

Leaning against the wall outside of the hospice room, waiting for my heart to slow down and sync with the still of the moment, I wondered how time could seemingly pass with such high speed—like a movie in fast-forward—then suddenly switch, just like that, to slow motion.

“She’s ready. You can go in now,” the nurse said. Her voice was kind, and she spoke with a slight Japanese accent.

I turned and saw Nurse Misayo greeting me with a soft smile. Tiny in stature, with an ever-so-shallow bow, she welcomed me into the room, her open palm guiding me toward the bed where her patient lay.

“The ride from the hospital was difficult, and she seemed a bit agitated,” Nurse Misayo said in a lowered voice, “so I gave her some- thing to settle her. I hope you don’t mind.”

I managed to nod in thanks. My feet were heavy and immobile.

Nurse Misayo smiled. “Go to her. Tell her you’re here. She’ll want to hear your voice.”

I closed my eyes briefly and nodded again before the nurse left the room. Stepping toward the bed, toe-heel, toe-heel, I saw her lying there. Her breath was shallow but peaceful as if she were taking an afternoon nap under a crisp white sheet folded neatly over a loosely knit, white cotton blanket. Her arms, elbows slightly bent, rested gracefully at her side.

Her hands were relaxed and beautiful. Just a few days earlier, she had treated herself to a mani-pedi, choosing a rich, creamy, pinkish-salmon nail polish. The tips of her manicured hands contrasted with the white- ness that cradled her, reminding me of early blossoms of her beloved *sakura*<sup>2</sup> after a light spring snowfall. The fragrance of fresh linen filled me. Time, once moving so fast then slow, now seemed to suspend itself for her, floating above her—buoyant—weightless. My tears fell onto her crisp, white sheets.

I wrestled with thoughts in my head.

*It’s her time now. Your journey together will end soon, and she’ll need to let go. Must she?*

*She must.*

*But I need more time.*<sup>3</sup>