

Tom

Richard Hill

Mandy knocked on the door, gently, and opened it. Tom was sitting in his wheelchair, near the window, looking out onto the garden. "Dad?" said Mandy, in a quiet voice. The first thing she noticed was a faint smell of stale urine mixed with the strong smell of disinfectant, the sort that used to be used in hospitals. "Dad." she said, a little louder, "It's me, Mandy. I've come to see you."

Tom didn't move, so Mandy moved into his eyeline. "Dad." she said. "I've come to visit," she repeated. "How are you?" His eyes, deep and dark, remained fixed far into the distance. She put her hand on his arm. He lifted suddenly as if shocked by a taser. He looked straight into her eyes. "Who are you?" he asked. "It's me Dad, me, Mandy, your daughter." Now his stare at her became more intense as if he'd had a supernatural appearance in front of his very eyes. "I don't know who you are," he said. "Mandy's my little girl with little ringlets in her hair and a lovely pink dress and black shiny shoes. That's who Mandy is, not you. You evil cow. Who are you really?"

Mandy wasn't prepared for this, her own father not knowing who she was and being so threatening. But his memory was accurate. That was her as a child. In fact she had a photograph of her exactly as Tom had described. But what was it he had called her? an 'evil cow'? How could he, how should he think that of her, his own treasured daughter?

Mandy recalled the time she'd gone to visit Greenfield Residential Home for the first time. She hadn't been sure that this would be the right place for her father. She'd had reservations, but all the healthcare professionals and social services had assured her that it was the best place for him. "Mr Cuttings," one had said, "will get the very best care and attention for someone like him, someone in such an advanced stage of dementia."

'Such an advanced stage of dementia,' he had said. These words were the worst she could hear, especially of her own dear dad. But yet, in the main, this place did seem to tick most, if not all, of the boxes.

She came back to the here and now. She tried to gather her thoughts and work out a way to convince dad that it was really her; Mandy, her little girl. She thought about her dear late mother, Brenda who had died 7 years earlier. How would she have dealt with it? Mandy imagined that she would have given him a good shaking and told him to pull himself together. She looked at her dad, and realised that he was

once more back in his own world, wherever that was. If only she could get through to him.

She was reminded of the phone conversation she had held with a counsellor at the Dementia Helpline and was told about something called 'Sundowning', "a term used for changes in behaviour that occur in the evening, around dusk." She looked at the clock. Half past six and she realised it was sunset time around now. She remembered what she'd read on their website; 'Some people who have dementia experience a growing sense of agitation or anxiety at this time and think that they need to pick the children up from school, even if they're now adults. Other symptoms might include shouting or arguing, pacing, or becoming confused about who people are or what's going on around them.'

"Dad." she said to him. "I'm going for a coffee now. I'll be back in an hour or so.". She quietly left Tom's room, hoping beyond hope that he'd remember her later. She remembered the little food hall that they had in the home. She thought she could probably get a coffee and a bite of something there. But where was it? Coming towards her, using a walking frame, was a dear little old lady with a smile from ear to ear. 'I'll ask her' thought Mandy as she approached. "Excuse me" asked Mandy. As quick as a flash the old lady's face dropped. "Aw, piss off!" she said, and carried on her way.

She found the canteen, had her tea and a bun she'd been kindly given by one of the staff, and after an hour or so made her way back to her dad's room. She knocked and went in. Tom was facing the door. "Mandy!", he said, "My dear Mandy. How nice to see you!"

-ENDS-

760 words

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