

# *No Food by Mouth*

by Marianne Brems

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I carry into the hospital waiting area  
the nameless constriction of my mourning.  
Boxes of tissue wait on horizontal surfaces.  
Every voice too loud.  
Every noise amplified.

My mother hiked the Sierras into her 80s.  
Played tennis until she was 90.  
Now at 97 she lies with a fever of 102,  
a needle in her arm,  
little awareness of any of it.

Fellow strangers wait near me.  
No reason to speak.  
One offers me a cup of water.  
My mother was here just  
three months ago I say.

We talk about the mothers  
we will have for a little longer,  
the bond they cinched in our hearts,  
their travel down love's unpaved roads,  
their departure from cognition,  
the tangling of their feathers  
against their will  
in the chain-links of aging.

A nurse calls me.  
I leave this better-known stranger  
to hear what I already know.  
Aspiration pneumonia the verdict.  
No food by mouth the recommendation.

As the fever shrinks,  
my common sense grows.  
ThickenUp and half-inch pieces  
will have to do  
for the next small forever.