

When she'd been given the name and room number she pursed her lips; she knew what the room number meant and wasn't a fan of having to insert ports on patients in these rooms because it was always such a depressing sight. So, when she got to the sixth floor, wing 'B' and heard all the noise coming from the room it was a surprise. There was the sound of laughter and movement, clinking glasses and there were so many people.

It was a single occupancy room, and in this instance that was a very good thing because it didn't look like there would be enough room for another person, or even another object, in this room. A cart had been moved in along with several chairs filled, and still several people were standing and navigating their way through the sea of others.

She observed each face that she could see in turn and found subtle similarities in eye colors and noses, the set of their lips and curl of the hair. It was also easy to see who was and wasn't biologically related to the woman of the hour; Shirley Olive Inward.

From conversation going on around the room she overheard that Shirley was the mother of five, grandmother of eight, great-grand mother of ten; widowed in the last five years and the dementia had been steadily creeping in around her ninetieth birthday. Shirley had watched her friends and family lose themselves to dementia and was damned if she'd let herself lose all of her faculties and become solely dependent on other people.

That was why she was here in the morning. Sufferers of dementia were more likely to know themselves in the morning. The three mandatory doctors' consultations that led to this gathering would have been done in the morning as well.

It wasn't uncommon for her to hear some insensitive conversations going on over inheritance yet the hushed discussion between the granddaughters wasn't over who would get the engagement ring, it was over whether the eldest could have the fridge magnet that read 'Shirley's Kitchen' that had travelled from home to home as her grandparents had moved, the slightly younger granddaughter requested the framed picture she'd taken of her grandmother's childhood home in London, before she immigrated during the second World War and the youngest asked whether anyone knew what was happening to the crystal candy bowl that everyone, without fail, would head for to take a Jujube upon entering the Inward family home.

It was easy to pick out Shirley from the crowd, she was the one that everyone was turned toward, making sure her wine glass was full and that she had the selection of whatever she wanted to eat. Looking at her now, it didn't seem that this woman was about to pass over; she was smiling and looking regal in the dress she'd worn to two of her grandchildren's weddings. Her sharp eyes and arched eyebrows reminded the woman of Dame Maggie Smith, it wasn't hard to believe that all these people in the room loved and respected her

enough to have travelled from all corners of the country just to be here for her final moments. It was hard, however, to need to interrupt the festivities with the reminder of what was about to happen as she excused herself over and over again, weaving her way through the generations to Shirley so she could do her job.

“Thank you, dear,” Shirley told her after she’d finished pulling her sleeve over the taped down IV line. “Would you like a butter tart?”

The polite decline fell on deaf ears as at least five of Shirley’s progeny hopped into action and plied her with butter tarts, croissants and a brownie.

At the door now was the doctor.

Eyes started growing glossy and the laughter died down.

Except for Shirley, who was smiling.