

February

They found another tumor today. It's nestled up against my right lung, so they're calling it lung cancer now. I guess that's easier to say than we-have-no-idea-what's-wrong-with-you-it-is.

It's almost funny. Know what Dad said when I told him? He gave me that disappointed father frown. *You knew the risks of smoking.* Like, what? Your only daughter tells you she has cancer, and your response is to blame her because she smoked three cigarettes back in high school?

I told Mom over the phone, since I can't afford to take time off work to drive out. She gave me almost the exact same spiel, citing my *risky lifestyle* as the cause of my trouble. She took it a step further, though, saying I'm selfish for making the choices I did. Can't I see how this affects the family?

Yeah, I see it pretty clearly.

It'll be okay, though. I'll take out a loan, pull some extra shifts, and apply for medical financial aid. Hopefully no one in the rat's nest of American healthcare will get their panties in a wad over some drugs I did in my teens.

March

I'm beyond livid. I feel like a pipe bomb with the fuse lit. I'm five seconds away from going completely off the goddamn wall.

They canceled the surgery to remove my lung tumor. Not because it's too dangerous, not because they discovered it's benign, not even because I'm struggling to afford all this crap.

No. It's because the biopsy results got mixed up with someone else's, and it turns out my tumor contains stem cells, whatever the hell those are. The doctor explained it to me like I should be excited. They're calling me a *medical miracle*. Oh, and by the way, it's grown 22% since we last checked.

April

Do you know what it's like to have a giant needle rammed through your chest? The doctors and scientists clearly don't, since they keep doing biopsies.

They say the tumor is *developing*. Developing what? They show me these fuzzy pictures, but all I see is a malignant blob.

Whatever this thing is, it's starting to affect my breathing. I can't fully inhale without pain, and I've been getting all kinds of dizzy spells and body aches. But they tell me it's too valuable to risk removing from its host. Its host? Is that all I am now?

Erin came over to play Scrabble and commiserate. She keeps saying I should sue the hospital. With what lawyer? I can't even afford medicine to keep the pain at bay.

May

Organs. It's developing goddamn *organs*.

June

The doctors have stopped calling it a tumor. Now it's a separate entity. I asked them why they're letting a *separate entity* grow inside my ribcage, and apparently this thing still has human DNA. I don't know why that matters. They showed me pictures again and they do not look human in any way.

July

Got fired. Supposedly it's because I'm not meeting quota. Yeah, I'd like to see *them* meet quota with a parasite sucking the breath from their lungs. Erin wants me to sue. Ha, ha, ha.

It's almost a relief not to work. The dizziness and pain have only gotten worse. I'm hungry 24/7 but can't seem to keep anything down. Sometimes my puke has blood in it.

God, *fuck*. I don't want to die.

August

I finally found a lawyer willing to represent me for no upfront cost, but she warned me it might take time to navigate the snarled channels of medical law. I'm starting to doubt I have that time. My chest is lopsided now, the ribs on the right spread too wide. The Thing, as I have dubbed it, is forcing my spine at an angle. My legs feel uneven when I walk.

It's also compressing the organs in my chest cavity. Including, you know, my *heart*.

Mom told me I should be grateful. Apparently, I'm bringing "new life" into this world, and it'll redeem me from my dirty lifestyle. She's treating it like a baby—the grandchild she never got. How can she look at the thing killing her actual daughter and call it a "kid"?

September

Erin found me a doctor who's willing to try and remove The Thing. The operative word here is "try". It's grown so large that I need a sternotomy, which is where they hack through the breastbone to get at what's underneath. Then my surgeon will cut The Thing out and cauterize the blood vessels it's been stealing from. Finally, she'll stitch me back up, and I'll have tubes coming out of every orifice for a week before (maybe) my body adjusts to the empty cavity between my lungs.

I should mention that this is in no way legal.

If I don't write anything after this, well, I guess future scholars can assume what happened. But I'm so tired of being afraid and in pain.

Sometimes I can feel The Thing moving around inside me. I keep having nightmares where it bursts out of my ribcage, or eats its way down through my lower organs to emerge from my abdomen. Every day that passes, I feel less like a person and more like just a carrier. Like I'm only a stepping stone in this thing's twisted life cycle. A dumb incubator. A host.

Has anyone stopped to think what it might do once it's free? What it might become?

October

My surgery was supposed to be today.

Everything's numb. Like I died the day they arrested Dr. Janessen and everything since has been slow decay.

I'm numb, but not empty. I feel too full, bursting apart with crushed organs and crushed hopes and this wretched, murderous Thing. It's squirming constantly. I know it's trying to get out.

I can't let this be my life. I can't let this be my legacy.

I have no surgeon, no anesthesia. But I do have this knife, some ibuprofen, and nothing left to lose.