

STEPHANIE HART

AN UNEXPECTED KINDNESS

It was early summer and my body was healing. Cancer had overtaken my life in December of 2015. In a metallic voice over the telephone the doctor had given me the diagnosis. This led to two surgeries to remove uterine and ovarian tumors as well as six rounds of chemotherapy. I suffered nausea, deep lingering fatigue, the indignity of hair loss, and the menacing fear that the cancer would run unchecked throughout my body. I would look in the mirror at my pale face and bald head and feel as if I had lost a part of myself.

My long-time live-in partner, David, bolstered my spirits by making me simple meals and regaling me with his wit. My friend and neighbor, Ruth, encouraged me to walk with her in the long hallways of our building. As I gained physical strength, my will to fight for my health returned. I had an optimistic oncologist, who pronounced, "I never want to see this disease again." Chemo nurses reminded me of how much courage I had to endure this rough regime as they administered treatment. Finally, in late spring, I emerged, according to scans and blood tests, cancer free.

As if I had just broken out of a cocoon, I felt both stunned and grateful to have a new chance at life. Although my legs ached from nerve pain, an after effect of chemo, I could still walk. While I feared for my future health, I wanted to embrace the moment. I loved the feel of my feet on the pavement moving forward. Since it was such a pleasant evening in Chelsea, Ruth suggested that we have dinner out. This happened to be the evening of the annual Gay Pride Parade in Manhattan. Our neighborhood was alive with color and activity. Men and women wore headdresses and brightly colored outfits; they carried banners announcing their newly granted freedom to marry. They held up signs, showing solidarity with the lost lives in the Orlando night club. They carried rainbow flags. The spirit of liberation was manifest on every block as we navigated our way toward Sixth Avenue.

The restaurant we chose, like so many others in the area, was teeming