

# NEAPOLITAN SKY



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*For Jillian*



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## PREFACE

**R**AIN IS FALLING softly outside Jefferson County Memorial Hospital. The windows which once clearly overlooked the crowded and well-landscaped courtyard have taken on a dull, foggy sheen, as small pocks of water cling tightly to the glass the way a cat's fur sticks to a worn cardigan sweater.

From my vantage point on the second floor, I can see puddles forming on the asphalt parking lot where thousands of tiny water droplets whisk their way across the hood of my car and down the driver's side door. Washing away any remnants of salt and road debris that's accumulated over the long winter months.

It's at that moment the strangest thought occurs to me:

I don't think I've been to the car wash since Mom died last summer.

When I arrived at the hospital this morning, the sun was peeking through the pale, cumulus clouds that lingered on the distant horizon. Now all I see is the dull mist rising above the brown, silhouetted trees far beyond the hospital grounds and into the celestial sphere of grey, pink and white. A harlequin of color that reminds me of childhood and my favorite

triple ice cream combination of chocolate, strawberry and vanilla.

The Neapolitan sky has taken on an ominous glow, and the moist air is heavy with the smell of earthy spring pollen. Swollen thunderheads slowly traverse the atmosphere in a west to east direction just above the pink horizon. Their shapes gently blending together as they move in unison like a whimsical river to some distant sea.

I find solace watching their journey.

The floor of Room 216 always reeks strongly of Lysol in the early morning hours from housekeeping's daily mopping, but by noon, the smell settles into a more palatable combination of alcohol and sterile bandage adhesive.

The three hundred square foot vinyl floor covering the room is decorated in a two-toned tiled pattern. One hundred twenty-three tan squares, each one foot by one foot, run the entire length of the room with an equal number of grey tiles alternating between them.

The remaining fifty-four tiles—my estimate—aren't visible because they're either hidden beneath the hospital bed, portable IV pumps and medical carts or the lumpy, blue-grey, vinyl recliner near the window where I spend most of my time staring out at the hazy courtyard while my father sleeps.

You may be asking what's the point in knowing the exact number of tiles in a hospital room, and my answer to you would be that there really is no reason at all. I know these things simply because I've counted the tiles to pass time whenever Dad was away getting a body scan, blood draw or x-ray. I counted them even while he was sleeping soundly for hours while I sat next to him in silence.

For me, there was nothing I could do during this time other

than wait. Wait for the next doctor visit. Wait for the next test result. Wait for the next IV bag to be changed. You get the idea.

In retrospect, I think if I had done something other than wait things might have been different.

Different for me and maybe, even different for Dad.