

# Retrospective with Mum

*by* Martin Reed

I've brought a stack of old photo albums to the home with me. It'll be nice to go through them with Mum, I'm thinking.

When I arrive she's doing her usual routine, where she sits silent for a time then bursts unprompted into laughter, lungs rattling, shouting at some invisible friend, Don't mind me, see, don't mind me. Two of the nurses are looking at her from the other side of the room, whispering. I ignore them.

Mum, it's just me, I say quietly.

Get yes, minded, she replies to the empty chair next to her, nodding. Don't mind.

I sit with her, wait until she's calmer, until she's passive enough for me to rub moisturizer on her chapped hands. She's been scratching her knuckles raw again.

Then I take the wedding album from my bag.

Mum watches, nodding as I turn the pages, pausing on each one. I feel I should be saying something, narrating the images, but the room feels too quiet for that. I'm self conscious, so we look in silence. Standing on the church steps, confetti showering, some in black and white, some in faded color, smiles, me nowhere to be seen, not even thought of yet. And Mum looks at this young couple, nods and begins to point, saying: there's people for you, young people, I don't think it would have happened that way, back when, well I don't know. That dress. It's all.

She taps the bottom picture. It's one of her and Dad standing next to the old Just Married tin canned Jensen, about to get in, posing for

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the last few, for this one, shiny faces, guests looking on, happiness for the young couple, about to begin, setting off, thinking this is our life, it never ends, it goes on.

Mum taps it again. Then taps my knee. Hoots a laugh, nods and shouts at the empty chair, Don't mind me, see, don't mind me.

