

Chapter VII

I'll go on living in you....



The relationship with my father had always been ambivalent. Either loving or rejecting him. It mainly depended on the moment. Perhaps because, I could never understand him enough. Perhaps because there had been too many unasked and unanswered questions.

The grown ups keep repeating that my father, because he was a man, wasn't guilty of my unhappiness. The blame is always the woman's. Why did they say it repeatedly? Surely, because they weren't thoroughly convinced of it?

Whatever it might be, at his thirty six years old he held a halo of invincible athlete; the powerfully immune to any danger human being, he knew the world and used to dress smartly. Deep in my heart I was happily proud he was my father.

He had smoked five packets of cigarettes a day for ages, and severe pain at the pit of the stomach, diagnosed as an ulcer that gnawed him lots of years.

One day I was told he had been operated and he was asking for me to travel and see him. I found him in a hospital bed terribly thin after nearly a year without having seen him. His sunk eyes and his thin face shocked and frightened me in such a way I hardly recognized him.

He had always seen my happiness in welcoming him after not having seen him for over a year. Today the happiness was his because it was I who was coming. He had dreamed when I'd be older to become a pilot, fly and be nearer him.

In middle of serum flasks, probes and vandages he talked and comforted me. In the ward, families and patients looked at us; on realizing it, I blushed quite ashamed, trying to avoid weeping on watching my "holder rock" in such terrible conditions.

He convinced me his ulcer was upsetting him, and only he was in the hospital to get a solution to it. I understood it wasn't anything very serious, he'd recover soon. I wanted to believe it, because I needed to.

Back home again, something attracted my attention: brothers, sisters, cousins, grandparents talked, talked....Everybody talked, but I, as usual was separated, excluded from them. What's the matter? I keep asking myself constantly. I'm fourteen years old but nobody tells me anything.

I manage to listen to them, through a closed door, and when I understand the reasons of so much talking, angrily I go into the room and question them:

- "We are worried about your father", an uncle answers prudently.
- "My father is going to recover", I answer in a desperate challenge.

- “Your father has cancer, cancer in the stomach, without healing” aunt Giolanda snaps to me wickedly.

I'm overwhelmed. I breath deeply and bend my head. Time stops forever. A before and an after. It was a punch straight to my stomach. Treacherously.

My father comes with his new wife to live at my grandmother's house. He needs a lot of help, care, support and real economical aid. He had spent till his last cent at t he blessed operation. Lots of friends, but at the moment of a true and definite help, nobody comes. I begin to work in a shop. A month ago the doctors diagnosed he had six months left of life. Now there are only five left. Medical Science acknowledged itself powerless in curing him.

Paradox of destiny. I had never been with my father more than three days together and only once a year. Now I've got him all day long and as much as possible. How much should I hate the cancer and how much should I thank it? I feel horribly for asking myself such a question.

On summer nights we used to sit together in the garden watching at the sky. He taught me all about the Southern Cross and from four mayor axis, it points to the South Pole, the Great Bear, the Little Bear and the Three Maries, Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn and all the Milky Way Constellation; the speed of the light, Freud, Mahatma Ghandi, Communism and how the height of clouds is calculated when there are lightning's and thunder. How beautiful and important the sky looks like at night. And above all I had a father only for me...

Nobody dared to beat me. Giolanda was all sweetness and besides she quarrelled with my father's wife, therefore she stopped aiming her guns against me.... I told him about my new girl friend and he gave me some good advise about women; how to develop muscles by cycling; he talked about anabolic diets; about a new kind of a drawing board and designed a new one. And best of all he had a son only for him....

We used to make plans for after his recovery. I refused to accept that from 91 kilos without a gram of fat, he hardly weighted forty five now. His clothes hung loose on what was left of his body.

The end was getting nearer, he used to eat jelly just to taste it, realizing that in two or three minutes, due to the stoppage of his oesophagus, he'd vomit it. If there was anything thicker than water it just wouldn't go through. If, on watching TV, there was somebody eating he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. I tried to talk about other things...

As I was on school holidays, I worked in the morning and I used to train cycling on the ring-road outside the city in the afternoon. I escaped, to challenge myself. To avoid thinking. Desperately.

At a cross-road, I saw a heavy lorry with a trailer, coming along a road perpendicular to my way. I never knew why, but instead of breaking, I increased my speed at the same time I proposed to God Himself if I passed before the lorry. He wouldn't take my father away. I risked it. I did it.

The puff of the lorry blew strongly a few centimetres behinds life? Or, on the other hand, was it a kind of violence I was practicing against myself?

Later, I walked into the Parana River more than twenty reasonable meters to swim two kilometres down stream. I had done it several times. Half way there was a dangerous whirlpool. I'd try to overcome it.

- "If I survive, my father will be cured". I said while I was rising my threatening fist against Heaven.

But a few meters before the place, I have abdominal cramps which compels me to get out of the water. I'm sad and thoughtful. "Did Death defeat me, although the real duel inside the whirlpool wasn't achieved?"

Some months have passed and my father's vomiting became completely uncontrollable and unbearable. One day, at one o'clock in the morning a doctor was called urgently and prescribed an intravenous anti-vomiting injection.

On my bike, I go out to look for an all-night chemist's. I rode on and on. My training increases my speed and endurance. I promise myself my father must suffer as little as possible. The sooner I get it the better. A second less of suffering will be a painless second in my father's life.

They haven't got such injection at the first chemist's. At the second one either. But I found it at the third one. Holding tightly my treasure, I rush along the road with very few vehicles at the hour. Closing my eyes I cross one street, then another and another. I won't stop at any cost.

At a cross road a car is coming at high speed. I see it, I won't, even for a second, stop pedalling. I won't use the brakes because my mission is important, extremely important. I must arrive as soon as possible. I'm nearly a few metres from the car and I'm not going to brake. I'm too furious to think about it. After all I'm riding on the right, therefore I have priority...

In a screeching in which my life may end forever with all its dreams, the car brakes hardly half a meter from me...

The injection was given, he calms down, breathes and I breath relieved. I fall asleep on the floor of the patio, alone and quietly. My bike shields me. It the silent witness of my madness and imagination. But it also knows what I'm feeling for my father...

My father falls in agony and dies. Just then I question myself about having risked until the very edge of death...

When I kiss him, his corpse is already cold. "I'll go on living in you", he told me before dying. I keep repeating it over and over again deep in my heart. I look at his face in the coffin and it seems to be in peace...

Silently, I promise him I'll be a boxer as an unfulfilled dream and I'll rise on each round, although they are defeating me.

Although my opponent is bigger... like Death it self...