

# Smiles in the Fog

It starts with the little things,  
seemingly unimportant,  
debris cluttering the brain:  
When to prune hydrangeas?  
How many cups of flour in sugar cookies?

“I always forget,”  
she says  
with smile in her voice,  
“When did you say you’re coming to visit?  
Is it this week or next?”

We repeat and repeat,  
stifling the urge to exclaim  
“I already told you!”—  
exasperation more fear  
than anger.

My brother and I,  
with furrowed concentration,  
try to remember  
ourselves  
what it is we said  
that she forgot.  
Amused,  
somewhat,  
that we can’t recall  
what our mother can’t remember.

[new stanza]

She too laughs,  
“You know my memory,”  
she lilts with the childlike smile  
of one who doesn’t truly know  
her memory.

Because if she did,  
she wouldn’t smile.

But we all smile.

Fog and smiles abound.  
Nobody knows for sure  
what’s been said,  
what’s been forgotten.

The doctor asks her to remember five words:  
cake, rainbow, money, book, purple.  
With the victorious smile of a spelling bee champ,  
she recalls all five words.

But after a conversation of cholesterol  
and exercise,  
blood pressure and sleep habits,  
she can’t remember one  
of those five words.

She can’t remember the exercise.

“What five words?”

[new stanza]

Too random, we state;  
no connection, we sustain;  
you remember what's important  
we lie.

But is this how it happens?  
First the random words slip by,  
then the pruning dates,  
and recipe ingredients.

There are levels of small:  
cups of flour, birthdates, graduations,  
grandkids' ages and names:  
“They're not both in high school, are they?!”

And even that makes sense,  
even that can be justified,  
time ebbing and flowing  
then cascading—  
moments' motions  
fleeting fast.

So hard to understand  
how infants  
become teenagers,  
how children  
become middle aged adults  
trying hard to remember  
what is it their mother has forgotten.

