

## In Passing by Susan Rich

The hospice nurse asks me if I know how to take a pulse.

“Sort of,” I say.

She takes my hand and tenderly places my fingers on my mother’s bone-thin wrist. I feel a weak, irregular push against my fingers.

“Do yo feel anything?” she asks.

“I think so.”

“Let’s try the other arm,” she says and again gently takes my hand and presses my fingers against that wrist.

“What about now?” she asks.

With apprehension, I reluctantly answer, “No.”

“There is no pulse on this side,” the nurse explains as she removes my fingers from my mother’s wrist. “your mother’s body is slowly shutting down.”

After the nurse leaves, I lie beside my mother on the bed she and my father shared for over sixty years.

Our bodies touch. i wonder if she senses my presence and finds it comforting to have her daughter lying close. I hope she is assured by the intimate proximity of our bodies and perceives the depth of her daughter’s love.

I am blessed to have had this mother in my life. I will miss her.

As I lie contemplating, the door of Mother's bathroom slowly opens, and a very dapper gentleman wearing a straw boater atop his head emerges.

If it were anyone else I might be alarmed, but this is Bob.

I've been told he is smitten with my mother and spends a good deal of his time in her room while she sings songs and converses with her collection of stuffed animals. His wife visits him most days, and both he and my mother are under the impression that she is Bob's mother.

He stands looking at Mother and me for several minutes. Then a soft smile forms around the corners of his mouth, and as he quietly leaves the room, he says, "That is a very beautiful thing you are doing."

Later I relate this incident to one of the staff. She is astonished.

"We have not heard Bob speak in the two years he's been here," the nurse says, "and according to his wife, he was silent for the last year he lived at home – never spoke a word."

My mother's lovely persona worked magic not he lives of many for nearly ninety years.