

The Touch of a Man

It glances off the circle of green ferns,

this sweet afternoon sunlight,

pours through
the open ranchslider
warming the room,
touching
the soft paleness of your face.

Your eyes twinkle softly,
say,
'hello old friend'
as you recognise me.

The wounded king
is lying in state,
receiving
those who feel called..

You bless them with your open heart.

I kiss you
on both cheeks.
Your whole being smiles.

Each day
more friends and family draw near
as if to a fire
on a cold evening,
never knowing
how long the night will be
or
how long
the fire will burn.

Nothing to hide anymore
and
that is infectious.

You cry often
and quietly
as I read my poetry,
play my songs -
a few of your favourites.

Your family and friends
hover about,
and dip
into the ripples

of our communion.

Tears splash down your daughter's face as she gathers up your grandson.
Play a happy song now, she says.
So I do.

I sit on the floor beside your chair.
Honesty and our lives are the food we share.
My hand rests lightly on your arm as we speak,
close enough to feel your breath.

Our stories are different.
To mine, you say 'that's big.'

Yours
stretches my heart even wider.

The cancer disappeared
for eighteen months
then reappeared suddenly
disintegrating the fifth cervical vertebrae
and overwhelming
your entire body.

Now your right arm
is as limp as a noodle
and that whole side of your body
seems to be saying goodbye

Your ex-wife
has always been your friend

Now she is your guardian angel –
twenty four hour a day .
she feeds you carefully,
knows all the routines -
how to move you,
help you to the toilet or the bed.

This is her world,
her house,
her gardens.

Thirty years ago
I met you both here.

None of us could have imagined this moment.

Now she takes care of everything,
The welcoming hearth,

The endless cups of tea
home-cooked food for everyone who arrives,
the many phone calls enquiring after you.

She guides your visitors to you
protects you
from them.

Generosity,
Respect,
Forgiveness,
Sacrifice,
Appreciation
for paradox and complexity
a time-won understanding -
all gifts of love

Today you are a glowing presence.

Resistance is dissolving
and leaves traces of
a genuine acceptance and
surrender,
a delight in small things,
the rising and falling of the breath.
listening with eyes closed,
just sitting still,

the extraordinary power of this very moment.

My hands gently massage
your frail and weak body.

'Ah the touch of a man ,
I drink it in'
you say.

When I bend over to whisper goodbye,
you kiss me on the lips.

Mana, Coromandel...October , 2006