

Chapter 4

Practice Round – Day Five

*All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy.
No man does. That's his.
~Oscar Wilde*

THURSDAY

Inside the hospital, it's cool, the air laced with acrid smells of medical chemicals and cleaning fluids. Someone always seems to be mopping a floor. Food carts squeak as they are pushed down the halls, and people on their way to rooms make noise, but I focus all my attention on the soft sound of my mother's breath as she sleeps. The change to Mom's arms since yesterday is a shock. The mottled bruises have spread and congealed into the appearance of midnight-blue or eggplant-purple opera gloves that span the length of her arms.

Outside it's a warm July afternoon and life goes on. People stroll the blocks of Westwood Village, innocent of the dramas and traumas that go on inside this hospital. Those lucky people walk the streets of my youth and happy memories. I've loved Westwood Village my whole life. When we were young, Mom and I would wander those same streets, look into windows, sometimes go inside and buy something, and always stop for lunch. In my twenties and early thirties, I'd come to Westwood to attend classes at UCLA, visit my therapist, go to The Bruin or Village to catch a movie, shop at Bullocks, or meet friends at Café Moustache, where I'd always eat a spinach crepe and chocolate soufflé.

But today there are no strolls, shopping, lunches, movies, classes, or therapy. Today I'm inside this hospital, a place where nothing seems to happen while the most profound aspects of life occur at every moment.

I've been at Mom's side since 10:00 this morning, both of us in loud silence not talking about the procedure scheduled for 4:00 p.m.

When it's time, two young men—one with curly, dark brown hair and a beard, the other a clean-shaven, shaggy-haired blond—wrap a white sheet around Mom and lift her out of the bed with as little effort as it would take to elevate a feather. Their movements are slow and meticulous. With gentle care they place Mom on the slender, stiff gurney. I study their every move from my vantage point on the opposite side of the bed as though my attention will assure they won't drop her. Mom seems teeny, small as a child.

This is a seismic shift in our relationship. Me, the adult; her, the child.