

The last breath

Those sunken eyes which lay before me
I ask myself – what can she see?
A life of love or pain and sadness?
Maybe there's hope – an end to all this madness

Her shallow breaths fill me with sighs
Of happiness, relief, but a reminder that time flies
I know that time is ticking away
But for now, I believe she may still have some days

Some days for family, some days for goodbyes
A final look into her loved ones' eyes
Some days to feel the touch of the ones she holds dearest
But little did I know that day would be nearest

“Could you wait here, I just need my stethoscope”
The consultant leaves me believing I could cope
Alone in the room with a woman filled with sorrow
The pain of not knowing if you'll make it till tomorrow

Do I speak? Do I just stand?
Racing thoughts as I fiddle with my hands
My first palliative care placement, I admit that I'm fearful
The last thing I want to be is disrespectful

I stand by her bed, with her side by side
Her eyes ajar, mine opened wide
Our breaths in sync, but hers slowly diminished
Surely not, it can't be, has a sacred life just finished?

The consultant returns, we listen together
A vacant chest, light as a feather
Pronounced dead. She had passed away.
I was the last one with her but had nothing to say.

I should have held her hand as she took her last breath
But nothing quite prepares you for witnessing a death
I think of her family not being with her now she's gone
But in our memories, she continues to live on.

By Corinna Chidora Ekebuisi