A Waiting Game.

by Lori Delaney

Based on real life experiences of Breast Cancer.

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Characters

Tegan, 29

Young woman, lost her confidence and struggling to find her identity. Tegan identifies as bisexual and feels her sexual identity is already complicated but is further so by breast cancer. She has a history of mental health problems (bipolar), and tamoxifen caused a huge setback in her mental wellbeing.

Natalie, Mid 30s

Diagnosed with BC after being newly married. Struggling with the realities of infertility and a rare aggressive breast cancer.

Amara, South Asian woman, 44

Dealing with the reality of infertility in a culture where marriage is extremely important. She has been made to feel like damaged goods by family, friends and her community/culture. First diagnosed aged 26, then suffered recurrence at 33.

Mike, Young man, 37

Feels like he doesn’t fit in anywhere, lonely, feels emasculated, embarrassed, not taken seriously. Feels rejected by the BC Community.

Cheryl, Mum, child with disability, 44

Working 2 jobs and carer for her disabled son, lack of support, doesn't really have time to talk about the impact of breast cancer. She just needs to get on with it. Angry at how covid affected her experience.

Mary, 75

Feels invisible, was not allowed chemo as too old. People expect she should just get over it or that she shouldn’t need her breasts at her age. Limited access to support, does not have internet or really know how to use it.

Karen, 52

Struggling with ongoing health problems, breakdown of marriage/intimacy. Lost confidence and feels breast cancer has taken her identity. Had to give up her job. Bankruptcy. Sore joints. No energy.

Linda, Middle class, middle aged white woman, 56

Advocate of the cancer charities, wearing pink. Attends various support groups. Projects the message that breast cancer has been a gift and that we all need to be positive and focus on our blessings “after all we are alive, aren't we?”

SCENE 1

Opens in a waiting room with 7 characters sitting waiting.

They sit for a while then move around with purpose as if going somewhere, then sit in different positions. This movement piece is repeated 3 times to a soundscape of a waiting room with professionals and patients talking about appointments and waiting.

Linda enters wearing pajamas. While everyone else walks with purpose/intent Linda is dislocated, unsure where she is or why.

MIKE.
I was just an average guy. An average guy doing average things. I liked being average. I'd like to be average again.

AMARA.
I had gone away to India, I was tanned, so I was thorough about moisturizing. I was checking my breasts from a young age because of my mum. I watched it for 2 weeks, then told her.

CHERYL.
I knew for a while. I didn't go see about it, because I was frightened of what they would say. Because I knew that life would change. Doing anything was hard at that time, not having enough support for my disabled son. His care needs came first. I was looking at myself (trails off).
I could see myself in the mirror. I thought, you are fucked. And that's when I had to go, because I knew that I had cancer.

AMARA.
And then you get told at 29 that you know, you have breast cancer, and you probably need chemo and your whole world falls apart.

CHERYL.
And how frightening it was, being told on that very day, **31st October**, you have breast cancer, and it's in your lymph nodes and we don't know what type yet. And coming home and my boy was in his wheelchair, dressed as fucking Dracula because it was **Halloween**. And not having a clue, not having a clue, how things are going to fucking work out for these kids.

MARY.
At your age we do not think it would be beneficial to have chemotherapy.

KAREN.
Before breast cancer I was healthy. I had a good job, and very rarely got sick. Now I'm just a shell of myself. I feel older than I am.

MARY.
There were no explanations.

CHERYL.
Even going to the doctor and the doctor knowing as well as I did. And her saying, you know what that is don't you? Okay, I'm gonna send you a fast track. You're going to get into the hospital.

KAREN.
I trained as a social worker. 20 years it was my job, it was my life, and I loved it, that's been a big part of losing my identity. I know **I'm just not the same**, and I'm just so tired.

CHERYL.
From finding the lump to treatment was like being plunged into the darkest hole and I knew intuitively, it was breast cancer.

MIKE.
I hated the waiting, there was so much waiting.
(to audience)
Awaiting results, waiting for bloods,
for chemo, radiotherapy, more results, for recovery, for check-ups, more results, more waiting, more fucking treatment.

KAREN.
I'm just waiting to live. I found that I just couldn't get back to work. I had to get early retirement. All those years.

MIKE.
To be taken seriously in work, for people to acknowledge that men have fucking breasts. Waiting and waiting.
Restless legs, middle aged women, funny looks.
Pink
Pink madness.
Pink Bullshit.

LINDA.
But I had a really positive experience. Everyone was great and I found that because I am such a positive person, I was able to make the most of the situation. Waiting, well I just read my book and spoke to people. I love pink.

CHERYL.
And so that was that. Got it. Got the results. You've got a very aggressive form of Breast Cancer Cheryl, and we need to know if it's spread through your body. And of course, I believe it spread through my body. All that head work. Yeah. It's in my body. It's all over my body. You're going to die soon. Waiting for them to tell me.

NATALIE.
A few weeks later I was diagnosed. I went for my appointment, 'I'm very sorry to tell you that…'. And then they passed you over to the nurse.

MARY.
I had a terrible time with all of them. The only person that was any good was the oncologist to oversee radiotherapy.

LINDA.
I'm just grateful to have the luxury to wait. Some people don't get that chance.

MIKE.
Waiting for normality, for a girlfriend. pfft...
For people to treat me normal again, like a normal guy instead of the poor fucker that got breast cancer.

CHERYL.
And who is going to look after my son, who is profoundly disabled, when I die is the most important thing. Because there was no other way. I knew I was going to die. And it was the first time I'd thought that. From what was going to happen when my son died, to now it was going to be who's going to look after my son when I die.

KAREN.
Catch everything that's going. My immune system is shot to pieces, I've **never been the same** since. And I mean, I want to get back to work. But I am **not the same** person.

MIKE.
Waiting for the shocked faces, the surprise.
Oh does your partner have breast cancer son?
No.
No?
No okay, she FUCKING doesn't.
Funny looks, sad looks, sorry looks, confused looks, don't look looks.

MARY.
I had a terrible experience with my nurses and was constantly being told to be positive.

CHERYL.
I guess I was naive, before that I thought I was the only one who had breast cancer, and I would get this treatment, and it was so, you know, specific for me. They were like let's get this all sorted for you, and I believed them.

('SICKNESS' Sound Cue Begins)

And I walked in, and there was rows and rows of fucking people attached to chemotherapy. It was like a factory. You're so insignificant here. You're just a number, and I felt frightened.

(**Chemo Choreography:**

9 counts of 4,
repeated x3
First two in unison, third using choreo out of sync with each other)

SCENE 2

(There is a shift in the background noise and lighting.

There is the sound of a playpark, then a lullabye.)

NATALIE.
We must have been with the nurse for 2 hours and they said, "you know about kids, do you want them, are you planning on having children?" We had a lengthy conversation about that. And they're like, okay, we can work with you, there's a good egg supply there. We'll be able to start your medication today. Amazing, I feel some hope in this terrifying situation.

AMARA.
There are so many issues around fertility. It's important to talk about that kind of thing because it's a massive part of South Asian culture, if you don't have children, you're almost like a second-class citizen.

NATALIE
All I ever wanted was to be a mum.

AMARA.
I was getting it from all angles. My nephew, he's a great child, but he said, *"I'm upset because you have not given me a cousin, you have let us down"*, and I was like, Wow! It was just a bit like a matter-of-fact situation, because you notice that's all we talk about.

NATALIE.
So, I started on the tablets, and let me tell you, I have never had pain and sickness like this and all I know was my body was screaming at me, saying, what are you doing? It's horrendous.

TEGAN.
I hadn't even come out yet or understood what I was: I am still not there. The oncologist said about freezing my eggs. I don't know!

NATALIE.
Periods start, happy days, and they're like, okay, come up on Wednesday and we'll get you started with injections.

AMARA.
I cannot have children, its heart breaking but I'm not on the children path. I'm also at the age where I'm getting older. It's hard, so I didn't realise how big it weighed on me. You just wake up there.

NATALIE.
Monday, I got a phone call from my Oncologist to come up. They tell me I have inflammatory breast cancer. Due to the aggressive nature of it we need you to start with the treatment like asap. But what about the fertility process? They said you cannot have it. I was not okay, and alone. I've just been told I can't have kids. At 26.

NATALIE.
That was worse than being told I have breast cancer, because that was our hope.

AMARA.
It hurt, it was really hurtful and they just seen me as damaged.

TEGAN.
I cannot even think about eggs or babies right now. I just need to breathe.

NATALIE.
Maybe if we got to continue and knew if it worked. Maybe I would feel different. But there was a bit of hope and then the rug was pulled. I think the difficulty in being younger is, you've got longer of your life left to live post cancer and it's a lot mentally and physically.

SCENE 3

(Lighting comes down and
soundscape uses distorted
breathing and voices.

'SEX' Transition.
Actors move curtains around
the stage.)

AMARA.
I could not believe it. The GP, a family friend. He says, obviously, I don't want to look at your breasts. It's not appropriate. This is our culture. You'll have to wait until next week to see a female GP. Wow.

KAREN.
It's the ongoing effects that affect you; no one talks about how hormone receptive breast cancer affects you as a woman as well, and all that sort of taboo.

MIKE.
I used to like to go out with my mates at the weekend, to pull girls. I actually liked breasts.

Then bam, life turned upside down. Being asked to make decisions about the rest of my fucking life at 32.
Having to wank into a cup.
Waiting to wank into a cup.

KAREN.
Obviously, it's okay, but it's not okay. We are supposed to be a couple. But I think he's just glad I'm still here. We have no closeness as such anymore. You feel more like friends, if that makes sense.

AMARA.
My doctor was completely baffled when I brought up sex. It was like what, sex? I'm like yes, yes, sex is a thing like, and yeah, the whole orgasm thing. We don't want to be just existing you know.

KAREN.
I tried speaking to the GP. I don't like talking about it but feels like I'm a child again. I've not got any room in there to feel any sensation. So, I'm not missing it because there is nothing there to be missed.

AMARA.
There's nothing you can do, but we need to talk about it. No one wants to talk about it because they have shame about it. l am always talking about it. I realised when you get reconstruction, it basically cuts through your (points down).

KAREN.
I tried, you know, up to a point. It was a sexual relationship. It was something we both enjoyed. That's been taken away. We don't have that enjoyment, that connection anymore. We don't have, you know. And he doesn't say much.

AMARA.
Surely, it's not supposed to go through a muscle. It did impact me. The thing is women are going to run with shame. They're just like, I have to be grateful for my life. When they don't have a quality of life.

LINDA.
(clearly embarrassed/flustered).
Ach well, I mean we were past all that by then anyway.

KAREN.
I totally understand how hard it must be as a young single person. I have been married for 32 years, and now there's just nothing, you know. It takes all of you.

LINDA.
(trying to make light of it)
32 years. Come on, have you not had your fun.

KAREN.
I felt a lot of guilt because he wasn't talking about it, and I'm like I know you're all right with us, because you just love me and want me to get better. But I miss feeling close to you.

AMARA.
They cannot even say about sex and those things. So even the types of surgery, people in my culture do not have those conversations.

(Linda stares into space, as if deep in thought. Then she comes to her senses and visibly gives herself a shake.)

LINDA.
WELL!!! I am so excited, to get out with my pink ladies tonight. Get a good old natter. I would be lost without my ladies.

AMARA.
I have had to bring up the unmentionable to my doctor, you know, loss of sensation in sexual relationships, which in my culture, for them it is unattractive. He's like, "Don't you know, there is nothing that can be done?" But I have to say, okay, you got to keep trying because I'm single. I want to know.

LINDA.
My Malcolm is just happy to have me here fit and well.

MIKE.
I'm waiting to feel that again. I don't feel like it anymore. I want to but then when it comes to it, I feel emasculated. I feel exhausted.

AMARA.
One of the things that kept coming up for me was the whole marriage thing. Like culturally, if I am introduced to someone and he's aware of what I have been through he would automatically be like no.

MIKE.
Waiting for THAT conversation. I feel like once I tell a woman, it changes her perception of me.

AMARA.
As far as people are concerned, I would be off the radar. It's unsaid but I'm seen as damaged goods.

MIKE.
Maybe that is in my head, but I cannot shake it, and it has just become this complex thing now instead of fun.

AMARA.
I was being wheeled down for the surgery with the anesthetist, a South Asian woman said to me, she knows me, and she said, *don't worry I won't tell anybody.* This is in the hospital, a woman, the biggest hypocrite.

TEGAN.
I have never heard another person like me talk about it. A classmate actually asked me if it was easier to lose my breasts because I am gay. What kinda misinformed bullshit is that?

AMARA.

I've done nothing wrong, and this is the educator. The anesthetist is saying that shit to me. Oh, because now I want to get my action, hide my breast cancer. I'm like. No, I'm talking about it.

TEGAN.

The truth is I spent my life hating my tits. I hated the whole idea of femininity and finding where I fit in has been tough. I am embarrassed to say this but there is a sort of femininity about breast cancer that made me feel shame.

SCENE 4

CHERYL.
And then, of course, Covid hit. and Covid caused more disruption to me than anything else.

(Lighting changes and we hear a soundscape overlapping news about covid and some discuss cancer patients.

Cast bring seats on in a line and stand facing the back

Linda walks on with remote control and 'turns on TV' Projected at back is covid footage.

After clock sound begins, cast take two steps back/in place then clap loudly before slowly stopping.

They then break into 'hospital' scene, walking across stage with intention in hospital setting.

Linda crosses stage with groceries and begins 'washing' them)

TEGAN.
Nobody knew what was happening. So I went from feeling very safe at the Beatson and even though I am scared of starting my treatment, I was like, right, this is all moving very fast, and it seems very in control.

CHERYL.
And then, of course they stopped my chemotherapy which was so fucked, because they had gone from, you need to get this chemotherapy to give you the best chance of living to, you don't really need to get that chemotherapy, which was just awful.

TEGAN.

Yeah, you know, they clearly have a blueprint for this. I'm going to be fine. Then all of a sudden all of the people who had initially made me feel safe were flapping.

(Cast cross stage 'flapping.)

It's like everybody is flapping, and that was when it became scary for me. I was like oh so these people who know what they are doing now do not know what they are doing, and everybody is just trying things out.

CHERYL.

Tell me after surgery, that they'd taken out the lump, didn't have anybody. Because of restrictions.

ALL.

Stay Home. Protect the NHS. Save Lives.

CHERYL.

No support whatsoever. I got let out of the hospital, carrying my own bag, with no strength, not even a porter to bring me down because of Covid. The nurse waiting outside, standing crying because she couldn't help, and they wouldn't even let her bring me down.

LINDA.

It must have been really hard for them too.

TEGAN.

They called me up and said, 'we were just wanting to see, you know, if it were to happen that way, would you be up for it?' I'm like up for it? 'For stopping your chemotherapy treatment early.' I was like, where is my nurse, she told me this would not happen. 'I am sorry' they said but she now has covid. Covid? I was terrified, no one seemed to know what was happening.

CHERYL.

In the beginning I got chemo on a Friday, and I was hospitalised every single time because of vomiting so my mum, or somebody, would come and help with my boys for the weekend, but then it was like, oh, Covid hit so we can't help anymore. We're doing it for you, and I'm like, I know, **but I need help.**

TEGAN.

They were like, you know your radiotherapy that you were getting at 21 sessions, well we are now going to do it in 5 days. All of it, and they're going to just give you more, and I'm like what, what? We have been thinking about it and doing trials for a while, so we have just decided to bring that forward.

TEGAN *(cont.)*.
It's like trials, exactly, trials... Now there is no waiting, we are just giving it a bash and hoping for the best.

CHERYL.
I still had to get 7 more rounds of chemo and he told me outright that they were stopping it. Covid swept everything away. Now we see how little covid impacted breast cancer in terms of people getting ill with Covid. What they got was, their life-saving treatment removed from them.

LINDA.
I thought it was just fabulous how they protected all those cancer patients. We had to protect the NHS to save lives, as Boris said.

CHERYL.
But yeah, Covid, Covid in itself was disruptive. And then you've got this **'unprecedented'** situation, and I wanted to shout, but this is a fucking unprecedented situation in my life.

NATALIE
That's so important to discuss the actual impact of Covid because the impact of Covid was huge for cancer patients.

CHERYL.
People were just left to die man; all my care was removed from my boy.

TEGAN.
This is what really pissed me off like. "We would like to put this to you as a choice. But if it was down to me, I think there's more risk in continuing." How can you leave me with that choice, so that if it all goes wrong, I can't let that go.

CHERYL.
It was laughable when everybody around me was like, we were just protecting you by not going anywhere near you. I was like, back off. I was so angry. I became really angry at my family.

LINDA.
I was so lucky, the people around me could not do enough. We had a coffee morning on the zoom and a banana bread in bake-off, and then Sheila walked a 10k in her garden like Captain Tom.

CHERYL.

They actually told me that my son would not fit the criteria for a lifesaving intervention if he gets Covid because of his disability. Nobody fucking talks about that. Nobody talks about how suddenly all the rules were changed, and we went from disabled people having rights to actually seen as useless. You're not getting a fucking ventilator, totally.

TEGAN.

I still feel angry. What made me most angry was that Covid took away my experience of Breast Cancer and you need to talk about that. It's not fucked up because imagine how many people went through this and nobody will discuss it.

CHERYL.

I remember like it was yesterday, I was in here trying to work out how I would make a fucking ventilator for my son, you get the scope? You see the layers, it wasn't just cancer and covid.

TEGAN.

And then the bell. They had to disinfect the bell and then it was just me in a corridor on my own. There was one woman at the other end, and I'm standing, and the nurse, who I had never met before took a video of me for my family and I'm ringing the bell, and if you watch you can see the tears were blinding me. I just wanted my mum.

(Transition: sound of bell.

Linda enters ringing bell.
Sound stops and Linda left
with bell that does not ring.

Gillian and Alison come on
with placards explaining that
they did not ring bell and
why. Then they exit.)

SCENE 5

(Soundscape fades and a new one begins and lighting changes)

MIKE.
There were 2 occasions on which it really, I asked about participating in a breast cancer boat race thing which is a big deal out here. They practice a couple of times a week together, and just bond in that boat. And I was told that as a man, I couldn't do that. So that was one of my experiences of exclusion.

I get it. You don't want to give some team an unfair advantage, because they've got a man on the team. But there's no way with 200 men a year diagnosed with breast cancer in Canada that I'm going to be able to put together a male breast cancer team.

And the second one was a little more, it wasn't subtle. They were very blunt with me, and that was my first experience where I asked if I could attend a breast cancer support group.

And the facilitator had never had to deal with the man asking before, and she said I'm going to have to check with the women because we talk about some intimate issues, and they said No. And that was that.

All the research had been done on women. Men had been excluded from all the trials and that was where, at the time it was starting to become clear how excluded you are as a guy in this situation.

So where do I go from there?
Where do I fit in?

(Linda enters.)

LINDA.
Oh I think your in the wrong place, this is the breast clinic!

(Music Begins for 'Breast Check/Disco'

Mike rolls his eyes, he lifts the bell and exits the stage.)

SCENE 6

('Breast Check' Dance Routine Transition.

Then 'Steroids' Instrumental Soundscape continues under scene.

Volume lowered after 'No one ever told me I was going to put on weight!'.)

TEGAN.
This one girl on my course she said, oh my god you look so cool and arty with a bald head.

KAREN.
Went to get my eyebrows tattooed before chemo. The woman thought it a good idea to start listing everyone she had known in her life who had died from cancer.

TEGAN.
Ach, you never had any breasts anyway.

NATALIE.
Will you get a free boob job then? Exciting. **Whoohoo.**

MIKE.
Don't be daft men don't have breasts.

TEGAN.
At least you got the good cancer. Could be worse.

CHERYL.
I am so jealous of your chemo curls. Really? Ta.

TEGAN.
Don't worry, you're not going to die.

MIKE.
How long have you got?

ALL.
You're such a positive person.

KAREN.
You're such an inspiration.

TEGAN.
You’re so strong.

NATALIE.
You are a fighter

MIKE.
You’re going to kick cancers butt.

GILLIAN.
You have to go vegan now.

TEGAN.
And sugar free. Cancer feeds off sugar.

NATALIE.
Have you tried juicing?

MIKE.
My dog got cancer. Wow.

NATALIE.
You don’t look sick.

ALI C.
Raw. **Vegan.** All Natural. **Organic.**

TEGAN.
Avoid dairy. **Gluten. Meat.**

MIKE.
Positive vibes only.

CHERYL.
The steroids though. **Fuuuck.**

KAREN.
Waking up in the middle of the night saying to my husband, I need your credit card right now to buy a juicer.

ALL.
A juicer?

CHERYL.
Singing Shakira, dancing around with a drip.

ALL.
La-la, la-la, la-la.

KAREN.
A yoga ball.

NATALIE.
Hiking boots.

CHERYL.
An exercise bike.

MIKE.
A home gym kit.

KAREN.
Off my head for days Then they would wear off.

(Music stops and becomes distorted.)

CHERYL.
I would eat for days.

MIKE.
I would clean for days.

TEGAN.
I would eat and clean and call and talk.

ALL.
Then I would shit.

TEGAN.
One time I shat myself.

CHERYL.
I couldn't sleep for days. I was tired but I couldn't sleep.

TEGAN.
I went to the toilet I wiped and all this hair just wiped off.

NATALIE.
Woke up and seen my hair on the pillow. Like loads of hair.

CHERYL.
These fucking sores man. My eyes were red raw, my nose too. Water and snot streaming down my face. And I would try to do the 'daily walk'.

ALL.
Are you kidding me?
If you didn't laugh you would cry.

(Confetti Falls.

Cast transitions off slowly, jerkily and exhausted, but using the full stage and any choreography/movement from the disco scene.

The feeling is uncomfortable and full of effort.)

SCENE 7

(At lighting change signaling next scene, cast begin to walk back and forth across stage - once again in 'hospital' mode, using props etc.

Slowly, slowly more and more of the cast are garbed in their white surgical outfit with cap and mask.)

TEGAN.
I was told I need to take tamoxifen, and I said, but will that interact with drugs I'm already taking for bipolar? And he said, I don't know.

CHERYL.
As someone with addiction issues living in recovery, I felt a lot of trauma around chemotherapy and how the drug in my system would affect me. It brought up a lot of stuff for me from the past. The way the medication made me feel, I wanted more. Give me more steroids. I need more.

TEGAN.
2 weeks I took it. 18 months of hell.

I was so angry, and I am not an angry person. It was messing with my brain chemistry. If you have a pre-existing, lifelong mental health condition, you're not receiving that treatment in the same context as people without. I was very sick.

CHERYL.
I was worried because when I got my lymph nodes removed they put me on morphine right? I didn't know what having that in my system after such a long time would do to me and my behaviour.

TEGAN.
Some days I remember I was just lying in bed counting every minute. That’s another minute on, that's another minute on. I stopped it.

CHERYL.
What if I enjoy that feeling so much that it triggers my addiction, and I don't die of breast cancer, but of my addiction. It was fucking horrible.

TEGAN.
It was just very like, “You need to take this drug and that’s it. It’s going to save your life.” What about this side of my health? I would rather get cancer again than live with the risk of suicide.

CHERYL.
These things are still happening, and they're happening through the lens of all these other things. You don't just get cancer. It's not just an isolated experience.

TEGAN.
My bipolar episode was 18 months long. It was horrific. I came as close as I ever had to just giving up. I'm familiar with suicidal ideation. It's just part of everyday life for me.

CHERYL.
Being stuck in a fucking oven, to have my fucking breast fried to fuck, and still not having a nipple replaced 3 years down the line because the state of the NHS after Covid.

TEGAN.
One of the breast cancer nurses said, if it makes you depressed, you can just take some antidepressants. Wow.

CHERYL.
I could feel those drugs in my system and I liked it. But having come downs, that was very triggering for me.

TEGAN.
It was hell. It was messing with my brain chemistry. It's important to see these experiences through different lenses. When I started talking, I started to feel the power of that.

(Tegan and Cheryl are dressed in their white surgical garb by remaining cast members.)

(Cast then stand in original V shape (order does not matter) and face front entirely neutral and anonymous.

Linda enters and interrupts.)

LINDA.

I was always told not to air my dirty laundry!!
Show them all that you have got this Linda!
You ARE a fighter
I AM a fighter
It makes me feel STRONG
What right do I have to feel bad?
I am ALIVE
I cannot fall apart
I need to stay positive
I’m not saying everything was perfect.
Of course not
But look on the bright side
Keep busy
Keep smiling
I mean, I guess you know, my hair...
...It never came back
No one’s fault... How could they have known?
Wigs are good enough for Dolly!
...Of course, it has affected me…
But I...Well I’ve got to...
I mean... I’m not the same.

SCENE 8

(White noise. A spotlight comes up on Linda and she stares into space looking exhausted. The white noise stops, and Linda starts to speak.)

LINDA.

The hospital didn't go well.
It seemed that everyone from the first doctor who examined me already knew, instinctively.

The area was marked in black pen, and I was sent to radiography.
The radiographer was lovely, and I knew she knew. At least, I thought she knew something that was beginning to dawn on me.
I was then sent for an ultrasound. This doctor was also very nice, she was in quite a lot of PPE though, which was disconcerting.

The doctor took a long time going over and over the area marked in pen, then the rest of my breast, then the adjacent area under my arm. I stared at the wall, pretty sure of what was coming. But it was still a shock.

She explained that there were three abnormal areas: two in the breast and that a lymph node under my arm was also involved. She would have to biopsy all three sites.
She talked me through each process: the local anaesthetic; the loud noise of the instrument she would use (it sounded like an industrial stapler); the metal clip she would need to insert afterwards to mark the areas she had biopsied.

I had to go for a second mammogram to ensure there was a record of where the clips were, for the surgeon, or in case someone needed to take more tissue.

After that it was back to the original doctor. She explained that it was not what she'd wanted to tell me. She used words like abnormal and diffuse. She told me cancer treatment wasn't the same as it had been in the 1950s.

There was a knock at the door. A clinical nurse specialist came in.
Did I want water? Yes.

(Alison B. comes to join her.)

LINDA *(cont.)*.

More than water. I wanted a minute. To process. To breathe. Did I have questions? Did I want to talk? I told her I was worried about how to tell my parents. They're in their eighties. My dad lost his mum to this when he was thirteen.

LINDA + ALISON B.

She said I should keep it simple. I have something in my breast that shouldn't be there. I've had biopsies. I'll meet a consultant next week who'll talk to me about my treatment plan.

I was told this would be the most difficult time. Waiting.

ALISON B.

It’s been 7 years since the breast cancer diagnosis. Found a lump. Scared
The doctor said, “Look at me. It has nothing, NOTHING to do with breast cancer and that’s good. You have a lymphoma. Do you know what that is?”
Sort of…… in the lymphatic system…. still cancer.
I’ve been diagnosed with Non-Hodgkinson Follicular Lymphoma, low grade, low volume. What?
He said “No cutting. No radiotherapy, no chemo at this time, hopefully never. He smiles, so at least your hair won’t fall out”
That’s a bloody joke.
“It’s not just in one place but that’s normal.” What?
You just get on with life, it’s just there, with your aches and pains from your medication, the worries of reoccurrence, always there.

(Take hands)

He said “You won’t die from this; you will LIVE with it”

(Black out)