



Somehow, it's afternoon. I don't need that big clock to tell me that. I try to take a walk at this time, no matter how much everything hurts. That's how things get worked out. Stepping out of my room with my wheeler, passing door after door, steadier with each step, I know I'll be fine. Walking was how I survived after William Sr. passed so young. And

walking is how I'll pass my time here, until I go back home. Making my way to the reception area, I notice the decorations on the center table of the atrium shining under the lights. Not so bad after all. The receptionist looks up over her glasses.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Sharp. Where are you going?"

"For a walk." *That's all she needs to know.*

A quick smile, "Just sign here if you are headed out." She looks back down at her papers.

"That won't be necessary. I'm just going out for a stroll."

"I'm afraid everyone needs to sign in and out."

"Well, I'm not everyone." I move towards the doors.

Suddenly she shouts, "Excuse me!"

I ignore her. The air outside is cold, and I realize I've forgotten my coat. Too much effort to go back. I'll just take a short loop around the parking lot. I push my wheeler forward. *Oooh, that wind. And so many cars. Could William still be here?* Then I see it. A red car with a square trunk close to the ground that looks familiar. And there's a dent and a scratch along the side! Agnes has come to visit! She can take me home! In her warm car, which I can see is running. I plow through the slush, eager to see my friend.

Agnes must have come for New Year's, and I'll bet she brought the good champagne, not the fake stuff. We've always celebrated New Year's together, ever since William Sr. died. She goes to Gulliver's Wines to get the Veuve Clicquot, named after a French widow, only four sips with our chocolates—solid milk chocolate, not with the cream or the liqueurs that make me silly.

Knocking on her car window, my hands cold, she doesn't seem to hear me. No surprise. Those ears of hers. I knock harder. "Agnes!" I say her name loudly, a few times. The window rolls down.

A rounded nose, soft, saggy cheeks. Agnes can't sit still long enough to let an ounce of fat stay on her, and this one has extra around her several chins. My stomach drops. Speechless, I stare. It's not Agnes.

"Are you lost?" Not Agnes asks. "Should I call someone to help you?"

Cold on my face, my feet and fingers numb, the sea of cars making me dizzy. This is not my walk. Where are my landmarks... the red brick ranch house, the little bridge over the brook? What's happening? I'm lost!

Not Agnes starts to get out of her car. Then I see the glass doors of the entrance to the stone building—that place—and arms in a green uniform waving, dancing, yelling. “Ms. Edith, you're going in circles! The receptionist called me. You're gonna catch cold!” *I recognize that voice.*

My green angel seems to float across the parking lot, and, relieved, I take his arm. We carefully push my wheels through the slush. Reaching the sidewalk, I pull the edges of my shirt collar closer together. “You know,” I say, taking a few deep breaths and loosening my grip on the handles, “I can walk blindfolded on the sidewalk along the brook. I know every crack.”

“I'm not surprised to hear that, Ms. Edith. But it's real slippery out here.”

I look down at the frozen ground. “I know how to walk when there's ice. Never step on the shine. But I'm sorry to go so slowly—you understand, don't you?”

“I do, but neither one of us has a coat.” He shivers. “Let's get us both inside.”

“You know... I think that lady stole Agnes's car.”

“That old thing? Not worth stealing.”

Inside, the building is warm. A break from the cold. Passing a few poor souls sitting in wheelchairs, we walk slowly, but not slowly enough, down the long hallway, approaching my room, my bed. Exhausted, my hip aches and I use my trick of stopping to admire one of the paintings on the wall. But unlike William, Raffee doesn't shift his feet. He seems to have all the time in the world for me.

Finally, I lay my tired bones down on this bed, to sleep.

