

## Letting Go

A shiny black vinyl purse slumps over the maple end table. It mirrors the posture of its owner seated in the brown leather recliner next to it.

She is a frail woman living in a ninety-pound body, a shell of her former dynamic self. Her mind slipped away cruelly during a tormented five years of anxiety and frustration, and now she is lost in her thoughts swinging back and forth between periods in her life worn down like the cracks and creases in the vinyl purse.

I reason that it is best to go along with whatever event my mother is rambling on about when I visit her in the nursing home.

The frayed purse once filled to the brim with a wallet and credentials providing identification is like the woman's mind, empty of the essentials that most people can retrieve in short order. Her car keys were taken away along with her fierce independence several years prior.

She cannot tell the nursing home staff how she filled her adult life and where she resided. They do have clues pieced together from her daily routine that she is a retired Wall Street stockbroker. Every morning she asks to sit in its business office with her purse draped over her arm, and subsequently, she oversees the inner workings of the finance department. She frequently points to *The Wall Street Journal*, and someone will dutifully place it in her hands — she is unable to read anymore. She has them all baffled until the social worker calls me to see what she did do in life. When I tell her that my mother was a homemaker, and a smart lady with a handle on her finances, we share a much-needed laugh. Then it stands to reason why one lingering memory clings to that part of her personality like a thread not yet severed from reality.

The woman never lets her purse out of her sight. It is ingrained in her to be vigilant over its contents — the key that unlocks her front door. The bag sits on her lap while she eats in the dining hall. Her slender hands finger it nervously, attempting to remember how to open the tarnished silver latch, almost like the clumsy way that she gets fork to mouth for nourishment.

I am about to leave exhausted one afternoon after keeping up a one-sided conversation. My mother looks at me and clearly says, "Can I afford to stay in this resort?" That's the name she gives the nursing home, a bit of her wicked wit that rarely pops to the surface anymore.

Her bills are covered, I assure her.

"Take my purse with you for safekeeping then."

The woman waves her hand freely in the direction of the purse as if she is no longer needs to clutch on to it for dear life.

My mother settles into her place of residence for her time left on earth.

The shiny black vinyl purse dismisses itself from years of service.