

BLOOD FEUD

*The Man Who Blew the Whistle on
One of the Deadliest Prescription
Drugs Ever*

Kathleen Sharp



DUTTON

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Prologue

IN the moments before she became a widow, veiled in blood, Sharon Lenox was happier than she'd been in ages. Her fifty-four-year-old husband, Jim, had just returned home from the hospital where he'd spent the night receiving infusions of magnesium, potassium, and trace minerals. After enduring months of toxic cancer treatments, the six-foot-tall, 120-pound man had become so dehydrated, he'd required immediate medical attention. Now, on this mild winter evening in January 2008, a week after Jim's birthday, Sharon was standing at the kitchen sink, washing dessert plates in soapy water, listening to her high school sweetheart patter on about their future together.

Earlier in the evening, their five adult children, fourteen grandchildren, and assorted relatives had gathered at their modest home to celebrate Jim's homecoming. About fifty of them had squeezed inside the family room to eat cake, drink soda, and talk politics. George W. Bush was still president of the United States, but Senator Barack Obama was campaigning to become the next leader. Around eight p.m., the last of the kids had left. Jim was now resting on the couch while his wife cleaned up. Frail but effusive, Jim was elated at the prospect of living long enough to watch his grandchildren grow up.

"Remember when we beat cancer the first time?" he asked his wife. In 1998, they had learned that the disease was ravaging Jim's left lung.

In a bid for life, he'd undergone surgery to remove part of his tumor-riddled organ. The operation had scared Jim so much he had quit smoking and, for nearly a decade, had lived cancer free. Then, in April 2007, the doctors had found two new lung nodules inside his body. Sharon had taken a leave from her job delivering mail to shuttle her husband to doctors' appointments, chemotherapy sessions, and blood transfusions. By August 2007, Jim was showing "significant improvement," according to one report. Still, the oncologist had told Sharon that her husband would probably live only six months. She had accepted that fact, but not Jim.

"We're going to beat this cancer again, honey," he said, his voice deep and steady. Sharon just smiled. She stood at the sink, her hands trawling the soapy basin for stray utensils. She retrieved a dish, sponged it off, and admired how her solitaire wedding ring still sparkled amid the iridescent bubbles.

Suddenly, Jim fell silent. Sharon turned back to look at him and saw thick, dark blood oozing from his mouth. At first she didn't understand. Jim coughed and struggled to breathe while Sharon waited for him to speak. But no words came out. Then, Jim scooted to the edge of the couch, his eyes pleading for help. Sharon dropped the dish, reached for the telephone, and dialed 911. The emergency dispatch operator asked Sharon some questions. By then, blood was spurting out of Jim's mouth and nose, thick rivulets dripping down his chin. Sharon gave the operator her name, address, and telephone number, then cried, "My husband is bleeding and he can't talk." Jim was now coughing up "pieces of tumor and lung," according to a report filed later by the Anne Arundel County Police Department. Apparently, some of his tumor was lodged in his throat, choking him.

Jim's eyes were bulging, and he tried desperately to breathe as blood poured down his chest. He grew so agitated that Sharon prayed for him to pass out, and mercifully, he did. Sharon fell to the floor, too, and began administering CPR while the operator instructed her calmly from the speaker phone. Every time Sharon breathed into her husband's mouth, his warm blood gushed into her mouth. When she pushed on Jim's chest, more blood spurted from his nose. In no time,

Sharon's face and white T-shirt were soaked in crimson, and her long, ash-brown hair was matted with clumps of red matter. She continued rhythmically breathing into Jim's lungs and pushing on his chest, while the operator guided her resuscitation efforts, the soothing telephone voice violently at odds with the gory scene.

When the paramedics finally burst through the door, they found blood dripping from the walls and pooling on the floor. Sharon looked up from her husband's body and the rescuers took over, measuring his vital signs. Sharon telephoned a family member for help, but after twenty minutes, the paramedics gave up. When Jim's son-in-law finally rushed into the room, ready to assist, he froze in horror. There lay his children's grandfather, a tube protruding from his gaping mouth, his death-dulled eyes wide open, his head encircled by a halo of blood, sputum, and malignant growths.

"It looks like a murder scene," he thought.

Was it? Earlier that day, a nurse had walked up to Jim Lenox and without consent had injected him with an overdose of a drug that stimulated his red blood cells. At the time, that shot had angered Sharon. Now, in light of her husband's slow, torturous death, that injection loomed large in her mind. Had that drug killed her husband? And were others dying in the same grotesque way?