

THE NEWS

1. I need to tell you, she said.

They had been watching television. The news was just over.

There was something in her voice.

Yes, she said. That.

His eyes filmed over. She reached across to hug him.

It's my own fault, she said. I'm abandoning you, aren't I?

Late stage?

She nodded. I should have complained months ago.

It was those birth control pills when we were first married.

I remember.

Well, she said. It's too late now.

2. He started to make plans.

The house.

Someone to keep up the lawn and do the cleaning while it was on the market.

Find assisted living for himself, hospice for her.

He couldn't sell the house while she was dying in it.

The car.

The books.

He found himself thinking about what meals might be served in assisted living.

3. He could not stop thinking about funeral music.

Before, it would be Thelonious Monk, '*Round Midnight*'.

Quiet, contemplative.

The way Monk played it, just when you thought it was going to end, it didn't.

Reached a resolution, settled on the dominant, then it started up again.

He doubted she knew that music but that was all right, he was the one going to hear it.

For the processional it would be Liszt. From *Années de Pèlerinage*.

The chapel piece, with the bells ringing. They'd both liked that.

Afterwards gave him trouble. Finally he settled on the Beach Boys *Good Vibrations*.

It was from their time. Positive. His eyes filmed over.

4. The next test was Thursday morning.

He woke feeling defeated.

When he was alone he played the Liszt and remembered coming down off the mountain with it going on the truck stereo and howling when the church bells started in and there were big wide looping curves in the highway there and the truck hunkered down and took a grip on the road and the bells rang and he howled in defeat.

He often felt defeated.

5. On Saturday the doctor's office called.

She took the phone and wandered off into another room.

Thank you, he heard her say.

She came back with the phone handset. I need to tell you, she said.

There was something in her voice.

No, she said.

Not that. It was fibroids.

What are fibroids? he asked, mystified and tentative.

Nothing, she said. It was nothing after all.

6. That evening he tore the page out of his notebook.

That was the page where he had written all that about the music.

Where he wrote about when to sell the house and the rest of it.

7. They watched the television news.

That was a scare, she said when the news was over.

Yes, he said.

What were you thinking?

I was thinking about vegetables, he said.

That there would be no one to make me eat them. What about you?

Well, she said after giving it some thought. I don't know.

8. I'd like a glass of wine, she said, getting to her feet.