Four seasons for reflecting.
Summer: taste and touch

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‘The End of May’, a monologue on 30 years of dialysis

Davide Giuva

It was spring. It was the end of May. It was at that point in my life when, reassured by the anorexic hand of my charming doctor, I entered the world of dialysis. A noise that perhaps could only be heard in my head, a very electric sounding noise, filtered out other sounds. The light. The light was sunlight but it was the most unnatural light I had ever seen. It was metaphysical. Because what I saw in my mind were images of cows. But there were scales, scale-beds, there were 10 in the room and I had only seen scales like those on a school trip when they took us to see the first model dairy farm in the town where I lived. Cows. Nothing else. Since that day, dialysis, like a wildly jealous lover, has never abandoned me.

On that day in May, on that bed, that scale-bed, I was petrified as I stared at someone’s blood that had somehow spattered onto the ceiling … and dried. Sitting up to have a glass of water, I perceived the enormous scale as being under

FIGURE 1: Davide Giuva, the Jellyfish, from “The names of Love” Melli Editore, Borgone di Susa, Torino.
the effect of a glue. My eye was caught by what was written on the centre of the face: whatever the brand name was, precision scale; and then like a punch to the liver from someone who was supposed to be a friend, were the words: ‘SCALES, WEIGHING EQUIPMENT, SLICING MACHINES, MEAT GRINDERS’.

‘Esperanza’, a memory

Federica Neve Vigotti

It was almost 6 in the morning, and the city was being invaded by swarms of people, as it always is on work days. Carlo was watching the crowd from the bus window, washed and polished by the rain. The raindrops were sliding as fast as his thoughts were wandering around in his head. Yesterday evening they had called him from the hospital. It was not like the first time they called after his name had been put on the waiting list for a kidney. This time it was Lisa who took the call, and when she passed him the phone, her hands were cold and clammy. He was the first on the list. He would receive his last dialysis that very evening, and the next morning he was to show up at the transplant centre. He knew the procedure well. It was only 6 months since their previous call. That time the disappointment was devastating, when at the last minute, things got complicated. And they got so complicated that he had to go home. No transplant.

He remembered it clearly. It was just after they had found out Lisa was pregnant. It was only thanks to this wonderful news that he had managed not to feel like the whole world had been conducting a massive plot against him during the previous 3 years.

Three years ago he was 30 and was wandering around the world with his camera around his neck. He managed to walk on all five continents, capturing the wonderful dawns in the Namibian desert, the vibrant humidity around numberless pagodas in Myanmar. He had been fearless, whether what was involved was dealing with determined mosquitoes in Cairo or selfish tourists in Venice.

He met his wife in San Francisco, on a cable car rattling up an improbable rise at dusk, when lights were coming on around the bay. It was then he first felt a sense of strong new roots growing beneath him. And then, during his last job in Amazonia he had felt in the depth of his being a need to stop and solemnly promised himself he would settle down—not forever, not for long, just for a while—and watch the world pass by and enjoy the bliss of slowness.

Instead, the world surrounding him went crazy, tying him down forever. What he had was called ‘haemolytic uraemic syndrome’, and was thought to be caused by an intestinal bacteria. People lost their lives because of this bacteria. He lost more, as his life at that moment depended on some damned machine and on tons and tons of multicoloured pills, making his existence grey and motionless. When he asked to be included on the waiting list for a kidney transplant, he had immediately been informed of the risks involved because of his primary illness; maybe, he realized, that was exactly what he was looking for—some frontier where he could feel alive again. The possibility that he might die was frightening, yet at the same time, fascinating; in any case, he thought leaving this world this way would be better than forever remaining trapped in frozen, sticky mud. That was how he had felt then.

Now he was on this bus; his wife was at home with their not yet known child in her belly. Some more stops to go, and after that, before him, a huge black hole. He felt his heart bouncing, and wondered if this might be due to some holes in the street, or whether it was because, after all, he was not ready to go, especially now that he still had to meet his newborn child. Maybe it would be wiser to wait a little longer. Maybe he could just say he had changed his mind and go back home.

Like a robot, he simply stood up, and went to the doors of the bus while peeping at the images and emotions of his fragmented memory flicking through his mind, cradled by the warmth of the people on the packed bus.

‘Are you getting off, sir?’ a short, plump woman asked him, touching him on the shoulder. She looked very much like the Peruvian caregiver looking after his parents, only slightly younger.

‘Yes, I am. Yes …’ he replied still numb, as he caught a glimpse of the gate of the hospital across the street.

‘Come on, Esperanza! Put yourself right here, behind the gentleman; we are getting off as well.’

A little girl was walking toward him, swinging her dark braids as sign of acceptance. He looked at her for a moment, and for a second he thought he saw her winking at him. In the same second, the bus doors opened, and a burst of chilly April air enveloped him.

‘Esperanza, it is time to get off. It is our stop.’

He plunged forward, running fast in the rain.

Figure 2: ‘There is Beauty Everywhere’, photograph of the corridors of the San Luigi Hospital, seen through the eyes of Gilberto Richiero, musician and filmmaker.
‘About Leaves’, a poem

David Ruff

About Leaves

Let us say that these paintings
Are, perhaps, about a leaf
Or let us say that these paintings
Are about leaves.
Maple, oak, olive, violet, birch, rose—
They are about the joyous
spring leaves of Botticelli,
the watchful leaves of Veronese,
the handful of leaves of Titian,
the leaves that await the storm of Giorgione,
the leaves of Adam and Eve of Tintoretto.
They are about all the leaves I have seen –
That unfold from the wet bud,
leaves that fall to earth to nourish roots,
leaves that gather light and warmth,
that fly through the sky like a
great blue leopard chasing the seasons.
That are unique and ever changing.

FIGURE 3: David Ruff. ‘Past and Passing’, (oil on canvas, 1980) photographed in front of his studio in Bagnolo Piemonte (Italy), 1984 (courtesy of Susan Ruff). David Ruff, American poet and painter of the Beat generation, spent most of his life in Europe. This painting is a part of a series of oil painting in which the beauty of flowers merge into different abstract dimensions.
Alina Seman, Rossella Picillo and Federica Demartino

1. ‘We lack a good photograph of all of us’

Better so, perhaps. It leaves more space to imagination, shades and shadows, mirrors and reflections.

Summer is four friends: red hair, black hair and two with darker and lighter blond hair. Four women talking of love, its pains, its desires and its challenges. They have been on dialysis, have been grafted, have been physicians. They know the disease, the hope, the loneliness. Despite the pain, they want joy. They had lovers, husbands and friends. Two are as round as peaches; one is as thin as a lily of the valley; one is as dark as a new-moon night. They talk. They laugh about men, as women do. They share the joy of one who has found her love; they share the pain of one who has lost it. They need love; it is in the nature of life.

With love, they flourish as peach trees do.

2. ‘Young we remain’

It happened to each of us in a different, yet somehow similar way. There is a moment, an hour, a day when your life changes. Just like that. We are young and we are fine and all of a sudden we are not fine anymore, yet young we remain.

On the morning of 23 July 2005 I had to do my hair and my nails, had only sunny flowers in my heart and happy thoughts on my mind. I was preparing to have a good time at my friends’ wedding celebration that day. No wedding party for me though, as that same evening, my first ever dialysis was prepared for me. It was only the first of many more to come.

‘I understand I am not well. I am aware of that. My question is how I can get well, doctor? What do I need to do now?’

‘You will never be able to fully recover, no matter what you do. The best thing that could happen to you is a transplant!’

‘A … what?!’

FIGURE 5: “Kissing dolphins.” (excerpt from a facebook page: our everlasting summer).

FIGURE 4: "We lack a good photograph of all of us" (excerpt from a facebook page: our everlasting summer)
3. ‘Twenty-three is my number’
I guess I simply made it mine. I have earned it. For better and for worse. My life changed from all possible perspectives, on a summer day—July 23rd.
In Andalucía my home for a while was on a street at no. 23, in El Puerto de Santa Maria and my house in Turin has the same number. All of a sudden, on another early summer day—May 23rd, after 2 years of dialysis, my new kidney found me. We met and it was love at first sight! So my life changed again, this time for the better.
This duality of 23 drives me crazy sometimes, it has no logic whatsoever. It may turn out well, or it may not. What next, I wonder?
Well, I have chosen to see the bright side of 23, living my life with its ups and downs. Life is a roller coaster, so we might as well have fun while we are up at the top, if and when we decide to go for the ride.

4. ‘A New Beginning Awaits You’
Just keep in mind that there’s a new beginning awaiting you just around the corner! This is the quintessence of the memories I cherish when I think about those days! A message that my doctor sent me on January 28, 2007.
How funny life is. Since then, nothing has been the same anymore. Everything has changed, and when I say everything, the thoughts that come to mind are to some extent related to the overall complexity of my life, both physical and psychological. Things that used to go well, no longer do. An example? I remember making a cake that did not rise. I used the same recipe I always had but a cake that had always been delicious and exquisitely light, turned out soulless and lifeless. Nobody’s fault. My life and I myself were changing, evolving, moving to another level, not better, not worse, just different. New. Anyway, I have stopped baking cakes for a while. But I have not given up on living my life. Not me. Not without fighting!
Then THE BIG DAY arrived! The call from the hospital that my long awaited and deeply desired kidney had arrived—and so I got my transplant! It was like the birth of a child. A joy never felt before. This great joy involved everyone I knew, even people who had not really been close to me before—the woman in the bakery shop, a neighbour, and the one colleague who had always been difficult to get along with.