

## Forgetting to remember

“You take the bloody pills! I don’t need them!” Margaret shouts at her son-in-law, towering over her petite body, robustly pushing the pills. Her small body, that once walked for miles every day, had become fragile over the years. Margaret seemed to dwindle in her already compact, brown, 70s style kitchen. She had convinced her little scallywags she could bake a cake blindfolded in the old kitchen, but it was now foreign territory, inhabited by unidentifiable people.

They were together as a family for the first time in years. That autumn evening, it seemed just a short time ago since the grandchildren ran amok in diapers, making a mess of the place. But things had changed, and now those same children had lost their grandad, as his wife was ridden of the last of her sanity.

At first, the dementia detracted trivialities from Margaret’s memory: phone numbers she had known by heart, the name of a neighbor as she bumped into her in the shops.... But year by year, the disease ate away at her, leaving behind intense uncertainty, confusion and anger. Recently, it started nibbling at the nature of her personality, and she was slowly becoming an unfamiliar character in a recognisable body. She had convinced herself the whole world was hatching a plot against her, and her family forcing her to take these pills was part of this conspiracy.

Since her husband passed away eleven days before, her daughter and son-in-law had taken over the role of pill poppers, and became soldiers in the nightly, strenuous war on drugs. Donepezil, one of three commonly prescribed inhibitors, increases the amount of acetylcholine in the brain, which helps reduce the symptoms of dementia in Alzheimer patients. Although the medicine didn’t affect her caring, loving, gentle soul, it did feed the cruel beast that had grown inside. When holding power over her, it would adopt a harsh tone and speak vulgar words, for which she would have washed her daughter’s mouth with soap years before.

The following day, her husband would go up in flames — an ending the church-going, faithful Margaret did not agree with — and for the first time in over 60 years, the two bodies would be separated for good. The loss of a loved one is a traumatising and heart-breaking experience for any person, but for a dementia patient, it is especially agonising. It is learning you will never see your loved one, not once, but every hour. Grandma continually asked her grandchildren to get Gordon, angry with him for being absent when they had visitors. She was inconsolable every time they explained he would not be coming back again.

The next morning dawned, proving the start of another bleak day, and even the rain was no longer dedicated to falling at its full potential. Instead it had become a soft drizzle, gradually soaking people to the bone. On the day of a father's funeral, most daughters would normally focus on picking out the suitable black attire, remembering to pack tissues, supporting other family members, the usual requiem rituals. But normality hadn't been part of the Shaw family's life for a while now.

The day started with Margaret launching into another bout of paranoia: "You must have all done a terrible thing, if you can't let me out the house. I won't tell anyone what you did, just let me go out!" The door was locked — Margaret had gone missing before — and her daughter, Catherine, was not prepared to have her go missing on the day of her father's funeral. But Margaret thought she was being held captive, presumably by a bunch of criminals, and was just trying to escape.

She walked around restlessly and untamable, banging on the kitchen window to the neighbours, in the hopes of being saved from the claws of these "intruders". Luckily, the cause of this explosion of anger and confusion was also the solution to the problems, and soon Margaret forgot what she was upset about, and finally decided to get ready to say goodbye.

The family pulled up at the crematorium, behind the funeral car. Oblivious to it all, Margaret walked past the car, as if it were an arbitral vehicle with no real purpose. She was greeted by old friends and relatives, most of which she had not seen for years, and had not

remembered for almost as long. At the sight of these people, who were so happy to see her, she decided it must be her birthday, a joyous celebration. Her spirits lifted as she walked through the group of people drearily dressed in black, ready to celebrate life, not there to mourn death. Her family became hopeful, believing that Margaret's befuddled state may prevent her from experiencing the funeral as reality.

Their hopes were soon dashed, as the service started and reality hit when Margaret tearfully stared at the portrait of her husband as a young soldier. Her family huddled together, enclosing the tiny figure in embrace, and every person in the room wished that, for once, Margaret could forget just a little harder.