

Hypnotised by the sea: Carole Ingram

I wake shaking from my dream. Fearful of more chemo and the tiredness it brings. The upset stomachs the vomiting. I dread the thought of more.

Then I hear the sound of the sea as the waves are pounding on the beach. This comforting sound always makes me smile. I walk to the window to see the sea's glory, the blue water stretching to the horizon.

My name is Jessica, and I am ninety-two years old and have been in good health for the last ten years. Now it has returned so cruel I don't know if I can take the slow death it will bring.

My husband died twenty years ago. About a year later my son left home one morning; never to return. He had planned it that way because of complicated personal circumstances.

I have had an interesting life over the last twenty years. Sometimes it has been full of happiness and sometimes sadness. I have immersed myself in helping others and enjoying the company of friends. I have travelled the world and seen amazing sights.

Looking in the mirror I see my hair has gone white. My eyes, which were very blue, have faded due to cataracts. I am thankful that I am still mobile and drive my car. I enjoy every day but know the end must come which does not scare me. I only want it to be peaceful. I used to walk along this beautiful beach I am looking at and swim in its sea. Now I only gaze at its beauty from my balcony.

Only when my carer Jenny comes once a week to help me with my shopping is when I do it. We walk gently along the sand, and I paddle in the water's edge.

Night falls, the sun sets and my beach is empty. The bathers have all gone home. I have taken a Valium and know I must not waste time or the Valium will make me sleepy and I will not be able to make it down to the beach. As I glance down at the medical report on my bedside table that the palliative care nurse left last week, I am reassured that I am doing the right thing.

I take the lift to the ground floor and walk onto the soft sand. I have done this before, but something has always stopped me. I manage to reach the water's edge when I hear Justin, my neighbour's voice calling, 'Jessica'. I have left my door open and my journal on the kitchen table with a note in it. Justin will understand why I am doing this, although I know it's unfair to put this burden onto my dear friend.

I make an effort to swim out to the depth, getting sleepy, there is no more fear. A wave takes me further and the last thing I hear is Justin's voice.