



SIX MONTHS

"I know what's going to be on my death certificate. That's more than you can say."

On Wednesday morning, eleven months earlier—October 11, 2000—the neurologist, Dr. Noble, entered the waiting room that faintly smelled of Pine-Sol and human traffic. He resembled my husband, George, in many ways: medium height and build, the same full-bodied gray hair, and wearing the same style of rimless glasses over his sapphire blue eyes—eyes the color of George's. I liked him right away.

"Mr. Thomas?" he said, smiling as he introduced himself to us. His handshake felt firm, but not aggressive. George had difficulty extending his hand, and I suspected the doctor noted this. I held George's arm as we walked to the doctor's office. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Dr. Noble watching George walk.

As we sat in his office, looking through floor-length windows with views of the fiery red fall colors of the large maple trees, Dr. Noble told us that the reports from the

referring doctors had not been sent. He had talked on the phone with one of the doctors to get his interpretations of some of the tests. "I would like to repeat some of the EMG tests to measure the strength of a few of your arm and leg muscles to confirm for myself what is going on," Dr. Noble added.

"I've had all these tests and now you want more?" George grumbled. "These tests wear me out. I'm too tired to have any more needles stuck in my muscles."

"I'm sorry," the doctor replied. "I can understand why you're upset. I just need to test two or three muscles to know whether these muscle twitches in your face and hands are a result of misfiring of the nerve cells."

Dr. Noble added, "I won't repeat the entire test. I need to review the original films from your MRI tests, and readings from the EMGs and interpret what I see, independent of what others have done."

George's head jerked up. "Thank you for explaining this to me. I've been told very little about what is being done and why. How long will your test take?"

"Not very long. I'd like to test two muscles in your arms and legs today. Given the potential gravity of any diagnosis, we need to be as sure as possible before we begin to talk about treatment and any other options."

While they went to the examining room, I found the ladies' room, sat on the toilet, and wept. *Where were the reports?* This meant another delay in knowing what was happening to him, another painful trip to a doctor's office, more tests. After washing my hands, I gripped the counter, practiced my meditation, and counted to fifty to