THE PANSY PARADOX

Something my mother always said: Beware of the brilliant blue sky.

But as I stand on the front porch, hand shielding my eyes, I detect nothing. The July air is heavy and sweet, full of summer and the promise of sweat, salt, and sunburn. Today is the first day I feel like myself again, or nearly so. The mask of grief that weighed down my thoughts and impaired my vision is lighter—more like gossamer than burlap. Three months. The time has both crawled forward and vanished in a flash.

I step inside and consider pulling my umbrella from the stand. She—as I think of her—is a pale, pale pink with a scattering of polka dots in all sizes, from dollar-size to tiny pinpricks. Also? She has ruffles. Yes, she looks like a frivolous thing. Oh, but don't underestimate her.

She is formidable.

But she is also leaning against my mother's umbrella, one of a deep rose red, an American beauty of a color. Their straps are intertwined, a mother and daughter clutching hands. To my right, the front room is empty now, but my mind's eye superimposes the hospital bed on the space. My ears anticipate the rhythmic, mechanical breath of the oxygen condenser.

I blink, cast my gaze back to the brilliant blue day outside my house. It's time I ventured downtown. I'm ready for that.

Even if my umbrella isn't.