

## And How Would You Describe The Pain?

*She was a former model but*

*She was not a model patient*

*She did not make terminal illness appear trendy.*

*She did not radiate optimism*

*She did not possess an indomitable will to beat her illness*

*She had not given her cancer a suitable pseudonym*

*To assert her dominance over this unwanted invasion.*

*Her neighbours did not bring around lasagne*

*Her husband was long gone ("a widow for years")*

*Her son was expecting another child*

*So would not have time for her.*

*She had friends who were dying too*

*They sometimes went into respite care at the hospice so their husbands could have a break*

*Her husband was dead*

*So she did not qualify*

*Although she could have done with a break from looking after herself.*

*She spoke of an in-between feeling*

*Not a sensation of the tumour creeping in between the lungs and chest wall*

*But the in-between of*

*Not knowing if it was weeks or months*

*The in-between of*

*Not sick enough for hospice but struggling at home*

*The in-between of court cases and ACC disputes*

*Even our conversation swung between*

*The difficulty of dying*

*And favourite coffee brands.*

*She spoke of fear:*

*Her biggest fear was dying alone.*

*Her biggest fear was that she would be put into a rest home.*

*Her biggest fear was a long, drawn-out death.*

*Watching hospice friends die, one by one, she was afraid she would be next.*

*I think she was also afraid she would be last.*

*She nearly cried*

*Talking about her husband dying*

*her friends dying*

*the shock of her diagnosis*

*the lack of support*

*being alone*

*I nearly cried too.*

*The day before, I had observed an interaction*

*Between a doctor and a body with metastatic cancer*

*Brought in by its owner, a bubbly 30-something, and her husband.*

*The three discussed the body's calcium levels and thyroid problems,*

*Fatigue and the gas in the stoma bag,*

*"More blood tests!" was what the body needed, and the couple had agreed*

*This was much easier.*

*I had seen dying before, but from a distance,*

*Not this prolonged, lonely dying –*

*I had not sat for so long in this place where questions have no answers*

*Where problems have no solutions*

*I had not looked straight into a dying face*

*And asked how it felt to be there.*

*I could only make feeble observations:*

*“That sounds really difficult.”*

*“So it seems like you feel quite unsupported?”*

*“It must be hard not to know.”*

*What else could I do?*

*I have learnt the skills of using stethoscopes,*

*Tendon hammers, sphygmomanometers, butterfly needles*

*I would like to learn the skill*

*Of putting them down*

*Knowing when a patient has had enough of being a primary-tumour-poorly-circumscribed-*

*With-widespread-mets-secondary-to-haematogenous-spread*

*And today, just wants to be a person.*

*If there are right things to say,*

*I would like to learn these.*

*If there are no right things to say,*

*I would like to learn this too*

*And learn how to sit in this space*

*Where we cry in between*

*Eating chocolate chip biscuits*

*And drinking Hummingbird Crave.*