

I've a BAD feeling about this

Amanda and Paul steel themselves for terrible news

The story so far

Unable to conceive naturally, Amanda and her hubby Paul decide on IVF. But then a lump removed from Paul's neck is found to be cancerous and the couple are fighting a far bigger battle — just to keep him alive. After Paul is given a tentative all-clear, they resume IVF. But that journey has come to an end and now Amanda and Paul have another, far more terrifying, result to hear... (To read last week's story in full, go to our website, www.thatslife.co.uk.)

Exactly a fortnight ago, after three painful months of IVF treatment, I let go of my dream of having a child with my husband Paul.

A pregnancy test had come back negative — but that wasn't quite the end of my IVF journey.

Three days later, I got up in the morning and blood literally poured out of me. I'd been told to expect a 'heavier than normal' period, but this was unreal!

Paul and I were staying with my mum up in the North of England when it happened, so she got to see the horrendous IVF fallout.

I knew it pained her to see her daughter go through this. Her anger was evident in the vigorous way she scrubbed the blood from the bedroom and landing carpet, her insistence no one could help.

Paul was also visibly shocked by my bleeding. 'After all you've been through, it's like having the

We've had to let go of our dreams of having a family

knife turned,' he said bitterly.

I hate to admit it, but I got very drunk that night and ended up at the top of my mum's garden, on my hands and knees, bawling my eyes out, barely able to breathe.

It wasn't very dignified, though with hindsight I think I needed to let it all out.

We returned to our home in Wiltshire, and two days later Paul and I were up at the crack of dawn to get to the hospital in time.

The day of Paul's latest six-monthly cancer check-up scan had finally come.

'If you get an all-clear from this one, you can say three Hail Marys,' Paul's head and neck

surgeon had told us. If there's no recurrence of a head and neck cancer after a year, then the likelihood of the disease coming back drops massively. And this would be Paul's year marker.

Suddenly, it felt like there was a lot hanging on this scan. It's called a PET scan, and involved Paul being injected with a radioactive substance, then lying on a stretcher which passed slowly through a very large metallic doughnut. It took about two hours.

During Paul's previous scans, I'd taken myself off to the hospital café, where I'd had a little cry and fretted about the future. But this time there were no tears. I felt like

a hardened old pro as I waited, although the deep-seated worry was still very much there.

We left the hospital knowing we'd be called back when the results were ready.

So over the next week, Paul and I put the scan and failed pregnancy behind us, focused instead on work and enjoying our evenings together. I celebrated my 41st birthday. Any residual sadness I felt about not having children diminished rapidly when I thought about Paul's scan. What if the cancer had returned?

Paul sensed my anxiety. 'I've not got a good feeling about this,' he confessed one night. I hugged him, but I didn't tell

'I pray we've been worrying about nothing'

him I had the same bad feeling.

The Result Day finally arrives. 'I'm not going,' Paul says now. 'I'm not waiting in that "death corridor" for hours on end to find out...'

His voice trails off. 'I don't blame you,' I tell him. 'But I'm going.'

Before he's had time to argue, I tell him I love him, get in the car and drive off alone to the hospital. I pray like mad that our feelings are wrong — that we've both been worrying about nothing.

By the time I park my car and walk into the hospital's head and neck clinic, my heart's thumping terribly.

The clinic doesn't have a proper waiting room. Instead, they have a 'waiting area', a dirty-white windowless stretch of corridor lined with worn-out seats.

Paul and I have sat there on so

many occasions since he was first diagnosed with cancer in April last year. And like every time before, nearly everyone sitting here today has some kind of facial disfigurement.

Over the past year, we've seen people with half a face, no noses, massive scars... I even saw a baby with no eyes once, which made my heart bleed.

So far, Paul has escaped with one large scar, which goes from his Adam's apple to his ear, and a shorter one underneath, near his collarbone.

One is from when he had the secondary cancerous tumour removed. The large one is from when he had his lymph nodes taken out to stop the cancer from spreading to other areas of his body.

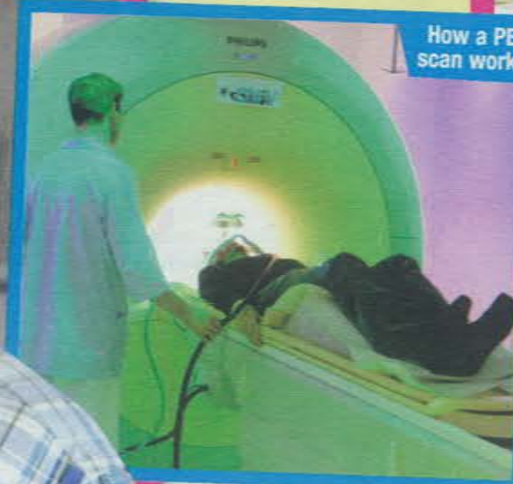
After an hour's wait, I'm finally called in to see the surgeon.

'What's the result?' I ask before my bum has time to hit the seat.

'Mmm, I don't know,' he says, clicking on his computer keyboard. Just then, the consultant we normally see, Mr Bond, comes in and I ask him the same question. 'Something's shown up on the back of the tongue,' he says, leaning over to the computer and pulling up the scan results.

I feel my whole body slump. My mind feels like it's whirring out of control. My greatest fear has been confirmed.

There's a part of me which just wants to collapse. Cry. Shout. Be angry. But I know this isn't the



How a PET scan works



Paul's big scar from last year

'I follow his gaze...realise I'm shaking badly'

time or place for dramatics.

All of a sudden, they're both speaking to me. Mr Bond is trying to tell me it might be a 'false positive'. He's a lovely man and a real optimist. I know he's trying to give me some hope.

But then the surgeon tells me there's a 95 per cent chance that it is cancer. I feel like I'm in the middle of 'good doc, bad doc'.

In a haze, I listen as they tell me Paul has to have another scan, and an operation to take biopsies from the back of his tongue.

'This will tell us if it is cancer — and if so, how big the tumour is,' one of them says.

The surgeon is drawing a round circle on a piece of paper, explaining they would have to cut the tumour out of the back of the tongue, as well as tissue around the tumour, to catch any stray cancerous cells.

I'm aware the surgeon keeps looking at my hand, and for a second I think he's looking at my wedding and engagement rings.

But when my eyes follow his gaze, I realise it's because I'm shaking pretty badly.

'Paul's always said he's not going to have any more operations,' I tell them both.

Mr Bond tries to say something, but the surgeon slams his hand down on the desk, and says: 'If that's the case, he's going to die.' It's a slap in the face. But at least he's being honest.

I ask him how long Paul has if he decides not to do anything. 'He'll be dead in six months,'

the surgeon says simply.

There's nothing to say.

When I leave the consultation room, I walk back down the packed corridor and out of the hospital to my car. I feel eerily different. Like I'm not me any more. Something steely and very calm has come over me.

As I'm driving back to Wiltshire, all I can think of is how I'm going to tell Paul.

Halfway home, my mobile rings. It's Paul.

For the first time ever in our relationship, I ignore his call. It feels weird.

I hammer my poor little car the remaining 15 miles home, park in front of the garage and see Paul inside.

I get out and immediately tell him: 'You've got it on the right side of the back of the tongue.'

Then I explain to him the facts — pure and simple.

'If it's cancer, then they may have to remove part of your tongue,' I continue.

'And if I don't do anything, how long have I got?' he asks. I pause. He has to know.

'Six months,' I say. Paul half laughs. 'Well,' he splutters, 'I suppose that's better than six weeks!'

I give him a hug. 'I love you,' I tell him. 'I love you too,' he replies.

He says he wants to be alone for a bit, so I leave him in the garage. I go and pour myself a glass of wine and sit and stare into space for a while.

About an hour later, Paul emerges from the garage.

'Shall we go out for a meal?' he says. 'I'm starving.'

Amazingly, we have a lovely night. We eat, drink and chat away, but we don't mention the C word.

There is one point in the evening when I can feel myself about to cry, but I stop myself.

Tonight is about escaping and being happy — and not thinking about the weeks ahead.

AMANDA REVELL WALTON, 41, HIGHWORTH, WILTSHIRE

Next week...

Amanda and her husband deal with the shocking news and Paul has his second scan. What will the doctors find?



Celebrating my 41st birthday