



# Chapter 28

Bởi:  
unknown

It had been thirty years since we'd planted The Healing Tree in the garden. Now I was coming back for what I knew would be my last visit. Robbie picked me up at the care center. He'd pushed my wheelchair slowly through the hospital corridors, solicitous of the memories – painful and beautiful – that inhabited this place of healing, which for a deeply-etched fragment of time had been my home.

We paused for a long time at the hallway leading back into the oncology unit. Even after all these years, they'd maintained the display featuring some of Maggie's best poems, the Maggie-grams that had touched so many lives in the course of her own too-short life. I smiled at the picture of my little mermaid's impish face with the dazzling green eyes and the wild red hair that only I knew was the only thing about her that wasn't real.

A young hospital volunteer in a blue polo shirt held the door open for us. It was a lovely September day, and a faintly exotic breeze drifted across the garden, inspiring the wind chimes to make their music. The Healing Tree – which had been no more than ten inches high when Maggie first brought her into my room – now towered over the rest of the garden. Robbie pushed my wheelchair up to the brick-lined border and I heard the long-familiar click of the wheels being locked. We sat in silence, Robbie's hands resting on my shoulders.

Something was moving under the tree, something vague and fuzzy. *These old eyes are playing tricks on me.* I shut my eyes and felt the breeze play across my face and sing softly in my ears. It was a familiar song, long unheard but never forgotten. *An angel in the window, a mermaid on a moonbeam.* When I opened my eyes again, the image under the tree had become more distinct. There was a little girl on a swing. Her long red hair flowed wild in the wind, her emerald eyes twinkled.

The girl in the swing looked back over her shoulder at the man pushing her. A man I had not seen in over thirty years. The only man I had ever loved.

They were waiting for me.

I put my hands on the arms of the wheelchair and slowly pushed myself up. Like an old sailor standing on dry land after a long voyage, it took me a while to regain my balance.

I rocked back and forth a few times, then took a tentative first step. Then another. Mark and Maggie encouraged me on. A few more steps.

I looked back over my shoulder one last time. Robbie was still standing there, his hands on the shoulders of the lady who had once been broken. I smiled and waved, though I knew I'd stepped into a world that my son could not yet see. Then, hand-in-hand with the man I'd always loved and the daughter I'd always longed for, I walked into forever.