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500 WORDS

The Only Time My Mother Cried About Falling

What made my mother finally cry about ending up back in the hospital, she told me, was not the pain from the broken elbow and fractured pelvis she sustained when she fell, not the return to nursing care and institutional food, but a question from the aide she'd summoned so she could transfer from her bed to a chair.

"Which chair do you want to sit in?" the aide asked.

And that was it. "Oh, I don't know," my mother said. I pictured her face crumpling as her voice rose. "I just don't know."

"How could you not cry?" I said. This accident, in her kitchen while preparing lunch, was the second in less than six months that had landed her in the hospital. She'd already spent six weeks in a leg-length cast after breaking her knee, followed by several months of rehab and physical therapy. She'd graduated from a walker to a cane, and had recently been granted permission to walk unaided in the house.

So at first she blamed herself for falling again. But by the time she called to report that she was in the emergency room, she was over it, she said. "I was so mad at myself," she told me, and I imagined her there, sprawled on the floor, red slippers on her feet, a plate and some silverware beside her, unable to move. "But I'm done with that now."

By the time I arrived at the hospital a few days later, she was staunchly optimistic. "It's not so bad," she said, smoothing down the back of her rumpled gray hair, still uncut since before her first fall. Then turning toward the double window that filled one side of the room, she added, "I get to see the sunset, and last night I watched the moon cross the sky."

In my mother's room, in addition to the hospital bed and a Formica table, there are four chairs. One is a faded turquoise vinyl with a high back; two adorned with speckles look like they might have been salvaged from someone's used kitchen set. The other is an oversized orthopedic chair with all kinds of positioning controls. "She's lucky to have it," I was told by several nurses, but somehow, whenever my mother sits in it for a while, it seems to be trying to engulf her by gradually folding her in half.

There aren't too many decisions she has to make— whether to read her book or find something to watch on television; what to order from the dining room for each meal and when to make the call to tell them; and when she's ready to move from one location in the room to another. But that morning, the morning she cried, from her vantage in bed, the four chairs presented an insurmountable challenge. And for all her resolve, there, lined up against the wall, they broke her. "I've been stuck here for so long," she sobbed. "I just don't know."

Susan Hodara is a journalist, memoirist, editor and teacher. Her articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Harvard Magazine*, *Communication Arts*, and others. Her short memoirs are published in anthologies and literary journals including *The Living Room* (2011), *Venus Envy* (2010), *Evening Street Review*, Number 3 (2010), *Illness & Grace*, *Terror & Transformation* (2007), *The Westchester Review* (2008, 2007), *I Wanna Be Sedated: 30 Writers on Parenting Teenagers* (2005), *My Heart's First Steps* (2003), and *Surviving Ophelia* (2001). She is a co-author with three other women of *Still Here Thinking of You*, memoirs about mothers and daughters.

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