

# Transport

by Ginnah Howard

Ruth carries

always a small bottle of  
nitroglycerin; and tissues, wads of  
tissues; two Tums (for calcium, she tells me),  
Tic-Tacs in a little plastic box that snaps; often several  
Smith Brothers Lemon Licorice Throat Drops. Pocket portage:  
pajamas to robe to sweater. Mornings, beneath her pillows, I find  
these nested, plus, a butterscotch ball; her bedside flashlight; for  
under

her breast where it itches, baby powder—Giant-sized with  
Cornstarch—though the list for her daughter said *small*, so Ruth  
could manage it better prone, in the dark. *Maybe I can just dump  
some on the sheet and roll in it*, she says.

Ruth resists  
bathing and changes of  
her *Cuddl* thermal bottoms.  
Her daughters have abandoned all  
hope of showers. Ruth hasn't said No (No  
is not how she does it), but any bath-manipulations  
hunker down her jaw, dead-weight her round-bellied body,  
and, given her bathroom, it would take me *and* her night lady  
both  
to step her up over the tub and lower her down onto the rubber  
seat of  
the stool, and one of us to get in there to hoist her back to  
standing. The  
main in-charge daughter tells me they're backing off on personal  
hygiene, but  
could I perhaps dampen her hair with a washcloth, then give it a  
touch with the

curling iron. When I suggest to Ruth perhaps the dirty clothes for her pajamas after a week she says, *Why I've never been so clean.*

Ruth desires  
horseradish mustard,  
pickle relish, ginger sauce.  
She hills these little pick-me-ups  
around the edges of her Meals on Wheels,  
the mounds of Swiss steak and carrots, rhrred  
to mush in the new little chopper—her dentures lost  
two months ago, the night her husband of sixty years died.  
More maple syrup on your oatmeal, more honey in your tea.  
Yes, oh yes. Sweets and the local newspaper. Much is a blur,  
but print, squinched at through just the right part of her bifocals,  
fills

her morning. She reads me random headlines while I iron: Man  
Charged

With Cow Neglect, and random phrases: finally a cure for the  
common cold.

We both agree we are not going to follow the story about the baby  
abused at his daycare. And greeting cards: Ruth has dozens for  
every occasion. For years she's been the Sunshine person for her  
D.A.R. I say, We might be able to go to their luncheons. *Oh no*, she  
says, *finally I have an excuse.*

Ruth worries  
about her daughters:  
driving at night, using a  
riding mower. Things men  
do that aren't safe for women.  
Be careful, she tells them. Do you  
think you should try that? Her daughters,  
nearing sixty, look heavenward. *And* she worries  
about catching something: pneumonia or flu, regards  
me with suspicion if I cough or sneeze. Her daughters

worry about her feet: poor circulation. For Christmas she got a little foot whirlpool. Could I toothbrush her toes? And what horny nails she has, yellowed with white spots and threatening to curl in upon themselves. I check my own as though early detection might improve my chances. *But* the night lady and I worry about Ruth on the stairs. Ruth, how about using the portable toilet in the dining room? Her walker does not change direction. Five perilous journeys on my watch. Going up: me behind her, with a tight grab on her waist—fall forward if you start to go. Descending, when she starts to list, we sit side by side, and come down on our rears. Ruth on recent falls: *My body goes where it will.*

Ruth fears

Tuesdays and  
Thursday afternoons  
when she must be in her  
house alone. All right you're  
all set: your nitro's in your pocket,  
your lap blanket's right here, your book  
with everybody's numbers, your lifeline's on,  
the remote, this little tub of fudge. I'll leave the  
kitchen light. Would you like Anne Murray or Miss  
Read? Remember all you have to do is push the red  
button with the X if you want to stop the tape. Ruth claims  
she cannot figure anything out, she never could. I say, Oh that's  
just what women do when there's a man to fix things, but if you  
had  
to, and you were willing to stand there in the cold and puzzle out  
how  
this little gizmo hooks up over that little whatsit...in order to free  
this, you're

going to have to do that...eventually you'd get it. But she never lets that through. I put on my coat and make my final entry in the log. See you tomorrow morning. *Have a nice evening*, she says, *and don't you worry about me.*

