

# The Caretakers

*(Two women find this in common)*

“He woke me last night,” a wife says,  
“and called for his boots.  
He said that more was due to foal  
and he had to be there.  
He tried to climb out of bed and fell,  
and I couldn’t lift him.  
There hasn’t been a horse on the place in years,  
and he’s never walked since that time he fell.”

“Their minds wander most at night,”  
a daughter replies,  
“I woke one day last week when I heard  
my father in the kitchen.  
Went downstairs to find he’d laid  
kindling and paper on a shelf in the fridge  
and was searching for a match.  
I guess he thought it was the furnace.”

“Forty-nine years married,” the wife says,  
“and now he’s taken to calling me ‘nurse.’”

“I understand. He calls me ‘Mother’ now.  
He won’t put his slippers on till I shake them out,”  
the younger woman says,  
“he says there are rats inside them.  
He’s remembering when he worked in the mines.”

“My husband hides food in his dresser drawer  
as if there’d be another famine.”

They laugh then, and hold each other’s hand.  
They understand each other,  
who else can they tell these things to?  
The foolish erosion of strength and dignity,  
leaves sad and comic figures.  
They laugh until they cry,  
and the tears run down their faces.

- Joyce Rankin  
“At my Mother’s Door”  
2002