

'I really don't need my razor any more, my love'

It was tough at the end, wasn't it my love. You don't believe in happy endings any more do you?

I see you now. I see your arm spread across the pillow holding on, soft and gentle, to the place where I used to lie. I see your secret tears. I see them fall in a silent, silver river and the way that you wipe them away with a swift, determined movement of your hand. You can't let them know can you, for they might say in their gentle kindness and concern that you should be getting over this by now.

You look at the photographs and they make you sad. So, mostly you don't because you can no longer bear too. You know now that I'm not coming back, but you hide that thought away don't you? You push it to the very edges of the darkest corners of your mind and bury it there. That way you don't have to face the truth that I will no longer wear the clothes that still hang, pressed and clean, in the wardrobe where I left them.

I really don't need my razor any more my love, or the shaving foam, or the after-shave that you smell when you miss me so much that you think you'll fall, and shatter into a thousand sharp and tiny pieces.

I didn't tell you the truth at first did I; not all of it? I knew so much more on that day when I waited and watched the swift, detached, determined efficiency of the hospital Nurse's and looked at pretty pictures on pastel painted walls.

I wasn't alone; there were many of us waiting there. We didn't talk. We didn't talk, but in our silence we spoke each one to the others, giving what strength we could in a small shy smile. We were a sort of family, a society of brothers and sisters in adversity that waited for a verdict.

On the table they'd put glossy magazines that spoke of normal life, but on the walls were cancer information posters that could not.

I'd waited quietly for my turn, but there was a part of me that had not wanted to know. For a fraction of a moment I'd thought that I should walk away so the words that would tell me how long I still had left would not be spoken. Perhaps then, their truth would wither and die and I would still be strong and whole and healthy.

They'd called my name. I'd walked into the room and sat down. The walls were white and devoid of decoration and for some reason I'd thought of home; of the cosy warmth of colour, of autumn-gold and terracotta, of deep mustard-yellow and picture-cluttered walls. The contrast made me smile. Remember, I told you about it? I know that you do because it made you smile too, just a little, through your tears.

I'd sat there and listened to the Consultant's words. They were calm and assured. They did not falter and there was no room for error in them, but they reached me through the fog that was my own disbelief that this was really happening.

'...Myeloma. Cancer of the bone marrow...'

'...High dose chemotherapy ... radiotherapy ... possibly a stem cell transplant. We need to start as soon as possible...'

'...There may be some sickness and probably some hair loss ...'

'...No cure ... but there are treatment options that may prolong your life expectancy ...'

There were words, words and more words on that day when first I knew, but mostly they did not settle in my mind for I let them go and they blew away and scattered like autumn leaves swept up on a breeze.

I was not afraid of death. I'd been a soldier and I'd faced it many times. But how could I tell you? What words could I use that would wrap in cotton wool the knife that I knew would pierce your heart the moment they'd been spoken.

I poured you a glass of wine and I held your hand as I told you. But I could see in your eyes that you wouldn't accept the reality of it. You were always the optimistic

one. Perhaps that's why, on that last day, you just shut down and closed out life when you finally had to recognise that your hope alone could no longer keep me alive.

There was a double rainbow in the sky when my body was laid to rest in that small and beautiful country churchyard. But you didn't see it because your head was bowed too low and your mind was far away in a place where it still searched for me. But they told you of it, those lovely caring people who came to say goodbye to me and to pick you up and carry you, should you stumble and fall.

Perhaps the rainbow was just a coincidence. Do you really think so, my love?

Time passes and most often wounds, no matter how deep, will start to heal.

You've remembered how to smile now, haven't you? It started on the day when Maddie was with you and she found the Cowslip growing on my grave. It was so small that it was hardly noticeable at first, but it was there - your favourite springtime flower. It was beautiful and perfect and it bloomed for you alone for no other ones grew there.

Perhaps the Cowslip was just a coincidence. Do you really think so, my love?

Now, when you look at the photographs of the last of our years together you smile because you remember that, even through the hell and the pain of it all, we were happy more times than we were sad.

You are strong, my love. Do not waste more tears. It is time to live again.