

Prologue

DR. BABAJALIAN addresses the audience.

DR. BABAJALIAN

Both my parents are practicing Hindus. They believe in the dharma, the order of everything that makes life possible. They believe in karma, that our actions have consequences which come back to us. They believe in samsara, the idea that our soul will be reborn over and over again. And they believe in moksha, or liberation, which will make us free of action and reaction, and of rebirth. I used to believe in these things too ... until the age of twelve. Then I believed in science. I believed in subatomic particles and the spreading of germs and the power of neurology, all things which cannot be perceived with the human eye. I believed that science could explain everything and if it couldn't it wasn't the fault of science but of the scientists themselves. Now ... I am not so sure. I have begun to question both my faith in religion and in science. There is a piece of the puzzle missing. And the worst part is, I am afraid the answer cannot be discovered through human reasoning. I am not even certain that such reasoning can be trusted. Since I began to lose faith in my rational mind, I am no longer truly certain of anything.

DR. McDERMOTT Anything else you need? Got enough pillows?

STANLEY Oh yes. Just fine.

DR. McDERMOTT Everyone's been treating you well, I hope.

STANLEY Everyone's been very nice.

ABIGAIL We were just saying what a nice hospital this is.

DR. McDERMOTT Well, we do our best. I'm just on my way home, I thought I would check in.

ABIGAIL We shouldn't keep you from getting home.

STANLEY God no. You've got your family waiting for you, don't you?

DR. McDERMOTT That's right. There's Ingrid, that's my wife, and my three daughters.

ABIGAIL Three daughters!

DR. McDERMOTT Kathryn, Elizabeth, and Maya. They're a handful sometimes.

ABIGAIL How old are they?

DR. McDERMOTT Let's see, Ingrid is ... I'm just kidding. Kathryn is seven, Elizabeth is four, and Maya is just over a year. I've got some ...

DR. McDERMOTT shows them pictures on his phone.

 That's Kathryn. Kathryn again. And Kathryn again. You always take more of the first born, don't you?

ABIGAIL That's the truth, isn't it?

DR. McDERMOTT Here's some of Lizzy and Maya.

ABIGAIL They're adorable.

DR. McDERMOTT Do you have children?

ABIGAIL We have a son and a daughter.

STANLEY Can't really call them children anymore, can we?

ABIGAIL They're practically grown now. Christopher is twenty-nine and Claire is twenty-four. Christopher's an actor —

STANLEY Well.

ABIGAIL An aspiring actor. Claire's still in school. She's studying Art History.

DR. McDERMOTT I can't wait to meet them.

ABIGAIL They'll be here tomorrow.

DR. McDERMOTT Well, I just wanted to make sure you were comfortable enough and getting everything you needed.

STANLEY Everything's fine.

ABIGAIL You should be getting home.

DR. McDERMOTT Oh, yes. I'll be going in a minute.

(Pause.)

So we got back the test results from the PSA exam and the biopsy. Are you ... ? Is this a good time? We could do this tomorrow if it suits you better. There's no rush.

STANLEY No, please, we're in your hands.

ABIGAIL You're sure you don't want him to come back?

STANLEY I'd like to hear the results.

DR. McDERMOTT Fine. Well. The PSAs returned a higher number than I was hoping to see. We'll be conducting more tests, obviously, but the indication is more or less what we

expected, which is a swelling of the prostate gland. Please tell me if I'm going too fast. The biopsy revealed a malignant carcinoma, prostate into the bones, including the spinal column, which explains the paralysis. The good news is that the injury is at the thoracic level, so you still have complete use of your hands and arms, everything above the waist. And your breathing is normal, so you won't require the use of a ventilator. That's very lucky. I'd like to run more tests, of course, and I don't think there's any immediate danger. We've still got time to review all the data and decide what the next step is.

(Pause.)

If you have any questions, please feel free.

Pause.

ABIGAIL

Then he ... definitely has prostate cancer.

DR. McDERMOTT

Yes, Abigail. I will say, it's extremely common in men over sixty.

ABIGAIL

Stanley is sixty-two.

DR. McDERMOTT

It's quite common. In fact, every man would eventually get prostate cancer, were he to live long enough.

ABIGAIL

And the cancer is what's causing the paralysis.

DR. McDERMOTT

Yes. The malignant cells have spread to the lower vertebrae. It's the same as if he'd had an injury in that area.

ABIGAIL

Will he ever walk again?

DR. McDERMOTT

It isn't likely. Do you have any questions, Stanley?

Pause.

STANLEY

How serious is the cancer?

DR. McDERMOTT It's serious. There's no question. But we're going to do everything we possibly can.

STANLEY Has it spread ... ?

(Pause.)

Has it ... ?

(Pause.)

I'm not sure how to ask this.

DR. McDERMOTT Take your time.

Pause.

STANLEY There are different types of prostate cancer.

DR. McDERMOTT There are stages. Stages one, two, three, and four. One being the mildest.

STANLEY Which have I got?

DR. McDERMOTT Probably four. Possibly three. But I'm about ninety percent certain we're looking at a Stage Four.

STANLEY And what ... what's the survival rate?

DR. McDERMOTT It varies greatly from patient to patient. At this point, I'd rather not speculate.

STANLEY How many people with Stage Four prostate cancer survive?

DR. McDERMOTT If you want a quick answer, I'm afraid I can't give you one. It depends on what you mean by survive. No one survives in the long run. Of course, that's true for all of us. It could be a matter of years. It could be months. It isn't curable, we can only prolong the symptoms.

STANLEY It isn't curable?

DR. McDERMOTT Even a standard PSA test might not have revealed anything. It can be very difficult to detect sometimes.

STANLEY How could I have been so stupid?

Pause.

DR. McDERMOTT It's extremely common for people to blame themselves when facing news of this kind. But I encourage you to focus on your physical therapy and staying strong for the tests we'll be conducting. You should remain as healthy as possible in your diet and exercise and be sure to drink several quarts of water per day. Also, difficult as it is, try using the wheelchair as much as possible. It will help prevent bedsores and keep your muscles from atrophy. Do you think you can do that?

STANLEY Yes, I'll try.

DR. McDERMOTT And Abigail, you can help him with these things, too.

ABIGAIL I will, Doctor. It was kind of you to speak to us like this.

STANLEY Yes. Thank you very much.

DR. McDERMOTT It's no trouble at all. I'll be back in the morning to check in. Please don't hesitate to ask any other questions that come to you. I'm at your disposal.

ABIGAIL Thank you, Doctor.

DR. McDERMOTT Would you like me to send a nurse before I go?

STANLEY Um, no, no, thank you.

DR. McDERMOTT See you in the morning, then.

STANLEY Good-bye.

ABIGAIL Drive safely.

DR. McDERMOTT Goodnight.

DR. McDERMOTT exits.

STANLEY Wonderful man.

ABIGAIL Yes, he's lovely, isn't he?

Long pause.

STANLEY Well, that's it.

(Pause.)

That's really it.

(Pause.)

It is, isn't it?

(Pause.)

When you die, you die.

(Pause.)

At least I don't have to go back to work.

Long pause.

ABIGAIL Oh God, Stanley, I don't think I can ... I'm sorry, but I just can't ... Do you have any idea what this means for me? I know that sounds terrible but do you realize what you're expecting of me? What kind of *sacrifice*? This could go on ... we don't know how long. I know you never planned — I feel so sorry for you. I would never in a million years wish something like this to — *no one* should have to ... But you are. And I can't ... I know I sound like an awful person and *I hate myself* for saying it but you can't ask me to ... not after the way you've *treated me*. For *thirty* years I've put up with your ... to get just a simple *kindness* from you. To feel I mattered. This hasn't been a real marriage for years. We've been

like strangers to one another. We've said hello and good-bye and *thank you* and I have put up with *rudeness* and your temper and hurtful *hurtfulness* towards me and everyone around you and... The truth is you've spent your whole life in denial. Putting your faith into some *horse racing system* that was *never* going to work. Always going on about a *book* you're going to write on politics when you've never written a single page. You've destroyed yourself. Your relationship with your son. Your daughter. You *wasted* it. Every opportunity. And we've gone along with it — God knows why — we all went along with the charade. It doesn't matter now. I'm so sorry, Stanley, you have to go through this. I'm sure I've made you feel even worse, if that's possible. I'm to blame, too. I know I haven't handled things well. I've managed our finances very poorly ... I've been unhappy for such a long time. I never thought it would be something like this. You're a much stronger person than I am. To be facing this.

Pause.

STANLEY

Abigail.

ABIGAIL

Yes. Yes.

STANLEY

I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about. But if it makes you feel better, I'm glad. I'm glad.

He squeezes her arm.