

Foreword by the Duchess of Kent

I urge everyone to read this book. It tells the story of a remarkable woman who was diagnosed with leukaemia at the age of 29. Fran was just married, and with her life ahead of her she was not to be deterred from her dream of having children. Amazing the medical profession and against all advice, she postponed treatment until her two sons were born.

Then, and only then, did she bravely submit herself to a long drawn-out and debilitating experience of treatment.

Fran confronted fear with courage, and insecurity with trust, a trust in her family and medical team whose support began then and continues to this day.

Above all, it is her humility that shines through in this book. She writes not for praise or sympathy, but to reassure and enlighten others who find themselves in a similar situation, and who seek guidance at a critical time in their lives.

I am proud to call Fran my friend, I am a better person for knowing her. And I do not forget Adrian her husband, and those two boys Matthew and Sebastian for whom this book is written.

Chapter One

A Bolt from the Blue



I was as empty as it's possible to feel.

A nurse adjusted the *Hickman line* in my chest, her grey uniform bathed in the artificial neon glow of my isolation room. No light could penetrate through the blinds of the single locked window, and I couldn't tell whether it was day or night, winter or spring.

I was so tired. It didn't matter how much the drugs made me sleep – I was too weak to think, speak, or move, and the pain nagged away at my body and my determination. From the hospital bed I heard the constant clatter of metal trolleys and sterilised implements on trays. Occasionally I could just make out faint taxi horns and police sirens, so London life must be going on outside, although I was no part of it. For me, life had stood still at eleven am on 5th May 1995, when they exposed me to total body irradiation.

Then I heard the noise I feared more than any other, the call of a nurse telling patients to stay in their rooms. It meant another patient had died. I heard doors banging shut, and Adrian pulled our blind down. For the third time in a week, they wheeled a trolley down the corridor – ten patients on the ward, three deaths. I had peeped at the last trolley, when I was still able to walk, and seen the white sheet covering someone just like me.

My ears picked up another sound, somewhere in the Hammersmith Hospital I could hear a CD playing. The tumbling of notes down the scale of a piano took me back to a happier, faraway time.

I was thirteen years old, and playing the grand piano at home in Warwickshire. The surroundings couldn't have been more different from the drab tiled walls of this isolation room. In the warm remembered glow, I saw myself against the backdrop of curtained winter windows, with a fire burning in the grate. I was note perfect, playing the theme tune to *Love Story*, that I knew by heart.

Immediately after watching the film's first showing on British television, it had become an obsession. I bought the sheet music and played and played, weeping as I practised, until I knew it from memory. The poignancy of the story stayed with me for days, I loved the romance, and the joy of the young couple who were so much in love. Their idyllic relationship was what I longed for, and just like Ali McGraw, I yearned for a knight in shining armour who would whisk me off my feet and do anything for me.

But her life had gone wrong. Soon after marriage, Ali McGraw was diagnosed with leukaemia, and as she lay dying, her young husband watched helplessly at the bedside. So, twenty years before my own diagnosis, I knew the plot – you get leukaemia, you die. Why should it be any different for me?

It was uncanny how real life had mirrored the story of my favourite film. My knight in shining armour had come true too, and he had been forced to go to hell and back for me.

I let my eyes trace the details of my hospital prison, seeing the get well cards, three or four deep on my pin-board, the drug trolley and the Duchess of Kent's own teddy bear looking back at me with sightless eyes.

'How did it all come to this?' I wept.

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I said a prayer for you today, and know God must have heard,
I felt the answer in my heart, although He spoke no word.
I didn't ask for wealth or fame, I knew you wouldn't mind,
I asked Him to send treasures, of a far more lasting kind.
I asked that He'd be near you, at the start of each new day,
To grant you health and blessings, and friends to share the way.
I asked for happiness for you, in all things great and small,
But it was for His loving care, I prayed the most of all.
