

*Journey to
Senility*

Lisa Bell

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Radical Women

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Death of memory

Evokes the release of emotions

Mentioning the past triggers memories or frustration

Events of the day or long-ago fade

No one can explain why

Time makes the condition worse, not better

Intimate details of life no longer matter

Anyone can fall victim—themselves or in a loved one

“Never let the brain idle. ‘An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.’
And the devil’s name is Alzheimer’s.”

— George Carlin

The Fall

Oblivious to surroundings, Gertrude stared at the old shed, memories haunting her mind.

Miserable whitewash. Hid nothing. Ought to bulldoze it.

Someday.

She shook her head, averting her gaze from the wooden building. Despite the early morning coolness, the sun peeked over the back fence, hinting of the intense heat predicted later in the day. Still, her flowers bloomed, the trees blossomed. The lawn she mowed the previous day glistened, traces of dew cleansing and refreshing every inch of greenery. Gertrude breathed in the freshness scented by colorful flowerbeds bathing the yard. Birds greeted the morning, pouring peace over her soul.

Perfection.

And it all belonged to her—worth every moment she spent laboring over it. Inside the house—who cared? Too many reminders of childhood and teen years lingered there. She preferred enjoying the yard more than sitting inside, cooped up in the dreariness of the old Victorian.

Glancing at the pristine Bible on the bistro table beside her, she picked up her coffee. “I will get to that in a moment. Is it wrong for

an old woman to enjoy coffee while steam still rises?”

A nearby squirrel chattered a reply.

“Oh, you pesky little thing.” Gertrude detested the thieving creatures. “You leave my birdseed alone, you rat.”

The squirrel vaulted to the ground, right through her rose garden. “Hmmpf. You better run.” She took another sip. “What is that?”

A revolting weed popped up its ugly head beneath the Almost Black roses, defiling the perfect bed. The rich redness of the flowers, their fragrance permeating the air—intruders did not belong beneath them.

“Oh, that will never do. A weed among roses? That is as bad as sugar in coffee. Should tend to you right now before you invite all your seedy little friends.”

When did she start talking to weeds and squirrels? “I am not like my mother,” she whispered to the breeze.

Oh yes, the weed. Still in silk pajamas, Gertrude sipped coffee and nibbled a bran muffin while scrutinizing the garden intruder. “Really should get the hoe out so I do not forget about that pest.”

So many things to do, and forgetting the weed must not be one of them.

The key. Need the key.

Setting the cup back on its saucer, she stood and stretched. She did not like searching for things. Such a cute house plaque with neatly tucked keys. The discreet latch prevented prying eyes from discovering her secret. She tripped the hidden lock, revealing several keys. The small silver one? No, that started the mower. The one with tiny hearts—leave it alone. No one needed to know about that one. Ah, yes. The black one tinged with red roses. Perfect for the shed key. Gertrude plucked it off the minuscule hook and shut the miniature door, making sure the latch clicked in place.

Stretching again, Gertrude wandered toward the steps. Her friends kept telling her, “Sell the old place,” insisting she was too frail for an old-fashioned house. Frail? Not her. True, the house

reeked with unpleasant memories, but she grew up there and knew every inch of it, including those special places where she used to hide. Besides, without a mortgage from the time her mother finally passed, why should she sell it?

“Old biddies. I am not weak and decrepit like them. Jealous old women, forced to live in retirement communities, pretending they dwell in an enchanted castle instead of a place with decaying old people.” Gertrude shook her head. “Not me. This is a fine, vintage house, and I shall stay here forever—at least until they cart me out.”

She looked at the key in her hand, searched her mind. Gazing around, Gertrude rubbed her forehead with her fingertips. “Oh yes. I must take care of that weed.”

As she shuffled toward the steps, chittering caught her attention. “So, you came back, did you? Trying to steal my breakfast now? Go on, you little rat! Get away!”

The squirrel flicked his tail, shooting icicles into Gertrude’s eyes. She blinked. The creature’s snout lengthened. Dropping fuzziness, the tail grew longer, thinner. Changing from a soft brown to dark gray, the animal’s skin took on the pallor of death. A beady gaze bore into her own.

“Aaaaaa. A rat!” Her legs trembled as she twirled, searching for a weapon.

Nothing.

“You stay there. Let me get my hoe! I will destroy you!”

Gertrude rushed to the steps, dizziness sweeping over her. Two steps down, she caught her big toe.

Tripping.

Tumbling.

Pain searing.

Sprawled on the pathway beside the bottom step, she looked up. No rat, but the mischievous squirrel stared back, chattering while amusement spread across his face.

How dare he laugh?

The critter grabbed a seed from the bird feeder and sped away.

Fire exploded in Gertrude's hip and traveled through her entire body.

Not good.

Reaching up, a ginger touch to the forehead.

Ouch. Move. Must move.

Can't.

“Oh, what beautiful flowers.”

Without warning, Gertrude's colorful world went black.