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Forget to Remember



Alan Maley

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Cambridge English Readers

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Level 5

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Characters

Sarah Morton: Jan and Kate's mother, seventy years old (also known as **Mum**, **Mother** and **Gran**).

Jan Summers: Sarah's elder daughter and Cindy's mother, fifty-four years old, very poor.

Cindy Summers: Jan's daughter, a dropout and ex-drug addict.

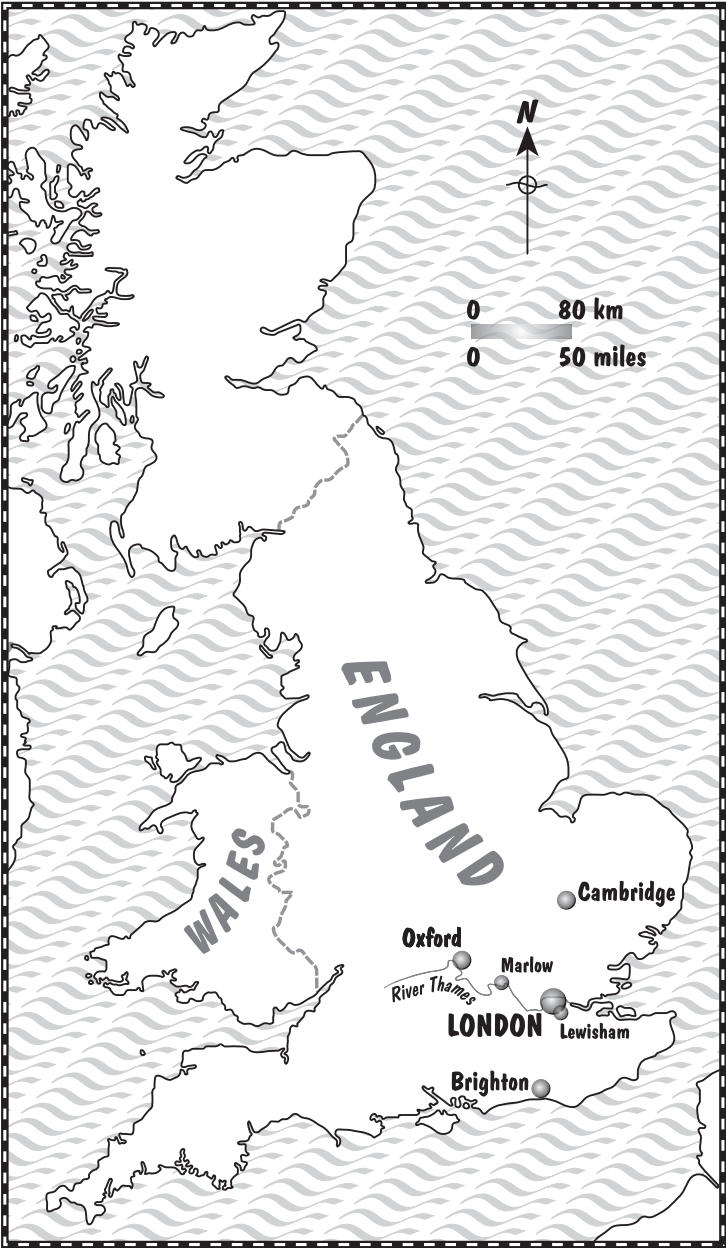
Kate Ogilvie: Sarah's younger daughter, forty-eight years old; a lawyer, married to Hugh, very rich.

Hugh Ogilvie: Kate's husband, forty-nine years old, works in financial investment.

This book is in memory of my mother, who forgot who she was.

‘Life without memory is no life at all ... Without it, we are nothing.’

Luis Buñuel



Chapter 1 *Remembering and forgetting*

Jan picked up the telephone and called her sister's number, but there was only an answerphone message: 'I'm sorry. There's no-one available to take your call. Please leave a message after the beep.'

Jan tried to make her message as calm as possible.

'Hello, Kate. This is Jan. I'm sorry, but you'll have to come down to Mother's. We've got to talk. I can't go on like this. It's becoming impossible. I know you're always busy, but you'll have to come. I can't manage with Mother any more. Please call me back at Mother's house as soon as you can.'

Her mother's voice called weakly from the next room.

'Who was that, dear?'

'No-one important. Don't worry, Mum.'

'Well, if I don't worry, who's going to worry? Someone has to do the worrying ...'

'It's OK, Mum. Really.'

'Oh good. Did you have a nice time then?'

'Sorry?'

'Didn't you go on holiday somewhere?'

'Not me, Mum. That was Mrs Jenkins from next door.'

'Oh. Who are you then?'

'Mum. I'm Jan. I'm your daughter. Surely you can recognise me.'

'Oh yes. That's right. The trouble is, there's too much to remember. I can't remember everything, you know.'

'I know that, Mum. I know.'

Jan sighed. It was late on Sunday afternoon. The room was already getting dark. On the table there was a bowl of rotting fruit – the bananas were black, the oranges brown. On the shelf above it stood her parents' wedding photograph in a silver frame. It was yellow with age. Next to it stood a framed photo of her sister Kate getting her degree from Oxford University. Then there were pictures of Jan's daughter, Cindy, and Kate's children, Jeremy and Caroline, when they were all on holiday together in Spain in happier times. There was a picture of Kate and her husband and children by the river, in the garden of their beautiful house in Marlow. There were pictures of herself and Kate as children. She picked up a picture of her father. He was carrying Kate on his shoulders. He looked so strong, so confident, so full of life.

There were no photos of Jan with her father. That was typical. He had always loved Kate more. She had been his favourite in everything. Jan remembered how he'd always treated her so badly and Kate so well. When Jan left school she'd had to go out to work, not go to university like Kate. But Kate had had the best of everything. Jan had always felt hurt by it. 'Why were families like this?' she wondered. Anyway, now her father had been dead for nearly four years.

As she put the photograph back, Jan noticed the thick dust on the shelf. She sighed again.

Outside the window a cold wind was blowing the petals off the spring flowers. It began to rain.

'Is my father still alive?' came the tired voice from the armchair.

'No, Mum. He died twenty years ago.'

'Oh, did he? What about my mum? Did she die too?'

‘Yes, Mum. She died ten years ago. Don’t you remember?’
‘Are you sure? I thought she came round for a cup of tea last week.’

‘No, Mum. That was old Mrs Jenkins who lives next door.’
‘Oh, was it ...?’ Her voice died away as she slowly thought about this piece of confusing information.

She was silent for a while. Her hands lay still in her lap, except when she occasionally moved the newspaper she was holding. Her eyelids were heavy, her eyes almost closed. She began to breathe more loudly, a low bubbling sound coming from her throat. She was dribbling from the corner of her mouth and down her chin, like a baby. Jan tiptoed to the kitchen and put the kettle on for a cup of tea. When she returned, her mother was still fast asleep, her mouth loosely open. Her head had fallen to one side.

Suddenly, she woke up. Her eyes were wide open, but they were empty. They seemed to see nothing. Then they slowly focused again.

‘Oh hello,’ she said brightly. ‘Nice of you to visit me. Have you been here long?’

‘I’ve been here since yesterday, Mum. Don’t you remember?’

‘Oh, have you? Yes, perhaps you have. But you can’t expect me to remember every little thing, you know.’

She picked up the newspaper from her lap and looked at it, but without reading it.

‘Anyway, where’s my tea? I can’t do without my tea.’

‘I’ve already put the kettle on, Mum. It won’t be long.’

‘I should hope not. I can’t wait around for ever, can I? I’ve got work to do.’

‘I know, Mum. I know.’