty and freshly made. When he would ask the nurse where his friend was, she would reply that the child had gone home.

When this happened again and again, he said that he finally figured out what was going on. His friends weren't going home—they were all dying. It was a tough dose of reality for any child to face.

From that moment on, he considered himself to be one of the lucky ones, because he had survived. Unfortunately, he died at age fifty-five from heart failure. When he passed, I wondered if the chemo and radiation treatment had something to do with his untimely death. All those chemicals and treatments are tough on the heart.

Doctor A.'s voice cut through my memories. "Hodgkin's Lymphoma is a cancer of the lymphatic system. It spreads from one lymph node to another and is often isolated in the neck area."

For twenty-four hours, I had been nurturing the hope that I didn't actually have cancer but rather some other, more easily treated disease. However, that dream was being crushed with each passing moment.

Surely he's talking about someone else.

"What's the treatment?" Paige asked.

"I'd rather wait to discuss the particulars of treatment until we know more," Dr. A. said gently. "We won't know what we're looking at until we get a biopsy. First, though we need to schedule a CT Scan, so I can see which lymph node would be best to remove."

I nodded. "When?"

"I'd like to schedule it for tomorrow, if that's okay."

"Tomorrow's fine," Paige said before I could answer.

PAIGE

AS RODNEY WENT TO HANDLE SOME PAPERWORK, I leaned back in a chair in the waiting room and allowed my mind to drift back to our first date.

I was so excited to actually be going out with Rodney. When he'd asked me if I might like to see a few local bands play, I was a little hesitant. I quickly overcame my fears, though, because I knew this man was worth it. However, I worried that he'd mesh with this crowd while I stood out like a black duck on a lake of swans.

Rodney arrived on my doorstep wearing a T-shirt and holey jeans. I'd carefully chosen a black skirt with a black fitted blouse with gold buttons. I wanted to look my best.

The moment we set foot inside the club, I cringed. It was a seedy bar, complete with women trolling for any male who would look their way. A few of them even hit on Rodney right in front of me. Talk about a lack of manners!

Paige, we are in a bar. Did you really expect anything different? I asked myself.

Yes! Yes, I did!

As we walked over to a table in the middle of the room, where his friends were seated, Rodney seemed to sense my discomfort. He gave me a reassuring smile and gently slid his hand into mine, intertwining our fingers. When we reached the table, he pulled out my chair and scooted his next to me, sat down, and draped his arm protectively around the back of my chair. I felt laser beams from at least three other women, boring holes into my head from all angles.

Eat your hearts out, ladies!

I leaned back into the chair and listened to the band play songs from the eighties. They weren't bad. I was finally relaxing a bit when

the lead singer suddenly called out to Rodney to come up and play with the band.

Rodney leaned toward me and whispered, “Do you mind if I go up and play a set with them? I won’t be long.”

I nodded, unable to think of a reason to say, “No.” Honestly, I was torn. I’d miss his warm, comforting arm, but I was dying to hear him play.

Rodney looked over at his friend to the right. “Watch out for her while I’m up there. Okay, Squatty?”

“Sure, man,” he replied.

No one could have picked a better nickname for the guy. Although it was rather unflattering, it was completely justified, seeing that he was about five-foot-five inches tall. He was a very sweet guy, with long, black hair and beautiful, crystal-blue eyes.

Rodney sauntered up to the stage like he owned it, taking the seat behind the drums. The minute the music started, he wreaked havoc on the set. Rodney fit right in with the screaming guitar and thumping bass.

He twirled the sticks, popping them up in the air off the snare drum and catching them on the way down, all the while keeping time with the band. Not that any recording studio would hire me to scout talent, but he was the best I’d ever seen.

Even though Squatty was put in charge of watching over me, he left to get a drink in the middle of the set. My body stiffened, and I counted the minutes for him to return.

At the table next to me sat a man with glazed eyes. He had noticed that I had lost my protection and decided to take advantage of the situation. He leaned his chair back on two legs and tried to put his head on my lap.

The first time, I managed to dodge the unwelcome gesture, but being determined, he tried again. Fortunately, Rodney had just

finished up on stage and was en route back to our table when he caught a glimpse of the man's game. Rodney quietly sat down behind the unlikely suitor. When the man leaned back again, Rodney leaned over him and said, "What are you doing?"

It startled the man so much, he lost his balance, and his chair crashed to the floor!

As the man jumped up, ready for a fight, he said, "What's your problem?"

"You're disrespecting my girlfriend and me," Rodney said sternly.

The bouncer at the club came over and stepped between the two.

"What's going on here?"

The man was silent and staggered off to another part of the bar. Then, my knight in shining armor, dressed in jeans and cowboy boots, looked down at me and asked, "You ready to go?"

"Oh, yes," I replied, exhaling a sigh of relief.

As he drove me home that night, I couldn't keep my eyes off him. This wonderful man had stood up for me, something no one had ever done before. Despite having just met me, he protected me as if I were family.

When he pulled into my driveway, he walked around the car to open my door. Then he escorted me to my porch and asked, "Can I call you tomorrow?"

"Sure!" I probably sounded like a love-sick teenager.

"Maybe we can shoot some pool or something."

"That would be great," I replied, restraining my urge to clap with glee. "I love pool!"

"I know," he said with a chuckle. "Just go easy on me, okay?"

I nodded. Then he wrapped his arms around my waist and gave me a sweet, tender kiss goodnight before he returned to his car.

A perfect gentleman! Such a rare breed.

Reluctantly, I opened my eyes to the present, wishing I could stay in the past just a few more moments, but my chivalrous knight brought me back.

RODNEY

“YOU READY TO GO, SWEETIE?”

“More than you know.”

Paige leaned against me as we walked out of Dr. A.’s office, her cheek on my shoulder. Her body was limp, trembling under my arm, and I could feel a growing wet spot on my shirt.

“Do you want to sit for a bit?” I asked.

“I just want to get home,” she whispered between silent sobs.

“Let’s go.” She sounded exhausted.

I kissed the top of her head. “We’ll get through this. I know we will.”

She looked up at me, so forlorn and beaten. Her gut-wrenching moans cut me to the bone as I realized that she was affected as deeply as I was.

“How, Rodney? How on earth are we going to get through this one?”

I looked her straight in the eye. “I’m Superman.”

She laughed. I could see her regaining a bit of strength as she nodded.

“You’ll always be my Superman.”

“That’s my girl.”

She wrapped her arms around my chest, squeezing me. “Hey, maybe you just have a few overzealous lymph nodes.”



The next day, Paige drove me in to have the CT scan. After I was checked in, I drank a large concoction of iodine that tasted horrid. It took all my willpower to keep the stuff down.

Paige requested to be with me during the scan, but the nurse shook her head. “Too much radiation.”

The scan didn’t take long. After it was complete, they put me in a room to wait for the radiologist to go over my results.

Before long, Paige came in. “How did it go?” she asked.

“It was pretty simple.”

She paced the small room. “I just feel so helpless.”

When she passed by, I pulled her to me. “I know.”

A few moments later, the radiologist came into the room. “I just finished looking over your scan,” he said.

“What do you think?” I asked, feeling my throat constrict as the words tumbled out of my mouth.

“Well, to be honest, I’ve never seen scans like this that weren’t cancer, but we’ll need to wait for the biopsy to confirm what’s really going on.”

Dead silence.

I caught my breath.

Although I appreciated his honesty, that was hard to hear. A bitter pill to swallow. Where’s the spoonful of sugar to make those dreaded words go down easier? Here I was, in the prime of my life, with a beautiful family who needed me and my business just taking off. I needed cancer—*Not!*

Any remnant of hope that I didn’t really have cancer had been extinguished by the radiologist’s words. They kept repeating over and over in my mind, like a bad commercial.

I felt lousy and wasn’t in the mood to talk to anyone that evening. Since we hadn’t told our daughters what was going on, I had to maintain a cheerful façade, when really all I wanted to do was crawl into bed and sleep the next few days away.

No one felt like cooking, so we went out to our favorite Mexican restaurant for dinner. Normally, I’d scarf down my favorite, a Durango

Burrito, but that night, I could barely eat anything. My stomach kept threatening to spill its contents.

When we got home, Paige and I went to bed early and tried to sleep. But it was hard with the radiologist's words still haunting me.

I've never seen scans like this that weren't cancer.

They continued to echo through my mind. Surely there's been an error. How can I get my brain to calm down and sleep with a guillotine hanging over me?

Well, I'd just have to suck it up and wait. The biopsy was only a day away, and it would give us a wealth of information and a plan for how to move forward. A black cloud hung over us both.

The wait was interminable.