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Opening extract from

Back to Blackbrick

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My granddad was pretty much the cleverest person I ever met so it was strange in the end to see the way people treated him – as if he was a complete moron. We were waiting for a train one day, not bothering anyone, when this boy said to me,

'Hey. Hey you. What's wrong with the old man?'

In fairness, my granddad did happen to be in the middle of quite a long conversation with a lamp post. But still, it didn't give the boy the right to be so nosy.

I walked a bit closer to the boy and I whispered:

'He suffers from a rare condition that makes him randomly violent to anyone who asks stupid questions about people they've never met.'

That very same week, me and Granddad saw this programme all about how Albert Einstein was always looking for his keys and wearing odd shoes and not brushing his hair for weeks on end.

'See, Granddad,' I said to him, 'Einstein was exactly the same as you are. And no-one ever thought there was anything wrong with *his* brain.'

'No-one except for his teachers who apparently thought he was an imbecile,' my granddad replied.

Next day he asked me where the toilet was. And the day after that he looked at me suddenly and he said, 'Maggie, Maggie, what's the plan of action now? When are we all going home?' which was kind of confusing, seeing as there was no plan of action, and seeing as we already *were* at home. And also seeing as my name is not Maggie.

My name is Cosmo. When I'm a legal adult I'm going to change it by deed poll. I've checked it out and it's fairly straightforward.



The first time Granddad peed in the dishwasher was when me and my gran realised we were going to have to make a few changes. For one thing, we got into the habit of putting the super hot cycle on twice.

He began to repeat things over and over and I knew that there was definitely something wrong, because he hadn't usually been a repetitive sort of guy. It got to be pretty annoying. He began to forget the kinds of things

that you'd never imagine anyone could forget, like for example that my brother Brian was dead, even though by then he'd been dead for quite a while. Granddad got this idea that Brian was actually in the kitchen, completely alive, and ready to make cups of tea for anyone who shouted at him.

'BRIAN! BRIAN!' he'd yell. 'DO US A FAVOUR LIKE A GOOD FELLOW, AND BRING US A CUP OF TEA!'

So then *I'd* usually have to go off and make the stupid tea. Granddad always said, 'Ah, fantastic,' straight after he took the first sip, as if drinking a cup of tea was the best thing ever.

When he started to get up in the middle of the night and wander around the house, poking about and searching in drawers and stuff, me and my gran kept having to follow him. We'd have to think of quite clever ways to convince him to go back to bed, which usually took ages. He'd sometimes have gone out into the garden before we even woke up, and we'd run out to him where he stood shivering, thin and empty. Like a shadow.

I'd say, 'Granddad, what are you doing out here in the dark like this?' And he'd say, 'I don't know really. I used to love the dark.'

And after that my gran would sit with him as if he was the one who needed to be comforted, even though it

was me who'd been woken up in the middle of the night. He would say, 'Oh my girl,' in a way that made it sound like Granny Deedee was someone quite young, which obviously she isn't. And she'd look down at his hands and stroke them and she'd tell him how beautiful they were.

Don't get me wrong – I mean you could say a lot of nice things about my granddad, because he was a great guy and everything – but I really don't think you could say his hands were beautiful. For one thing they were old and brown and bent like the roots of a tree. And for another thing, instead of an index finger, he had a kind of stump on his right hand that only went as far as his first knuckle. It wasn't that noticeable except when he was trying to point at something.

Whenever I asked him what happened to that finger, he would look down and his eyes would go all round and he would say, 'Good God! My finger. It's missing! Assemble a search party!'

It was kind of a joke that me and him had before he got sick. Nobody else got it.



I tried to talk to my gran about Granddad's memory but she pretended it really wasn't that big a deal. She said we would do our best for him for as long as we could, but eventually we'd have to tell Uncle Ted who at the time was living in San Francisco being a scientist and never answering his phone.

'Aren't there brain pills or something that Granddad can take?'

'Cosmo love, he's already on lots of medication.'

'Well, no offence, Gran, but you'd better go back to the doctor with him and change the dose.'

'It's not the dose,' she said, 'it's the illness.'

I didn't think that was a very constructive attitude. I told her I knew for a fact that there were loads of doctors who didn't have that much of a clue what they were even talking about. I started telling her about this one guy I'd seen on the True Stories channel who'd had a heart attack because they'd given him rat poison instead of cholesterol pills, but all Gran said was, 'Oh for goodness sake Cosmo, will you please stop it?' which was quite cranky of her if you ask me. She never used to be grumpy like that, no matter how many things I told her about.

Later that night I googled 'memory loss', and I honestly didn't know why I hadn't done it sooner. It turns out there's a load of information for people in our situation. The very first link I clicked on was a website called:

THE MEMORY CURE

Proven strategies to delay and reverse age-related memory loss when someone you love starts to forget.

Those glittery words of hope shone from the screen, making me blink, and I could feel pints of relief pouring through my body, right down into my toes.