REFLECTIONS

Caretaking

What is odd is how easy
it comes: draw the bath,
comb her hair, help her in and out
of the car. Sort a sea
of pills, green orange blue
dull yellow shiny red.
Sort Tuesday from Monday. Tell time
by the slow build of soap operas,
the tick of milk
expiring in the carton.
Tip the glass to her lips, say:
Mom, swallow. Say: That's
the sink. The light switch.
The telephone. Your life
is far away, farther even
than the grocery store. Getting there
is a series of still photos
down a long white hall:
Purse. Keys. Shoe. Door.
Tell time by doctors' appointments.
She brushes smells from
beside her head, hears light
pouring from her hands.
A hundred bubbles
escape from the teapot, and your dead father
rises over the toilet tank,
dispensing investment advice
and coffee cake.
I feel so odd, she tells you.
I can't wait for this to be over.
Think: *yes*
and close your eyes.
Chop the small blue pills
in half, and half again.

LISA GLUSKIN
South Lake Tahoe, Calif.