

The Truth About Cancer

Truth About Cancer 1

This is the truth about cancer.

It comes in three parts.

The first is this.

It's about life and death

People die of cancer.

They do.

To say anything else is a lie.

And this is supposed to be the truth about cancer.

But equally true is this;

Many more live!

The second is this.

It's about people

Everyone is touched by cancer.

You will be touched by cancer.

To say anything else is a lie.

And this is supposed to be the truth about cancer.

A friend, a family member, or heaven forbid, yourself

Will have cancer.

But let me tell you this:

You or they are not the first

and

You are never alone!

The third is this.

It's about luck.

Whether you get it, when you get it, whether you don't.

To say anything else is a lie.

And this is supposed to be the truth about cancer.

But as well as bad luck

There is *good* luck.

And that's it,

That's the truth about cancer.

So where do we go from here?

I see you there as you angrily recoil from the page. You might standing in a book shop, book in hand, wondering whether to make a purchase. Or perhaps you're in a library, reading the first page and thinking to yourself They recommended this? Or maybe you're a long sought after agent picking up a few typewritten pages from an overburdened slush pile wondering whether it's worth your oh so precious time. Or perhaps it's a barely sought after gift and you're standing in the bathroom in your jim-jams wondering whether to turn the page.

But all of you are thinking this:

What in God's own name is he on about? "This is the truth about cancer" and "Anything else is a lie". What is this bollocks?

But what you really should be thinking is this.

Who the hell wants to read a book called "The Truth About Cancer" if he's told me that truth on the first page? What's the point?

And the answer to your question is this:

There is a story to tell.

Within these pages you will find a man with breasts, another man with a chain saw and a classic story of girl meets geek. There's also advice on taking a leap of faith, the danger of thinking too much and the embarrassing truth of sperm banking

There's tales of good and bad luck, letters to friends and above all, the truth about cancer.

And within these pages, I promise you the meaning of life,¹ and maybe, just maybe, the occasional laugh along the way.

And there's other things I hope you'll find.

I hope you'll find someone you'll recognise and I hope you'll find some understanding.

And most of all, I hope you'll find hope.

So the choice is yours.

Do you put the book back on the shelf?

Or do you turn the page?

But let me offer a little friendly advice.

Join me and let me take you for a ride.

There are some people I'd like you to meet...

¹ Honest. It's on page 163

C Minus 14 Days and Counting...

"I'm not getting on that thing," said Steve loudly.

"Why not?" asked Chris.

"It's a deathtrap."

"It's a Yamaha FZR 1000R. That's what it is."

Steve shrugged.

"Taxi!" he cried.

"Aw c'mon, don't be like that."

Steve shrugged again.

They were standing outside Sheffield Midland Station. Steve had just gotten off the train from Nottingham. Chris had met him there and was supposed to be giving him a lift to their close friend Bas' wedding.

Chris owned a tailcoat and always wore it to weddings. When Steve had arrived on the forecourt, he was surprised to see Chris was not wearing was wearing a one-piece skin-tight leather jump suit.

Surprise turned to shock when he realised Chris was carrying two helmets and was gesturing towards a bright red motorcycle. Steve stared at it. He could tell it was expensive.

"Did your Dad buy it you?" he asked.

Chris' parents were divorced and his father was happy to use his affluence to buy into his sons affections by bankrolling Chris' current infatuation.

"What do you think?"

"And you can actually ride this thing?"

Chris smiled. A wide toothy grin.

Steve turned on his heel and headed back towards the station. He raised his right hand.

"Taxi!" he cried again.

"Aw c'mon," said Chris. "Don't be like that."

"I'm sorry, but I've currently got four limbs and I'd like them to remain attached to my body.

"It's perfectly safe."

"Are you kidding? The way you drive, I'm surprised you manage not to fall off a car."

Chris pursed his lips.

"It's this or nothing," he said.

"I say it again, 'Taxi!'" said Steve walking off.

Chris grabbed his shoulder.

"Just think of the impact we'll make when we arrive," he said.

"The impact is exactly what I'm thinking of."

"Well then."

"It's the impact with a wall, a bus, a car, the central reservation..."

Chris' shoulders dropped

"It'll be a laugh," he said with a pout.

"If I want a laugh, I'll watch Faulty Towers."

Chris wasn't about to give up.

"What's the worst thing that can happen?"

"I would think the least that can happen is that we'll end up in hospital. I thought you'd spent enough time in there."

There was a sudden uncomfortable silence.

Two years ago, Chris had suffered from Hodgkin's Disease – cancer of the lymph system.

Steve found himself self-consciously rubbing the side of his neck.

The two small lumps he had found almost a week earlier were still there.

“Have you got lumps on your neck?” asked Chris.

Steve nodded.

“You should get that looked at. It could be something nasty – like glandular fever.”

Steve looked his friend in the eyes

“How are you?” he asked, quietly.

This was no casual enquiry, this was a genuine cause for concern.

“Fine. I went for a check-up last week. I don’t have to go for another year.”

“That’s brilliant.”

Steve offered Chris his hand.

Chris offered Steve a motor cycle helmet.

“Last chance – are you getting on the back or not?”

What the hell, thought Steve. You only live once.

And he followed his friend to the back of the waiting bike.

Snapshots 1

Arachnophobia

She is frightened of nothing.

Except, perhaps, spiders and snakes.

Which is why she stands in the bathroom, armed with a feather duster and a bucket.

The spider’s web has been there, in the high corner above the shower, all winter.

She has stared at it through her long, lonely baths, taken in search of the warmth that her house now lacks.

The web has wanted removing for some time now, but it didn’t seem to be getting any bigger and she had other things to do.

But the time has come.

It is spring and she wants to use shower and web hangs low enough catch on her naked body. Worse still, the web has become occupied.

She looks up at the spider. It is a terrifying beast, the biggest she has ever seen. It must be a black widow at least. She thinks for a moment of the spider in Lord of the Rings, what was it called?

Sherlock? she thinks *No, Shelob.*

She congratulates herself for answering her own question. Terry had given her the book a couple of years ago and told her she’d never finish it. He was wrong, and although it had taken her a lifetime to read, she had enjoyed the time spent and had been proud of the achievement. When they had gone to see the films together, she had closed her eyes during the scene with the giant spider, but her imagination had created far worse than pictures on the screen.

She looks back at the monster, watching her from his lofty perch. Although she cannot see them, she knows he has fangs.

Terry would have mocked her fears, calling her useless. He would have cupped the spider in his hands and thrown it through the open window. Despite his apparent bravery, he would still have slammed the window shut.

But Terry is long gone, back to that bitch of a wife.

She is frightened that the spider might drop onto her head so her hair is tied back and hidden under a shower cap. She closes her eyes and reaches behind her, waving the feather duster in the general direction of the web. After a couple of minutes flouncing she dares to look back.

The web is gone; there is no sign of the spider.

She looks into the bath and there it is, trying to scramble up the enamel.

She hurriedly turns on the taps especially the hot one and is pleased to see steam rise from the surface. For a moment she loses sight of the spider but is suddenly relieved when she sees it curl up into a small ball and get washed down the plug hole. She grabs hold of a bottle of bleach and pours some straight after it. The water is now running scalding hot and for a moment she is surprised by the lengths she has had to go to get rid of a spider. Eventually she turns off the taps and smiles to herself, pleased that she has carried out the deed. Now that the beast has gone, she decides it is safe to take a shower. She has opened the windows as the late spring air gives the house new warmth, she undresses in the bedroom. She takes a couple of towels from the airing cupboard and steps naked into the bath. She sets the shower going and after what seems like an eternity of juggling the taps, finds the ideal temperature. She moves her body into the fast flowing water and after standing for a while under the jet, ducks forward and lets the water soak her hair. Her hand moves unconsciously to the lump on her breast. It is the size of a peanut beneath her skin and moves slightly when she touches it. She knows she should get it looked at but it doesn't seem to be getting any bigger and she has other things to do. She lowers her hand and closes her eyes and for a moment all thoughts of the lump are gone, but as she rigorously soaps herself clean, she is gentle with her left breast. After standing for a while under the fast flowing water, she decides to get out of the shower. She dries herself quickly and feels the lump move under the skin. She leaves the left breast wet. She looks at the feather duster on the floor and thinks of the spider. That wasn't so hard, she says to herself. She is frightened of nothing. Except, perhaps, spiders and snakes.

Biographical Details 1

Name : Christopher Massey
DoB : 2nd December 1962.
Height : 5'11"
Weight : 12 stone
Eyes : Blue
Religion : : None
Starsign: : Sagittarius
Next of Kin : Marie Massey (Mother)

Chris Massey was born three months before Steve Smith in a house three doors down. His mother had moved into the house three weeks before the birth following the first of many separations from his father.

His father, Edward, came from a well off family and his mother, Marie, had been a landlord's daughter. Both were considered attractive, both were considered "nice" people, both were considered something of a catch.

People said *Don't they make a lovely couple.*

After the wedding, they had moved into a separate suite of rooms in Edward's father's house. Edwards's mother, Christabelle, had taken an immediate dislike to Marie and very quickly, the arrangement had become untenable. Edwards's father had gifted them a small semi that they bought several years earlier and used to rent out.

It was four houses down from Steve Smith.

Unlike Aaron Mycock (of whom we'll hear later) whose parents were completely unaware of the unfortunate nature of the name they had given their child, Christopher Massey was deliberately named as a joke by his father. When he'd been younger he'd always wanted to become a father during the festive season so that he could call his offspring Christopher or Christine.

His mother did not get the joke until several years later, when her current boyfriend had pointed it out to her.

Edward and Marie had split up shortly after the birth. During the pregnancy - and immediately after - Edward had been sleeping with any woman who would let him, a trait later to be inherited by his son. As Edward was attractive and affluent as well as having more front than Brighton, there was no shortage of such women.

Despite leaving on Chris' birth, he was back three months later.

Edward would fall for one woman and temporarily move back into the suite of rooms at his father's house. In his eyes, this would legitimise any potential relationship and he would then have a mad fling with the woman in question. This would last until he got bored, at which point he would move back into the house with his wife and son.

For some unaccountable reason, Marie seemed happy with this arrangement. She rarely went out with other men and whilst she far from welcomed Edward on his return, she never threw him out.

Despite his unconventional home life, Chris' life took a fairly conventional course; he went to the local comprehensive school where he was unexceptional academically and decidedly poor at sports. He had excelled at art, but his clear crisp designs had always seemed a little soulless.

He was easy going and possessed of a quirky sense of humour, and this coupled with his occasional bouts of affluence made him not unpopular amongst his contemporaries, although his friendship with Steve had never waned.

It was at the local comp that Chris and Steve had met Bas. Chris and Bas both came from relatively privileged backgrounds and they were made for each other. Chris brought Steve into the mix and his utter normalcy, if somewhat boring, made the relationship between the trio work.

At sixteen, Chris, Steve and Bas had all gone their separate ways, but had still kept in touch. Bas had gone to Art College, Steve stayed on in the sixth form and Chris had gone to work for his father.

One of his family's many investments had been in a small design company and Chris had been given an "Apprenticeship" there. His ability in this field had become clear and despite being the

boss' son, he easily pulled his weight and his outgoing nature made him popular with his workmates.

Chris' father had bought him a small flat in town. This was little more than a glorified bed-sit, but was the first property that Chris or any of his contemporaries had owned. Every night was party night.

Around this time, Chris discovered that he was surprisingly successful with members of the opposite sex. This must have come genetically from his father, as he wasn't particularly attractive, but there was something about him that women couldn't resist.

Also around this time, Steve and Bas went to University. Bas stayed in the same town to study fine art, but Steve went further afield to study computing. They met up in the summer holidays and Chris's Dad found work for Steve installing computers in the design company. Everyone benefited from this arrangement. Steve was paid enough money to take a decent holiday and the design company entered the world of information technology cheaply and ahead of its competitors.

One night, Steve and Chris were sitting on the large second hand sofa which filled the small lounge, waiting for their friends to arrive. Chris was rubbing the side of his neck.

"Have you got lumps on your neck?" asked Chris.

Steve rubbed his neck.

"No. Have you?"

Chris rubbed his neck again as if the action could make the lumps disappear.

"Yes," he said, simply.

"You should get that looked at," said Steve. "It could be something nasty – like glandular fever."

The following night Steve had turned up at Chris' flat to find it in darkness. He had called in on his mother and his father and had found their homes vacant too. He called on Bas who had heard nothing and convinced him that there was nothing to worry about.

It was the following evening that they found out that Chris had taken Steve's advice and had his lumps checked. He had been diagnosed as having a non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, or cancer of the lymph system. They had "kept him in" and his mother and father had stayed with him. The treatment was to start immediately.

But of course, his story doesn't end there.