

## The Longest Wait

It was a chilly November morning when Emma found herself standing in the hospital corridor, her arms crossed tightly against her chest. She wasn't cold; the sterile environment and the faint smell of disinfectant had a way of making everything feel distant and unreal. Today was supposed to be a routine checkup for her mother, Grace, a sprightly woman in her late sixties. But when the doctor's face grew serious after reading the test results, Emma's heart sank.

"We need to run more tests," the doctor had said, his tone gentle but firm. Grace waved it off, joking about how doctors always wanted to poke and prod. But Emma knew her mother too well. Beneath the humor, there was unease.

Hours stretched into what felt like days as they waited for the results. Emma watched people come and go: a father comforting a crying toddler, a nurse pushing an elderly man in a wheelchair, a young couple holding hands tightly as if afraid to let go. Life seemed to move on for everyone but her.

Finally, the doctor reappeared, holding a folder that seemed heavier than it should. His expression gave nothing away. Emma's mind raced, imagining every possible scenario. Was it something minor? Or was it the unthinkable?

"Ms. Grace," he began, addressing her mother. Emma held her breath, her hands clenched. "The tests indicate a small mass in your lungs. It's early, and we believe it's treatable, but we need to act quickly."

The words hit Emma like a freight train. She felt a mix of relief and fear. Treatable. That was good, wasn't it? But cancer—even the word was terrifying. Grace, however, remained calm. "Well," she said with a wry smile, "I guess it's time to quit smoking for good."

Emma's throat tightened. Her mother's resilience amazed her, but she couldn't ignore the fear gnawing at her insides. Over the next few weeks, their lives revolved around hospital visits, consultations, and treatments. Grace faced everything head-on, her humor never wavering. She joked with the nurses, teased Emma for fussing over her, and even named the tumor "Fred," saying she couldn't wait to evict him.

As time passed, Emma began to see things differently. The waiting rooms, once a place of dread, became a space for reflection. She found herself talking to other families, sharing stories, and drawing strength from their courage. Grace's determination became a beacon of hope, not just for Emma but for everyone around her.

Months later, on a bright spring morning, the doctor delivered the news they had been praying for. "The treatments were successful. The scans show no signs of cancer."

Emma felt a weight lift off her shoulders. She turned to her mother, who simply said, "Told you I'd kick Fred out."

Life didn't return to normal—it became something better. Emma learned to cherish the little moments: the laughter they shared, the quiet evenings, the simple joy of having her mother by her side. Grace's journey taught her that even in the face of uncertainty, love and resilience could light the way.