

My Mother Puts Her Face On

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At the end, we clean her up—dress her
in a favorite sweater set, a loosely-knotted scarf

at her throat, and earrings that smolder
in the silence the fever left behind.

All dressed up with nowhere to go—it's true,
but why would we not do this one last thing

the way she'd done it all her life—as if
it mattered. The way she made us wait—excruciating,

when we were young and in a hurry—while she
“put her face on.” Seated at the sink, tiny sponge

dabbing her cheek, a tray of glittering tins, wands
and brushes, swabs, and powder pressed

into a small compact with a mirrored lid that held
one blue eye at a time.

A fine mist of hairspray hangs in the air—then,
as now—scented with a strange bouquet of roses

and formaldehyde. We ignore the label
warning—*flammable*. We focus on

its promise: *a reflective shield of shine.*

