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## **My Mother Growing Old**

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### MY MOTHER GROWING OLD

Shortly after she had to move into the nursing home, she lost interest in seeing the snapshots of our trips—she who had loved to travel and was always eager to know where other people had been. Now she scarcely looked at the photos we brought her when we visited. Or she'd furrow her brow and ask, "Just what cathedral did you say this is? And where was that castle? I can't keep this stuff straight." And she'd brush the pictures aside. There soon came a time when she never even glanced at them.

But something started happening to the photos. I first noticed it in that one I took at the Grand Canyon. A shadowy figure stood by the guard-rail I hadn't seen there before. It had been hazy at the canyon and nothing in that shot was very clear. Yet, after staring for awhile, I had to admit, "You know, that could almost be mother. She didn't go along with us that year, did she?" And, of course, she hadn't.

After that, she kept turning up in photos of other places I knew she'd never been. That woman on the Acropolis striding toward the Parthenon—that was surely mother. And there was mother beside an Alhambra fountain, mother in a Venetian gondola, mother at the Tower of London and on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius. Mother had entered all our photographs.

Last summer in Paris, I unexpectedly met her. One morning when we were strolling to Notre Dame, I saw mother sipping coffee at a cafe table with a fine view of the cathedral. What shall I do? I wondered when I came near her. She certainly isn't expecting me. She doesn't look as if she needs anything. Yet how can I go by without speaking to her. So, though you held back, I went over and said, "Good morning. How nice to see you here. Fine day, isn't it?" She looked up, slightly surprised. But, after a moment, she smiled and replied, "Yes, indeed, such lovely weather we're having." Then, because neither of us could think of anything more to talk about and she still had her coffee and seemed happy to be there, I said goodbye and we parted.