

Prologue

Betsy Struthers

THE PUSH

Such a beautiful day, Mom welcomes me in. She's fully dressed, hair freshly permed. *Can we go out for a walk?* In the elevator and along the hall to the vestibule, she chatters about the blue eggs in the nest on the dining room window sill. When they will hatch. When the chicks will fly. The whole floor's making bets. *Smell the lilacs, listen to those birds!* We head for the glasshouse in the park, three blocks, one busy street, and there we're stopped – I can't tip the wheelchair over the stubborn curb, afraid I'll lose my grip. *Let me*, two tattooed arms crook down to lift the chair and Mom, as if they were weightless, and sets them right. *Thanks*, I stutter. He waves my words away and bows, *Grandmother, I honour your days*, turns and shambles off to join a group of men sprawled, playing cards on a low stone wall. She's quiet when we enter the tropic dome, the rooms of tulips, hyacinths, the crown of thorns. *I'm tired, take me back*. Click of tires over pavement cracks, the rhythm like that of my son in his stroller, the same strain to push against the pull of the slope ahead. The signal flashes red. I stoop to tuck her shawl. *You're good to me*, she says and clasps my hand in both of hers. Like that, we're stuck, waiting for the changing of the light.

