Sunrise

Betty had been sitting in a secluded nook of the hospital cafeteria for who-knows-how-long, trying to collect her thoughts about *him,* a few floors above. Was this the day he might slip away from her?

Foot traffic was picking up. She watched them come and go, like agitated goldfish, as all manner of employee hurried in to grab a quick snack or drink, to fortify themselves before clocking in to a morning shift.

She was shivering from the bite of late January outside. It had still been dark when she arrived. The little styrofoam cup of coffee didn't help her chill much. It and the two bites of muffin only made her stomach churn. No wonder. She really preferred plain hot tea, with no sugar. It was curious, Betty thought, how she could feel cold, yet detect perspiration creeping around underneath her clothes.

Betty was 49 years of age, a mother of two grown children and had a Master's Degree in psychology. She had never considered herself to be overly emotional. Was she too accomplished or too green, she wondered, lamenting this, the sunset on one life chapter and the beginning of another.

She had always liked hospitals. After all, they were places of help and healing. Betty's mother, now three years in remission, had survived colon cancer surgery and chemo. Her father finally succumbed after his second heart attack, but the doctors really tried! That odd little uplift was helpful right now.

Finally rising to her feet, Betty made her way toward the elevators, hyper-aware of her own footfall. She pressed the button for her destination and braced herself against the elevator wall, legs not quite as steady as she would have liked.

The doors slid open on the fourth floor. An unwelcome mixture of breakfast food smells hit her, creating a brief wave of nausea. Betty found a spot to hide her tote bag and stuff away her winter coat.

It was still quiet in the hallway. She could hear the soft, random whirs & clicks from the IV pumps, and the regular rhythm of a ventilator in operation, air rushing back and forth. Whoosh on the in breath, whoosh on the out breath.

Betty looked at her watch for the umpteenth time. 7:00am. She took a deep breath, managed a nervous smile and stepped into the room.

"Good morning Mr. Ramirez! I'm Betty. I'll be your student nurse again today."