

Adult Essay Second Place

Pink, Berry, Plum Maybe, but Never Peach

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There are many things for which we can prepare ourselves in life but seeing your parent in an open casket is not one of them. Don't get me wrong, I had seen *many* open caskets in my lifetime. In fact, I had *kissed* the dead people *in* the open caskets. My Ukrainian grandmother taught me to kneel solemnly at the casket, touch the deceased's cold neatly folded hands, pray, and then kiss the person on the cheek. KISS the dead person! I had the privilege of doing this with my grandfather, great-grandmother and a half dozen other relatives all before I was 10 years old. I was well trained in ethnic funeral parlor protocol.

But no matter how well funeral parlor trained we are, every part of the internment process is awkward, including having to pick out the outfit in which your beloved person will be buried. I stood in my mother's closet thinking, "In what did she look prettiest?!" And I was under the gun; the funeral parlor men were there waiting, impatiently I might add. I picked a floral silk blouse that had perfect hot and light pinks and a hint of peach. When my mother was healthy and wore this blouse, she was beautiful.

I answered a dozen questions along the way to burial about the casket, prayer cards, tombstone, flowers and pallbearers, but I *never* thought I had to be bold enough to pick lipstick color. I wish I had.

It is a ridiculously surreal experience when friends and family come together to mourn your loved one. And God bless all the people who said, "She looks good!", which begs the question, of course, by what standard really? She looks better than other dead people? Do any of them actually look good? They all look dead and made over, and in my mother's case, a makeup job horribly flawed! From an embalmer's perspective, the work was top notch. From a 1980s "Color Me Beautiful" perspective, she was wearing peach lipstick and peach was NOT her color.

I panicked, found the nearest Kleenex, and then irrationally wiped that horrible peach smear off her lips. I don't know what color-stay lipstick brand funeral parlors use, but this color barely budged. I quickly disposed of the tissue evidence, simultaneously realizing my mother now lay without lip color, which does nothing for a dead person. I had not fully thought out my plan. As if my arm were not a part of my body, I thrust my hand into my purse and found my berry lipstick. Yet another life lesson: Applying lipstick to a dead person is not easy. And I was rushing because heaven forbid the funeral parlor staff see me repainting their canvas!

My mother would not have approved of my lipstick efforts; they were sloppy at best. But I always say, "God does not expect us to be perfect, but He expects our intentions to be perfect." My intentions, in that peach-tinted moment, were sadly and genuinely perfect.