

## 'That's Life!'

'Mrs Richardson?'

Keen green eyes looked up into the face of the man asking the question. She didn't say anything, just stood up tall, proudly and followed the man into the sterile room.

'You know how to proceed?' he asked.

'Yes,' she answered with a slight smile. A little cubicle lay to her right. She walked in, put her bag on the chair and closed the curtain. Struggling, she tried to remove her top, whilst keeping the inadequate curtain in place and desperately pulling her wig down with her other hand, to keep it in position, but to no avail. Top and wig were removed simultaneously. She sighed in exasperation and took off her bra, avoiding looking at her reflection in the mirror. She still hadn't come to terms with this stranger that returned her gaze. On the chair lay a tiny white rectangular covering, the size of a pillowslip.

'Not very appropriate in size,' she commented, walking out of her changing closet, her cheeks turning a hazy pink as she tried to remain unflustered and appear calm and collected, the way a lady should!

'Please excuse my lack of hair; the wig has a mind of its own!'

The man in white chuckled and indicated that she climb onto the bed. She placed the tiny covering across her chest and waited for the young man to attend to her.

*Barely out of his teens*, she thought to herself. Her attention was interrupted by the entrance of another two radiologists dressed in pristine white.

'Good morning Mrs Richardson, how are you today?' asked Janice.

'Please call me Hannah. I'm fine, just trying to come to terms with my new look,' she replied, indicating her bald head.

Janice smiled sympathetically. 'That is how all our patients feel, men and woman. Don't you concern yourself about it,' she replied, placing a comforting hand on her patient's arm.

'Unfortunately, it doesn't get any better from here, as far as dignity is concerned. Give me your right arm; thank you; I will be placing it behind your head into the stirrup. All done, now put your left arm behind your head.

*Well, if this is the most embarrassing it gets, exposed to all and sundry, I'll deal with it*, Hannah thought to herself. *At least the cloth seems to be staying!*

There we go, all done! Relax, Hannah. We do this every day and even though we are aware of all our patients and their discomfort it is commonplace to us and it's just part of our job.'

'Thank you,' replied Hannah taking a deep breath and trying to relax. It didn't work. As soon as the young man walked up to her and removed the tiny piece of covering her pink blush turned bright red and she started to perspire – heavily!

'Oh dear, a chemo-induced hot flush! They always find the appropriate moment to appear!'

He smiled at her. 'I know this is a small comfort to you but we see this kind of reaction every-day. I have been told those hot flushes are awful,' he continued as he measured the exact co-ordinates of the radiotherapy machine to the four tiny blue dots placed around her left breast and under her left arm where two more tumours had been removed. The preciseness of the action was imperative to the success of the radiotherapy and she knew the people handling her treatment were experts in their field.

'Oh Lord, thank you for small mercies,' she said out loud. 'Sorry,' she smiled, must seem a random comment to you but I was just thanking God for your expertise and even though I'm not comfortable, I am grateful.'

'Thank you,' he replied. 'What would we do without Him?'

*Wow Lord, you are amazing, at least this young man knows You, even though he is staring at my 46 year old breasts. I know he probably thinks of them as lumps of meat and I suppose, if I look on the bright side, they will be slightly more presentable than a woman's of eighty; I think I'm deluding myself but thank you that they are mine and that they were not removed; very relieved that those tumours were cut out as lumpectomy's; scary to think if this had happened five years ago, I would just be sitting here with scars!*

'All set Mrs Harrison; we will leave the room for a couple of seconds whilst the radiotherapy does its work.'

Aside from a couple of sound-effects and movement, the procedure was an absolute pleasure in comparison to chemotherapy. She still wasn't quite sure how she had survived those six months of treatment. Sitting with her head down the one loo in the house, constantly, had made her think she'd have to hand out buckets to her family when they got desperate but somehow it had all worked out; when she was in there, no-one else needed to use it!

Other memories invaded her mind. She remembered, when in hospital after her first chemo with an infection, having a shower, putting make-up on and exiting the bathroom with a towel around her head.

‘I’m so sorry, I didn’t realise someone was waiting to use the bathroom,’ she commented.

‘That’s okay, nothing else to do in this place. I’m Christine.’

‘Hannah, pleased to meet you. Are you okay, you look a little faint?’

‘I’m feeling fairly weak, just had my gall bladder removed. Why are you here?’

‘I was diagnosed with breast and lymph node cancer a month ago, had chemo seven days ago and have my first infection.’

‘I’m sorry, but you seem so well. I know this sounds strange but you look as if you have just returned from an amazing holiday, not chemotherapy.’

Hannah smiled. ‘Thank you for the compliment. It’s surprising, a week ago I thought I was going to die from nausea and was feeling really sorry for myself. This is my fifth day in hospital and I supposedly have a urinary tract infection, a chest and kidney infection and an ingrown toenail and the only discomfort I have is that damn toe; it is twice its size! My entire family and visitors think I’m just enjoying the private room, with a private bathroom, toilet works but shower is blocked, so that’s why I’m here. Everyone also thinks it is ridiculous that I’m served food in bed! Good, kind, caring family and friends! I must say though that the care I have been given here has been amazing and I feel totally fine.’

‘Let me know your secret,’ laughed Hannah’s new friend.

‘Truly, I think it is that big Man upstairs although we are going to have words one day, when I meet Him, as I don’t think that cancer was one of my career choices! My only comfort is that He does know what He is doing; just wish He would tell me!’

‘Well, good luck, if you carry on like this you will be fine!’

‘Thank you so much; I hope you recover well. Nice to meet you,’ replied Hannah walking out towards her private ward.

*Little did I know what was going to happen the next day,* she thought, lying there outstretched on that bed. The vision returned with such clarity that she tried to expunge it from her mind. It was still not something she wanted to think about or deal with; all she knew was that God had intervened and saved her life. Memory flashes of collapsed veins, young doctor with a God complex looking for a vein in her groin area, compromising the artery twice and then when

asked by Hannah, in a temper, to leave and not return, had promised to revisit with another doctor as they had to find a viable vein. All she could visualise was the artery erupting on its own an hour later, blood spurting, life-saving adrenaline kicking in and her calmly walking out of her ward and calling for help. The nurse had been in the right place at the right time, dropped his tray and raced down the passage and applied pressure to the artery for an hour. A time in intensive care afterwards, blood and platelets being pumped back into her body and the peace of God was what had saved her life.

The three returned, interrupting her thoughts, one moving the equipment, the other helping Hannah to disengage her arms, and the third lowering the bed so that she could climb down.

Even though her pride had already been totally compromised Hannah grabbed for the small cloth as quickly as she could to re-cover her dignity; a little late perhaps but necessary all the same. She returned to her closet, closed the curtains and re-dressed hurriedly. The wig was returned to its rightful place, smoothed down and she exited with a smile, walking tall and thanked her three attendants with decorum as she left.

*That's life,* she thought to herself as she headed home.