

25. May 19, 2021

On May 19, 2021, Barbara rushes to Kiner Memorial's oncology department after a call from Marie, expecting something routine yet urgent. The hospital lounge, with its comforting decor and ambient music, contrasts with the tension of those waiting. Barbara finds Marie, who explains that their mutual acquaintance, Olivia, has cancer but it's a slow-progressing type that she has lived with for years. This visit, however, is not solely for a check-up; Olivia has news for Barbara.

Olivia's condition, described with her usual wry humor as "ass-cancer," has been a long-term battle, monitored carefully by Dr. Brown. Despite its malignancy, the cancer crawls at a pace allowing Olivia to manage life almost as usual, with increasing doctor visits to monitor its growth. Barbara, a high school senior, momentarily puts aside her academic priorities, concerned and curious about the reason for Marie's call and Olivia's condition.

The discussion moves towards Barbara's life, her poetry, and an envelope Olivia presents to Barbara, which contains news of Barbara's inclusion in the Penley poetry shortlist - a significant achievement greeted with a mix of relief and emotional overwhelm by Barbara. This moment offers a brief respite from the grim atmosphere of the hospital, showcasing a blend of personal triumph amidst ongoing struggles.

After leaving the hospital, the drive back to Ridge Road is filled with a mix of nostalgia, as Olivia sings along to tunes from her past, and anticipation as Barbara processes her achievement. Despite Olivia's physical frailty highlighted by a slow, unsteady walk and her candid acknowledgment of her bodily functions, she maintains a sharp wit and a strong spirit.

The chapter closes with a touching yet comic moment in the foyer of their home, where Olivia, ever the matriarch with a blend of candor and humor, encourages Barbara to release her pent-up emotions in a scream, acknowledging both the weight of her medical condition and Barbara's recent success. This blend of life's ups and downs, captured on a seemingly ordinary day, frames the story's emotional landscape, highlighting resilience, relationships, and the complex interplay of human emotions in the face of adversity and achievement.