



Rita starts every day the same, with a commitment to herself to be patient today. Rita's patience, like a once soft and plush carpet, is threadbare and wearing thin; still intact but worn out. Rita's husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's some years ago and she has been caring for him ever since. Every time Rita thinks about her options, namely the thought of long-term care, she reminds herself of a promise she made 57 years ago. She replays the words 'in sickness and in health' and once again buries the seed of an idea that her family have been hoping will grow for some time. It's not that Rita has anything against residential care, it's that she can see how happy her Donald is at home; their home. Rita and Donald have a large garden area surrounding their house, some parts are manicured, other parts are wild. They have a vast range of trees and plants and at this time of year particularly, they share a love of the wildlife their garden is home to.

From her kitchen window, Rita can watch her husband 'potter' around the garden, he gazes up at the big Ash tree and gets mesmerised by the birds and their songs. In those moments, Rita's heart aches with happiness; seeing Donald at peace.

Night times are a different story and with the recent lack of routine, have become worse. The evening ritual starts at 5 o'clock and by the time the 10 o'clock news comes on, Rita feels like she's done a hard shift at work. Rita herself is

getting more tired and her own health is beginning to decline. She always encourages Donald to make his own choices but that means things are done at a slow pace and things happen at odd times of the day. They often don't eat dinner until 9pm. Rita rarely has a settled night's sleep, more often than not she is up changing sheets in the middle of the night. In a practical sense, Rita is a survivor, but emotionally she is struggling more and more. Rita is a highly intelligent woman and loves nothing more than conversation. Rita and Donald would once have conversed for hours, putting the world to right. Although she longs to, sadly, Rita can't talk with Donald like that anymore. Before lockdown, they had a home help who visited regularly and had become a friend; they saw grandchildren, family and friends, and loved nothing more than having people over for lunch or afternoon tea. They would go off for a drive in the car, to natural beauty spots

nearby or further afield. They both love the rich history and natural beauty of Scotland. Despite having her Donald at home, and having everything they need, Rita finds herself feeling deeply alone. She wishes she could have something

to look forward to. Rita misses seeing people. People fascinate her, and she has always been inspired by different cultures. Rita has not seen anyone 'new' for months, she feels like a hamster in a wheel of monotony and feels like giving up sometimes. She won't give up, Donald means too much to her but some days, sometimes, it all feels overwhelming.

What makes humans unique is our ability to understand emotions, to reach out to people, to empathise. What Rita misses most is human contact, someone reaching, someone offering comfort. Telephone calls of support help, and she is grateful for them as they have been her only lifeline through all of this but it's very difficult to replace the feeling of an embrace with someone who understands you and who feels your pain. At times Rita feels angry at the sacrifices they are having to make, in the short term it is manageable, but as time goes on, she is feeling wearier. Rita fantasises about throwing caution to the wind and just going back to living life as normal but logic prevails and so they continue, but she asks the question, how long can we be asked to live like this? Losing months of your life in your 80s, to Rita, feels much like a huge cost. In Rita's eyes, time is the greatest wealth in the world.