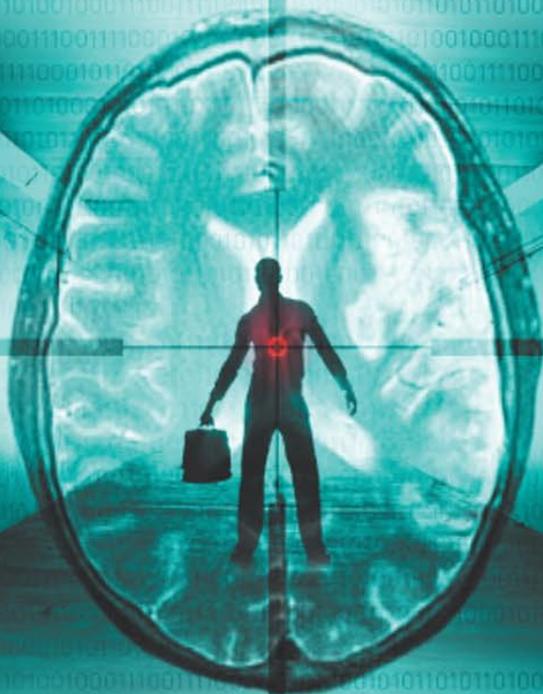


THE FIRST OF THE JONATHAN SAVAGE TRILOGY

WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT TO DIE,  
HOW FAR DO YOU RUN?



# FINAL DIAGNOSIS

PAUL V. WALTERS

# Final Diagnosis

A Novel

by

Paul V. Walters



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## About Author

**P**aul V. Walters spent most of his career as an advertising copywriter and creative director. During that time he worked on some of the world's leading brands working for well known multi-nationals in several countries. After running his own successful agency for many years he decided to pursue writing full time.

*Final Diagnosis* is his first novel and the first in the Savage trilogy. *Blowback*, the second is now in wide release.

2012 will see the release of the third and final instalment as well as an anthology of short stories entitled *Looking For Lionel*.

Having lived in several countries Walters now divides his time between his home on the Gold Coast and Bali in Indonesia.



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This is purely a work of fiction. Quite simply I made it up. Any resemblance to people living or deceased is co-incidental.



*For Elisabeth, Hannah, and Hope.*

*There But For the Grace of You Go I*



## Final Diagnosis



## Chapter 1

# New York—November

Jonathan Savage sat in the rear of the limousine furiously typing continuous emails into his Blackberry. His concentration was intense—reflected in his furrowed brow, focussed and intent on his task.

Outside of the closeted environment, the sky above Manhattan hung like dull, grey steel, hovering low and threatening above the monolithic skyscrapers; snow was in the air.

Pedestrians, heads down, hurried through intersections, huddled against the biting, unforgiving wind that whipped around the corners of buildings at street level. He noticed nothing of this as he tapped in another rapid-fire message to one of his team.

Savage was chairman and chief executive officer of Trident Communications, one of the fastest growing technology companies in the world, with offices in thirty-seven countries, and a worldwide workforce of over sixty-thousand. Over the previous two years, the company had introduced some of the most technologically advanced software programs ever seen; and tomorrow the executive team would assemble to plan the launch of the Triphone, a device that would effectively make the computer obsolete.

Savage was irritated therefore by having to spend time away from the office to see his physician. The call had been insistent; they requested that he come down today to discuss the results of

the medical exam he had undergone two weeks prior. The board was rigid in these matters; all senior members of the staff had to submit to an intense medical exam each year. Savage referred to it as making sure the drones were healthy so that the investors continued to receive their dividends.

He was not feeling particularly concerned; he felt in perfect health and was probably fitter now than when he was in college. He had a rigorous routine when it came to exercise; he spent two and a half hours a day working out even when he was traveling. He was 6 ft 3 in, weighed a trim 190 lbs, and looked like a man in charge of every facet of his life. He had straight, sandy-coloured hair, combed straight back, which was greying slightly at the temples; he had intense blue eyes, sharp facial features with high cheekbones, and a strong chin. At forty-seven, he looked the picture of health, which was why this trip downtown was irritating. Apart from the frequent headaches, which he put down to tension, he had never felt better.

The window between the front and back seat glided down, and a voice from the driver said, "Two minutes, Mr Savage; I'll drop you off in front of the building, and when you're finished, just let me know. I'll be in the same spot to pick you up."

"Thanks, Harvey," said Savage, hardly glancing up from the Blackberry.

The car pulled up next to the kerb in front of a towering glass and chrome building on 47<sup>th</sup> Street, and he stepped out, wrapping his overcoat around him, and strode purposefully towards the foyer.

Taking the elevator to the 52<sup>nd</sup> floor, he looked at his fellow passengers and wondered about their lives. Get up each morning, arrive at work, spend eight hours in a cubicle, and then go home; it seemed wrong somehow. Once the commercial world had embraced the concept of the Triphone, most of these people could quite easily accomplish their tasks from home without ever having to come into the office.

The elevator pinged, and an electronic voice from the overhead speaker said, "52nd floor."

His musings disappeared as he stepped out of the elevator and headed down to the suite of offices of doctors Katz, Rubenstein, and Partners. The foyer was sumptuously furnished with faux fifteenth-century Louis XV chairs and couches lining the walls. A raven headed beauty sat at the receptionist's desk whose smile revealed perfect teeth.

"Mr Savage, so nice to see you again. Dr Katz is expecting you; please take a seat."

He eased himself into one of the chairs rather gingerly, afraid that it might not take his weight, and picked up one of the glossy magazines that sat on the delicate coffee table. Forbes, Business Week, and The Robb Report—all of the magazines had a business slant to them, and it was obvious from the décor that Messrs. Katz and Rubenstein had some very wealthy clientele. He idly flicked through the magazine, not really seeing anything, and noted his irritation was growing; time was wasting away.

The door to Dr Katz's office opened and a stunning blonde-haired woman emerged, dressed in an impeccably cut suit; she walked to the receptionist and glanced surreptitiously at him; for a brief second their eyes locked, she smiled slightly and her eyebrows arched. Savage was used to this type of attention from women, and he quickly looked away, avoiding the icy stare given to him for avoiding her charms. She swept out of the office just as the receptionist called across to him, "Dr Katz will see you now."

He eased himself out of the delicate chair and made his way into the rooms of the eminent Reuben Katz, one of New York's finest physicians, so he had been told. Strangely the consulting suite itself did not resemble the foyer; so perhaps it was Dr Rubenstein who had a penchant for antique French furniture. The office commanded stunning views of the Hudson River; and, apart from a glass-topped desk, two visitors' chairs, and a patient table in the corner, it was rather austere. This was offset, by a gallery of framed degrees and diplomas from prestigious institutions, arranged 'just so' on the pastel wall. It seemed his

whole life was displayed from floor to ceiling, as if to reassure his patients that they were in safe hands.

The man himself emerged from a small room off to the side, drying his hands on a monogrammed towel that Savage thought a touch ostentatious, removing the detritus of the last patient from his skin. “How are we today?” he asked with a smile, shrugging into his jacket and taking a seat behind his desk.

“Well, I’m much the same as when I saw you a couple of weeks ago, and how is your health?” said Johnathan, making no attempt to hide his sarcasm. “Well, I’m here, so let’s get on with it. I have a busy day ahead of me.”

“How are the headaches?” asked the doctor, leaning back in his chair and gazing intently at him. Still the same, or have they got any worse?”

Savage looked across at him before he answered. Like any answer he gave, he thought before he spoke. “Just at night; they seem to be more intense after a hard day, nothing I can’t handle, and the pills you gave me certainly help.”

“Nothing else—trembling of the hands, blurred vision, change of mood?” asked Katz, scribbling notes onto a pad while he spoke.

“No, nothing that I’ve noticed. Why? Is there something wrong with me, something I should know about?” Immediately he felt a quiet unease creeping into his gut and knew that this wasn’t just a routine follow-up to his medical check-up.

“Are you still taking the anti-depressants?” Katz asked. “I note here from your file that we dramatically decreased the dosage a couple of months ago.”

Savage thought for a moment and answered, “I only take 50mg each morning, and I’ve been wondering lately as to whether even that’s too much. I’m slowly coming to grips with being alone, and my work keeps me focussed.”

Katz leaned back in his chair, placed his hands in front of him with fingertips touching as if in prayer, and said, “There’s no easy way to say this, Jonathan, but we found something on your MRI. At first we thought that it couldn’t be right, but we’ve checked and double checked, but it’s still there. How we missed

it at your previous medical check-up is beyond me, but sometimes these things take time to emerge.”

“What things?” said Savage; and even he could hear the anxiousness in his voice.

Dr Katz stood and walked to the far wall where a large flat screen television was mounted, picked up a remote control, and pressed a button. The screen came to life, and there was a brain in three-dimensional colour, which the doctor could rotate with the remote. Even in his anxious state, Savage was pleased to see that the system the doctor was using had been developed by Trident’s medical division. The image on the screen rotated and up-ended so that the brain was upside down, showing the brain stem at the top. Savage walked to where Katz was standing and gazed intently at the screen.

“I take it that is my brain we are looking at?” he asked.

“It is,” answered Katz. “This is the image we captured at your medical check-up last year; and clearly there are no abnormalities.”

“Well, I’m not a doctor; so if there were, I wouldn’t notice,” said Savage with a trace of irritation.

Katz continued without hesitation “Above the brain stem is the medulla oblongata, which joins the cerebellum and is the most important part of the brain—controlling all cognitive thought and movement. It’s the engine room if you like.” He demonstrated this by using a small pointer, and as he touched the screen, the areas indicated lit up.

The clarity of the image on the screen was undeniably impressive and Savage made a mental note to again congratulate his research team.

Katz operated the remote again and the screen split showing two identical images. He aligned them so that they sat side by side.

“The image on the right is the MRI we did two weeks ago,” It didn’t take a doctor to see that in the area above the brain stem a spider like black spot had curled itself around the very top of the stem itself.

“What the fuck is it ?” said Savage pointing to the spot.

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“As I said, I’m amazed that we didn’t pick this up even last year as the growth is phenomenal. What you are looking at is a brain stem glioma; or to put it in laymen’s terms, a severe brain tumour.” Katz delivered this last sentence with clinical authority.

## Chapter 2

# New York—November

Jonathan emerged from the front of the building to see Harvey standing beside the limousine, holding the door open. He crossed the sidewalk and spoke quietly to him. “You know what, Harvey, I think I’ll walk back to the office. On second thoughts, when you get back, tell Sylvia to cancel all my appointments for the rest of the day; tell her that I’ll be back at the office in the morning.”

“Are you alright, Mr Savage?” asked Harvey, looking a little concerned.

“I’m fine,” said Savage a little too brusquely, “I just need a little time on my own, thinking time if you like; I’ll take the route through the park to the apartment. The cold air will clear the cobwebs.”

“Why don’t I drive you to the park, and you can walk from there?” said Harvey, as always trying to be helpful. “Thanks Harvey, I’m fine I just need the fresh air.”

“Then at least take an umbrella,” he said, reaching into the front seat and handing him an umbrella of classic elegance, a long handled polished Louis Vuitton piece. He recognised it as one of Hannah’s; as always, she was watching over him, keeping him out of harm’s way. “Thank you, Harvey. I’ll see you in the morning at the usual time; and don’t worry, I am capable of walking, you know.”

He turned and walked towards the park through the abnormally busy pedestrian traffic that crowded around him. His head was reeling. He needed this time to go over the last hour, which had effectively altered the rest of his life.

The cold was biting and he wrapped his scarf around his neck and buttoned the overcoat up to ward off the wind that cut like a knife. He stopped at one of the street sellers at the entrance to the park and bought a cheap baseball cap, as even his head felt frozen. He loved the park at this time of the year, the trees bald and asleep for the winter. Hannah and he had taken long walks in January when the snow and ice lay thick on the ground. It was as if the cold and the ice gave them energy; they would force themselves to walk for at least two hours through the rambles before returning to the warmth and security of the apartment.

He walked slowly around the lake, running through the conversation with Dr Katz, again and again. A brain tumour! It couldn't be, even though all the evidence pointed to that fact. He felt healthy, fit even. How cruel could life be? He was just getting back on his feet after the tragedy, and now this! The tumour had, by all accounts grown at a phenomenal rate, and this is what was causing the headaches.

Slumped in the chair Jonathan had asked the inevitable question, after being told that the tumour was inoperable. Katz was a little hesitant to put a time limit on it, but when pushed, answered: "a year at most. For the next six maybe eight months life will not change too much; but after that, given the aggressive nature of the condition, you will begin to feel the full effects."

"What effects would those be?" asked Jonathan. "I really do need to know."

"As far as we can tell the first thing to go will be the eyesight, then generally muscle degeneration; and it's pretty much downhill from there. However, given your current health and fitness level, it might take longer than that."

"How much longer?" he asked.

"No more than a couple of months," the doctor replied. "We have a variety of drugs that will help, but I'll go over those the next time we meet. I'm so sorry, Jonathan. After what you have

been through, it hardly seems fair that this should be happening to you.”

He paused in his walk and sat a while on one of the benches, watching the other park users stroll by, knowing that they had their problems as well; but he knew, at that moment, he would willingly swap theirs with his.

Suddenly he was angry, incredibly angry. After Hannah and Sophie’s deaths, he had thrown his entire life into Trident. The result was the company had grown exponentially: the successful IPO sixteen months ago, the breakthrough in the nanotechnology sector, and the new products. These were projects they had been working on for years and now he would be removed from it all.

He stood and resumed walking, heading up to central Park West towards the apartment. He wasn’t really seeing anything, just visions of what he had to do. ‘Putting his house in order’ was, he believed, the correct expression.

As an only child, he was alone. He had never been that close to Hannah’s side of the family; and anyway, they lived on a ranch in Montana. Friends? Well, Trident had become his best friend, although Peter Brown, the flippant Australian and his second in command, was close to being a friend, even though their bond was work. Sylvia his ever-faithful personal assistant was again a close companion, but outside of work hours he rarely saw her. So technically, he was alone.

How ironic, here he was in the prime of his life, having built a hugely successful company, immensely wealthy; and suddenly in the space of two years he had lost his wife and daughter, and now he was dying with just a year to live.

He reached John Lennon’s Strawberry Field memorial and exited the park, crossing the street to his apartment. Albert, the doorman, greeted him in his normal cheery manner. “Cold enough for you, Mr Savage? The painters have been and gone from the apartment, so you shouldn’t be disturbed.”

“Hello, Albert, thank you,” he said, and for some reason slipped him a one hundred dollar bill. “Why, thank you, sir,” he said, pressing the button for the elevator.

Jonathan leaned against the mahogany-panelled walls, absently watching the numbers tick over before his floor was reached.

The doors opened onto the foyer of the apartment, and he was about to go through the daily ritual that he had with Maria, his housekeeper, when he changed his routine. A small table sat beneath the Matisse painting that he and Hannah had bought at an auction a few years ago. On it was a photograph in an ornate silver frame showing Hannah, Sophie, and him, sitting next to a waterfall in Vanuatu. All three of them looked so incredibly happy—content with life and each other. Each day on his return from the office, he would pick up the picture and place it in the drawer. Every morning, without fail, Maria would replace it on the table, telling him from time to time that he had to have some presence of their having been here. Poor Maria, she had been with them for over ten years. She had adored Sophie, treating her almost as if she were her own, and the feeling had been mutual. After they were gone, it was he and his housekeeper who had spent the evenings mourning their passing, each giving comfort to the other. He picked up the photograph and looked at it for a few minutes before placing it back in its usual place on the table.

He entered the apartment proper and heard Maria bustling around in the kitchen. She emerged, wiping her hands on a dish towel; she was a large dark, curly-headed Mexican woman in her mid-fifties, with eyes that twinkled like stars on a moonless night.

“Mr Jonathan, you home early today, what’s the matter?”

“Hi, Maria,” he said, picking up the mail from the hall table. “Nothing’s the matter; I just felt I needed an early night.”

“Harvey told me that you walked home tonight. It’s cold out there; you will catch your death in this weather.” Jonathan gave her a wry smile and was grateful for the concern.

“I’ll be fine, Maria, I just needed some air.”

“I fix you some soup,” she said, and bustled off to the kitchen.”

He gazed around the vast living area and thought once again how absurd it was that all of this space was for one person.

Every aspect of the fittings and furnishings had been overseen by Hannah's incredibly creative eye: the tasteful furniture, the long, elegant drapes, and the grand piano, which sat in the corner silent now for two years. He walked into his floor to ceiling book-lined study, sat on the couch, and turned on his Blackberry. There was the usual assortment of messages, along with concerned texts from some of his more senior staff. Had he relapsed, they must be thinking, gone 'walkabout' as Peter would have put it in his typical Aussie interpretation of events.

He tapped out a quick message to Sylvia to ask that Harvey collect him at the usual time of 7:00 a.m. He then turned the machine off and sat back, resting his head on the deep soft cushions. Maria came bustling in with a bowl of soup and a glass of red wine, arranged perfectly on a tray made as if this were fine dining.

"Here you are, Mr Jonathan. This will keep the cold away, and you look tired; so eat this, and I think you go straight away to bed, no working into the night."

Jonathan gave her a smile. "Thank you, Maria, you are as always too kind. Why don't you take the rest of the evening off, I'll be just fine here."

She gazed at him with big brown eyes, and tut tutting turned and left the room, calling over her shoulder as she went, "Make sure you eat all of that, and remember, tonight no working; a man cannot just live for working."

He looked at the dish and decided that he had no appetite; so he took the wine glass, walked to the tall sash windows, and looked over the darkened park. He caught sight of his own reflection in the glass and felt that he had aged years in just a few hours. Perhaps he had; in reality, the last two years had been lonely and painful. He felt so terribly alone, desperately alone, and he began to harbour thoughts that dying might not be too bad after all.

He had never recovered from that terrible day when Sylvia had entered his office, ashen faced, to break the news that the plane Hannah and Sophie were on had disappeared somewhere over the Caribbean—the flight he should have been on with

them, heading off on that long overdue holiday. His wife and seven-year-old daughter had taken the Trident Jet to one of their favourite hideaways. At the last minute he had changed his plans due to ‘a crisis in the office,’ promising faithfully that he would fly down within the next forty-eight hours to meet them. The plane had apparently developed problems at 35,000 feet and de-pressurised, killing all those on board instantly. As if that made a difference! The plane had flown on until it was out of fuel and fell to the earth somewhere over the Dominican Republic.

The recovery process and the funeral were a blur. Although he received tremendous support from colleagues and competitors alike, he simply shut down and slipped out of New York one night, and ‘disappeared’ for almost three months. Numb and broken he travelled aimlessly through India, Nepal, and South East Asia, and he began to drink incessantly.

It was Peter Brown, who found him incoherent in a seedy bar in Bangkok; he got him cleaned up, and eventually after a few days, back to New York. Everyone went out of their way to help, but he remained cloistered within himself, emerging only to immerse himself in his work, as if this were the narcotic needed to ease the pain.

Ideas for new products and services began to pour out of him; his team was hard pressed to keep up with his rivers of ideas and impatience, when they didn’t deliver on his almost impossible deadlines. The ideas were revolutionary, and he would never be told that, ‘it couldn’t be done.’ To those who uttered those words his icy reply would always be, “perhaps you should try working at another mediocre firm, turning out mediocre products.”

He became isolated, alone with his grief and anger at having something so precious stolen from him. He rarely socialised, and inevitably the circle of friends that they had had together dwindled and finally disappeared altogether after each invitation to come to dinner or a show was rejected.

Now, he had to face his own demise, his march towards death; except that his would be slow and lingering, rather than having his life snuffed out in an instant. From here on, he would

take a tortuous journey towards the final curtain, and in what state he couldn't even imagine.

A year, at best just a year, only 365 days and it would be all over! It wasn't fair to know how long one would have before death arrived, and in what guise he couldn't imagine. How would he fill his days? Would work sustain him? Did he need to gain some sort of immortality so that he would be remembered for his accomplishments?

As always, when the odds were stacked against him, he would take a blank piece of paper and write out a meticulous plan to deal with the crisis at hand. Once done, he would stick religiously to the path he had set himself, believing always in himself, whatever the outcome.

He watched his reflection in the glass and thought that this was no different. A plan had to be made, thousands of loose ends tied up, a succession plan put in place and, most importantly, how he was to spend the next 365 days of his life. He walked to his desk, took out a piece of crisp white paper, and began to write.

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