



# Death in Slow Motion: My Mother's Descent into Alzheimer's

*Eleanor Cooney*

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Alzheimer's is death in slow motion," says Eleanor Cooney in this jarring and unsentimental memoir about caring for her mother, "and it has the ability to kill love while the person you love still breathes."

When it was all but certain that her once-glamorous and witty novelist-mother had Alzheimer's, Cooney moved her from her beloved Connecticut home to California in order to care for her. In tense, searing prose, punctuated with the blackest of humor, Cooney documents the slow erosion of her mother's mind, of the powerful bond the two shared, and her own descent into drink and despair.

"She was always my favorite person," says Eleanor, "hip, cool, brilliant, funny, sane -- my ultimate confidante and sympathizer." Now, overwhelmed by the Chinese water torture of endless small worries, endlessly repeated, that dementia thrusts on victim and caregiver, Cooney resorts to booze, tranquilizers, and gallows wit to blunt the edges of the relentless loss and the demands of ministering to this devastating disease.

But the coping mechanism that finally serves this eloquent writer best is writing, the ability to bring to vivid life the memories her mother is losing. As her mother gropes in the gathering darkness for a grip on the world she once loved, succeeding only in conjuring sad fantasies of places and times with her dead husband, Cooney revisits their true past. *Death in Slow Motion* becomes the mesmerizing story of Eleanor's actual childhood, straight out of the pages of John Cheever; the daring and vibrant mother she remembers; and a time that no longer exists for either of them.

Deeply moving, shockingly honest, and framed by wounded love, Cooney's tale reveals in remorseless prose the true nature of the beast called Alzheimer's, and with it, the arcane processes of the writer's craft and of a splendid mind's disintegration. "Alzheimer's," Cooney writes, "you'll never be the same once it's paid you a visit."

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