

Emilija

Emilija is an Lithuanian catholic who is in a hospice and very near the end of her life. She is planning a special traditional celebration of Easter with her daughter Camilla and friends.

They're putting out a table for us. They think we're going to make a mess so they're putting something down on the floor in case we spill dye on the carpet.

I hope Camilla doesn't mind that I've asked my friends to join in. She's probably expecting it to be just the two of us, like usual. But it's such fun and she always makes such a good job of it, and I want my friends to see how beautiful the eggs look when they're finished. And anyway I have to join in with all of their traditions so it's about time they took part in something Lithuanian. And this is what we do on Holy Saturday. I think she was three when she did her first ones, and we've only missed one year since in all that time. And this will be the last time. Maybe I shouldn't have asked the others to join in.

I mustn't say that though. That these are probably our last eggs that we will paint together. Camilla still thinks that some kind of cure may appear out of the blue, some kind of Easter miracle when I know that's not going to happen. But I couldn't have asked for things to be better than they are. All these lovely people here helping me to wash and dress and sometimes to eat and all so kind. It's not what you want really, people having to do all this for you, but it is what it is.

And everything is prepared, that's the thing. Not like with my husband, which was terrible. I remember saying to Camilla 'never let that happen to me', and she said of course she wouldn't. But when it came to it, of telling the doctor exactly what I wanted, what they should and shouldn't do, it was Camilla who was unsure and trying to hold me back. After all that we both saw.

The Doctor was very good. I think she knew I was ready to have that conversation. I was a little stronger after my operation and she approached it all very calmly and kindly, asking how she could be of most help in supporting me in what I cared for most going forward.

And I had thought of this. Of painting eggs on Holy Saturday with my daughter. Tracing patterns with wax and dipping them in dye; beetroot and onion skins. Red for life, yellow for a plentiful harvest. The Doctor could see how upset Camilla was and had to console her and said that my decision would only ever be acted on if the doctors were absolutely convinced that it was for the best.

I'm determined that she won't go through what we both did with her father. That really was terrible. The delayed diagnosis, all those days in hospital when nobody seemed to be able to explain

anything properly and having all those questions being asked of me that I couldn't really understand. It's not a nice place to die, with everyone rushing around and a lack of space and privacy to grieve. It's a shame that you have to learn about these things through experience, but sometimes that's the only way we ever really understand anything properly.

That was the one year we missed painting the eggs, and the year when I started going to the church again, even though I'm not much of a religious person. But it's been important, and I've enjoyed coming back to some of my roots and traditions and rituals which I'd begun to forget. But not this of course. You never forget this.

And some of those I made friends with there come to visit which is kind of them. And they tell me that everyone is praying that one day I may still be able to return to the village I moved away from as a little girl. I know that I won't; but I can feel their belief and it comforts me very much. I'm very thankful for it. Between the doctors and God I seem to be in very good hands. If only Camilla would understand I'm sure she would stop feeling so guilty about not having me at home with her.

Anyway today is going to be fun. And I hope these hands of mine don't shake too much because I want to show off my patterns to everyone here, so that they understand why it's such a lovely thing to do. And when it's over I'm not going to let the staff talk me into washing them, my hands, at least not for a while. I always remember how fascinated I was by the way the tips of my fingers used to change colour when I painted eggs with my mother when I was a tiny little girl. And I want to remember that too today. And to tell Camilla all about it. Like I do every year.