# Chapter 4

## Wednesday 19 January 2011—Someday March 2011

I got up early, as usual, Wednesday morning. I dressed as I normally do, poured my cereal for breakfast, helped Rathiga prepare for the day and I dropped her off at child‑care. Kavitha went to work; she needed to arrange a few things so she could take a couple of days off work once I was admitted.

I returned home and tidied up. I’d never spent a month in hospital before but I knew enough to know that it would turn our life upside down. Tidying the house was the least I could do for Kavitha who would soon find herself juggling all the daily tasks – the chores that feel onerous enough when there are two to share the load.

I called my manager at work.

‘Hi Jane, it’s David,’ I said.

‘Monday’s biopsy didn’t go so well. It looks like the Leukaemia is back. I’m starting chemo tomorrow,’ I continued.

‘Damn! I’m sorry to hear that David, Is there anything I can do to help,’ she replied.

‘It’s okay. It sucks, but we’ve done it before, I’m sure we can do it again.’

I continued: ‘I’m going to be in hospital for a month or so, which will be followed by a good three months recovery. It’s possible that I might need more treatment after that.’

We discussed the important deliverables that I was working, what should go to whom and what could wait until I returned.

‘You should prepare for me being away for at least four months … potentially more,’ I continued.

It was easier not to mention the transplant. Even though I knew it was certainty, I figured it was best not to discuss it until I was through the first phase.

Afterwards, I met Kavitha for lunch. I ordered octopus salad. Most seafood, and certainly salad, would be out of the question after a few days, when my blood levels fell and I was neutropenic. I don’t recall what Kavitha ate.

Kavitha returned to work and I went shopping for supplies. First, I bought myself a mobile broadband plan, my Ph.D. supervisor had supplied one the first time I was ill – it had proved useful in the hospital. Then I bought some toiletries: toilet paper (the softest that could be found), moisturiser and lip balm; followed by snacks, anything that I thought might be helpful in keeping me eating.

This time, I was prepared for hospital. The chemo was going to be a breeze; it was the transplant that I had to worry about but I didn’t have to worry yet … that would come later.

I returned home, packed my bags and waited for the girls to return. We went out for dinner. Where we went and what I ate: completely blank.

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Thursday morning came around. We dropped Rathiga at child-care. Kavitha and I went to hospital. We found a home in the waiting room and we waited for the Emma. Sue, the ………., came to see us.

‘It’s going to take a while to get you a room … but we will get you one,’ she said.

Emma arrived with Dr Amy Holmes, the new registrar and an intern. They outlined the plan for the day, a heart pull scan at 1000 and the Hickman’s insertion at 1230.

‘Can I go home after the Hickman’s and come back tomorrow?’ I asked.

‘I can’t see why not. So long as the sedation has worn off; and you don’t drive. Why not go home for the night,’ replied Emma.

The heart pull scan was undertaken without incident. My heart was strong and would once again prove a successfully distributor of the toxins. Next, I was ushered off to radiology for the Hickman’s procedure.

There were three nurses present when the wardsman wheeled my bed into the theatre. We exchanged pleasantries but I was eager to explain my concerns about this procedure … concerns of course which were based entirely on my earlier experience of an uncooperative piece of silicon and a cursing surgeon.

‘Last time I had one of these inserted it didn’t go very well,’ I said.

‘I don’t respond very well to sedation. Is it possible to get more than the usual dose of Midaz?’ (Midazolam, or Midaz, is a sedative used during procedures where it may be required to rouse the patient. A good dose and you forget the procedure all together – a useful trait if you have to come back again. I remembered my previous Hickman’s insertion too easily and was keen not to have another memory to add.).

‘When I have a bone marrow biopsy they have been known to use 8-10g of Midaz to knock me out,’ I continued.

‘Oh we can’t give that much said one of the nurses. In a bone marrow biopsy you are on your side that makes it easier to keep your airways open. You need to be on your back for this procedure. We can’t give large doses of sedation on your back because your airway could become blocked by your tongue,’ said one of the theatre nurses. The nurse was probably in her late forties; a pretty face, a little tired perhaps, but she would have not doubt attracted significant attention during her youth. She looked and spoke with experience. It could have sworn that she was my only friend.

‘Are you sure you can’t bend the rules for me?’ I asked.

She was shaking her head when another of the theatre nurses pitched in: ‘Don’t worry about it. This procedure is really simple. I would much rather a Hickman’s insertion than a bone marrow biopsy.’ Presumably, she was referring to the pain as the treffarine needle enters the bone.

I snapped my head around to see the intruder.

‘Have you ever had one of these?’ I asked.

Her body language told me that she hadn’t.

‘Well I have … and it was fucking horrible so don’t stand there telling me that it is easy because it is not.’

I am not sure who was more surprised, the unsuspecting theatre nurse or the screaming patient. I had never sworn at a nurse before. I hadn’t even raised my voice at one. In fact, I hadn’t raised my voice or shed a single tear since learning of my relapse. Suddenly it felt the theatre walls contracting towards me.

‘You can hold my hand during the procedure,’ interjected my friend, before I could say anything else that I might later regret. ‘Dr Walton will be putting your Hickman’s line in and he has done loads of them. I have assisted him many times and he is one of the best.’

She kept her word and held my hand throughout the procedure. The remainder of the team completed their business, one team member down. The Hickman’s line was inserted and I was in and out of theatre within an hour.

Kavitha was waiting, where we had parted at the entrance to radiology. We left the hospital and went to pick Rathiga up from child‑care. This would be the last time I would see her at child‑care. She would be at school before I was discharged.