

The dog was back again today. I don't mind him as long as he stays off of the furniture. Not that his claws could scrape my faux-suede or chintz. Still, I worry about him rustling the taffeta. Since Martha passed away I've tried to keep the house in a semblance of decent shape, especially for when the health visitor comes around. The Encumbrance makes things a tad difficult but I can usually get around it. Even when the dog is here. His silly games are a mild distraction, though I'm sure that the vacuum cleaner puts the fear of God into him. Doesn't stop him appearing every now and again.

Not being a dog person, I find it hard to describe him. A small, terrier-like thing whose muzzle is at just the right height to wipe his mouth on the floral print sofa. Oh I've watched him do it, stupid animal, running back and forth in the front room. It's for attention really. As long as there aren't any flecks of spittle left behind I let him get on with it. Of course, when you're a figment of the imagination you haven't any hope of drooling on the upholstery. As such, I've come to recognise that he is part and parcel of the Encumbrance. I still have yet to christen him with a name.

Often I'm impressed with his temerity. Pets can be such energetic troubles, always getting underfoot and upsetting the ornaments. Reminds one of children. Small wonder we never got round to having any. Perhaps if we had, there might be someone about to nurse me on those days that my quivers are stronger than my ability to overcome them. Even the assistance of chemical means isn't guaranteed to stabilise my shaky posture on the worst days. If I leave my bed, it is with a stuttering stoop which I must put up with. I am slowly being martyred by my own body.

Looking back on it, the initial meagre foreshocks weren't actually the tremors themselves. At the time I put it down to other things, but the first I really felt something was wrong was at her funeral. It was a grand service. Most of Martha's family were there. They've never really gotten

on well with me of course, but I received all of the expected condolences. She had gone peacefully and that's all you can hope for. Gladys, her sister, bought a lovely bouquet of lilies and propped them on the coffin lid. Before the service I watched her return to the forefront of the room again and again to plump them up as they wilted in the dry heat of summer. The last rites were given and all the while their beautiful pink and white petals caught my eye. She would have loved them. I should have brought flowers but I forgot. As penance I've been laying them on her grave ever since.

When it was my turn, I stood up and spoke as everyone else had. Saying much the same things as anyone who had already gone before me. I strove for some sort of original comment, something to really immortalise her. When I started the speech I groped for it, along with any leeting poetry. Anything would have done to elevate her tragedy above others. But in the moment it escaped me. Though I made an effort not to, my eyes began to tear up and my voice broke. Afterwards I bent to the coffin to bid my last goodbye and noticed that I couldn't smell those precious lilies. The scent of a lily is delicate honeylike aroma. It was not there for me. Some young relation of Martha's helped me back to my chair and I sat there, preoccupied with it. Even as I pressed my nose against the flowers I couldn't sniff any of their fragrance. As with life's little niggles, other things came up and it slipped through my mind. Instead I became fixed instead on my inability to provide a meaningful eulogy; my last disservice to my wife. Being unable to smell was the least of my worries.

Dogs, on the other hand, have a honed sense of smell. Their noses are so developed that are forty times better at olfaction than us. While human brains are led by what they see, canine brains follow what they can smell. Animal psychologists have trained seeing eye dogs for the blind and other helpers who can detect the warning signs of epilepsy, but I have yet to hear of a

sniffing dog for the anosmic. My brain is having problems both with vision as well as the detection of scents. That's at least two out of five going, where does that leave me?

Although the excitable dog can be bothersome, the most troubling thing has been the quakes. I'm worried that my new friend might upset the china or knock over the porcelain but the real concern should be that I get there first without his help. Shortly after the funeral I had a visit from next door. She was just checking on me to make sure everything was tickety boo. It wasn't, but I didn't say so. Normally I'm quite spry and can get around to do the things I need to do. However, after Martha died I lost a bit of my pep. Such a thing is to be expected of course, but the new stagger to my walk was a nasty surprise.

My neighbour brought more flowers and apologies; she hadn't been able to make the service, would these do? They were a lovely arrangement which sat on my coffee table for two weeks. I didn't smell them once. As she was sorting them, I toddled into the kitchen to put on a pot of tea. She and my wife had been better friends than we were, but she was kindly enough to come over for a chat. When I returned with two mugs, my unsteady hand slopped a load of tea onto the carpet. My friend saw and was shocked. While she helped me clean my mess, I saw her looking at my left hand and the way it shook back and forth. The wrist pivoted around its centre in a strange flapping motion, a stammer.

When she drew attention to it, I was embarrassed. I'd heard about such things happening to drinkers who stop suddenly and I worried for myself. Of course, I hadn't been drinking. They got a lot of names for themselves over the years; the shakes was what I'd heard the called during my service days. It wasn't long before this had taxed my worry. So I did what I usually do, put it out of my mind and try and keep it there. You would be surprised how many problems can be dealt with that way.

Of course, my lady friend pressed me to see a doctor. I was reluctant, but each time we bumped into each other or one of us stopped over with the other she would make a point of asking after my spasm. It did get worse. Martha would have nagged me to go, but without her I let it slide. With hindsight she was right. Eventually I did do something about it after nearly dropping my keys down the drain when I failed to grasp them properly from my pocket. Such a nuisance was the last straw.

So I saw a doctor. And another one. And another one. By the time I had had the first scan at the hospital in the city, I'd been through a parade of professionals and was sick to the back of the teeth with them. The stress drove me around the bend. Not long after that, the results came back to confront me with what I knew to be true. Dementia. One of the exotic ones mixed with a shaking palsy. Not Parkinson's, but a close cousin. It explained the failing nose and probably the dog as well though I hadn't met him by that point. As I had slept peacefully, little worm-like bundles of protein had infiltrated my head. Where these pests lodged my difficulties grew. At best I'd have seven years. They were so sorry. Did I want a tissue?

Seven years was longer than I wanted, far longer than I needed. We had always lived a quiet and tidy life and there wasn't much to take care of. The council arranged for someone to come and visit, though I was sure it was partly to check that I wasn't dead. Oh, there were leaflets and fiddly paper booklets too, but I didn't trouble myself with them. When the 'care home' came up, I knew that monolithic phrase had nothing good attached to it. Shaking my head more than my arm, I refused point blank. After a time, my stubbornness was accepted. If I was going to die, I wanted to do it my own home; the place where she had left.

Then one morning as I was struggling with crossword, the dog came. He was hiding behind the dusty television set. I have gotten well to know the interior of this room, since it is rare that I

leave it these days. Thus I know when something is amiss. Imagine my surprise when a guest with four paws and a wet nose bounded out and leapt into my lap. Imagine again when I found that he didn't weigh anything and my hand passed right through as I made to pat him on the head. I thought it best that I made no mention of my new companion to authorities, lest they him take away from me somehow.

As with every dent in a man's life, I have grown accustomed to my problem. Some weeks are better than others. I find the confusion comes and goes, but it will get me in the end. Lurking around every corner, it is the Encumbrance. Each morning I rise to find it looking over my shoulder in the mirror and I must take care or else it will trip me on the stairs. It is safer to in the house, in case he befuddles me while I'm out and about. Fortunately the health care visitor is there to assist me. Such a helpful young lady but I find that I forget her name, and not for the first time I'm sure. Each time she smiles politely, but behind her eyes I can see her willing me to remember.

She vacuums for now. And dusts and me in the shopping. I find that I don't the isolation. The outside world is a dangerous place for me in my present condition. No, it's the smells I miss fondly. Lawn clippings, fresh brewed tea and the lemon zest of a gin and tonic. Of course I regret the lilies as well, but I hope that Meredith will forgive me. Nowadays I think of her often but have trouble recalling her face. Or where she has gone.

The shaking presents obvious problems. Has made walking around inside problematic. Recently I can no longer climb the stairs. And so have begun to drift off to sleep in the front room. The animal comes to me now, more and more often. Sometimes he even has a couple of friends. This group are good for keeping company. I could just watch them frolic for hours. In fact usually do. Funny things with four legs. What were they called now?

The woman from next door came again, I've always been bad with her name. She brought a nice thing with her. Ah what's its name? You slice it and eat it. Put it in a pan with cream? A pie! She had a key lime pie with her. I put a great deal of effort into speaking, but still my voice came out strained and dull. It sounded like that of a stranger. My once charming flow and diction has become clumsy and slow. I feel that I am losing words, like a dictionary with bookworm. Makes the crosswords more, um, harder.

The shakes worse. It is hard to walk. Someone put the bed downstairs. Was it me? When I speak my words are lazy. Feel drunk. It is worse with pills. Little tablets the doctor gave me. They top up in jar. But I don't recall them there. My cupboards are. Filled. Did I? Who is that man mirror? When did she die? Was it a month or a year. Longer? Everything feels fuzzy. Muddled. Slow.

My dreams become vivid. Stretched out. Animals are there too. Makes it hard. To tell which is real. I am living in a house that me very much of the one I lived in before. When my wife was there. Other women on some days. They seem nice. They are good.

As I my words sound tired, rolling off lazy tongue, but people don't. They out rows and rows of coloured pills. More of swarm at the end of day. Take them, even though they bitter in my mouth. Stick while I.

I wonder what it will be like. To go. This muddling dementia rob ability to the next world with grace. Instead, every day fall a little further. When come, will I feel it, shall know that it's there? Will wife, woman, partner there? Who flowers?

Mary, Mina, Mandy, where we are now?