



Chapter 6

Bởi:

unknown

My son is a genius. While I was sleeping off the world's most gargantuan hangover, Robbie had gone through old scrapbooks, shoeboxes full of unsorted photos, and hundreds of videos, put it all together in a *Greatest Hits of Mark and Carrie Anne Murphy* movie, then loaded it onto a laptop computer for me. Mark and Carrie Anne hauling their backpacks through the Rockies; Mark and Carrie Anne picnicking under giant redwood trees; Mark and Carrie Anne cruising along the vibrant reefs of Cozumel. Mark and Carrie Anne carrying on for the little man who was always behind the camera. Mark and Carrie Anne doing the things together that Carrie Anne would never be able to do alone.

I'd been watching the movie all morning, sitting in bed with the laptop floating weightlessly on my thighs. It's funny how things that seem insignificant at the time later emerge as magnitudinous markers of an impending change perhaps known to God but as-yet unseen by those of us on earth. In the last vignette of Robbie's montage, I was videotaping Mark and Robbie as they strapped on their bicycle helmets, something they had done every Saturday morning for years. In the background were the three new bikes Mark bought after he'd gotten a raise – five weeks before the accident. The end was coming soon, I knew. Two of the bikes had already been sent to the Goodwill. From this point on, our movie would be filled only with partings, funerals, and sorrow.

There was a soft knock on the door. “Can I come in?” It was Maggie.

I turned off the computer and folded down the top. “Sure, Maggie. Are you out making your poetry rounds?”

Maggie took a tentative step into the room. “Sort of. Actually, it's not just me.” She looked back out into the hallway and waved for whoever was out there to come in. “This goes against the wall, under the clock,” she said, pointing to the space opposite the foot of my bed. Two men wearing uniforms of the hospital maintenance department came in pushing a 40-gallon aquarium that was mounted on some sort of stand with wheels. While one of them polished the glass, the other fiddled around with the plugs and filters. In no time it was bubbling a happy song.

“Perfect,” Maggie exclaimed as she admired the aquarium. It *was* beautiful – a saltwater tank populated by creatures that God must have created while in her most jovial mood. Maggie peered into the tank, pointed at something floating inside and said, “that’s my favorite!” It was a petite plastic mermaid, blowing bubbles as she glided through her cozy little home under the indoor sea.

“Okay,” said Maggie, putting her hands on her hips, “that takes care of the ocean. Now, the mountain goes over here.” She removed the towels and the blue plastic water pitcher from my bedside table. The two maintenance guys went back out into the corridor, and returned pushing a utility cart.

The cart carried a wooden board that had been painted green, and apparently cut to be just the right size to fit atop my bedside table. There was a miniature papier-mâché mountain standing at one corner. A little blue stream had been painted coming down from the mountain and flowing across the painted board. A minuscule gravel path, complete with tiny cairns to mark the trail, traversed the green field toward the mountain. And in the middle of it all, dwarfing everything by its relative size, was a tree. A real live tree. The tiniest sycamore tree I’d ever seen.

“Why, Maggie, this is beautiful. Thank you.”

Maggie beamed. “I figured if Carrie Anne can’t go to the mountains or to the ocean, then we should bring the mountains and the ocean to Carrie Anne.”

“And the forests, too,” I replied. “This is the cutest little bonsai tree I’ve ever seen.”

“Yep, and it’s a very special bonsai tree. This is The Healing Tree. It’s full of magic healing powers.” Maggie bent over and looked closely at The Healing Tree, then took a deep breath, as if simply sharing its air would make her well.

“She is a beautiful tree, Maggie, but I’m afraid there’s no magic in the world that’s going to heal what’s wrong with me.” I noticed that the guys from maintenance had slipped out of the room, and instantly felt guilty for not having thanked them for bringing me the oceans and the mountains, and The Healing Tree, before they left.

Maggie let down the bedrail and sat on the side of my bed. “I’m really sorry that all this has happened, Carrie Anne. But don’t lose hope. Miracles do happen, you know. Maybe The Healing Tree’s magic really will help.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry too. We’re all sorry, aren’t we?” The darkness was closing round again. “You know, Maggie, I’m sick to death of hearing that word sorry. Aren’t you? Don’t you get tired of people looking at you with pity in their eyes? I know I do.”

Maggie scrunched her face like a child who'd just been given her first taste of kiwi fruit and was trying to decide if it was delicious or atrocious. Then she said, "Where there is beauty, there must also be pity, for the very reason that beauty must die. Vladimir Nabokov said that. So every time somebody looks at me with pity, I just assume they're really trying to tell me that I'm beautiful, and I thank them! Try it – it will give you a whole new perspective."

"Well, there's a connection missing somewhere, Maggie, because for all the self-pity I have, I sure don't feel beautiful."

Maggie leaned over and kissed me on the forehead. "Don't think of beautiful as an adjective. Think of it as a noun. Beautiful is not what you look like, it's who you are. Real beauty is what's reflected from the inside looking out, not what's seen from the outside looking in."

In my dreams after Maggie had left, I sat on a swing suspended from a branch of The Healing Tree. Mark and Robbie waved to me from the top of the mountain at the end of the trail. My wheelchair was parked by the edge of the stream, where it made a fine perch for the birds and butterflies. And I was beautiful.