

## The Lieutenant Beats the Red Devil

Until August 29, 2019, when the war began, I looked forward to our annual weeklong visit from my 92-year-old Grandpa John. But this summer, Grandpa John was different as he perched on the couch, quiet as an owl. Being an operative, I crept closer to him, like an undercover agent on the lookout for counter-intelligence. “Was Grandpa a double agent, or was he silenced?” I wondered.

### **The Situation**

That week I stayed on patrol. My Grandma Jeanette and sister Elissa slipped through the front door into my mom’s foxhole like spies into the night. I knew this bedroom brigade had a secret that involved my mom. And I was correct. On August 29, 2019, at 3:00 pm, I receive the words no one wants to hear. “I have breast cancer,” my mother shared in a quiet and sad tone.

I knew this situation was serious. My Grandma Sally died from the same cancer. “Is this why grandpa’s quiet as an owl? Will my mom become frail and die like Grandma Sally?” I worried. My dad assured me this would not happen as he tried to make me see the world through rose-colored glasses. In a blurred daze, my brain buzzed. “It’s just an annual mammogram, not cancer! This is not my life. It’s a joke. God! I’m awake; you can end my dream now! I can’t manage life without my mom! What will I do if she dies?” I thought to myself as a million thoughts bounced through my head.

I did not sleep easily that night, nor the nights to follow. If my mom didn't want sympathy, she certainly didn't want to talk about it. I couldn't even share this family secret with my best friend, Gabriella.

My mom, Lieutenant Jennifer, went from doctor to doctor, deciding her path. I stopped and admired her perseverance and strength, where I knew I would have given up and surrendered to weakness—a true inspiration. As a researcher myself, I knew the survival rates of triple-negative breast cancer were poor. So, while the bedroom brigade navigated their moves, my trustworthy iPhone declared war through researching on our lieutenant's cancer. But, it was too late.

### **The Lieutenant Surrendered**

Her mission—*Go to MD Anderson*. Yes, the hospital on the billboards with a red line crossed over the word *cancer* as if it were that easy. Our lieutenant chose the same Red Devil chemo that killed Grandma Sally. She fell victim to a medical port for this wartime chemical to make her as bald as an eagle. Her appointments continued, and she even became part of an Artemis study. Artemis was a vigorous, wild hunter and a Greek goddess. She was a protector of young girls, so surely, she would protect me, too.

At home, to prepare for battle, I fell behind enemy lines. I held up the camp as my life flipped upside-down. The lieutenant vanished like a ghost away from the walls I called home. Worse yet, my unit became silent. “Did we lose the battle?” I wondered.

### **The Retreat**

The bedroom brigade planned more combat missions. And like a good private, I stayed out of the way. This retreat went on for two unendurable days. I stayed behind our post even though my lieutenant could die.

**The Advancement**

In the mess hall, our lieutenant announced a change of operations—*not going to MD Anderson*. Since the Red Devil chemo did not work half the time, the mission changed. The following week, the lieutenant killed our enemy. As a lowly private, schoolwork came first because I couldn't risk being absent, or the school would come after me—eye roll. So, pages and pages of homework and worksheets wisped away, distracting from the fact that the lieutenant was under anesthesia. Like any decent soldier, I carried on while the surgeon used knives to remove the evil tumor. Thank heavens, that cancerous devil did not cross enemy lines.

**The Victory**

Shortly after that, the supplies in our camp changed. The brigade threw out all the Tupperware and plastic water bottles. Toothbrushes and hairbrushes became wooden. Our sleepers became organic. We quit using Lysol, the stuff everyone says kills germs. “Is my house even clean?” I wondered. “Who cares,” I thought. The biggest change of all, our supply line became vegan.

Nowadays, our lieutenant takes healing medications, making her sick but keeping her well. Some build up her good cells, and others take down her bad cells. I know the lieutenant feels better because she yells again. Our camp is normal, and my dad, General Dennis, informs us her scans and blood work are standard, so the enemy is at bay.

**Life Can Change in a Moment**

This mission taught me to live each day as if it were my last. Like an excellent private, I tell my lieutenant, “I love you” now more than ever. Our unit may not be perfect, but we are so

much better than we were in the past. Some days I even forget our lieutenant has cancer. It works for now, so I hope it lasts forever. *Or at least for thirty more years.*



<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1S64UpSe6EWyHoFiUCkEp5r9bjXNiQtnf0nuzK2QG0LU/edit?usp=sharing>

- Appeal to the emotions-5.
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