

Emily Main pushed a thick plait of her long auburn hair off her face and groped around on her nightstand for her phone. “Mom? What time is it?”

“It’s six fifteen. Did I wake you?”

“It’s fine. I get up at six thirty to take Garth out to do his business.” Emily sat up and threw her legs over the side of the bed. “What’s up? Are we still on for today?”

“That’s just it. We’ll have to change our plans.”

Emily’s heart sank. She’d been so busy with work these past months that most of her things in the studio apartment were still in boxes. Martha was supposed to come into the city to help her organize—they’d planned to make a weekend of it. More than Martha’s organizing prowess, Emily craved the comfort of her mother’s presence.

Unwanted tears stung her eyes. The months she’d spent in her new studio apartment hadn’t been an unmitigated success. She hadn’t slept well, waking to every new floorboard squeak or rattling pipe in the old building. She’d bashed her shins countless times on unopened boxes and fumbled to find items that hadn’t, as of yet, been assigned to their permanent homes.

Emily knew, in her mind, that all of these things would get sorted out in time. In her heart, however, she just wanted her mother.

Garth picked up his head and looked at Emily. “What’s ...” Emily took a deep breath to steady her voice. “Why?”

“Do you remember me telling you that Irene’s been having pain in her hips?”

“She’s been complaining of that for as long as she’s lived next door to you.” Emily didn’t intend her words to sound as sharp as they did.

“I’ve been telling her she needed to see her doctor about it. Anyway, she fell last night when she was getting ready for bed. Zoe heard her and came over to get me.”

“That’s awful.” Emily pictured how scared nine-year-old Zoe must have been. “What did you do?”

“I tried to help her up, but we couldn’t budge her—she was in too much pain. I called the paramedics, and they took her to the hospital.”

“I’m so sorry for Irene—and Zoe. Have you heard any more?”

Garth got out of bed and came to Emily’s side, resting his muzzle on her knee. She brought her hand to the top of his head and rubbed behind his ears.

“Irene just called. She’s broken her hip, and they’re going to do surgery tomorrow to replace it.”

“I’m sorry she has to go through this, but I’ll bet she’ll feel much better with a new hip.”

“That’s what I think. Anyway, I’ve got Zoe and her miniature schnauzer—you remember Sabrina—staying with me while Irene’s in the hospital.”

“I figured as much.”

“That’s why I can’t come down to San Francisco. I’m sorry, Em. I was looking forward to spending the whole weekend together.”

“I was looking forward to spending time with you, too, Mom.” Emily controlled the quiver in her voice. “We’ll do it as soon as Zoe can go back home to Irene. I’m perfectly capable of organizing my apartment on my own,” she said, not feeling the conviction she spoke with.

“You know how much I love doing that.”

“It’s one of your core strengths, that’s for sure. You can help me fine-tune things when you do come.” Emily searched with her toes for her slippers and slid her feet into them. “How’s Zoe doing with all of this? After losing her parents in that car accident several years ago, I know she’s extremely attached to her grandmother.”

“She was petrified last night, but the emergency room doctor that updated us on Irene’s condition did a fantastic job of explaining things to Zoe over the phone and reassuring her that Irene should make a full recovery.”

“That’s a relief. I hate to think of Zoe suffering any more loss.”

“Thank goodness she has that miniature schnauzer. She took Sabrina out as soon as she got off the phone, and then they both went to bed. They’re still asleep.”

“What do you have planned today? Will you go to the hospital?”

“Irene thinks it’ll be better if Zoe doesn’t see her until Monday after she’s had her surgery. I thought we could go to the store to buy craft supplies and make a nice card for Irene. Maybe go to a movie.” Martha sighed. “Any suggestions?”

“Well ... why don’t the two of you come into the city today? Are you too tired to drive in?”

“No. Not at all.”

“You could both help me get settled. I’m not trying to inconvenience you—I can handle it all myself—but Zoe is endlessly interested in the adaptations I have to make. I think she’ll have fun, and it’ll take her mind off of her grandmother.”

“You know what? You’re exactly right. That’s a great idea.”

“You’ll have to leave Sabrina at home. This apartment is small, and I don’t know how she and Garth would do, being cooped up together.”

“Of course. She’ll be fine.” Martha was silent for a beat. “Em—what would you think about Zoe spending the weekend with you? She’d jump at the chance. Is that too much of an imposition?”

“Genius idea! I’d love it!”

Martha could hear the smile in Emily’s voice. “I’m going to let Zoe sleep in. I’ll text you when we’re on our way.”

“Perfect. I’ve got to take Garth out and feed him. Then I’ll pull myself together. No rush. I’m happy that I’ll get to spend time with my two favorite gals.”

“We’ll probably be there by mid-morning. I’ll stay until after lunch; then I’ll come back here to take care of Sabrina. I’ll drive in on Sunday afternoon to collect Zoe.”

“We’ll do Sunday night supper, the three of us.”

“You’re positive you don’t mind? It’s not too much trouble?”

Emily leaped to her feet and snatched her robe from the foot of the bed. “Positive.” She grasped the guide dog harness from its place on the chair next to the bed and slipped it effortlessly over Garth’s head. “See you soon. I need to take care of my best guy here.”

Martha chuckled. “Give him a belly rub for me.”