

## *That Memory*

My mind is scrambling, scrambling to find a memory. A memory where he knew my name. A memory where he looked me in the eyes and knew exactly who I was. A memory where his mind had not yet been claimed.

But I can't.

I can remember a time I sat in his room. I can see him there, in his chair, my Nanna close by. I study his body; his arms so slim, his legs so skinny, I wonder how he manages to shuffle around. He watch him scratch his arms, out of habit I suppose. I'm not sure whether he realises he does it, but then again I'm not sure whether he realises he does most things. I have an urge to hear his thoughts. I want to know if inside, he knows exactly who I am, who my Mum is, who the woman he sits next to is; but just can't manage to put it in words. Maybe, his mind is just blank, maybe there are no longer any thoughts to think.

I look to my Nanna, sitting reading the paper as if it doesn't hurt. I wonder if inside, she feels grief every time she looks at him. If she understands that he will never look at her the same way he used to, or if she continues to hope.

When people lose a loved one I almost feel jealous that they have all these memories they can look back on, jealous they got to say goodbye and the person looking back understood who they were, jealous because I lost him a long time before he was actually gone.

I can remember when he sat at the kitchen table, safe in the knowledge that he belonged in that room. We were introduced to him as though he had never met us before and I didn't understand why until every time my mum said our names, he said, "nice to meet you." I understood then, I understood that he had met us before but his mind hadn't. I turned to my Mum and looked at her, trying to read her mind, trying to understand what she was feeling. I wonder if she feels sadness, that he no longer is the same man she once knew, or maybe she feels guilt for not knowing something was wrong earlier. I wondered if she was angry, angry that it could happen to her family, to a man so knowledgeable.

But I knew what she felt. She was worried, worried that maybe this could happen to someone else that she loved.

My need for the memory grows stronger. I concentrate really hard, as if my life depended on it. I just want something to hold onto, to cherish.

I can remember feeling useless, as I sat there and watched. I looked on as the blood poured out. It was just a scrape, a little cut that should only be equal to a little blood. But this was not a little trickle, or even a puddle, it was a river. As he was helped to a seat, the number of people around him grew. His eyes looked dizzy and disorientated. As my family scurried around to stem the flood, we could tell who he was looking for. Even if he didn't know us, we knew him, we knew the little things only a family member would know. He was looking for that woman who was always by his side, whom he trusted and on whom he relied on.

He was looking for his compass.

I had to look deeper, deeper into my brain, into the part where my memories are kept. I needed to go further into the past, into every moment he was present.

I can remember sitting at the table, sitting next to him. I could feel his warmth, hear his breathing right next to me when my Mum came into the room. I could remember the rain last night that had pelted down on the roof but I was safe, safe in the cocoon of my bed. I can remember Mum telling us both how our rabbit had been locked out of her hutch which meant that the rain had teemed down on her all night. After hearing this story, he described how if he had known she had been in the rain all night, he would have run outside in his pyjamas and let her back into her hutch.

That was the man he was, a man who helped others, a family man, a man who expected little in return. At that moment, he was in control. He knew who he was, but more importantly, he knew who we were.

There it was, it was what I was looking for. I knew I had found it, the memory, that memory.

By Pep Salmon