

Chapter X

I never understood why 33 pairs of socks



Twenty fourth of December, half past eleven PM. I listen to a nurse calling me in the passageway of the ward. The intern of duty asks the resident of the first floor to come down to the Emergency Ward.

I was going to phone home. I listen to the Christmas petards and I watch the fireworks while I'm walking along the corridor. My waist aches, I'm hungry and I've got three flasks with haemoculture in the pocket of my white jacket.

A man is lying on a stretcher, tall, with a foot outside, the mask of oxygen that blows and stops the panting, and a nurse struggling with his veins.

I'm handed radiographies, analysis, and a microvoltage lost in an electrocardiogram. The jugulars are swollen, his body is of a dirty blue colour, and he opens his mouth fighting for breathing. He looks at me but says nothing.

- "He isn't for Therapy or Coronary, it's a lung cancer with pleural and pericardial effusion without any chance, inject him some serum and disconnect him....and hurry up, we'll toast in half an hour".

Room 438, the bearer rushes. At the door a woman with two kids of 4 or 5 years old, silent, quiet, they look at my eyes. They don't understand anything, but nevertheless, I, intuitively, know that they understand everything. Was I like both of them when my father was dying? If Freud listens to me, surely he'll send me to an asylum.

Pericardiocentesis. But, I have never practised it. Nobody will help me. I take the electrocardiograph from the cabinet. A nurse has pity more on me than on the patient and comes with a lumbar puncture needle nº 18 and 50 CC syringe. The patient is blue. Like a storm.....and I keep repeating: "The needle is inserted at the left side of the xifoides in a 45° angle by substernal way and pushed towards the left shoulder". But I have never done it before !!!

I have never done it and I'm alone. If I leave him? But no.....everything is blue: the bed, the sheets and the pillows. Everything is dyspnoea and more dyspnoea.... If I review the technique on the book all over again?

Wasn't there any other way of doing it? I open and close door. Two pairs of little eyes are fixed on mine and I listen they are whispering: "The doctor!!!" Of course I'm the doctor, but...why is my pulse shaking and I can't breath freely? I have never done it before....

Blood pours out. I empty the syringe again and again. The jugulars aren't swollen any longer. Then, puncturing the pleuristical bloodshed was easier. Fireworks are blowing up and the sky is brilliant. It's midnight.

- "Are you breathing better, Julián?"
- "Yes, much better, thanks". (a nice good smile)

I slacken. The control X-Ray plate is brought at 1 A.M. Everything is all right.

The patient is sitting and hugs his kids who are munching a piece of nougat that the nurse gave them.

- "Doctor, wouldn't you like to toast with us?" The nurse invites me.
- "Well... yes, but I haven't rung up home yet". I answer without knowing what to do...

Thirty first of December, eleven o'clock P.M. the wife and the kids phone me home. They want to thank me they have the father at home with them.

All of them are very happy on Twelfth Night, a truck and a multicoloured crane are the reasons. On 21st. January I'm going on holidays. I rent a house in Santa Teresita. Another colleague takes my place. He promises to perform radiotherapy to reduce the pain on his backbone. Morphia soathes the pain. The effusion increased.

I return on 3 erd. February. The bed is empty. Later in the morning his widow comes. "It was the best New Year's Day we had spent", Julian had told her. He died on 26th January. His job was a traveller and sold socks for men.

On his last day he had asked her to give me a number of pairs of socks.

I never understood why they were just thirty three pairs of socks...