

Old Woman in a Hospital Bed

By Stephen Carp, PT, PhD

Quietly I rest, but solitude closes in.

No noise is noisier than no noise at all.

I'm fading, blanched white by illness, paled by age,

The gray of desolation, the darker gray of destitution.

I am not pretty anymore.

Cruel memories arise of times when I silenced

the children: "I want to rest, let me be! I want

to read, let me be!" Now I long for a touch, a word.

No one is here.

I am not pretty anymore.

My children have moved away. Their kids have kids.

My friends have died. I'm too ill for church.

I'm an anachronism. And I am alone.

No one to call.

I am not pretty anymore.

Morning comes and my body awakens.

My eyes open from habit. Nothing to see here.

A nurse enters the room and lightens my spirits.

She smiles. She speaks my name. She cares,

Though I am not pretty anymore.

Quizzically, she looks at my face, my eyes, my hair.

Hands on her hips. She comes to the bedside,

Tenderly, kindly.

I am not pretty anymore.

Her hand on my forehead is soft as cotton.

Quietly, deftly, she sweeps a stray curl from my eyes.

"There," she says. "That's a start."

Let me comb your hair. Let me put a little makeup on.

I have time to share.”

I am not pretty anymore.

I say not a word. I close my eyes and feel her work.

Her fingers in my hair are my husband’s, sixty years ago.

Her fingers on my face are my baby’s, fifty years ago.

Her perfume is my daughter’s, thirty years ago.

I am not pretty anymore.

I say not a word. The memories are so strong,
so lovely, a tear comes to my eye.

“Am I pulling your hair?” she asks, noticing.

“No, no. Continue.” I will cherish this kindness.

I am pretty again.

I am pretty again.



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About the Author



Stephen Carp, PT, PhD is currently Associate Professor in the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program at DeSales University. His PhD is in Motor Control, and he is also a Geriatric Certified Specialist (GCS.) He teaches in the areas of Geriatrics, Clinical Medicine, Professional Development, Management of Physical Therapy Practices, and Research. His areas of research interest include: effectiveness of non-government support of the poor; doctoral program admissions; immigration medicine; and exercise and its relationship to cognition and fall-risk.

He has authored over 15 publications and has published two textbooks, with the most recent being *Foundations: An Introduction to Physical Therapy*, published in January of 2019. In addition, he has authored four book chapters. He has served as an item writer for the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy and has developed three continuing education programs for the APTA. Dr. Carp is a Combined Sections Meeting proposal reviewer for the Academy of Physical Therapy Education and Academy of Acute Care Physical Therapy. He has presented at numerous national meetings. He was awarded the 2019 Distinguished Educator Award by the Academy of Geriatrics of the American Physical Therapy Association and delivered the 2020 APTA-PA Conference keynote address.

He is a journal reviewer for six journals, including the *Journal of the American Physical Therapy Association* and is a grant reviewer for the U.S. Army and the Army Medical Research and Material Command and the Occupational, Safety and Health Administration.

He has a broad community service agenda, including co-directing the Norristown Immigration Clinic with Kerstin Palombaro, PT, PhD of Widener University, the Society of Saint Vincent DePaul, and directing the pro bono Rehabilitation Clinic at St. Catherine's Infirmary in Germantown, PA. For the past seven years he has led a physical therapy student-directed service trip to Guatemala. Dr. Carp maintains a clinical practice at Chestnut Hill Hospital in Philadelphia, PA. He resides in Harleysville, Pennsylvania with his wife Diane. He and Diane have four children and two grandchildren.