

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Lion in Winter

In "Chapter Twenty-Seven: Lion in Winter," the deep bond between Congressman John Lewis and his longtime aide, Michael Collins, is explored during a troubling time. After two decades of close companionship, Collins took care of many facets of Lewis's life, including managing his congressional office and personal matters. However, by fall 2019, Collins recognized concerning weight loss and overall health changes in Lewis.

During a planning meeting for an upcoming speech, Lewis confided to Jacob Gillison, his former scheduler, that he felt unwell, prompting Gillison to insist on a medical examination. Though Lewis agreed, discomfort in his midsection lingered. Collins subsequently scheduled tests with Dr. Brian Monahan, but initially hoped that dietary adjustments would solve the problems. Ultimately, tests revealed a grave diagnosis: Stage 4 pancreatic cancer.

Collins and Lewis faced this shocking news together, with Lewis demonstrating his fierce spirit as he prepared to continue working amidst his health struggles. He delivered impassioned speeches during critical impeachment proceedings, showing no signs of weakness while rallying for civil rights and justice.

Over the holidays, Lewis attempted to maintain positivity, even painting and creating art as a therapeutic outlet. However, breaking the news of his diagnosis was painful for his staff and family, leading to an outpouring of love and concern.

As Lewis commenced chemotherapy in the new year, he remained engaged in politics, including endorsing Joe Biden for president. His resilience showed in how he celebrated significant milestones despite his deteriorating condition, including his eightieth birthday and the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, which he addressed despite needing assistance to physically participate.

Health challenges persisted as he faced hospital visits and interruptions tied to his treatment. Lewis demonstrated his characteristic concern for others, often asking about his visitors' welfare, even while combating his own illness.

The chapter offers an intimate look at Lewis's struggle against cancer, illuminated by emotional moments, his continuing commitment to activism, and gestures of friendship from notable figures. Focused on his legacy and the importance of nonviolence, Lewis remained hopeful but realistic about the challenges ahead, underscoring his lifetime fight for justice and equality?1?.