

# **I Have Never Used the Forgetting Pill**

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*“Breaking news: a man suspected of killing two people in London last week has been found at the airport this morning. So far, he has refused to speak. He doesn't remember anything, he says, as he allegedly took the forgetting pill. According to police, this drug has already helped more than fifteen criminals.”*

I have never used the forgetting pill. I know many people have, but I don't see why I should. There is nothing I would like to forget. I haven't suffered so much, and even bad memories are parts of myself: how could I delete them? Some people told me that the pill helped them feel better. It's very simple, they said. You put it in your mouth and think about all those horrible things you want to forget. Within seconds, the memories you have chosen to erase are gone forever. No worries anymore. Innocence and freedom. Your brain fills in the gaps, and you can live your life as if nothing happened. More and more people follow this new trend. They forget everything that keeps them away from their ideal lives. They forget that once, when they were five, they stole ten pounds from their parents and got punished, they forget that last year, they abandoned their dogs, they forget that yesterday they killed someone. They begin with petty things that make them uncomfortable. Who cares, they say, better live without these memories. And then, they go one step further. They forget their biggest mistakes. Better live without these memories. Of course, the forgetting pill is the future. I must be some old conservative idiot, but I think they're wrong. I'd rather live with all my memories, the good and the bad ones. Memories make us human. We're not perfect: we've failed, we've suffered. Forgetting won't make us any better. Making mistakes will, but ironically they seem to have forgotten. Is it really impossible for them to live with all their memories? Do they hate them so much they need to live a fake life? And don't they see what I see? Don't they see all the evil that pill has already done? Crimes. Abuses. Everything becomes possible with the pill. Regrets are old-fashioned. No problem if you shoot that person you hate. No problem if you cheat on your husband, just for one night. Nobody's going to know – not even you. But I've also heard other stories. People who deleted all their memories, and feel empty. People who don't know what's real from what's not. People who commit suicide.

I think we should be careful with this pill. Nobody knows who created it and how it works. Even in my lab, we wouldn't be able to synthesise such a thing. Nobody knows if it's good for your body, or if it will destroy you. But some are already making money with it, and some others have already died because of it.

I definitely don't want to be part of it.

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Strangely enough, I keep on thinking of this forgetting pill. At first, I thought it was something that just did not concern me, but actually it stays somewhere at the back of my mind and I don't know why. I'm not at ease about it, and I can't explain that feeling. Obviously, I worry about what the world could become if everyone used the pill, but there's something else. An indefinable mix of fear, anger, sadness... As if I felt that the pill could hurt me, even though I keep away from it.

At the lab this morning, I talked with Victor about the forgetting pill. I've worked with him for more than ten years and I really trust him, so I decided to be sincere with him. He agreed with me when I told him I was scared, and he added that he wanted to work on what he called a memory pill. "You know, Sarah, my father took the forgetting pill one month ago, and for me it's like he's dead. He chose to erase all the memories about his family life. He doesn't recognize me when we meet in the street. I don't know why he's done that. I guess he has his secret wounds..."

He made a pause. I smiled at him with sympathy. I understood so well what he felt.

"I'd like to make a cure. I've thought about it since the day my father... I want to bring him back. I find it so hard to live in this forgetting world... Sometimes, I wonder why I don't take the pill too."

He sighed and looked at the garden out of the window, as if he wanted to forget his pain through this contemplation.

"Don't say that," I replied. "I know it must be hard, but our memories matter. We can't let this forgetting pill win. However, sometimes I wonder... Do you think it's possible that we've already taken the pill, but don't remember it? What if I have erased something in my life? I can't answer that..."

"Well, that's a good question. I bet that if you take a heavy dose, it's possible you even forget you've just taken it. This makes a cure even more necessary. A memory pill. You should collaborate with me. I've thought about it for a while and I know all the research on memory will allow us to succeed."

"You've convinced me. I'll work with you."

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It's been two weeks since I've begun to work with Victor on the memory pill. He had already researched a lot before he told me about his project, and we've worked on memory for years. We're not far from making an antidote to the forgetting pill. I hope we'll manage. It's really important for both of us, we could help so many people with this new pill. Victor feels much concerned about it. I

know he does it for his father, but he says he wants to help all the people who took the forgetting pill and suffer. As for me, I must admit that besides helping them I'd like to know more about the pill, and be sure I haven't taken it. I would never do such a thing, but still I wonder. Of course I haven't taken the pill. But...what if?

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After a month of hard work, we are now almost ready. We've managed to create a molecule that seems to reverse the effects of the forgetting pill. We have tested it on rats and the results are quite promising. We have two groups of rats: both are trained to find the exit of a maze. The first group is given the forgetting pill, and takes more time to leave the maze than the second group, which remembers where the exit is. But when we give the memory pill to the first group, we obtain similar results to those of the second group! There doesn't seem to be any side effects. All our rats are healthy. It will soon be time to give the memory pill to the very first human volunteers. We've already found a dozen. Vick and I are both very proud of what we've achieved, but I can feel he's nervous, and I am too. I guess he's looking forward to giving the memory pill to his father, but we mustn't rush, we have to make sure the pill is not harmful. For now, we can only give it to volunteers that are aware of the risks they take. I do hope everything will be fine!

I wonder if I should test our pill on myself, just to see how it feels. I should not ask anyone else to take a risk I, as a scientist, wouldn't take. Plus, I would be able to know if I've taken the forgetting pill... I'm confident I haven't, but I still think about it, and Victor has already told me that this possibility scares him too... What if I took the forgetting pill? Why would I have done such a thing? What would I have erased? It opens the door to so many frightening questions... What would I discover if I took the memory pill? Would this lonely 35-year-old scientist still be me?

I didn't have time to talk with Vick today, as we spent the afternoon with two journalists who wanted to know more about our research. They work for a journal that prepares a special issue devoted to memory.

"Why an antidote to the forgetting pill?" asked at some point one of the journalists.

"We don't think the forgetting pill means progress," I answered. "It's going too far. We have to stop it. Its effects need to be kept in check."

"How are we supposed to live in society, if some of us erase our memories?" Victor added.

"Collective memory is important, too."

"Yes," said the other journalist, "Justice faces important challenges, you know... Offenders can't

remember their crimes, even if there is sufficient evidence to send them to jail for life!”

“Remember we're talking about criminals,” said his colleague. “They're not victims. Maybe if I had done such horrible things, I would like to stop thinking about my deeds.”

“The real tragedy is that the number of crimes has risen with the forgetting pill,” I replied. “I don't understand why the government isn't doing anything.”

“In fact, it is,” the first journalist said. “The police are investigating. They think the creator of the pill controls the traffic and would be able to put an end to it. You're not the only ones to worry.”

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I've talked with Vick today. We'll make the first tests on humans tomorrow, and I wanted to share my thoughts with him. He said he was going to test the memory pill, and told me I should do the same if I wanted to know for certain. The latest tests we've made suggest there's no risk with our pill, so nothing wrong should happen. Vick really thinks we should try the pill, so I'm going to do the experiment with him. I'm a bit nervous, but he seems confident about it.

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I took the memory pill yesterday. Today, as I wake up, I'm fine. No side effects for the moment. No effects at all, it seems. It's hard to say. I search my memory for something new, something that wasn't there when I went to bed yesterday. Of course, I have never used the forgetting pill. I will text Vick.

And yet... A faint reminiscence? A pill. White and round. On the table. A glass of water. A headache. What have I done? I can't remember clearly. Which means I did take the pill. A pill in my mouth. Freedom.

I can't believe it. I've taken the pill. I've used the forgetting pill. I know for sure. Why did I do it? When was it? I can't believe it... But what if the memory pill didn't really work? Sometimes, our minds create fake memories. Maybe those new memories are not true. I don't understand. Did I...? An empty box. Pain. Loneliness.

I must call Victor.

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I met Vick at the lab at 9. When I called him, I could hardly explain what was going on. My voice

was quivering and my words were confused. He understood there was something wrong and he immediately accepted to join me.

I found it hard to work while waiting for him. I could not focus on what I was doing. The same image was passing before my eyes, again and again: the white pill I had taken some day, somehow. I could feel it was a real memory of mine, but I still perceived it as a stranger's. As if a part of someone else's life had been grafted in my mind.

Seeing Vick was a relief. I was not alone with my thoughts anymore. He dropped his bag on a chair and grabbed a notebook.

“What's the matter?”

“I remember...” I began, hesitating. “I took the forgetting pill. I don't know when and why but... I did it. I can't deny it now.”

“Really? Tell me what happened. Does it mean our memory pill works?”

“Right after I had woken up, I remembered something. It's really hard to explain... I knew it wasn't there before. It was not even a memory... Feelings, images...”

Vick was writing down everything I was saying.

“I could remember a pill and great, great, pain. Something dark, heavy, horrible.”

“And how do you feel now?”

“Well...” I searched for the right word. “I feel strange. Everything's confused, my memories are blurred. I can remember being so sad... It makes me feel bad, even now.”

“Memories may hurt... I'm sorry. But we have to keep on working, right? Something good will come out of this pill. And the fact that you seem to have some recollections is quite encouraging.”

“I'd rather not feel so bad, but of course, we must go on.”

“You're helping science, Sarah, and all the people that believe in our work. But don't you remember why you were sad, or why you took the pill?”

“No, I don't. But if this pill made me so miserable, I'm even more determined to stop it.”

“So am I. You were right to take the memory pill. Maybe you should do it again. It would probably bring back more memories, and you would be able to understand what happened and feel better, I hope.”

“I'll do this. I'm sure it will help.”

“For now, you should go back to your place and take some rest, Sarah.”

“I will. Thank you, Vick.”

I took a memory pill and put it in a plastic bag. I would take it later.

“And what about you? You haven't said anything. Do you remember something new?”

“No. Nothing. I didn't take the forgetting pill.”

“Good news.”

I came back home and checked my e-mails: all our volunteers were fine. Some of them were uncomfortable with their memories, but nothing serious. I swallowed my second memory pill and went to bed. Even if it was only 11, I was exhausted.

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I don't know if Victor's idea was good: since I took the second memory pill this morning, my memories have grown more vivid, and this is not a pleasant experience. My nap ended because of a nightmare: I was in my room, alone, crying for something unidentified. I could hear a baby screaming. The room was full of shadows, and I was so scared, so desperate. I wanted to find peace, silence and light, but when I tried to move, I fell and woke up. The baby and the shadows had gone, but the fear and the sadness were still much present.

It has been a few hours since I woke up, and I'm still trying to understand. The memory pill is not fully efficient yet: it seems that when you swallow it, it takes some time before you remember everything. It needs improving. By now, my memories are like puzzle pieces. Scattered elements with strange forms – and I struggle to draw links between them.

Those new memories came gradually, when I didn't expect them. I was standing near the window, looking at the street. A father was pushing a buggy with a child. Even from a distance, I could see the baby smiling at his father. It was giggling and waved its hands. Its father stopped to rearrange its little blanket, gave the baby a kiss and moved on. And suddenly I knew. Images flickered in my mind. A baby girl in blue pyjamas, playing with a teddy bear. Her first steps in a flowered dress on a sunny day in June. Emily. Her little body in my arms, her sleepy breath.

Who was she? So tiny, so frail. I can see her now in my memory. I can hear her voice calling me “mummy”.

I tried to cook something for lunch, but I cut my finger. The disinfectant reminded me of a hospital. A man was holding my hand. The doctors were sorry.

What happened there? And where is Emily now?

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I went back to the lab to face Vick. He was the only one I trusted enough to talk to, and I needed to be with him.

Vick has always been so supportive. He has always listened to me, and yet he has never said a word about his problems... Do I know him at all?

I told him everything I had remembered since I had taken the memory pill for the second time. He understood I was becoming scared of what I was discovering, of all this unknown past that was suddenly coming back, but he seemed strongly convinced I should take the pill again until I completely recovered my memory.

“You've always said you wouldn't want to erase any of your memories. Now you can have them back, go ahead. Don't become like these people who take the forgetting pill, Sarah.”

“I'm already one of them. But you're right.”

“Everything will be fine. And don't forget that when you take our pill, you're helping us to improve it. We have a duty to all these people!”

I must admit that before saving people, I wanted to save myself. Victor was full of good will and wanted to help everyone, but I wasn't sure he really understood what I was going through – discovering all those things was confusing. Anyway, I had decided to follow his advice. Near our stock of memory pills were some boxes of forgetting pills that Vick had purchased for our research – where had he found them? I took the pills I needed and went back home.

Before going to bed, I swallowed a memory pill. I wanted the pill to bring me enough memories to understand and, at least, be at peace.

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*“...We are now with Alex, who accepted to tell us about his experience with the forgetting pill. Alex, would you say you are happier now?”*

*“Of course I am. I feel so free! I've stopped asking myself useless questions. My life has changed, and now I'm trying to fulfil my biggest dream: to... –”*

I really don't care about this Alex and his dreams. The broadcast was not interesting, and I'm tired of hearing about the forgetting pill. I have never used it and I'm not going to use it. I don't see why people need to show everyone how happy they are thanks to this pill. I know many of them feel better without some of their memories, but I think this is going too far. I'm scared of what the world could become if everybody forgot everything. Using this pill is madness, people are reckless, they behave like babies... Babies? This word has suddenly reminded me of something. As if... I don't see what it could be. Did someone tell me about a baby recently? No. Not that I remember. This



stupid pill... Could it be contaminating me? The pill... It doesn't work so well. I can remember. Not everything, but... I remember what I did this morning. What I did when I remembered why I had erased my memories for the first time. I took the forgetting pill.

I still don't have all the pieces of the story. I can't remember why I decided to forget. What am I fleeing from again and again? What's hiding behind all these shadows?

Should I take the memory pill again, even if it hurts? What would Victor do? I already know his answer: he would take the pill. He really believes in our memory pill, and every time I was hesitating, he reminded me that memory is one of the most important things.

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I have never used the forgetting pill. I would never do it, even if my family died and – why do my memories come back so fast? Why can't I erase them for good?

Emily...

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I have never used the forgetting pill. Never. And if I haven't, why are there so many blanks in my memory?

Who am I?

These memories... They're hiding somewhere at the back of my mind... Are they real? Did I really...?

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I have never used the forgetting pill.

That's why I remember so well the day when Emily died.

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Emily... Even her mother's love could not save her.

The eighth of October. It was a Tuesday.

And I forgot it. I abandoned her.

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I have never used the forgetting pill. Never.

When Emily died, I remained alone and desperate, but I overcame the pain, didn't I?

I was as always – strong and determined. I never tried to forget her, I know it.

I came back to work. Memory. That's what we were studying.

And what did I do, then? What did I create with the energy of despair?

I betrayed her.

How could I do it? Could I ever forgive myself?

And Victor... Why did he help me?

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I took the forgetting pill once again, but nothing happened. I've taken too many pills now. My memories are back and it seems that I can't forget them anymore.

I'm not the person I thought I was. This young researcher – true to herself and determined, who loved nothing more than sincerity... She's never existed. Or maybe she did exist before Emily's death, but since then... She's been a fake image created by a mind overwhelmed by pain. I thought I could be a perfect mother, have a perfect life... When I realized I was wrong, I tried to accept it, but it was too hard. I was broken. I was convinced I could have saved Emily from the disease that was killing her, just by believing harder that she would live. But life is not a fairy tale. Nothing would have brought her back. I thought it was all my fault, and I didn't know what to do. I've tried to feel better by any means. As I was already working on memory, I was able to create the only thing that could help me: the forgetting pill. But it still wasn't enough. I could remember something was missing... And I remembered I had made the pill. I knew something was wrong with my past. Therefore, I took the forgetting pill again and again, until I forgot everything, even the fact that I had created it. How ironic this is! I've devoted a lot of my time to fighting the forgetting pill and trying to help people remember, but what I was fighting against was myself, my own self. I had created what I considered one of the worst things in the world. And I have forgotten my daughter... I've lied to myself...

Who am I, now? What's left? I'll have to create myself anew... I should ask Victor. He'll help me like he's always done. But now come to think of it... He knew everything... Why did he work on the forgetting pill with me? And then, why did he insist on making the memory pill? Was it really for his father, or could there be other reasons? I really must go and see him.

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“Victor, we need to talk... I remember everything.”

“Everything? It doesn't seem to make you happy...”

“Oh no, it doesn't. Now I know... My daughter died! And I was unable to prevent it...”

“Calm down Sarah, she was sick, it wasn't your fault. Even the doctors couldn't save her. There was nothing you could do.”

“But at least I could have remembered her, respected her memory... Why did you help me with the forgetting pill?”

“Because you asked me to. You were so desperate. Your pain seemed heavier every day. I would have done anything to help you. When you had the idea of the forgetting pill, I thought it could work. And then, that it could help other people as well, all the people that felt uncomfortable with their memories.”

“But why did you work on the memory pill, then?”

“I understood the forgetting pill was not as good as expected. Some people found it hard to live without memories. Plus you were always telling me that memory was so important. And then you started asking me questions... I thought enough time had passed. I wanted to save you. And you know, I was so proud to be part of this, to help so many people... I wanted to go further.”

“You were proud? Really?”

“And I am still proud! We're going to make big things happen with our pills. We will change the world!”

“I think I've got it. You didn't do all this for me, nor for anyone else. You did it because you wanted to become a hero, you wanted to save the world! ”

“No, You've got it all wrong! I sincerely wanted to help you... But you don't understand: we can become famous thanks to the memory pill. When the pill is ready, we'll just have to release it. We'll be the lab that has found the antidote to the forgetting pill! We are a great team!”

“We? Do you remember why I created the forgetting pill? I think *you* don't understand. It was an act of despair. It was not supposed to make anyone rich and famous! And when you told me to take the memory pill, were you really trying to help me? Or were you using me as a guinea pig to move onto the fast track and become a superstar?”

Victor kept silent.

“And what about your father?”

“Well... He's fine.”

“Really? So you lied to me! You manipulated me to take advantage of my pain! Listen Victor, thanks for all. I've had enough of your help!”

He didn't say anything. I didn't know if my words had touched him – he was probably too selfish to care about what I had just said.

“Now listen, this is what you're going to do: you've got to stop it all, and leave me alone, or I'll make sure that all this monkey business comes to an end.”

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I went back home. I began to pack my things. I felt so lonely, without Emily, without Victor. No one could help now... I wished I could forget. I knew I couldn't do it anymore. It was not the right thing to do. It was not how life was supposed to be... But it was the only thing that could help me. I felt so sad...

The doorbell rang. There wasn't anyone waiting at the door, but a little box was on the threshold. I opened it. Inside there was a white pill and a letter.

“Sarah,

*Here is the strongest forgetting pill we've ever devised, stronger than the other ones. You took the same pill to forget your daughter and all the rest. If you take this one, you will forget everything.*

*I'm sorry for all I've done. I hope you'll find peace with this pill.”*

I recognized Victor's handwriting. After betraying me, he thought I would accept his help... Of course, swallowing this pill was tempting. I would be free... But how could I be true to myself if I kept forgetting my past? I needed to remember Emily, to bear that suffering... After all I had done, I had deserved it. But could I really stand all this pain?

Anyway, I didn't know if I could trust Victor. Was this forgetting pill a real one? It could be some kind of lethal poison that would kill me so that he could act as he liked...

I put the forgetting pill on the table. It was a hard decision.

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*“Breaking news: the creator of the forgetting pill has been arrested as he was trying to leave the country. He admitted he had created it, but made no other statement.”*

I have never used the forgetting pill. I know many people have, but I like my life as it is. I wouldn't

want to erase any of my memories. They're part of myself. I wouldn't be me without them. I don't understand why people need to forget their past, and I have to confess this forgetting pill scares me. Actually, I'm glad its creator was arrested. Such a person must be very dangerous. I hope this will put an end to the trafficking. We'll live better without the forgetting pill.