

**When Life Gave Me Lemons: A Translation and Critical Analysis
of Marco Braico's Autofiction Text *La festa dei limoni***

Allira Hanczakowski (BA; MTransSt)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce

School of Humanities and Social Sciences,

Department of Languages and Linguistics

La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia

August 2021

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Acknowledgements	6
Statement of Authorship.....	7
Part One: Exegesis — A critical and theoretical reflection	1
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Translators' subjectivity	5
1.1. Introduction	5
1.2. The translator as a reader	6
1.2.1. Individuality of interpretation	9
1.2.2. Interpretation as an interpersonal act	11
1.2.3. The role of the target text reader.....	15
1.3. The translator as a writer.....	17
1.3.1. Individuality and creativity.....	18
1.3.2. Individuality of voice	20
1.3.3. Variation and correctness.....	22
1.4. Trust me, I'm a translator.....	26
1.5. Conclusion	29
Chapter 2: The many paratexts of <i>La festa dei limoni</i>.....	32
2.1. Introduction	32
2.2. Defining the paratext.....	32
2.2.1. Paratextual features: Genette's typology	34
2.3. Extratext	37
2.4. Metatext.....	38
2.5. Paratext and (re)framing	39
2.6. The text and the project of <i>La festa dei limoni</i>	40
2.6.1. The epitext of <i>La festa dei limoni</i>	42
2.6.2. The peritext of <i>La festa dei limoni</i>	43
2.7. Reframing <i>La festa dei limoni</i> 's paratext	44
2.8. The book cover(s)	47
2.9. The book title(s).....	55
2.10. Prefaces and afterwords: Genette's typology	58
2.11. The prefaces and afterwords in <i>La festa dei limoni</i>	61
2.12. The translator's preface	64
2.13. Translators' notes.....	66
2.14. Conclusion	67
Chapter 3: Translating culture-specific elements	69
3.1. Introduction	69
3.2. Connecting language, culture, and translation	69
3.3. Defining culture-specific elements.....	71
3.3.1. Defining allusions.....	72
3.3.2. Categorising culture-specific elements.....	72

3.4. Translating culture-specific elements.....	75
3.4.1. Translating culture-specific elements in La festa dei limoni	79
3.5. Dialect and dialogue.....	83
3.5.1. Dialect in La festa dei limoni.....	85
3.5.2. Dialogue in La festa dei limoni	86
3.6. The translation web.....	87
Conclusion	89
Part Two: Translation of <i>La festa dei limoni</i>	1

List of Figures

Figure 1: One of Braico’s (2011a) news posts about a recent donation.	41
Figure 2: Front cover (Braico 2011b).	48
Figure 3: Back cover (Braico 2011b).....	48
Figure 4: Dust jacket (Braico 2015a).....	49
Figure 5: Inside flaps (Braico 2015a).....	51
Figure 6: Proposed English book cover 1. Image reprinted by permission of the artist, Lodovica Paschetta. © 2021.	54
Figure 7: Proposed English book cover 2. Image reprinted by permission of the artist, Lodovica Paschetta. © 2021.	55
Figure 8: Translation web	88

Abstract

Combining the practice and theory of literary translation studies offers a unique perspective on transferring culturally embedded texts. This practice-based thesis incorporates a translation of Marco Braico's autofiction text *La festa dei limoni* (2015a) from Italian into English. Braico's alter-ego, Gabriele, is the optimistic and witty narrator of his real-life illness story – a story which inspired the author to establish a fundraising project connected to the text to assist those who are in a similar situation to him. This text is an interesting case study due to the many cultural references it contains and its connections beyond the page.

Alongside the translation, this thesis includes a theoretical exegesis exploring the key challenges involved in transferring *La festa dei limoni* into a new linguistic and cultural context. The genre of the text (autofiction) encourages reflections regarding the subjective nature of literary translation. A given text may have countless interpretations and consequently, countless translations. One of the most significant and challenging aspects of *La festa dei limoni* is its paratext – the information and other materials and initiatives surrounding the storyline, whether physically attached to the text or in an abstract form. Existing theoretical work in this area allows an in-depth analysis of how the paratext can be transferred to a new target audience. Lastly, the exegesis also explores how the Italian cultural references peppered throughout Braico's text encourage an approach of transcreation as part of the effort to maintain the text's Italianness in translation.

The aim of this practice-based thesis is twofold: to demonstrate the value of connecting theory and practice, the two sides of translation that are often viewed as quite separate, and to offer new theoretical insights into translating and transferring the many elements that comprise a work of autofiction.

The two components of the thesis are to be given equal weighting in the examination.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Brigid Maher and Dr Gregoria Manzin, for their constant guidance and for being on board with my project from the very beginning; additionally, for always reassuring me that I was doing enough – your support on an academic, professional and personal level has made this entire journey thoroughly enjoyable.

I am grateful to La Trobe University for funding my doctoral studies and international research and conference trips, and to the Department of Languages and Linguistics for all the opportunities presented to me over the past three years. Thank you to the Graduate Research School's Research Education and Development (RED) team for providing a supportive and entertaining space in the form of (physical and virtual) Shut up and Write sessions – where much of this thesis was written.

Grazie di cuore to Marco Braico – the author of *La festa dei limoni* – without whom this project would never have existed. Thank you for your inspiration, for answering my hundreds of questions about your text and for always making time to catch up over a pizza when I visit Italy.

To my partner, (Dr) Rory McKenzie, thank you for reading through my translation in its early stages, for being patient with my constant indecisiveness about translatability and questions about lexical choices. I am grateful that this thesis led to crossing paths with you, *amore*.

Thank you to those who read my final translation – my parents, Sue K, Katherine, Lou, Dallas and Ella – for picking up on the typos and helping improve the overall flow of the text. Another thank you to Katherine for explaining the medical terminology included in my translation; and to Giada for clarifying the ambiguous Italian sections of the text.

A heartfelt thank you to my parents, grandmother and sister, for always encouraging me to pursue my passions, and to my Melbourne family – the Pittocks – for providing me with a home away from home while I undertook this project.

A final thank you to the School of Languages and Cultures at Victoria University of Wellington (Te Herenga Waka), New Zealand, for welcoming me as a visiting scholar during the final six months of my candidature.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Allira Hanczakowski, 24 August, 2021

This thesis includes the following practice-based artefact: English translation of Italian text *La festa dei limoni* (2015a).

Marco Braico holds the copyright to *La festa dei limoni* and has given permission for the PDF of the book to be included in this thesis submission for examination purposes.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the relevant Ethics Committee, Safety Committee or authorised officer. Interview with the author of *La festa dei limoni*: HEC19115.

I acknowledge the poem written by Rabindranath Tagore, quoted on page 99 of my English translation of *La festa dei limoni*.

I acknowledge the quote from Seamus Heaney's translation of *Inferno* (Alighieri 1993) that appears on page 40 of my English translation of *La festa dei limoni*.

This work was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Part One: Exegesis — A critical and theoretical reflection

Introduction

Exploring the art of literary translation from a cultural perspective has been a common theme within translation studies since the early 1990s. There is a vast array of research on the complexities of transferring and maintaining cultural elements in the transition from a source text to a target text. However, much of the focus of the existing literature uses one specific lens – that of the translator, the scholar, or the author – and fails to combine all three perspectives into one theoretical account or observation. Connecting these three perspectives allows a well-rounded understanding of the countless factors involved in translating a literary text that is deeply embedded in the source culture. With this practice-based thesis, I aim to bridge the current gap between the art of translating and the scholarly practice of analysing translations through the lens of translation theory. If we view translation as being parallel with any other form of art, such as painting a portrait or composing a piece of music, we begin to understand the infinite possible outcomes – or target texts – of any given source text. However, justifying, contextualising and explaining the translation strategies, decisions and consequences creates a discourse with just as many variations.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the interconnectedness of translation practice and translation theory, and to reflect on how they inform one another, each providing a unique perspective from which critical observations can be made. Engaging with the practice of translation, by translating an Italian novel into (Australian) English, offers a reference point, a case study, and an experience to which I connect concepts and theories. In turn, including examples from my translation experience offers new insights into existing translation strategies. The translation was the starting point, the motivation for this practice-based thesis, then the two elements became entwined, complementing each other through the entire process. My experience of translation informs the reflective analysis, as I overcame translation challenges on a macro and micro level.

The text I have chosen to translate and to use as a case study is *La festa dei limoni* [The lemon festival] by Marco Braico (2015a). Selecting this text was an organic process and was largely a result of my being in the right place at the right time. In 2015, while volunteering as an English language assistant at the *Istituto d'istruzione superiore Majorana* (Majorana High School), just outside of Turin, Italy, I found myself in an auditorium in which Marco Braico was presenting this text to the students. He recounted his personal experience of being diagnosed with leukaemia, the premise on which he wrote this work of autofiction. His presentation was both emotional and entertaining – a trait of his which is also reflected in his writing style. His purpose in travelling to various schools around the region and country was to promote his book and the fundraising project which

at the time was inextricably linked to it. The project ‘La festa dei limoni’ had been launched in 2011, just months before the book was first published. The project was born out of Braico’s desire to help others who found themselves in a similar situation to his – in hospital and grasping at the hope of recovering from leukaemia. Braico had initially attempted to collect donations without the book attached, yet he soon realised that people needed a story with which they could connect, a motivation to donate; this was the origin of the idea to recount (in partially fictionalised form) his own illness story. All proceeds from the book were directed towards the project, which became a highly successful fundraising campaign. Braico used the book profits along with monetary donations from the public (via his website) to purchase hospital equipment and other goods that would improve the lives of those spending their days in cancer wards; he would then personally deliver these items to hospitals all over Italy. Braico went on to write another four works of fiction, all of which were connected to the project. After ten years of a constant stream of donations (with a total value of over €200 000), in late 2020, he announced on his website that the project would no longer exist. However, he went on to publish another book in March 2021 – *Le cose belle sono curve* (Braico 2021).

While the context for selecting this text was initially personal, wanting to help Braico circulate the text and the project more widely by transporting the work to an English-speaking audience (in Australia), it soon became clear that from an academic perspective, *La festa dei limoni* would provide many translational challenges and would be an ideal case study from the perspective of translation theory. This practice-based thesis facilitates both avenues. It is divided into two parts which are designed to complement and inform each other, yet each can also act as a standalone piece of writing – one a theoretical exegesis and the other an English translation of the text. The first part, the exegesis, is a critical self-reflection on my translation process and output. It provides the theoretical groundwork and offers an in-depth analysis of the various issues that arose during the process. The exegesis is further divided into three core chapters, exploring the most relevant and striking translation issues of the case study. The chapters move from a macro to a micro perspective, beginning with broader concepts external to the text and gradually shifting to focus on specific linguistic elements of the text.

In Chapter 1, ‘Translators’ subjectivity’, I explore why literary translation is not a straightforward activity with a single outcome. By focusing on the agent of translation – the translator – I highlight the variations in practice that naturally exist within the field. These differences relate to every stage of the translation process, from selecting a text to translate, to reading and interpreting a text, to the linguistic and cultural decision-making strategies implemented. I largely draw on anecdotal evidence (i.e., published interviews and conversations

with translators, and translators' own writings) as this material is well suited to the reflective nature of the topic. Recognising that an element of subjectivity will always be present in literary translation encourages me to reflect on how this has manifested in my translation of *La festa dei limoni*. As human beings, we cannot escape the personal viewpoint from which we carry out a translation, though we can endeavour to be conscious of how our viewpoint may influence our translation decisions and strategies, creating a better-rounded and more carefully considered target text.

Chapter 2, 'The many paratexts of *La festa dei limoni*', narrows the focus towards my case study. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that there are far more elements to translating a novel than solely the storyline, particularly when a text is heavily embedded in the source culture. The findings of Gérard Genette (1997) and Kathryn Batchelor (2018) form the theoretical basis for this chapter. While certain paratextual elements (predominantly the fundraising project) were key contributors to the success of *La festa dei limoni*, they are also arguably the most difficult elements to translate, as they are not always concrete linguistic elements. I consider which paratextual elements can be transferred to the (Australian) English-speaking target audience and how this may be achieved.

The third and final chapter, 'Translating culture-specific elements: a linguistic approach', continues to narrow the focus by analysing the challenges of translating words, phrases, expressions and concepts that are connected to the source culture. From my first reading of the text, I noticed countless Italian-specific cultural references, many of which were familiar to me (having spent ample time in Italy), while others which would require further research and discussions with native speakers and Braico himself. The protagonist's story is recounted using everyday colloquial language and represents a contemporary Italian culture (predominantly a Northern Italian culture). I discuss various theoretical strategies and demonstrate how the context, the source language, and source culture largely determine which translation is the most suitable in each instance. This chapter elucidates the rationale behind some of the micro translation decisions within my case study.

The second part of this thesis is the practical element, my translation of *La festa dei limoni* into (Australian) English. This translation can be viewed as a case study to demonstrate the practical side of the theoretical points above. I have aspired to translate the text in a way that portrays the key themes of the book (life-threatening illness, father-son bond) through the perspective of an Italian narrator. The text was written for an Italian audience – with no translation in mind – which contributes to the text's themes being heavily embedded within Italian cultural contexts. For this reason, I have aspired to transfer the themes of the text in a way that maintains its Italianness, such that the English-speaking target readers (consciously or subconsciously) sense

that the text is Italian, through the settings, characters and other cultural features. Australian readers are the target audience for my translation, as this is the cultural and linguistic landscape in which I am situated. When Braico first brought up the idea of this translation with me, he highlighted that having an Australian audience in mind would be unique; he believed it would be well received due to the immigration history between the two countries. I certainly agree with this; Australian readers bring something to the reading of a translation from Italian that readers from a country without the same history of immigration from Italy might not be able to access to easily. I have also endeavoured to maintain Braico's witty and concise writing style and voice through my own translator's voice, an element which developed and strengthened over the course of the translation process. Meeting Braico and getting to know him on a personal level led to a more intuitive understanding of how to respect and re-create his voice.

While the final translation of *La festa dei limoni* can stand alone as its own text, its value becomes clearer when situated within the context of this thesis. I have chosen to structure the thesis with the exegesis placed first, as it sets the theoretical groundwork and perspective which enables the translation to be read and interpreted at a deeper level. Translated texts are often read in isolation, with little (if any) explanation of the scrutiny and meticulousness involved in the process. Likewise, translation scholars often comment on translated texts as an outsider peering in. With this thesis, I offer first-hand insights into the value and joy of connecting translation theory and practice; I aim to bridge the gap between the two sides of translation, using a touching and entertaining work of autofiction as a case study.

1. Translators' subjectivity

1.1. Introduction

Translators' subjectivity and their presence in the target text is now a well-explored concept in literary translation studies (Wright 2016, 64). The nature of subjectivity favours a descriptive rather than prescriptive approach; therefore, proposing theories and methodologies to analyse this issue is not necessarily productive. This analysis stems from reflections I have made during the process of translating *La festa dei limoni* (hereafter *FL*) (Braico 2015a) into English. I became acutely aware of the subjectivity inherent in my English translation and began reflecting on elements of my individual reading and subsequent creation of the text, such as: how my (personal, linguistic, geographical, and social) background and context influenced my interpretation of the original text; how my use of translational tools (such as internet searches and dictionaries) modified my initial interpretation; how my rapport and dialogue with the author shaped my translation; and how I found the equilibrium between reproducing the characters' voices in another language without distorting them or likening them too much to my translator voice. The translation process occurred naturally, without strict rules to follow on what is right or wrong; instead, I was guided by matters of nuance, tone and style.

This chapter discusses these questions, drawing on evidence provided by other literary translators to shed light on my own case study. Stephen Sartarelli (2004) has contributed to this area of research through his critical work on his experience of translating Andrea Camilleri. Scholars such as Tim Parks (2014), Jean Boase-Beier (2006), and Klaus Kaindl and Karlheinz Spitz (2014) have also made recent contributions in this field. Given that exploring the creative element through the translator's perspective is still a relatively new area of research, I also use published and anecdotal evidence in my discussion. The concept of individuality, which I deem inseparable from any discussion of subjectivity, is the constant theme throughout this chapter. The first section focuses on translators as readers, unpacking how their individuality and a potential bond between the author and translator leads to a unique interpretation of the source text. The focus then shifts to the development of the target text, exploring the creative process related to elements such as emotion and voice. The next section explores the infinite variation within a given text and discusses how the quality of translation decisions can be evaluated. Finally, I discuss the end product, and how the target text reader – generally naïve of the complexities of this process – must trust the translator before the translation can fulfil its purpose.

1.2. The translator as a reader

Before any literary translator puts pen to paper – or fingers to keyboard – they must read the text. This can occur any time from seconds before the translation, to months or even years prior. Judging by translators' own accounts, there are no set standards or guidelines around whether an entire reading of the source text must be completed prior to starting a translation; it comes down to personal preference (and often external factors such as time restrictions, access to materials, etc.). Some translators, such as Julie Rose (2009) choose to translate as they read the text for the first time, while others may value a first reading purely to contextualise the writing. My initial reading of *FL* (Braico 2015a) occurred three years prior to starting the translation. I re-read the book multiple times (whether in its entirety or specific sections) before and during the translation process. With each reading, my understanding and interpretation of the text deepened and became further nuanced – from a linguistic, literary and cultural perspective.

The reading of a translator (which may or may not be the first reading), is “more intensive than an ordinary reading of a book”, as the goal is to capture “the subtleties of what the original author is doing” (Grossman 2010b). Indeed Chris Andrews (2014) proposes three different readings of a text: as a general reader, as a translator, as an academic or critic. Each of these agents have been drawn to the text by different motivations and likewise, they each have different intentions for what they hope to get out of the reading. A translator can be any of these agents at different times; they may have been introduced to the text through a different avenue, such as reading for pleasure, or reading for academic purposes. However, when the motivation for reading the text relates to the task of translation, the mindset and the way in which the text is read also changes. “A translator’s readings are not those of the casual readers, however well informed and engaged. They develop in the context of a rewriting of the text in another language and culture where it will be read as an original text: hovering between what is there on the published page and many drafts of the new writing” (Bush 2006, 25).

My initial reading of *FL* reflected that of a general or casual reader – this occurred in 2015 when the book had just been republished by Piemme. Although at that stage I had already met the author and had an idea of the story and its context, the purpose of my reading (for enjoyment and learning more about the author’s project) guided my reading; my attention was focused on the plot, the characters, the irony, the jokes, etc. There were linguistic or cultural references that I did not entirely comprehend, yet I brushed over them since my reading was driven by a contextual understanding. My subsequent readings of the book were very different. My second reading of *FL* was from the perspective of a critic, as it was the case study for my Master’s thesis focusing on lexical-semantic elements of the translation of emotion terms. While I had translation in mind for

this reading, my goal was not that of actually producing a full translation, I was rather concerned with individual words and with developing a methodology to translate this set of words pertaining to the semantic sphere of emotions. It was not until 2018 that I read the text from the perspective of a translator. I was reading for the purpose of rewriting in English, which led to an acute awareness of elements that would cause translation challenges, such as culture-specific elements and word play. I revisited some of the sections I had stumbled across and brushed aside in my first reading. Only this time I made sure to research the terms so I understood the source text in depth, a form of focused reading Christiane Nord attributes to translators: “As just one of many possible readers, the translator has an additional understanding of the source text and makes this the starting point for the translation” (2018, 79). Now it feels as though I have read three separate books. As my intention and motivation for reading *FL* changed, so did my interpretation of the text; this is a significant piece of the subjectivity puzzle I will seek to explore further in this chapter.

Chantal Wright (2016, 18) observes that “translators are the only readers to weigh every single word in a text. We are typically the ones who discover the typos and logical errors in source texts that several pairs of editorial eyes have failed to spot; but our reading goes much further and deeper than this.” Throughout the translation process, I often found myself stumbling across inconsistencies and typos; I frequently questioned editorial decisions such as paragraph order, spelling, or elements of plot and meaning that lacked clarity or logical consistency. One example is the following sentence: “Leaving room 23, I see photos hanging on the wall from last year’s World Transplant Games in Montreal.”¹ When searching the internet for the official English name that corresponds to the sporting reference, it appeared that the location and year were incorrect. There was no record of the World Transplant Games being held in Montreal in the year 2002. One could argue that this is a liberty taken in a work of fiction, yet given that this text is based on a true story, I would expect that including a specific place and date of an event would be one of the elements that reflects the truth. Another example relates to the logical sequencing of sentences within a given paragraph or section. For instance, the following sentence: “I mean, it’s even worse than RAI Television’s terrible staff canteen”,² appears three paragraphs before the sentence: “He used to work at the television company RAI. He was a manager and had spent his working life in the world’s nastiest canteen: the one at RAI on Verdi Street, in Turin.”³ Logically, it would make sense to explain the reputation of the canteen before using it as a means of comparison. These are the sorts of editorial decisions I often found myself questioning. None of the factual or logical

¹ Original text: “Uscendo dalla camera 23 vedo appese al muro le foto delle Olimpiadi per trapiantati a Montreal nell’anno precedente” (Braico 2015a, 177).

² Original text: “Insomma la mensa della RAI non può competere” (Braico 2015a, 106).

³ Original text: “Lavorava alla RAI. Era un dirigente ed era cresciuto nella mensa più perversa del mondo: quella della RAI di via Verdi, a Torino” (Braico 2015a, 107).

inconsistencies came out during my initial reading of the text, nor did they stand out when I re-read it from the perspective of a critic. However, when I re-read it (countless times) for the purpose of my translation project – wearing my ‘translator’s cap’ – these inconsistencies and debatable editorial decisions soon became extremely obvious. My personal experience mirrors the thoughts of other literary translators and scholars.

The motivation for reading a book is only the first point at which we come across subjectivity. As we have seen, the type of reader we are can influence the reading experience. Every reading experience (whether by a general reader, a critic, or a translator) is formed of countless variables. Wright (2016, 64-65) beautifully captures the individuality of reading in the following reflection:

[...] The fact that I am translating a particular text while sitting in the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon on a rainy but warm-ish October day, when the heating inside is overly eager, making it hard for me to concentrate, while outside the slow-moving gardener spreads out an old embroidered green tablecloth to catch the hedge clippings, and an orange tabby who must belong to one of the neighbouring houses meows to be allowed to enter the world of books [...], this fact will form part of my reading experience [...] and hence will influence the text that I create.

Even if translators were to sit at the same desk each time they read the book they intend to translate, the fleeting moments of the target text reading experience would never be entirely the same: moods, seasons, and people change. Reading is a personal act, created in one’s own mind; while all readers may be glancing their eyes over the same words on a page, each mind calls forth different imagery and voices. These (internal and external) influences on the reading experience often exist subconsciously, creating crucial complexities in the theoretical analysis of the translator’s subjectivity.

In spite of the multiple subsequent readings necessary for translators to complete their task, the aim of the reading experience – the translator’s conscious act – is to produce a translation that will re-create the effect that the text might have on a reader who reads it for the first time (Scott 2006, 111). Translators endeavour to “hear the first version of the work as profoundly and completely as possible, struggling to discover the linguistic charge, the structural rhythms, the subtle implications, the complexities of meaning and suggestion in vocabulary and phrasing, and the ambient, cultural inferences and conclusions these tonalities allow us to extrapolate” (Grossman 2010b, 8-9). It is obvious that this scrutiny on the part of translators is packed with the need not only to read the text and understand, but to interpret every detail and nuance. The translator’s close reading and interpretation of the source text is assisted by a thorough understanding of the wider context, which may involve using various tools and technologies, other experiential and background information, and discussions with the author (Emmerich 2017).

However, a paradox is created by the necessity for an in-depth reading (the result of multiple subsequent readings) and the contrasting requirement to maintain in the target text the spontaneity of a first reading.

1.2.1. Individuality of interpretation

As William Weaver says, “the words of the original are only the starting point; a literary translator must do more than convey information” (1989, 117). Just as reading the text is a personal and unique experience, so too is the interpretation. While the two acts (reading and interpreting) may go hand in hand and are often even used as synonyms, here I use the term interpretation to refer to the unpacking of the reading process, the analysing, the consulting of external sources, the researching, the discussions with the author – that which Clive Scott (2006, 111) alludes to as journeying to the origins. The source text words are the starting point; translators make use of a variety of tools in their attempt to read the source text as deeply as possible and to extrapolate meaning (Grossman 2010b, 8-9). Ann Goldstein, the well-known translator of Elena Ferrante, mentions that “the internet is a translator’s best friend,” assisting her as she unravelled the image that Ferrante had in mind while writing; for example, she would look up streets of Naples, where the books are set (Goldstein 2016). Australian translator Julie Rose made similar reflections regarding her process of translating Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (Hugo 2017): “I became a specialist in lacework doing this, which is also one of the joys of translating, you actually get to know and learn about bits of the real world that otherwise are inaccessible” (Rose 2009).

Searching the internet for contextual information – as well as having discussions with friends, family, native speakers, acquaintances, or experts in the field – is all part of the interpretation process. Each translator has different sources to which they can turn, depending on various factors including their social network, education, and background; this creates one layer of subjectivity. A further layer of subjectivity is created by translators’ inherent individuality. A translator’s age, gender, geographical location, cultural upbringing, interests, and political or religious beliefs, are just some of the aspects that shape their interpretation of a text. It is unfair and naïve to expect translators to be completely objective in their interpretation (and translation) when the only reading they know is that from their own unique perspective, including the infinite parts that make them who they are.

Searching the internet and consulting external sources during the translation of *FL* has significantly shaped my interpretation. I researched a wide range of elements including the medical procedures the main character undergoes (such as bone marrow transplants), geographical references, information about events and people (such as famous soccer players, songs and their

lyrics), just to name a few. This provided me with a detailed and thorough understanding of much more than just the Italian words, but exactly what was being referred to, for me to then select a linguistic match more accurately in English. However, another subjective layer of my interpretation has been formed not from the conscious decisions I made to consult external sources, but by all the parts that make up my identity as a reader.

This topic of translator's subjectivity has also been explored within a socio-cultural context, related to translation norms (Pei 2010). Denghua Pei (2010, 30) refers to this phenomenon as "the translator's subjective activity manifested in the translation process on the prerequisite of being adequately aware of the socio-cultural norms to achieve the purpose of translation." Essentially, the translator's subjectivity is not limited to their personal 'baggage', it encapsulates a wider array of socio-cultural norms, such as politics, ideology, ethics, morality, and potentially religion. I believe that the socio-cultural norm most relevant to my case study, *FL*, is morality. There are some vulgar and sexist comments in the text, potentially reflecting an Italian society that objectifies women. The issue then becomes how my personal values and stance on some of the comments made in the text shape my translation decisions. I have sought to find matches that I deem appropriate, both from a linguistic perspective as well as from a cultural perspective. It is part of my role to ensure that the English text is portrayed in a way that sits best with the audience. This is not to say that I have changed the meaning of jokes or phrases which I do not personally agree with or view as acceptable, but rather I have tried to ensure that my translation choices are suitable within the socio-cultural norms of the target culture and context of Australia. One example is when Gabriele makes the following joke: "What did you call me, you little shit? CANCER PERSON? Go and call your sister that. No one calls her by her name anyway, everyone calls her 'library' because she's open to the public" (Braico 2015a, 100).⁴ This is a prime example of how my subjectivity and personal morals and belief system (as well as my perception of the target readers' perception) shaped my translation. While the original Italian would translate as "everyone calls her 'beach' because anyone who passes by sticks their umbrella in," I opted for something which I thought was more acceptable as it was a little less explicit (although still too sexist in my personal opinion). Here, I had the opportunity to intervene because the 'joke' relied on word play, which would not have transferred well to English if left within the original 'beach/umbrella' context. My intervention strategy would no doubt be different from that of other translators, and it would be interesting to see other translators' creativity (and subjectivity) at work.

⁴ Original text: "Ma brutto stronzo, com'è che mi hai chiamato? Oncologico? Ma così chiami tua sorella, quella che nessuno chiama col suo nome. La chiamano tutti 'spiaggia' perché chiunque passa di là ci ficca l'ombrellone" (Braico 2015a, 100).

Here is another example of where the source text clashes with my own beliefs: “[...] Appare una dottoressa abbronzata e con un bel rossetto rosso, come una donna deve avere” (Braico 2015a, 90). (My translation: “A tanned, female doctor appears, wearing lovely red lipstick, as any woman should.”) My interpretation may be different from the author’s intention; however, I view this statement as determining what women should wear and look like, how they should beautify themselves to conform with society’s (and perhaps men’s) expectations. Perhaps my decision to use the word ‘should’ instead of ‘must’ (for the Italian term ‘deve’) was a subconscious attempt to soften the source text’s connotation.

A final example is related to sporting interests, and the many references to soccer throughout *FL*. While I am aware of the various teams that are included in the text, I have limited interest in how the game works and the jargon and technical language used in that area. This lack of understanding meant that I asked friends and family – whom I knew understood the game – about the various terms and tournaments. The following sentence is one of those cases: “Inizia Barcellona-Juventus e, dopo essere stati in svantaggio per 1-0, pareggiamo e poi, su cross da destra di Birindelli, Marcelo Zalayeta al volo di destro segna l’1-2” (Braico 2015a, 133) (My translation: “The Barcelona-Juventus game starts, and after being behind 1-0, we’re even, then Marcelo Zalayeta scores with a right-footed volley off a cross from Birindelli, 1-2”). Perhaps someone with a greater interest in soccer would have interpreted the references slightly differently, as they would be able to unpack the nuances. Individuality of interpretation cannot necessarily be avoided in literary translation; after all, it is a human activity and as humans we are individual, unique and have subjective perspectives.

1.2.2. Interpretation as an interpersonal act

While I have focused on the deeply personal element of reading, there is also an interpersonal interaction occurring – between the reader and the author. While it is the author who constructs characters and storylines, bringing a new book into the world, they are writing for a purpose. There may be an intrinsic or personal goal or motivation behind the process, yet when their book is published, they recognise it is destined to be hand-picked by readers who then interpret and transform the words to make sense in their minds. When a text is translated, a third agent is added to the interpersonal interaction – the translator. The text now travels through an extra layer of meaning and interpretation for it to reach a new geographical, linguistic (as well as social and cultural) landscape. The interaction between the author and the reader of the target text could be different than the interaction between the author and the reader of the source text, due to the intervention of the third agent, the translator. When a book is read in the original language, the

author is responsible for their written words; however, when a translator is involved, this correspondence becomes layered and more complex.

In the case of translated literature, responsibility for the content remains in the hands of the person who has created the original. While Katherine Gregor, full-time literary translator, likens herself to a creator or crafter, she does not take responsibility for the source text: “I am not an author, except in as far as I craft the bridge to make the passage as comfortable as possible for the book” (2014). Anthony Pym (2011) agrees, suggesting that translators do not have to take responsibility for the words on the page, as they do not have authorship (in the strict sense). He highlights four main reasons as to why translators are not authors (yet he claims that non-authorship of the translator creates a repressive and misleading system).⁵ Although the responsibility remains in the hands of the original creator, according to Nord (2018, 20), the original author does not play an active part in the translation process: “The source text producer only participates indirectly, being responsible for no more than the features of the source text.” Relating this back to my case study, Braico remains responsible for the Italian text and for the content, yet he is not held accountable for the English translation I produce. The source text author provides the intention, but it is the translator who is responsible for verbalising that intention (Nord 2018, 79). This demonstrates why it is important to acknowledge individuality and subjectivity, for it is not the author’s intention that is translated but the translator’s interpretation and understanding of that intention (Nord 2018, 79). Part of this interpretation of the textual features involves consulting secondary sources (as alluded to above with internet searches and dictionaries) and having conversations with people, such as friends, acquaintances, and experts who might offer insightful information about challenging terms or topics. Another valuable resource to assist with interpretation is the author.

The author-translator bond is often left out of translation theories – a limitation of such models (Nord 2018; Pei 2010). Pei demonstrates that there is a relationship of manipulation between the source text and the translator, yet there is no direct link between the translator and the author (Pei 2010, 34). Translators are readers of the source text before they are producers of the target text; they are responsible for assuming what the readers’ expectations are. Therefore, this creative activity is subjective and influenced by factors such as the individual’s vocabulary, background, education, etc. (Schwartz and De Lange 2006). A strong author-translator bond may assist in translators’ assessments of readers’ expectations.

⁵ 1) An author is someone whose position is established by the word; 2) an author is someone whose beliefs have been told; 3) an author is someone committed to what the words say; and 4) the translation process differs greatly from monolingual writing (Pym 2011).

Holding a similar view to Ros Schwartz and Nicholas De Lange, Juan Gabriel López Guix emphasises that the translator is initially a reader before all else: “The translator is an empowered reader, a reader endowed with the special power of rewriting the original text” (López Guix 2006, 95). He suggests that the way in which translators read a given text determines how the target readers will also interpret it, again highlighting that there is no right or wrong way to translate. This also relates to the battle with editors or publishing companies, who want the text to be as accessible as possible for the target readership. The challenge for the translator then involves making a text accessible for a new audience, without veering from their interpretation and understanding of the author’s intent. In this way, the translator can be seen as the mediator between the author or the source text and the target readers, or even publishing companies and editors (Schwartz and De Lange 2006).

I propose that dialogue between the translator and the author is an important element of the translation process as it can assist the translator in grasping, interpreting and reproducing the nuances of the author’s intention. There are many cases in which the author is inaccessible (e.g. deceased or does not want to engage in conversation). Just as reading a text is extremely individual, the relationship between an author and translator can be varied and take on different shapes.

John Minford (2017) reflects that translating the work of a contemporary Chinese poet resident in Hong Kong, P.K. Liang, was one of his favourite experiences: “We used to meet quite often in a bar and talk about the way I translated his poetry. On one occasion he just said: John, I think you’ve got this one wrong, but I prefer yours, so I’m going to go back and change my original. And for me, that was a wonderful expression of the equality between author and translator.” Indeed, the relationship between the author and translator works both ways; it is about creating a dialogue between the two agents involved in the translation process, one as the source text producer and the other as the source text interpreter and target text producer. French translator Mireille Vignol (2010) suggests that “most authors are really fantastic because they see the translator as a very thorough reader of the text and it’s in their best interest to have a good translation so they help you.” Returning to Pym’s (2011) concept of authorship, the translator is still responsible for the target text, it is their name to which the book is attached (though the translator is counted as lucky if their name even appears anywhere on the front cover); therefore, it makes sense that authors would be only happy to ensure their translator has all the necessary tools and information for the translation. Weaver (1989) would submit queries to the author and then revise his work; however, this strategy is best suited to cases in which the author has a sound command of the target language (which is not true for my case study). It cannot be assumed that all authors will have the linguistic skills required to provide critical feedback on the translation

choices. Gregory Rabassa (2005, 78) offers insight into a similar experience: “Mario [Vargas Llosa] looked over my work as I went along and would offer suggestions. Most were appreciated, especially where it had been some jungle peculiarity I had missed. At times, however, he would latch on to what he thought was a mistake and offer a correction. His limited English had simply kept him unaware of the fact that my word was nothing but a synonym for the one he was suggesting.” Although working closely with the author is often immensely beneficial, when the author has limited target language knowledge, suggestions may prove to be unproductive. These are situations in which it may be best for the translator to question the source text elements and investigate the decision-making process behind the selection of source text words, rather than vainly seek validation and clarification of proposed target text translatability. It must also be noted that the author cannot be expected to answer all queries with absolute authority, as a source text is not a fixed piece of work, but one with multiple interpretations by each and every reader. The translator cannot expect all readers to read the translation as the translator imagined – just as the author cannot control how the source text is read, the translator cannot control the reception of the translated text. Therefore, knowing the author is not synonymous with knowing the text, which stands alone as an artefact. However, it certainly does assist in shaping one’s understanding and interpretation.

Reflecting on my own experience while translating *FL*, I am fortunate enough to have a friendly rapport with the author (in his words, “the two of us are a great team” (Braico 2019)).⁶ This partly stems from meeting him prior to commencing the translation project, so a certain sense of familiarity and trust had already been established. On one hand, my experience with Braico has been extremely valuable, as he has completely trusted me to transfer the text into English how I see fit. When I asked him in an interview whether he was concerned that my personal interpretation may interfere with the autobiographical element of his text, he simply said that “no, this isn’t a problem. I’m not worried about this because you know me” (Braico 2019).⁷ Establishing this understanding and mutual respect empowered me to interpret and transfer the text based on my own judgement, knowing his personality, experience and writing style and voice. Throughout the process, I have been in constant contact with him, whether via email, messaging, phone call, and in person in Italy. The contact has predominantly been centred around his source text production, clarifying his selection of certain expressions or use of uncommon phrases. Parts of our interactions have been similar to Rabassa’s (2005) mentioned above, due to Braico’s lack of English

⁶ Original Italian: “Noi due siamo una buona squadra” (Braico 2019).

⁷ Original Italian: “No, questo non è un problema. Non ho questa paura perché tu mi conosci” (Braico 2019).

and understanding of translation (all of our correspondence is in Italian). While Braico is always extremely supportive of my translation and my decisions, and prompt in his responses, he lacks an understanding of nuance and sometimes his answers fail to address what I am asking. I often feel as though I have put more literary thought and analytical perspective into the translation, than he had in the writing process. This could stem from his profession as a teacher, rather than an author; it also supports the above observations, that the translator is often the most attentive reader.

Nord (2018) suggests that authors are likely to insist on a faithful rendering of the source text's surface structures, and this is supported in my interactions with Braico. For instance, in an interview, he suggested that I leave occurrences of Italian dialect as they are and add a footnote (Braico 2019). I did not disregard his suggestions; however, as I discovered his lack of English competency and understanding of translation early on in the project, I tailored my questions and interactions so as to focus on the elements we could both take away from the interaction. Rather than asking him to help me choose between synonyms or to explain a concept using English words and an Australian cultural perspective, I would ask him follow-up questions about the Italian concept and about his personal lexical decisions (which more often than not, were a matter of chance – given that he does not come from a literary background). I believe that our dialogue has shaped my source text interpretation and target text production; and our rapport has lent itself to a more nuanced interpretation of the text. Braico's speech and writing style are very closely linked, which also speaks to the autofiction genre of the text. The fact that I hear his voice and can picture him speaking as I translate affects the individuality and subjectivity of my translation.

Obviously, it is not always possible for translators and authors to have this dialogue, for varying reasons, whether because the author is no longer living, or simply because they do not want involvement or see value in this rapport. Elizabeth Bryer (2019), the translator of *Napoleon's Beekeeper* (Luis de Juan 2020), prefers to translate authors who are living so there is a dialogue. Translators may have this luxury of being able to choose which authors to translate, yet other times, this is not possible, and they must make do with the texts available for translation and other tools.

1.2.3. The role of the target text reader

In literary translation, it is true that the translator plays a major role in bridging the gap between two different linguistic and cultural groups; however, translators also must consider any prior knowledge and pre-existing ideas that the readers may bring to a text. Brigid Maher supports this idea, specifically regarding her translations of Italian author Milena Agus; she highlights aspects

that “the Australian public can bring to the experience of reading a contemporary Sardinian novel” (2014, 304). In recognising that the setting and landscape are significant features of these novels, Maher focused on conveying these through translation choices with the target reader in mind (2014, 306). In certain contexts, one translation strategy was to leave culturally salient terms in Sardinian in order to maintain the significance of Sardinian language and culture. She highlights that there is a widespread Anglophone view that the entirety of Italy is linguistically and culturally similar; therefore, making specific translation decisions, such as maintaining Sardinian words and cultural references, can offer the readers an insight into Italy’s diversity (Maher 2014, 307).

In addition to the response of individual readers, the relationship between Italy and Australia must also be considered throughout the translation process. While my translation of *FL* will (hopefully) be available for the wider Anglophone context, I have kept the Australian audience in the foreground. As a general observation, Australians have a relatively substantial idea or understanding of Italians and their culture, due to migration and travel; this works in favour of those translating from Italian to (particularly Australian) English, as many of the boundaries have already been broken down, or bridged, to some extent (Maher 2014, 309). On the other hand, this may lead to a deceptive sense of confidence or familiarity with the Italian culture. A translator’s role, as Maher (2018) suggests, is to sharpen the readers’ images of Italianness, exploiting the cultural associations if accurate, and short circuiting them if misinterpreted. Australian readers of Italian literature are generally also aware of the existence of various dialects throughout Italy, largely due to migrants to Australia who may favour speaking a dialect over Standard Italian. Consequently, the target audience has an underlying awareness of internal diversity being a dominant feature of the linguistic and cultural landscape of Italy (Maher 2018). When translators maintain the dialect in an English text, as Maher did with Agus’s novels, it fits in with the readers’ background knowledge while adding nuances to the aspects of the text (such as to the depiction of setting, in Maher’s case). By representing these various faces of Italy, as translators, we are providing Australian readers with valuable cultural knowledge, rather than confirming the (sometimes biased) views they have already constructed about Italy through mass travel (in terms of geographical representation, e.g. Tuscany being a popular region for tourism). Maher observes that “as readers, we bring something to our reading, but also expect to have it surprised or challenged” (2018), which suggests why it is important to consider what knowledge the readers may carry with them before opening the first page of a novel. Despite the act of translating appearing to be a very personal and private activity, translators have the task of “attempting to predict what happens once it [the target text] goes out there” (Maher 2018). “The strategic exploitation of the target language and cultural resources can result in the realisation of new

potential in translation, of extra layers of meaning and interpretation, and of fresh perspectives on themes” (Maher 2014, 311).

One of the aims of translating *FL* has been to portray the storyline through the perspective of its Italian narrator, and hence depicting an image of present-day Italian culture. As Maher (2018) suggests, this can be achieved by making use of correct cultural associations and avoiding those that are incorrect. To effectively achieve this, I was required to consider the cultural knowledge which the Australian target readers may bring to their interpretation of the text. If my target audience was instead a British, American or South African one, for example, the knowledge and understanding of Italy, its culture and perhaps even parts of its language, would be different. The close cultural connection between Australia and Italy – largely a result of historical immigration – influences the reading experience. It would be fascinating (yet outside the scope of this research) to explore how the cultural closeness between the countries of a source text and target text shape the translation. For example, food is a recurring theme throughout *FL*; I can assume that Australians are generally familiar with the significance of food in Italian culture. Retaining some of the words relating to food in the source language, such as: “*caponti*” (14) (a type of pasta),⁸ “*robiola*” (106) and “*stracchino*” (193) (types of cheeses), reminds the target readers that they are reading an Italian text.

1.3. The translator as a writer

Schwartz suggests that instead of focusing on translating individual words, translators must strive to convey the author’s intention (1999). This can be achieved by using one’s own personal reading of a given text and situating it within the linguistic, geographical, social and cultural context of the target text. Schwartz’s (1999) English translation of *Orlanda* (Harpman 1996) demonstrates how adjustments can be made at the word and sentence level, to maintain the author’s (perceived) intention. In order to create the cultural parallel of switching from the French formal “vous” to the informal “tu,” Schwartz added a hand gesture which was not evident in the source text. She proposes that the act of putting one’s hand on an interlocutor’s arm is an equivalent signal in English, to represent what would otherwise be lost due to the linguistic differences in French and English pronouns. This is the underlying role of translators, to render culturally bound elements in a way that evokes an equivalent effect for the target readers. Another strategy is transliteration, coined by Max Müller (1861), when words strongly embedded in the source culture are maintained in the original language, with the addition of a glossary at the end of the novel.

⁸ Italics in original.

Peter Bush emphasises the individual, creative side of translation: “Translators’ subjectivities are tempered by style, interpretation and research within a professional strategy that is driven by an ethical and emotional engagement: they want readers to experience and enjoy some of what they feel when reading the original and naturally what is added by the translation, the new literary architecture” (2006, 25). Despite a translated text, in this case a novel, being a complete piece of work, it is not merely a standalone element distant from the source text. The translation assists the original to have a second life, not only through time and space, but also by offering insights and reflections back on itself. Translated texts provide perspectives on the original from the “other side of its own linguistic and cultural limits” (López Guix 2006, 96). Scott (2006) argues that translation is not the preservation or recall of a text, but rather a transmission or reimagination of such. Texts, in particular works of fiction such as novels and poetry, are not stagnant and definite, they are dynamic and open to the interpretation of a multitude of readings. Translators demonstrate how a text *may* be rendered into another linguistic and cultural environment, not how it *should* be done. Scott (2006, 111) views the transition from source text to equivalent target text as “remaking the journey to the origins of the work in order to make an alternative journey out again.”

1.3.1. Individuality and creativity

Activities including an element of individuality (such as reading and interpretation) inherently involve a degree of creativity, whether internal (i.e. reading) or external (i.e. writing). When it comes to translating, there is a fine line between whether it is perceived as a creative process or not, by translators and scholars alike. Pym (2011) suggests that “translators are subjective in their minds and creative in their writing,” which supports the fact that reading, interpreting and translating have an element of individuality. Certain types of texts (e.g. literary translation) lend themselves to evoking the natural craft of creativity within the translator, while others leave little (if any) room to intervene with one’s individual creativity (e.g. technical translation). This is one of the reasons why translators’ subjectivity is more noticeable in literary translation; there is more room for connotative language and ambiguity which innately open up the space for multiple interpretations (Cachucho 2017). We undoubtedly view fiction writing as a creative practice, due to the imagination required to develop storylines, places and characters. This belief is often confirmed by authors themselves, when reflecting on the writing process. Chris Flynn, author of *Mammoth* (2020) – a historical story told from the perspective of a dinosaur – states the following: “When I am in the moment of writing the story I do not know where I am, I mean physically I am at the desk but mentally I am somewhere else” (Flynn 2020). I suggest that this ‘writing from somewhere

else' can also happen for translating. In his reflection of the process of translation, Weaver (1989, 117) makes the following statement: "I have tried to make conscious and logical something that is, most of the time, unconscious, instinctive." I believe that this unconscious and instinctive space from which translators think and write, is the creative space. In this view, translators can be seen as writers, engaging in the creative practice of shaping stories. Edith Grossman (2010a) offers a valuable insight from the internal world of the translator: "I believe that serious professional translators, often in private, think of themselves – forgive me, I mean ourselves – as writers, no matter what else may cross our minds when we ponder the work we do, and I also believe we are correct to do so."

There is the common misconception among the general public that translators are merely replacing the words of the source text with equivalents from the target language; in this view, there would be little opportunity for creative input. While translators do not develop the plot and characters, they still have the task of developing the characters' voices in the target language. "They [translators] have to infuse the work with their own life blood, and that is the real challenge of translation" (Minford 2017). Translators themselves have mixed views about whether their role is creative or not. Elizabeth Bryer (2019) suggests that translation is "distinct from writing in that it is creativity in a very focused way." Translators commence their task with a solid understanding of what the desired outcome is, the creativity arises in the process of choosing how to get to that outcome or transfer. At times, it comes down to personal choice; and this is not to say a translator selects a phrase or a synonym by chance or luck, it is an educated and deliberate process that often occurs over multiple drafts in which the translator may go back and forth between possible translantants.

My case study of translating *FL* supports these suggestions. Certain linguistic expressions, such as word play and puns, required a more lateral and innovative thought process. For example, when the protagonist, Gabriele, goes to the doctor for an initial pain in his hip, he makes the observation, "dottore-dolore, che rima di merda" [literal translation: doctor-pain, what a shit rhyme] (Braico 2015a, 26). The rhyme could not be directly translated and required a creative intervention. After constructing many possible translantants, I settled for the following: "Doc-shock, what a shit rhyme." However, for the word 'shock' to be suitable in this context, the previous sentence required some editing. This is just one of the many instances in which a creative and flexible approach was needed. After creating multiple options for a particularly challenging phrase, it would inevitably come down to personal preference and judgement. The creative constructions I settled on would undoubtably differ from another translator's – highlighting that "translation is based on choice and a rather personal one at that" (Rabassa 2005, 9).

The view of translators being similar to travellers supports the creative and individual element of the journey. “Perhaps Saint Jerome should share his status as patron saint of translators with Saint Christopher, who is reputed to protect travellers. We are travellers from one language to another” (Gregor 2020). Not all translators agree; Goldstein (2016) does not believe that translation is necessarily a creative process; she suggests that sometimes you need to be creative with parts but overall, it is a matter of conveying the author’s voice.

1.3.2. Individuality of voice

Writing in the author’s (and narrator’s) voice is one of the many difficult tasks of the translator. As with all elements explored up to this point, conveying the author’s voice is individual and subject to personal thoughts, beliefs and actions. In the following quote, Grossman (2010b, 12) shares her approach: “I think of the author’s voice and the sound of the text, then of my obligation to hear both as clearly and profoundly as possible, and finally of my equally pressing need to speak the piece in a second language.” The last part of this phase, the creation and reproduction phase, is like an echo. For the piece to exist in a second language, it is reliant on the original author’s voice and text. The echo is not identical to the voice from which it originated, but it is directly linked and cannot exist without the other. This demonstrates why the interpretation phase is crucial to understanding the subjectivity, because the reading and interpretation guides the creativity and the production of the voice. During my translation of *FL*, as the English text developed (the echo), the clearer the voice and image of Braico reading the text in my mind would be, and along with this came the clarity of how to produce this in English. Elements that have strengthened the author’s voice in my own head include our conversations in person, interviews, voice messages, and a book reading he presented at the school visit where I met him. This dialogue has always been in Italian and has provided me with a sense of his intonation, sense of humour, personality and how he communicates with others. The act of translating helped me develop my own voice, as well as the voice of the author, in a second language. Even prolific translators such as Rabassa, support this approach: “Learning by doing, as they say in kindergarten, is how my skills must have increased as I’ve gone along [...]” (2005, 63).

In the translation process, translators strive to represent the characters’ voices and the author’s voice. The characters’ voices developed in a literary text are masked behind the voice of the author. Goldstein (2016) believes that the translator’s voice should not sound the same for different authors as it should represent the author’s voice more than the translator’s. One of the many challenges of the translator, is ensuring that their own individual voice does not override the author’s voice. Given that there are countless factors influencing the translator’s voice, we enter a

grey area of analysis. Rabassa (1989, 7) states that “the past experience of the individual will affect the translator in the same way that it does the reader.” If we add an extra layer to this – the fact that we have already identified the translator as the closest possible reader – then the subjectivity of the translator comes to the foreground, and we cannot ignore how this shaped the target text. Every single translator’s voice includes linguistic variation, stemming from the indisputable fact that “every speaker of any language has an idiolect, a characteristic set of (ir)regularities that is not identical to the usage of any other person” (Bellos 2012, 298). Discussing the individual linguistic style of translators is a necessary part of the subjectivity puzzle; it would be ignorant and false for us to assume that all English translators living in Australia (or even living in a particular city in a specific generation) would have the same linguistic style. For instance, there is a relatively high use of swearing and vulgarity in *FL*; my own limited use of this kind of language growing up and in my personal vocabulary might have influenced me to use certain recurring English swear words over others (i.e. compared to the vocabulary of someone who is a frequent user of such language in their day-to-day life).

It is not only a question of the translator’s individual subjectivity then, but the translator’s position in the real-world environment. The text is reborn “through a particular person in a particular time and place” (Wright 2016, 64). David Bellos (2012) offers a valuable insight into this matter: “If style is such an individual attribute that it cannot even be controlled by the writer [...], then every translator has a ‘style’ of that kind in his target language, and the style of all his translations must be more like itself than it can ever be like the style of the authors translated.” This argument may initially appear to contradict Goldstein’s above comment that a translator’s voice should not sound the same for different authors, yet it is more complex than that. These two observations interweave perfectly. A translator’s style is personal and unique, and the aim is not to strive to become more like the author’s voice, but to remain true to one’s own voice across all the texts and authors they translate – and doing so will inevitably result in some form of variation anyway. This insight is summarised by Rabassa (2005, 49): “I follow the text, I let it lead me along, and a different and it is to be hoped proper style will emerge for each author.” He suggests that “the translator must be alert and aware of the fact that both he and the author have their ‘own’ words” (Rabassa 2005, 13).

Linguistic variation on the individual level is to be expected. The translator’s goal is not to exactly match the author’s selected words, but to closely represent their style as well as the characters’ voices. “The poor translator must not just go back and forth between two languages, but if he is worthy of his calling must shift between two selves, with all the perils of this induced schizophrenia” (Rabassa 2005, 20). This statement accurately captures what happens behind the

scenes during the translation process. Considering that translation goes beyond the word level, and into the cultural and societal level, there is an element of duality, of two personalities. Translators are often motivated by an ethical and emotional engagement – “wanting readers to experience and enjoy some of what they feel when reading the original and naturally what is added by the translation (Bush 2006, 25).” This motivation drives and influences their style, interpretation, research, and strategies, which can all be summarised as their subjective decisions.

1.3.3. Variation and correctness

Pym (2020) suggests that the translation process has never been binary; instead, it is a process that requires thought and active intervention. He suggests that “the translator is not responsible for the content of what is translated but should make decisions on the basis of projected consequences” (Pym 2020). Prior to commencing the translation of *FL*, I intended to translate based on Lawrence Venuti’s (2018, xiv) binary concept of domestication and foreignisation which he states “are ethical effects whereby translation establishes a performative relation both to the source text and to the receiving situation”; however, it soon became evident that not all decisions could be this way – for it would compromise target readers’ understanding. Stepping away from this strict binary and instead focusing on the reception (or consequences) of the translation choices, enabled my translation to take its own shape and find a balance between representing my interpretation of the author’s intentions, and being accessible to the target readers. Pym (2020) also observes that “translators are mostly risk averse,” resulting in translations that are dull because of less lexical richness. If translators use their interpretation of the text and their personal linguistic repertoire to replicate the text’s consequences, then we could associate subjectivity with variation and lexical richness.

As alluded to above, translators have a unique literary voice made up of vocabulary, experience, reading, approach, style, syntax, rhythm, irony, use of metaphor, phraseology, repetition, etc. (Qvale 2014, 56). This individual variation results in infinite possible outcomes for any given literary text; there can never be one correct way to translate an entire book, which is why we see retranslations of great works. Grossman (2010b) observes that despite *Don Quixote* (Cervantes 1605) being translated around twenty times into English, “each translation is different because each translator brings an individual sensibility and a particular literary experience to the job of translating it.” It is not only a case of each book being translated in a different way by different translators, but also within each translator’s creation, there are infinite possible ways they could vary their own translation. Any translator has to reach the inevitable point of selecting between synonyms, figuring out how to tackle word play or difficult references, though even

having made these final decisions, it could be that on a different day – perhaps weeks, years or decades later – that same translator might have made different choices. Grossman (2010a) captures this element of subjectivity, reflecting on her own translations: “Of course, every time I read a translation that I’ve done, I find things I would do differently if I were to translate the book today. It wouldn’t be the book that I did seven years ago, it would be a different book because I’ve changed in those years.” This highlights that translation is a human activity and therefore subject to the uncontrollable elements involved in the human experience, such as developing and changing over time. It requires a certain level of self-awareness and self-reflection to be able to make observations such as Grossman’s. I foresee that if I re-read my translation of *FL* after a significant period of time has passed – whether months, years, or decades – I will inevitably question my own translation decisions as my subjective self will have no doubt changed.

Another element contributing to the variation in translation on the individual level, is that there are no strict rules for literary translation. This relates to every step of the process, right from choosing (or being chosen for) a translation, to deciding whether to read the text in its entirety prior to translation or not, and of course down to the lexical choices in the text. Each step of the translation process involves some decision making on the part of the translator (in addition to other agents involved, such as the author and publisher); at each of these stages, the creative process is occurring and subjective choices are being made.

Within literary translation, we are often discussing nuances or shades of meaning; we are concerned with the tone of voice, the style, the characters’ personalities and what their vocabulary might look like in the target language. These subtleties shape the translation and the target readers’ subsequent interpretation. “A translation can’t be right or wrong in the manner of a school quiz or a bank statement. A translation is more like a portrait in oils. The artist may add a pearl earring, give an extra flush to the cheek or miss out the grey hairs in the sideburns – and still give us a good likeness” (Bellos 2012, 331). By bringing the creative and individual element to the foreground, readers and critics can appreciate the translation for what it is and what it conveys. To bring in Grossman’s (2010a) translation practices, her goal is to give something to the (in her case, English) reader which feels the same as what was given to the original (Spanish) reader. If we are aiming for a feeling, for a reading experience and emotion, then how can there not be infinite possible productions – this is merely a reflection of how unique the human experience is.

In literary translation, choice holds more power than one might initially think. “This matter of choice in translation always leaves the door open to the other possibility” (Rabassa 1989, 12). Every single translation decision – regardless of how insignificant it may appear – leaves open opportunity for another. For example, in *FL*, the school system is a recurring element; for all

references to the classes (such as “III A” (10)) which represent the Italian high school model, I made a conscious translation decision to replace these with the Australian high school label (such as ‘year ten, stream A’). There are many other ways I could have handled these references (and which I certainly did consider). By selecting a *translatant*, I have inevitably excluded other possibilities, which of course will influence how the English text is interpreted. Even now, I look back and consider how the text may be different if I had left the Italian labels and included a footnote to explain how the Italian high school system differs from our own. Now, these decisions have of course been made with the Australian-English audience in mind. For those readers who are from another English-speaking country, it will be obvious that I have used Australian English – certain expressions may jump out (e.g. ‘slides’ as the term for the open-toed sandals) – this causes an interesting dynamic as now a third culture is introduced (that of the non-Australian, English-speaking reader).

The published translation includes the translator’s final decisions, yet it is often forgotten how many other possibilities have been ruled out to get to that point (particularly for challenging aspects such as word play, humour, culture-specific references, and dialect). Goldstein (2020) highlights that having doubts about your own translation decisions is part of the role, whether this occurs when you are translating or retrospectively, looking back at your past work. Translators may strive for a ‘perfect’ translation, a text that captures all the characteristics of the original text – but the truth is that there will never be an exact replica, because by nature it is a different text, a new creation. Translators are aiming for a match, and “what counts as a satisfactory match is a judgement call and is never fixed. The only certainty is that a match cannot be the same thing as the thing that it matches. If you want the same thing, that’s quite all right. You can read the original” (Bellos 2012, 321). This is a valuable reminder for all critics and readers of translations, who may find fault with elements of a translation which they do not agree with; it is fine not to agree with a particular strategy, that is always going to be a repercussion of a subjective practice. Though the thing to take away from this message is to appreciate the translation for what it is, not for what it is not; it will never *be* the source text. This is captured perfectly by Bellos (2012, 320):

The truth of literary translation is that translated works are incommensurable with their source, just as literary works are incommensurable with each other, just as individual readings of novels and poems and plays can only be ‘measured’ in discussion with other readers. What translators do is find matches, not equivalences, for the units of which a work is made, in the hope and expectation that their sum will produce a new work that can serve overall as a substitute for the source.

Therefore, we should expect a level of subjectivity and variation when it comes to translation, both in terms of interpretation and production. If we do not expect readers of the source text to have the same thoughts and experiences as one another, then we cannot expect the translator (who

ultimately must consider and combine all the potential readings) to produce a completely objective translation. While evaluating and reflecting on translations can be productive for the descriptive side of translation studies, it is unfair and illogical for the translator to be criticised on their personal choice without acknowledging that variation is acceptable.

When analysing multiple translations of the same text, we must consider the intention. If there are mistranslations in terms of meaning and interpretation then that is a different discussion – here I am concerned with personal choices. Rabassa (2005, 89), for instance, chooses not to discuss other translators' work because his verdict would generally be that he would have done things differently, which is simply "more evidence that a translator is essentially a reader and we all read differently, except that a translator's reading remains in un-changing print."

Decisions are guided by knowledge of the author's work but there are no rules, nor an absolute right or wrong (Weaver 1989). This is where the author-translator dialogue comes into play again. In the decision-making process of a translation, it is not necessarily a matter of asking the author which option would fit best (although some translators do this as we have seen above); the dialogue, in this sense, refers to the translator's familiarity with the author's writing style, vocabulary, etc. If the author is no longer living, these are the tools the translator could turn to for guidance, but regardless of whether the author is living or has passed, their work remains a guide – nothing more nor less. The translator still begins with a blank page and no rule book, which is why we see so many variations. The lack of rules or a prescriptive way to translate literature inevitably results in subjectivity.

Maria Celina Cachucho (2017) empirically analysed the subjectivity of (Portuguese) literary translators, providing a model based on translators' choices regarding equivalence and fidelity in the target text. She analysed four different translations into English of the Portuguese text *Livro do Desassossego* by Pessoa (2011), by four translators. The translations were completed in the same era, yet by translators with completely different backgrounds, thus emphasising the individuality and uniqueness of each text (i.e. the subjectivity). She found that the translators' "subjective choices reflected their creativity, and attempts to produce a fluent, reader friendly target text (domestication)", and that the degree of subjectivity between the four translators also differs (Cachucho 2017, 174). She concludes that "the translators' subjectivity can be measured in terms of how much the source text is deformed" (Cachucho 2017, 175). Given that 'deformed' often has negative connotations, I propose this be replaced with 'altered'; therefore, the more a translator alters a text, the greater the subjectivity. Perhaps this is because they feel the need to explain things that were not initially clear to themselves as they were first in the position of a source reader.

Although not a rule in the world of translation, there is a common theme when literary translators discuss the requirements of the translator. This emerges as a constant, regardless of individual variation – translators must focus on their target language, and they must continue to develop this linguistic skill. When Rabassa (a native English speaker) was asked whether he knew enough Spanish to translate, he responded that the issue was whether he knew enough English (Minford 2017). John Minford (2017) (a native English speaker and Chinese translator) asks himself this question daily: “What I’m really up against is the inadequacy of my English.” The greater a translator’s target text knowledge and vocabulary, the wider the possibility and options for choice they have available. Reading widely offers different perspectives and writing styles which may (consciously or subconsciously) contribute to the development of their own voice as a translator.

1.4.Trust me, I’m a translator

Once the translator has made the linguistic decisions and the book has been published, beginning its own journey, subjectivity continues to play a role, but the text is now in the hands of the readers. As highlighted in an earlier section, reading is an individual experience and determined by several factors. It would be naïve of me to expect all readers of my English translation of *FL* to read it in the exact way that I had imagined. In (literary) translation studies, we are writing for our ‘ideal’ readers – i.e. someone to interpret the text with all its nuances and interpretations the way we have intended. As translators, we do not want our readers to miss any word play, allusions, cultural reference, jokes, idioms, etc.; however, this is not realistic. If our own interpretation (which we have already said is the closest and deepest reading possible) is subject to our own background and personal language use and experience, it is unrealistic to expect our target readers to have an identical interpretation – both to that of the (many possible) source text interpretations and that of their peers.

This is not necessarily a negative observation; each target reader brings a fresh set of eyes to the text, a new interpretation and vision. However, it is essential to get readers ‘on our side’, to obtain their trust right from the beginning of the text, and then maintain it throughout. Essentially, we (the translators) want the readers to have the same reading experience that the author intended for the source culture. To achieve this, we must focus on cooperation. “The goal of any translation project should be long-term cooperation between cultures” (Pym 2020). In this context, Pym (2020) suggests that cooperation refers to interaction and communication for mutual benefit. Equality, neutrality, and truth are not essential for cooperation; the foundation is that all participants (including the translator) obtain more out of the situation than without cooperation.

The translator benefits from the act of carrying the text across borders and from engaging in the creative translation process. The reader benefits from engaging in a literary world beyond their own language and culture. Reading fiction originating from an unfamiliar world view is a positive thing; translated literature has the power to bring something new into the literary ecosystem (Bryer 2019).

In order for the target reader to be involved in a communicative translation act, they need to trust the translator as the mediator. Pym (2020) proposes that if people lose trust, cooperation becomes impossible. It is not acceptable to just intervene and do as one pleases, as people will lose trust in you as a mediator (Pym 2020). Pym (2020) outlines the following general principles, which then require adaptation for each specific translation: 1) “Translate in such a way as to create and maintain trust; 2) “translations should create involvement in the communication act;” 3) “the ultimate ethical aim of translation is to seek cooperation between all the parties involved and when there is no possibility of cooperation, we should not translate, we should do other things” (Pym 2020). Although very broad and general, the room for individuality and variation is apparent. For instance, the strategies one translator may use to involve the target reader will inevitably be different from those of the next translator. Focusing on the target reading experience, rather than the linguistic elements of the text, could potentially permit the translator more creative license and thus increase the opportunity for the translator’s individuality to shine through. Discussing translation quality is in itself a subjective activity, which is why in today’s world of translation studies the issue is not faced by looking at quality in linguistic terms (i.e. comparing source text with target text). Pym (2020) suggests that assessing quality should involve reflecting on the relation between the translation and the receiver (i.e. receptor analysis). Translation studies has hitherto revolved around analysing the source text and target text, instead of the source reader and target reader; instead, further research is needed focusing on the readers and translators (Pym 2020).

Pym (2020) is not the only scholar to have written about trust and to have highlighted its importance in translation. Bellos (2012) suggests that readers must trust the translator; if they chose to read a particular text in a language they do not understand, there needs to be a level of trust for the text to achieve the purpose. Readers do not have to consciously trust the translators, given that often, readers may give little or no thought to the fact that they are reading a translation. In these situations, they are trusting the publishing industry and the standards inherent in the system. On the other hand, if a reader is aware that the text is a translation – whether they discover this only after reading the text, or whether they have actively sought out this particular book because of its foreignness or (less likely) because of the reputation of the translator – then the reader must develop a level of conscious trust with the translator. How does the awareness on the part of the

reader influence their level of trust in the translator (and thus their reading, interpretation, cooperation, and enjoyment of the text)? Could it be that the target readers who are oblivious to the fact that they are reading a translation, are more likely to give the translator complete trust, because in their minds they are reading the words straight from the author's mouth without the intermediary agent? Or perhaps the opposite is true, that the readers who are conscious of reading a translated text express more trust towards the translator because they are somewhat aware of the journey the book has gone through – having travelled across linguistic, cultural and geographical boundaries to end up in their hands. Maybe these latter readers can be on both extremes of the scales: 1) they could be the harshest critics, if they stumble across things in the text they do not agree with or understand – they have the liberty of blaming the translator (rather than the author) for their lack of enjoyment; or 2) they could be the most supportive readers – they are grateful to the translator for opening up an otherwise inaccessible story, and therefore are more understanding when they encounter tricky cultural references and confusing sections. André Lefevere (2017) argues that for the majority of readers, the translation is the original, albeit a rewriting of the original text. This confirms why it is essential to consider the readers' perspective when translating. In summary, the translator's role is to foster communication, trust, and cooperation through their translation strategies and decisions. The target reader's role is to understand that the text they are reading is not the original but if they trust the translator then an engaging and unique reading of the text can nevertheless be experienced (and perhaps it will even be richer because of the foreign aspect and the fact that it has transcended the borders thanks to the work of the translator).

Similar to the notion of trust, Nord proposes the concept of loyalty, referring to the “responsibility translators have toward their partners in translation interaction” (2018, 2). Our partners in translation interaction include the source text author and the target text readers. The translator has a responsibility towards the source text author, by means of understanding and interpreting their writing (both in terms of what was written and unwritten). Ideally, if the author is living, it would involve communicating with them, particularly on ambiguous sections or unclear word choices or phrases. By clarifying any particularly challenging sections, the translator is demonstrating a sense of loyalty to them and their text. On the other side of the process, this view proposes that translators must also be loyal to their target readers. If we want our target readers to trust us, then we must cultivate this by being loyal to them. “Translating thus involves aiming at a particular communicative purpose that may or may not be identical with the one that the other participants have in mind” (Nord 2018, 2). It is not, then, a matter of the translator foreseeing exactly how the target readers will arrive at the reading experience (i.e. their expectations and reasons for picking up the book in the first place), it is rather a question of mirroring the source

text author's communicative purpose in the target language. The goal of loyalty is to focus on the social relationship and interpersonal interaction between the source text author and the translator (and the translator and the target text reader) rather than strictly on the text, as is often the case in theories centred on fidelity and faithfulness (as well as radical functionalism) (Nord 2018, 115).

Although I have demonstrated how trust and loyalty are crucial elements for a translation activity to serve its purpose, it is difficult to apply this to a specific translation strategy or model. "Theories are not static models of the world: they partly determine the answers to such questions but they are also determined by the answers" (Boase-Beier 2011, 73). While translation theories offer valuable reasoning or guidance for certain processes, at times, the creative element is not accounted for in the theoretical concepts of literary translation. This is the reason for the anecdotal evidence I have chosen to guide my discussion. Indeed, Pym (2020) chooses not to discuss concepts such as faithfulness, *skopos* and other theories, believing that all texts and purposes must be construed; what we need more than limits are traditions. The individuality and variation of translation makes it difficult to slot the findings around subjectivity into any single theoretical model. After all, the purpose of (both reading and writing) literary translation is extremely broad; it could be focused purely on enjoyment and provoking emotion and imagination, or it could be linked to educating, sharing, learning, growing, or even connected to a political or ideological agenda. Given that the scope or purpose of literary translation is much broader than other areas (such as technical or informative translation types), there is more room for subjective interpretation of the purpose. This should not be viewed as a hindrance, but rather as something to be aware of when attempting to discuss translation from a theoretical perspective.

1.5.Conclusion

Translation is a human activity, requiring a human point of view; there is inevitably going to be a degree of individual variation and subjectivity during this process. The subjectivity of the translator has received a significant amount of attention in the literature, particularly since the 'translator's turn' in the discipline, whereby the focus shifted to be more on the translator as a subject rather than just on the source text (Robinson 1991). Focusing on the agency of the translator and the activity of translation offers a different lens than analysing and comparing a source text and a target text (or multiple versions of the text). Nowadays, it is almost a given that multiple versions of the same (literary) text can exist, and there is the widespread view that there is no single correct translation. It is necessary to take a step back and look at the entire process of translation to comprehensively understand the complexities of individuality occurring in this interpersonal act.

Therefore, in this chapter, I have followed the natural progression of the process, from the initial reading of the source text, to interpreting, creating and editing, and finally to the target reading. The common thread throughout this chapter is the individuality of the approach at each stage, along with the social interactions between the immediate agents involved (of particular interest are the source text author, the translator and the target text reader). The nature of studying subjectivity steered me away from following or developing a structured theory (whether it be descriptive or prescriptive), and more towards focusing on the activity, such as in Scott's (2018) work.

I have demonstrated that there is ample room for individuality and variation at each stage of the process. Firstly, in the reading process, no two individuals are going to read the same way; yes, they are reading the same words on the page, but they differ in their respective backgrounds, culture, education, and many other factors. A reading experience is formed by countless variables, so people will read differently from one another, as well as reading differently on different days depending on their situation and mood, among many other aspects. This leads to multiple interpretations of the same text. Readers use all the tools available to them (often subconsciously) to quickly interpret the meanings of the text and to follow the story and references. Here, translators may have the opportunity to discuss the text with the original author, providing them with an extra layer of interpretation. The author-translator bond can play a fundamental role in the interpretation phase, along with other tools and techniques such as research, reading other works by the same author, etc. When the translator reaches the point of producing the target text, there has already been so much variation. During the creation stage, an additional layer of subjectivity and individuality is automatically added as a response to the translator's emotion, vocabulary, writing style and experience. The translator's voice also comes into play here, and it can take on different forms, because after all, it is their unique interpretation of the author's (and narrator's) voice. When evaluating a translation decision (for instance a synonym, word play, cultural reference or joke), there is never going to be one correct way of translating. There are no rules when it comes to literary translation, which of course gives way to infinite possibilities. This does not give the translator complete liberty to manipulate the text as they like, disregarding the source text (if they want to do this, then they can write their own original text). Instead, this view is about a translator using their in-depth and nuanced interpretation of the source text to guide their production in the target text. The translator's aim here is to create a version that will inherently foster trust and cooperation between the target text and the target reader. Finally, when the target text finds itself in the target reader's hands, they may not even be aware that what they are reading is a translation – and may thus be oblivious to the fact that these words and sentences are just one of the infinite

possibilities for that source text. Nevertheless, they must trust the translator and their unique creation. The target reader's experience may not necessarily match that of the source text reader (one could argue that such a match would be impossible, given the vast differences between their readings and contexts), but if the target reader enjoys the experience and is engaged with the story and does not stumble their way through or give up as a result of clunky expressions and confusing references, then the translation activity successfully served its purpose.

Subjectivity is not a negative phenomenon, it is merely something to be aware of and offers translators, scholars and readers alike an understanding of how unique and intricate the act of reading and writing a translation can be. What I have hoped to achieve in this chapter is to draw together literary translators' self-reflections and thoughts, with translation studies literature, as well as my own case study of translating *FL*, to break down the translator's subjectivity from a practical perspective and to explore what happens at each stage of the process. There are many areas within this topic that would benefit from further research. For instance, more research is needed with a focus on the target readers and their interpretation and experience. This could be an evaluation of multiple versions of the same text by the same readers, or one version of a text evaluated by a range of readers. Research of this kind would investigate what truly happens when translations reach the reader's hands.

In the following chapter, I shift focus from the agent of translation (the translator) to the product of translation – the text. I will demonstrate that the text itself (i.e. the translation of *FL*) is not a standalone element; it exists within an entire concept known as the paratext.

2. The many paratexts of *La festa dei limoni*

2.1. Introduction

There are far more elements to a novel than the contents of its pages; there is the broader context, which influences how a text is accessed and interpreted by readers and the general public. This becomes even more complex when a text is translated, as it raises the question of how the text's untold story can be carried beyond the borders of its source country into a new cultural context. One of the challenges translators face is capturing as much of this implicit information as possible. The parts of the text that are not explicitly written in words can be defined as the paratext. A text's paratext refers to any elements, physical or otherwise, that contribute to the existence and dissemination of the written words (Genette 1997). A literary text is often accompanied by other productions – such as a preface, images, a title – which “surround it and extend it [...] to ensure the text's presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book” (Genette 1997, 1). “It is an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text) [...]” (Genette 1997, 1). The success of *La festa dei limoni*, of which over 10,000 copies have been sold, is not only due to the author's moving account of his battle with cancer, but it is largely due to external aspects and the wider picture within which the text is situated: the fundraising project of which it was a central part until late 2020. *FL*'s reliance on its (Italian) paratext becomes an issue when the text is translated and situated in an (Australian) English context. While I have translated the linguistic components of the text, the issue I now address is how the paratext could be transferred from Italy to Australia. Therefore, in this chapter, I aim to shed light on Braico's social intentions, through references to an interview with the author, and highlight various paratextual features and their implications for the English translation.

2.2. Defining the paratext

French scholar Gérard Genette has made a substantial contribution to literary criticism and aesthetics since the 1960s, particularly in the branch of paratexts (Batchelor 2018, 7). Genette's paratextual typology is the most widely accepted and employed model across a variety of disciplines. He proposes that “the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (Genette 1997, 1). Another narrower definition of paratexts, is offered by Jeremy Munday (2009, 214), who views paratexts as “material additions to a text which comment on, evaluate, or otherwise frame it.” For instance, the

book cover of *FL*, a paratextual element, is what materialises the story, allowing it to be received by the public within the frame of a specific context, and simultaneously provides them with hints about its content. A text's paratext is an essential component (whether in material form or not), acting as an intermediary between the text itself and how it is received or read.

In this view, the criterion for defining a paratext is function-based; i.e. an element is judged as being paratextual not in light of its material existence (as Munday suggested), but on whether it "provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received" (Genette 1997, 7). Relating this definition back to *FL*, if a reader goes to one of Braico's book presentations and learns about the project that co-exists alongside the book (which I will discuss in depth in a later section of this exegesis), then goes on to read the book, they would most likely have pre-formed ideas and expectations (whether conscious or subconscious) before opening the book. Supposing that this commentary is positive, the reader is then inclined to empathise with Braico's experience and project, which in turn shapes their reading. Therefore, in this example, the book presentation fits the function-based criterion of a paratextual element.

Genette (1997) also suggests that the paratext can be divided into two main categories: the epitext and the peritext. The epitext is what he refers to as any external elements of the text (e.g. interviews or conversations with the author), while the peritext comprises those materials physically part of the text, such as a title, a blurb, the author's biography or acknowledgements. This terminological distinction is the key notion I adopt in later sections of this exegesis to highlight *FL*'s external elements (e.g. media interviews), labelled as the epitext, and the internal elements (e.g. the afterword), labelled as the peritext.

Genette (1997, 345-346) notes that "the epitext – in contrast to the peritext – consists of a group of discourses whose function is not always basically paratextual (that is, to present and comment on the text), whereas the more or less unchanging regime of the peritext is constitutively and exclusively inseparable from its paratextual function." In simpler terms, while the peritext's role is only paratextual, the epitext can have several other functions, such as to create public discourse around a topic or person. Any material physically part of the book (e.g. the acknowledgments section) is automatically attributed a paratextual value, while external elements may also serve other purposes. For instance, a Spotify playlist centred around *FL* created by a reader also serves as a creative outlet for the reader and a means by which his artistic practice can be shared; similarly, media interviews with Braico highlight other aspects of the author's life such as his inspiration, daily routine, goals, etc.

While Genette's modelling of the paratext did not systematically consider applications to the field of translation studies, Kathryn Batchelor's work (2018) fills this gap. She analyses

Genette's theoretical framework and provides the following summary of his definition, derived from what he says about the paratext: "The paratext consists of any element which conveys comment on the text, or presents the text to readers, or influences how the text is received" (Batchelor 2018, 12). Exploring the interaction between paratexts and translation studies,⁹ she suggests that "even while shaping and constraining our encounter with the foreign, [paratexts] ultimately enable communication and interaction" (Batchelor 2018, 195). Her insights on paratexts through the lens of translation studies provide the foundation on which my analysis of *FL*'s paratext relies. The term paratext is already established across a range of disciplines, thus by adopting this term in translation studies, "we are more explicitly able to engage with the theoretical developments that have taken place since Genette and to incorporate our own research into that tradition" (Batchelor 2018, 142). Furthermore, the established distinctions between epitext and peritext allow for a clearer and more detailed analysis of paratextual elements, while providing consistency across disciplines. Before further exploring the paratext from a translation studies perspective, I offer a deeper analysis of the features of paratextual elements.

2.2.0. Paratextual features: Genette's typology

According to Genette's typology (1997, 4), the five core characteristics of paratexts are: 1. spatial, 2. temporal, 3. substantial, 4. pragmatic, and 5. functional. Although paratextual elements often exist in material form, it is not a requirement. Batchelor logically identifies that the spatial characteristic (1) only becomes relevant if the paratextual element "consists of a message that has taken on material form" (2018, 153). While the spatial category aims to highlight the location of the message, either in the epitext or in the peritext, Batchelor points out that in the present-day digital culture and media environment, these boundaries need to be considered with flexibility. For instance, if translators are dealing with e-books, TV advertisements or video games, the division between epitext and peritext is not necessarily relevant or productive; instead, other spatial boundaries may be created. However, considering the literary nature of my study, these spatial boundaries remain valid.

The temporal aspect (2) of paratextual elements refers to their date of release in relation to the original text. This aspect also needs some reconsideration according to Batchelor (2018), as Genette's model is not constructed for translation studies and therefore does not view the translated text as existing in its own right. Cees Koster (2002, 26) proposes that "a translation is a

⁹ I use 'paratextual elements' and 'paratexts' interchangeably. Genette (1997) employs 'paratextual elements', while Batchelor (2018) prefers the term 'paratexts'.

representation of another text and *at the same time* a text in its own right.”¹⁰ Within this perspective, Batchelor (2018) proposes the following categories, based on Genette’s (1997) temporal variables yet adjusted to allow for focus on the translated text: pre-source text, with-source text (i.e. simultaneous), post-source text, pre-target text, with-target text and post-target text.

This model can be contextualised using an example of an already translated source text, such as Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1952).¹¹ In this case, a ‘pre-source text’ paratext refers to an element designed specifically for the Dutch readers, before the text was released, such as the newspaper article written by Jan Romein in 1946 that praised the diary in the hope of finding a possible publisher (Kuitert 2010, 61). ‘With-source text’ are those paratextual elements that were released at the same time as the original publication, for instance the Dutch title *Het Achterhuis* (‘Secret Annex’) (Brenner 1996). ‘Post-source text’ includes elements constructed after the Dutch publication, such as any scholarly article or book reviews. Batchelor (2018) specifies that this category may inevitably overlap with ‘pre-target text’, but adjustments can be made depending on the case. In the case of Anne Frank’s *Diary* (1952), ‘pre-target text’ paratext refers to any translated version, rather than the original Dutch version. Therefore, a ‘pre-target text’ paratext includes marketing material (e.g. a catalogue or poster in a bookshop) created by the new publishers, anticipating the release of the translation. Following this, the ‘with-target text’ elements are created; for instance, the book cover was changed to incorporate a photo of Anne Frank. Finally, ‘post-target text’, refers to any paratextual material that has been created since the translation was released; using the first English translation (Frank 1952) as a point of comparison, we could place the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam, as well as the documentary *Anne Frank Remembered* (Blair 1995) as ‘post-target text’ elements.

These six temporal paratextual labels allow for a more refined analysis when considering translated texts. Adopting them in my paratextual analysis of *FL* allows the distinction to be made between the already existing (Italian) source paratext and the potential (Australian) target paratext, creating the basis for a more nuanced investigation.

Returning to Genette’s typology, the substantial aspect (3) refers to the mode or how the paratext is presented. Within the sphere of print literature, ‘textual’ paratexts are the most common mode, yet they may also take the form of iconic, material and factual. Again using Anne Frank’s *Diary* (1952) to illustrate the meaning of these labels, her photograph on the front cover is an iconic paratext, the font choice is an example of a material paratext, and the general knowledge that Anne Frank was Jewish, is a factual paratext. Batchelor (2018, 155) notes that this categorisation does

¹⁰ Italics in original.

¹¹ First published in Dutch in 1947 and translated into English in 1952.

not consider digital and audiovisual domains; she refines some of the categories into the following: mode of expression, medium of expression, medium of materialisation, medium of access, and medium of discovery. Although *FL* as a text itself is in print format, some of the paratextual elements, as well as an e-book edition of the book, do in fact span over the digital format, and these additional distinctions may become useful.

The pragmatic aspect (4) of paratexts highlights whom the communication is aimed at, or who has created it. Genette (1997) proposes the following subcategories: authorial, publisher's, allographic, public, private, intimate, official, unofficial, and illocutionary force. Like the temporal aspect, the pragmatic feature also needs to be adjusted to suit translation studies. In Genette's typology, translators sit within the allographic force category (i.e. any material created by someone other than the author), without distinguishing them from receivers (i.e. source text readers). This model also lacks a distinction between source text receivers and target text receivers. Koster (2002) offers a detailed insight into the various overlapping communicative roles in translation. He highlights that the translator is simultaneously a source text receiver and the target text author; however, the translator is not a target text receiver, which is why it is necessary to create a divide between source text receiver and target text receiver.

When analysing the agents of paratexts, distinguishing the translator from the target reader(s) is essential, as the translator has a role in determining how the target reader will interpret the text. Batchelor (2018, 157) proposes a distinction between "those senders who are authorised by the text-producers to produce paratexts for the text in question," and "those who produce paratexts independently." This is beneficial for my case study, as there are paratextual elements created by readers (e.g. the already mentioned playlist on Spotify), which can then be identified in contrast to paratextual elements developed by professionals (e.g. newspaper articles). A divide between source text receivers and target text receivers is also valuable in my research as it explicitly accounts for the paratextual differences that will inevitably arise between the Italian version and the English translation.

The last feature of Genette's paratextual typology is the functional category (5), which refers to the message or the purpose of the paratext. Genette highlights that creating sub-categories for this feature is almost impossible due to the varying purposes for which paratexts are created. Instead, he suggests that we can identify functional types. Scholars have attempted to account for the various purposes of paratexts within this vague category, depending on their area of expertise. In the context of transmedia storytelling, Amy Nottingham-Martin (2015, 836) outlines six functions of paratextual elements while, from the perspective of literary translation studies, Urpo Kovala (1996, 134) suggests nine functions of paratexts. Batchelor (2018, 160-161) identifies

Annika Rockenberger's (2014, 262-263) extensive list of functions within the context of videogames as being the most relevant and applicable to translation studies. With minor adaptations, the list comprises 14 categories: referential, self-referential, ornamental, generic, meta-communicative, informative, hermeneutical, ideological, evaluative, commercial, legal, pedagogical, instructive/operational, and personalisation. As with the other characteristics of paratexts, there are inevitably going to be cases of overlaps; this list can be used as a guide and altered accordingly to respond to the specific issues encountered in my own project.

While Genette's (1997) typology allows for a nuanced and sophisticated analysis when applied to the paratexts of translation, it is important to recognise that it is not the only theoretical framework addressing what Genette termed paratexts.

2.3. Extratext

Research into the term extratext from the perspective of translation studies is rather limited; nevertheless, Batchelor (2018) offers a summary of some key scholars who address this concept. The following summaries of the three scholars' perspectives and uses of the term extratext have been drawn together by Batchelor (2018). Şehnaz Tahir-Gürçağlar (2014, 44) offers a similar approach to Genette, yet modified for translation studies. She makes the distinction between extratext and paratext, suggesting that extratexts are "the general meta-discourse on translation circulating independently of individual translated texts."¹² Unlike Genette's peritext and epitext, which are inevitably linked to a specific text, extratext refers to general statements about translation studies or socio-cultural phenomena. Tahir-Gürçağlar (2014, 44) then refers to paratext as "presentational materials accompanying translated texts and the text-specific meta-discourse formed directly around them." This definition of the paratext encompasses Genette's concepts of epitext and peritext. However, in this case, only the translated text is under analysis. This is only one criterion by which these two concepts, extratext and paratext, can be distinguished. Sharon Deane-Cox (2014, 29) suggests that the difference between paratextual material and extratextual material lies in who has created the content. Paratextual material derives from the author, publisher, or translator (i.e. anyone directly involved in the production of the text itself), while extratextual material refers to articles and reviews that have been made about the translation, translator, publisher or source text author. Another distinction between paratext and extratext, offered by Szu-Wen Cindy Kung (2010, 165) is similar, if not identical, to Genette's (1997)

¹² Meta-discourse refers to commentary about the text itself or the writer's perspective towards the content (Hyland 1998, 438).

distinction between peritext and epitext respectively, and focuses on the spatial aspect of paratextual or extratextual elements.

In short, when making commentary about the connection of translation studies and paratexts, adopting one of the above uses of the term extratext is productive; however, when the aim is to instead make commentary on a specific text, then the term metatext needs to be introduced.

2.4. Metatext

If metalanguage can be defined as language that comments on language, then metatext refers to the commentary on a specific text. Although metatext then appears to complement paratext, Batchelor identifies an important distinction between the two: “A paratext is a threshold to the text. A metatext is a commentary on the text” (2018, 150).

For instance, returning to the example of Anne Frank’s (1952) *Diary*, a paratext would be the preface by Eleanor Roosevelt, and a metatext would be book reviews written about the text. However, Batchelor (2018) notes that metatext did not always have this connotation; she found that when methodologies and approaches to descriptive translation studies were just being established in the 1970s, metatext referred to “all types of processing (manipulation) of the original literary text, whether it is done by other authors, readers critics, translators etc. (Popovič 1976, 226). This model would thus view the English translation of *FL* as a metatext (a manipulation of the source text). However, as translation studies developed and new concepts were introduced, such as paratext, translation scholars started using metatext in the narrower sense.

The current widespread understanding and definition of metatext is the one used “in the narrower sense outlined by Genette and in keeping with its dictionary meaning, namely to refer to texts (or aspects of texts) which comment on another text” (Batchelor 2018, 150). Paratexts and metatexts are complementary labels; when selecting the terminology for an element under analysis, in some cases, either can be used depending on the research perspective and goal. We can, however, make a subtle distinction between paratextual metatexts and metatextual paratexts: paratextual metatexts are elements specifically created to introduce a text to the world (e.g. the preface of Anne Frank’s (1952) *Diary*), while metatextual paratexts include all other commentary on the text (e.g. a book review of Anne Frank’s (1952) *Diary*).

While the concepts of extratext and metatext provide an insight into potential research questions in paratextual analysis, I chose to adopt Genette’s terms epitext and peritext for my translation and commentary of *FL*’s paratext, as they highlight the differences between the external and internal elements, and the different approaches I take in attempting to transfer or reframe the

two faces of the paratext for an (Australian) English readership. The concept of paratext – with its constitutive subcomponents – is a useful tool to demonstrate how books can be framed, a matter I discuss in the next section.

2.5. Paratext and (re)framing

Batchelor (2018, 145) notes that the variety of definitions and uses of the term ‘framing’ is a result of its multidisciplinary nature and the range of research questions and aims it encapsulates. She observes that the concept of framing is applied across a variety of disciplines and has more recently been adopted in translation studies, most notably in Mona Baker’s (2019) research into translation and activism. Within the context of her narrative theory, Baker defines framing as “an active strategy that implies agency and by means of which we consciously participate in the construction of reality” (106). This includes strategies and decision-making processes relating to the translation of the text itself, as well as the construction of paratexts.

There is a connection between paratexts and framing, as paratexts are locations where the framing takes place. Batchelor (2018, 145) clarifies this statement as follows: “Suggesting that *paratexts* can be seen as sites in which *framing* takes place is not the same as replacing the term *paratext* with the term *frame*.”¹³ She highlights the difference between framing and frames – a result of the term ‘frames’ being applied in a range of academic disciplines. It can be useful to look at one of *FL*’s paratextual elements, newspaper articles, in order to understand the link between the paratext and the framing process.

The newspaper articles disseminating Braico’s novel and project are locations of framing, as they mould the receivers’ view. However, these articles are not frames; since they are connected to the text and have a functional aspect, in the way the text is read and received, they effectively form part of *FL*’s paratext. The link between paratext and framing is a productive perspective for my research: translation can be seen as framing a frame, or reframing (Baker 2019).

Considering that Braico’s *FL* has been framed for an Italian audience through the paratext, I intend to reframe the text and the paratext for an Australian audience. Approaching the English translation as an exercise of reframing, rather than an act of replication, highlights that the framing of the source text in Italy is not achieved through an easily transferrable material object (i.e. the book itself) but rather “an idea, a way of understanding and interpreting reality” (Batchelor 2018, 147). Braico and his allies (publishers, agents, etc.), have framed the text within their geographical, temporal and cultural context. I therefore aim to reframe the paratext for an adjusted

¹³ Italics in original.

interpretation, not only of the paratext, but subsequently of the text itself. For instance, by editing the peritextual content (e.g. the book cover) to suit the Australian frame, I am encouraging the target reader to interpret the text itself in a different way, in line with their cultural context.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I focus on *FL*, first by analysing the existing paratextual features, and then by proposing how they may best be reframed for the translation.

2.6. The text and the project of *La festa dei limoni*

The novel *La festa dei limoni* was attached to a project by the same name until as recently as late 2020. While the text and the project were born out of the same purpose, the project was created slightly before the novel.¹⁴ After Braico had finished his hospital treatment and had fully recovered from leukaemia, he wanted to find a way to repay the hospital staff for their support. As I noted in Chapter 1, he started collecting donations yet realised that something more than simply asking people was needed. Around the same time, his doctor suggested that he turn his experience and story into a book, due to his positive approach towards his illness. Hence, *FL* was created, first as a project with its own online hub (Braico 2011a), and subsequently as a novel.

The project was a fundraising campaign, in which all the profits Braico makes from *FL* and his subsequent four books (Braico 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2017) contributed towards buying hospital equipment, which was then donated to hospitals around Italy. In the same month that the book was published, October 2011, in the news section of his website, Braico wrote: “The project was born to give joy to people who are losing it. The aim of the novel is to spread a message of positivity and the money collected from the sales will be used to reach goal no. 5, which will improve the conditions for those in hospital” (Braico 2011a).¹⁵ On the website, the public could track what the donations were being used for; this information would be updated constantly and accompanied by photos of the most recent pieces of equipment purchased through donations (see Figure 1 for an example).¹⁶ Yet the novel was always the driving force of the project. When I questioned Braico about the interconnectedness of the novel and the project, he emphasised that “this book doesn’t make sense without the project by its side” (Braico 2019),¹⁷ highlighting that the text and the project were inseparable and could not be viewed in isolation. Interestingly, this

¹⁴ Private message from Braico to Hanczakowski, 27 September 2019.

¹⁵ My translation from the original Italian: “È un progetto nato per dare gioia a chi la sta perdendo. Il romanzo vuole portare un messaggio di positività e il denaro raccolto dalla vendita servirà a raggiungere l’obiettivo n. 5 per migliorare le condizioni di chi è in Ospedale” (Braico 2011a). Note that all subsequent English quotes from Braico’s text (whether from his novel, website or interview) are also my own translation.

¹⁶ English translation of writing in Figure 1: GOAL 79: Achieved. We gave a surgical ventilator for children (newborns) to the paediatric ward of the Mauriziano Hospital in Turin. There were doctors, nurses and many, many children who thanked us. The mums were touched, and so was I, but this isn’t worthy of making headlines.

¹⁷ “Questo libro senza il progetto a fianco non ha senso” (Braico 2019).

is no longer the case, as approximately a year and a half after that interview, an announcement was made on his website explaining the decision to cease all donation activities. Braico continues to publish books and have a social media presence despite the project no longer existing.

NEWS

OBIETTIVO 79 RAGGIUNTO

🕒 29 OTTOBRE 2019 👤 MARCO BRAICO



OBIETTIVO 79: Raggiunto. Abbiamo regalato un aspiratore chirurgico per i bambini (neonati) nel reparto di pediatria dell'Ospedale Mauriziano di Torino. C'erano dottoresse, infermiere e tanti, tanti bambini che ci hanno ringraziato. Le mamme commosse, io pure ma questo non fa notizia.

Figure 1: One of Braico's (2011a) news posts about a recent donation.

Creating a text of high literary standard was never Braico's primary intention, as he explicitly states in the afterword: "The novel is not for those with high literary taste, but instead it is written from the heart and I am sure that it will be read that way" (2015a, 217).¹⁸ Braico uses the text to spread his story and project, yet his aim goes beyond that of making his story heard; his aim is to reach out to others going through similar experiences, giving them hope and solace, and to improve the lives of people affected by the same illness that affected him. *FL* has therefore been created to represent the untold story and to facilitate his overarching goals.

¹⁸ "Il romanzo non è per palati letterari fini, ma è scritto con il cuore e sono certo che sarà letto con il cuore" (Braico 2015a, 217).

The way in which the project is presented to the public can be divided into two approaches: through epitextual elements (e.g. book presentations and hospital donations), and through peritextual elements (e.g. the book cover and the preface). I will now explore these two contrasting yet complementary methods of disseminating the ‘unwritten story’ in greater detail.

2.6.0. *The epitext of La festa dei limoni*

A message that is not represented in a material format can still be identified as a component of the paratext, labelled as the epitext (Batchelor 2018). *FL*’s epitextual elements are vital for a thorough understanding and interpretation of the source text, a fundamental step that ensures the target text mirrors the original aim of the source text. Braico uses epitextual elements (e.g. interviews) to disseminate his project and his novel, not only to readers or potential readers, but also to the wider (Italian) community. One way he achieves this is through book presentations around Italy, predominantly at high schools but also at universities.¹⁹ The high school context, including the student-teacher bond and the school environment, receives a significant amount of attention in the novel itself. This is largely due to Braico’s role as a teacher both in real life and in the text, through his alter ego, Gabriele. Braico’s school presentations would generally involve an explanation of the project, some readings from the book, and he would then provide the audience with the opportunity to ask questions. In addition to private presentations at institutions, he would hold book presentations for the public (often held at libraries, bookshops, cafés, etc.) which would be designed not only to promote the project, but also to be a space where people can share their own experiences, speak up and connect with those around them who may be enduring similar experiences.

Another means of dissemination is through media and social media. Braico has been involved in TV, radio, newspaper and podcast interviews, which often involve discussions of how *FL* is entwined with his personal life and what the aim of the project is. Braico uses platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram to increase the circulation of the text and the project. These platforms are all closely connected to the project’s web site (Braico 2011a), which – as previously mentioned – he would use to update readers about what has been donated with the funds collected, along with the next fundraising target.

These different media channels are all interconnected and collectively work not only to disseminate the text and the project, but also to create a growing community of readers and supporters. Each time Braico would donate a piece of equipment, he would travel to the hospital

¹⁹ As I noted in my introduction, it was through one such presentation, in 2015, that I first encountered Braico’s text and project.

and capture the moment with a photo, which would then be passed on to viewers through the various media outlets. These visits to Italian hospitals were a core part of *FL*'s epitext and strengthened Braico's network (Figure 1). In turn, this networking led to word-of-mouth recommendations and conversations which have substantially contributed to the text's and the project's dissemination. It is largely through his personal network and connections within these contexts (such as schools and hospitals) that the novel and project have been so successfully received in Italy. All the above-mentioned elements assist in raising awareness of *FL* and have positively contributed to the text's reception within the Italian context, forming an 'unwritten story'.

However, the inseparability of this epitext from the book itself means that a translation of the text cannot simply be placed into a context void of these existing elements (such as Australia). I discuss this specific translation issue in a later section. In the following section, I focus on the peritextual elements of the text.

2.6.1. *The peritext of La festa dei limoni*

In addition to the textual content, books comprise countless combinations of elements that are materially attached to the text (e.g. title or preface), labelled as the peritext. The purpose of these elements is to explicitly represent the text itself and shape its reception and interpretation. The peritextual features of *FL* have changed significantly since its first publication.

The text was first published by Effatà Editrice in October (2011b); pleasantly surprised by the book's sales, Braico posted on the project's website: "Something amazing is happening, 40% of the printed copies have already been sold after three days" (Braico 2011a).²⁰ A year later, Effatà Editrice released an e-book edition (Braico 2011c), and almost three years after this, Braico updated readers on his website that "the final copy was sold last night. The new *La festa dei limoni* will be released on September 10 with the publisher Piemme."²¹ The book went through an extensive editing process for this republication by Edizioni Piemme (2015a). This editing process and change of publisher contributed to many revisions of the book's appearance; the original paperback and e-book versions of the novel were no longer available. *FL* went from being a paperback (2011b) to a hardback (2015a), and the e-book version was also updated and released as a second edition (2015b). The book cover was completely altered. Although the title remained the same, the tagline on the front cover changed. The blurb changed drastically, the author's

²⁰ "Sta succedendo qualcosa di incredibile, il 40% delle stampe effettuate è già stato venduto dopo tre giorni. Oggi l'editore Effatà ha deciso di procedere alla prima ristampa" (Braico 2011a).

²¹ "Ieri sera è stata venduta l'ultima copia. Il 10 settembre esce il nuovo *La festa dei limoni* con edizioni Piemme" (Braico 2011a).

biography was moved, the index page was removed, and the prefaces became afterwords. Within the story, sections and chapters were added, deleted, and modified. It appears that the new publisher's intention was to increase the literary status of the book, as common words were replaced with more eloquent synonyms, and sections became more descriptive. The graphic features of the text reflect the progression of the novel and of the project, demonstrating its growth and reception in Italy.

The peritext, or the tangible elements of the book, profoundly influence how the text is received; the most relevant material features of *FL* (which are analysed in depth in a later section), are the book cover(s), the title, and the prefaces/afterwords. The connection between *FL*'s paratext and its Italian context creates challenges for the translated version, which I propose can be managed using creative practices based on my theoretical findings.

2.7. Reframing *La festa dei limoni*'s paratext

Texts circulate without their context; signification is provided by context of reception. This means that the reception of the English translation of *FL* will be shaped by how well the Australian readers can interpret the paratext, parts of which are embedded within Italy. As texts inevitably have multiple paratextual elements existing simultaneously, with differing degrees of significance, the focus becomes identifying which should be prioritised and whether they can be maintained in translation.

When deciding which paratextual elements to prioritise in translation, the following central question should be considered: "What are the functions and effects of the paratext of the source text, and to what extent are these functions and effects necessary, retained and of positive relevance in translation?" (Pellatt 2013, 3). The research questions linked to the specific study also determine and justify which material should be included in a paratextual corpus (Batchelor 2018, 144). In the case of *FL*, I initially believed that the epitext should be given the priority out of the two, given the impact of the book's larger project; however, now that the project no longer exists, the challenge becomes capturing the essence of the epitext through the peritext.

Narrowing the focus towards the aim of the epitextual elements in the source text facilitates the reframing of the target text. Batchelor (2018, 11) summarises Genette's views that "the paratext is not the element itself (the interview, correspondence, recording, journal, etc.), but only that small part of the element which serves to present or comment on the text in question." Consequently, instead of being absorbed by the paratextual elements – which are inevitably 'left behind' (e.g. presentation nights held by Braico) – and attempting to 'make up' for them through

the peritext, the perspective shifts to identifying the key messages within the paratextual elements and reframing them for the (Australian) target culture (Batchelor 2018).

Given that the aim of the project was making donations to hospitals, establishing a similar, partner project with the target text, one that makes donations to Australian hospitals, was one of my initial solutions. Another potential solution was to create a connection with an Australian charity or organisation that is already well established. At the time of my interview with him, in 2019, Braico believed it essential that the book be accompanied by a project, rather than simply translated and published in isolation. In the following excerpt of that interview, he explains that while a partner project would be born out of the same idea as the Italian one, and would use the same text, the Australian project would need to function independently, not influencing nor being influenced by the Italian one:

No, it's a project that would be born in Australia and cultivated in Australia. It can't be linked to the Italian project; the Italian project is the Italian project. If this book were to be published in Australia, it would be born in Australia, and a project in Australia would also be created, in which whoever creates it (possibly you, with or without me) starts talking about it with presentation nights, with hospital donations. It would become a sister project, travelling parallel to the Italian one. Creating it in Australia wouldn't harm the Italian one and the Italian one isn't – let me use the term – diminished, or reduced from having a project enter Australia, quite the opposite. That's my idea, if it were to happen, this is how it must happen, this book doesn't make sense without the project by its side. It's a good book but there are lots of good books. It wouldn't have sold thirty thousand copies if it didn't have the project by its side (Braico 2019).²²

While I agree with the interconnectedness between the text and the project and respect the emphasis Braico placed on the fundraising campaign, I also believe that creating a project which is linked to an already established Australian organisation would be the most effective, logical solution (rather than establishing a completely new and isolated project). While I am no longer focused on the idea of creating a sister project, below I explore the concept of how it could have been approached. However, tackling these issues generally goes beyond the role of the translator.

According to Maïca Sanconie (2007), having engaged in such a comprehensive reading of the source text through the translation process, the translator is in fact compelled to make comments on the text and all its subtleties in a way that perhaps not even the most attentive, critical

²² “No, è un progetto che nasce in Australia e viene coltivato in Australia. Non può essere legato al progetto italiano, il progetto italiano è il progetto italiano. Con un'eventuale uscita in Australia questo libro nasce in Australia e parte un progetto in Australia, dove chi lo fa partire (che puoi essere tu, con me o senza di me) comincia a raccontare di questa cosa con serate, con donazioni in ospedali. È un progetto che diventa gemello, può andare in parallelo. Crearlo in Australia non fa danno a quello italiano e quello italiano non è – fammi usare il termine – sminuito, o ridotto dall'avere un progetto che entra in Australia, anzi. La mia idea è che, se si dovesse mai fare, si deve fare così, questo libro senza il progetto a fianco non ha senso. È un buon libro ma ce ne sono tanti, di buoni libri. Non avrebbe venduto trentamila copie se non ci fosse stato il progetto a fianco” (Braico 2019).

target reader could engage in. So as not to confuse the translation itself with the commentary the translator may instil into the text, adding a translator's preface is desirable; here the commentary can receive its full value (Sanconic 2007). Having the translator deal with such paratextual elements can also be justified from the perspective of transcreation.

Viewing the target text as a transcreation provides the space to holistically transfer all elements of the text rather than the words alone (Ekman 2003; Paterson 2006). While transcreating the epitext would ideally stem from a publishing company willing to invest in such a project, this is unrealistic and outside the typical role of publishers. An online community would also need to be created, involving similar avenues of communication originally pursued by Braico; this could involve creating a website and social media presence to initiate word-of-mouth dissemination. When the idea of a sister-project was proposed, Braico suggested that the project would have to be established prior to publication, creating conditions that foster the success of the book: "We can try to launch it [the project] with me, and then it will find its own path. But the conditions must already be ready, there must already be a path for it to follow" (Braico 2019).²³

Following the text's publication in Australia, the epitext would need to be continually publicised, and events such as those that Braico engaged in (presentations, interviews, etc.) would be necessary to not only divulge the project, but also to provide validity to the text itself. While the text remains intrinsically linked to Italy linguistically, the epitext would be reframed for the Australian readers. The benefit of transcreating the project to Australia does not solely regard the fundraising aspect; target readers are more likely to engage in the project, as well as the text itself, if it is established in Australia, rather than remaining geographically and culturally locked in Italy. Undoubtedly there are going to be elements of the epitext that cannot be reframed for an Australian readership, such as encounters with the author himself and the personal nature of his presentations and visits.

Given that translators do not often have the responsibility or position to voice these kinds of concerns or opinions, I am aware that the points discussed here go beyond the scope of translation studies and are not simple to implement. The aim here is to demonstrate not only how complex the paratextual aspects of the novel are, but also to create a picture of how the text would ideally be transcreated for a new cultural context, from my perspective as the translator.

While this case study is centred around Australia, a similar strategy can also be applied to other countries. In an interview, Braico discussed the possibility of a French translation being carried out, and in that case, a French partner project could be established, using the Italian project

²³ "Si può provare a pensare di lanciarlo con me, e poi fa la sua strada. Però ci devono essere delle condizioni già pronte, ci deve essere già una strada che poi parte" (Braico 2019).

as the driving force, thus creating additional epitextual elements in France.²⁴ While it is not possible to predict the pathway or the reception of the English translation of *FL*, being aware of the essential paratextual nuances and aspects ensures that Braico's social intentions are respected and transcreated to suit the context of the receiving audience. I suggest that any epitextual elements which cannot be reframed for an Australian audience, but which are fundamental for the text's reception and interpretation, are placed in the peritext. This may be achieved by adding photos of Braico in the text, or by including sections of an interview with him in the preface.

Having explained why the epitextual elements of *FL* cannot be mirrored in the target text, as the project has been designed for an Italian context and is embedded in Italy, using the peritext to assist with the epitextual reframing becomes invaluable. While peritextual elements are generally more straightforward to translate because they are physically visible, their connection with the source text and source culture makes them challenging. I now investigate *FL*'s key peritextual features – the book cover(s), the title, and the prefaces/afterwords – and provide insight into how these can be handled in my English translation.

2.8. The book cover(s)

The first peritextual element readers come across is the book cover, which essentially “works as an advertisement that uses primarily visual means to attract attention to the text and to convey the minimum of essential information [...]” (Sonzogni 2011, 15). Book covers use a myriad of techniques to reach the desired outcome; one of the intentions is that of “anticipating textual content by means of its own visual language” (Sonzogni 2011, 15). They are a powerful peritextual element because, unlike the text itself, they can be modified over space and time to reflect the readers' needs and context, as well as any political, social and cultural changes that have occurred from first publication to the latest edition (Genette 1997).

This peritextual element is not only relevant for marketing and potential engagement but also its important role in the construction of a book's translation. From the perspective of translation studies, a book's cover “re-presents and re-positions the text across languages, cultures, times and spaces” and “performs a crucial act of socio-cultural mediation, providing a bridge between authors and readers” (Sonzogni 2011, 15). Therefore, the book cover can act as a cultural mediator, aiding the transfer of a text into a foreign context (e.g. *FL* being carried across to Australia). Unlike the restrictions of faithfulness that are inherent in the translation of the text itself, the translation of book covers allows much more freedom.

²⁴ “[...] there's also a French project, we'll see what happens there.” Original Italian: “[...] c'è anche un progetto francese adesso vediamo anche lì” (Braico 2019).

The fact that book covers can be modified over space and time is particularly relevant for *FL*, given how the book cover changed when it was re-published in Italy. The cover of *FL*'s first publication was created by the author himself: the original front cover (Figure 2) was a full-length picture of a young, smiling schoolboy. This is Braico's nephew in real life and represents one of the protagonists, Roberto, son of the narrator Gabriele. The book title in the top left-hand corner stands out in red, with the author's name directly above it in smaller blue font. Below the title, the tagline reads "*Il profumo della gioia di vivere*" ("The fragrance of the joy of living") (Braico 2011b). The cover image and the tagline suggest a positive and joyful story, with no hints at any emotionally challenging themes.

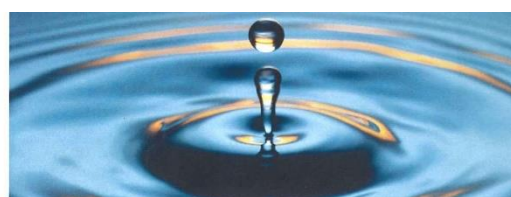
Marco Braico

La festa dei limoni

Il profumo della gioia di vivere



EFFATA EDITRICE



Roberto ha dieci anni ed è il figlio di Gabriele Longo, professore di Matematica e Fisica che viene travolto dalla malattia. Insieme decidono di combatterla rivolgendosi alla loro passione per la matematica, alla gioia di vivere e all'amore. Si ride e si riflette molto, raggiungendo l'obiettivo di ritrovare l'allegria anche nella cattiva sorte e cercare di fare qualcosa di utile all'unico scopo di guarire.

Il lettore potrà capire come si possa trovare fiducia e gioia semplicemente nel profumo dei limoni: nulla di più naturale. Nulla di più "essenziale" che il semplice profumo di un frutto può rappresentare la felicità. Ma questo percorso richiede la forza di spogliarsi di tutto quanto è superfluo, vano e inconsistente.

Dalla Prefazione del Dottor Alessandro Busca



Marco Braico è nato a Torino nel 1968 e vive a Volterra. Insegna Matematica e Fisica in un liceo scientifico. È arbitro di serie A di pallavolo. Il primo romanzo *La festa dei limoni* (2011) si è classificato terzo all'XI Premio Nazionale di Arti Letterarie Città di Torino e ha ricevuto la Menzione d'onore al XII Premio Letterario Internazionale Lago Gerundo. Ha in seguito pubblicato *Metà di tutto* (2013) e *Cuori di panna* (2014).

Il ricavato di questo libro verrà utilizzato per l'acquisto di una strumentazione che consenta ai "pazienti malati" di vivere meglio la loro avventura.

Rimani aggiornato sul progetto:

lafestadeilimoni.it



€ 13,00

Figure 2: Front cover (Braico 2011b).

Figure 3: Back cover (Braico 2011b).

The back cover (Figure 3) includes two images: the centre top image is a photo of a water droplet, and in the bottom left-hand corner, a photo of Braico. The back cover is crowded with writing; first is the blurb, below this in bold red print, is a quote from the preface written by the author's doctor. The bottom third of the back cover includes Braico's biographical note and photo. At the very bottom, there is a brief explanation of where the book profits will go, and the project's website URL. The amount of information the potential reader encounters on the back cover risks being overwhelming. One of the aims of book covers is "to draw the attention of potential readers and persuade them to find out more about the book" (Sonzogni 2011, 12). I believe that the entire

cover of the first edition lacked an element of captivation which has been effectively added by a complete graphic redesign in the later edition.

The cover of *FL* has changed quite dramatically in the subsequent edition (Figure 4). The paperback cover has become a dust jacket with a blank hardback cover underneath (excluding the author, title and publisher on the spine). The cover has become more modern and eye-catching, reflecting the overall goal of book covers. However, when placed on the shelf without its dust jacket, this edition is stripped of the majority of its vital peritextual aspects.²⁵



Figure 4: Dust jacket (Braico 2015a).

The publishing company of the second edition, Edizioni Piemme, created the new design and proposed it to Braico, who then accepted it. The book cover now displays the face of a young boy swimming, his nose, mouth and chin immersed in water. The boy is not Braico's nephew as in the previous edition; instead the image comes from the publisher's database.²⁶ The radiant colours, such as the aquamarine water and the boy's sun-kissed skin, suggest summertime and warmth, and the idea of leisure or holidays. However, the boy's eyes are slightly squinting and serious, staring directly at the reader, creating a contrast with the care-free nature expected from a boy of his age, and which is depicted in the book's earlier version.

²⁵ It is often the case that libraries remove the dust jackets of books, in order to avoid barcode confusion when scanning them out for borrowing.

²⁶ Private message from Braico to Hanczakowski, 3 September 2019.

The first edition's cover image quite explicitly alludes to the school context (the boy's schoolbooks and backpack), whereas the second edition's cover is more obscure. This is in line with one of Wendell Minor's notions for achieving a successful cover: "The visual message should be ambiguous enough to allow the reader to participate with his or her own imagination" (1995, 1).

The book title is directly below the boy's face and is now centred rather than aligned to the left as with the previous edition. The author's name is directly above the boy's face; this too, is centred rather than left-aligned. The author's name is in slightly smaller print than the title, yet interestingly still larger than in the first edition.²⁷ Under his name and to the right, in slightly smaller print again, is the tagline, which has also changed: "Un padre, un figlio. Ci sono legami che possono salvarti la vita" ("A father, a son. There are bonds that can save your life") (Braico 2015a). This tagline invites the reader to become curious about the book's content, and unlike with the title, there is an immediate and obvious connection with the cover image. Perhaps readers make the connection that the boy swimming is one of the two protagonists mentioned ("un figlio"), and they may deduce that the reason for the boy's grim gaze relates to the heavy theme already alluded to in the tagline, saving one's life.

The back cover is now relatively minimalist. The background of the back cover is the same aquamarine water as on the front, and additional information is included: "Un romanzo contagioso, che fa bene a chi lo legge. Un successo del passaparola" ("A contagious book, good for your soul. A word-of-mouth success") (Braico 2015a). I suggest this phrase has been added to place the book within its (Italian) context, verifying its status and achievement. Simultaneously, it is hinting at the epitextual elements of the text; rather than referring to the content of the pages, this phrase relates to the external elements of the text and the effect the book has had on its receivers. This entices potential readers to find out for themselves why it has been so successful. Potential readers are also likely to be drawn by its promise to be "good for your soul," which has already been experienced and validated by readers of the first edition. The word 'contagious' plays on the book's theme of illness, by simultaneously referring to the text's catchiness and, more importantly, to the hospital setting within which the book is placed. Below this praise, is part of an excerpt from one of the more intense and emotional parts of the text:

"Hello?" "Hi darling, are you looking out the window?" I look out. In the car park in front of Molinette [Hospital], towards the Po River, Stefania and Roberto are holding out a large, long banner that says: "HAPPY FATHER'S DAY PAPÀ, I LOVE YOU." All the patients

²⁷ This could be linked to the rise of Braico's literary status, and the fact that the book won several awards between the two publications. However, it may simply be a stylistic choice of the publishers.

in the ward are at the window. Some with tears. It's March 19. Father's Day. I had forgotten (Braico 2015a, 115).²⁸

This passage points out to (potential) readers the topics that will be dealt with in the text, such as the father-son relationship, the hospital context, and the emotionally charged content.

In addition to the information provided on the front and back covers, there is now a front and back flap (Figure 5). The front flap contains the blurb, which has been expanded and extensively edited. It is more detailed than in the original edition and specifies exactly what themes the book deals with, such as leukaemia, family, hope, etc. The back flap contains the author's biography, accompanied by just his name, without any photo. Below the author's biography, is the project's URL and logo, yet there is no explicit reference to the project or where the book profits are going, as had been the case with the previous edition.

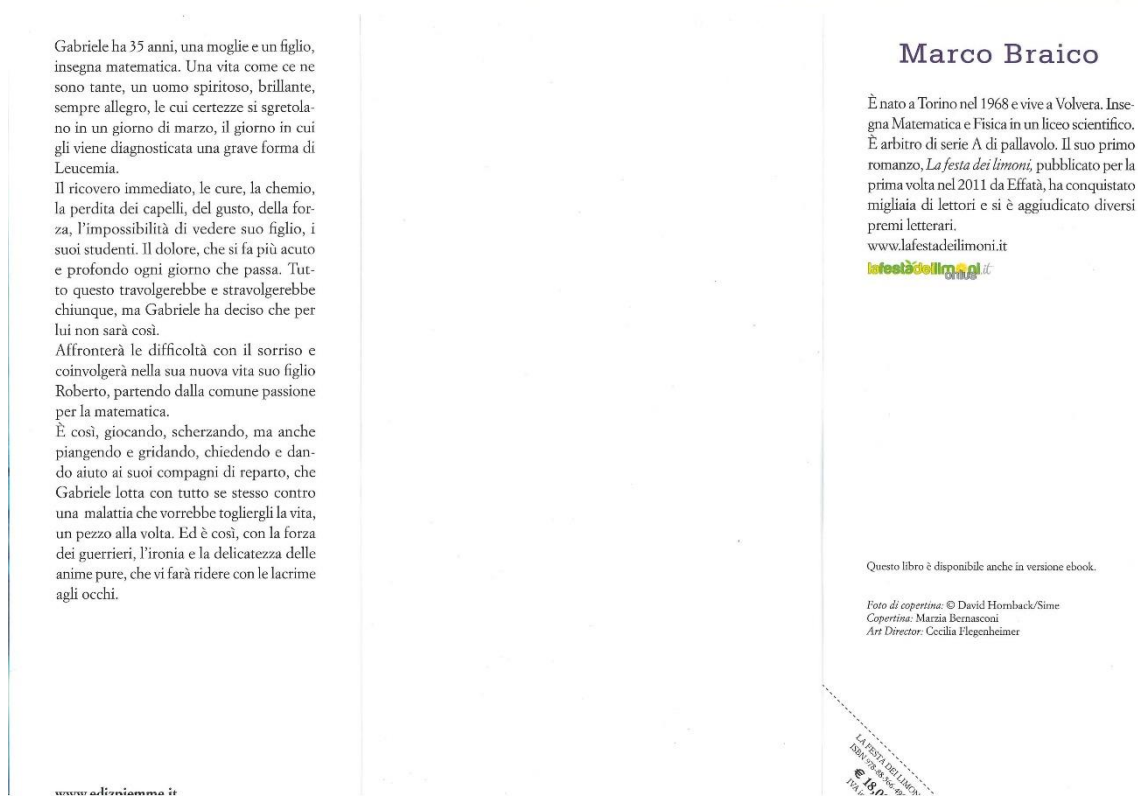


Figure 5: Inside flaps (Braico 2015a).

The entire dust jacket is far more alluring and inviting than the previous edition and is more closely related to the contents of the pages. As I mentioned earlier, Marco Sonzogni (2011) explores the interconnectedness between a book's cover and text, investigating this from an intersemiotic translation perspective. He suggests that two different interactions are occurring, one

²⁸ “‘Pronto?’ ‘Ciao Amore, ti affacci alla finestra?’ Mi affaccio. Nel parcheggio di fronte all’ospedale, verso il Po, Stefania e Roberto stendono uno striscione lunghissimo con la scritta: ‘AUGURI PAPÀ, TI VOGLIO BENE’. Tutti i pazienti del reparto sono alla finestra. Qualcuno con le lacrime. È il 19 marzo. La festa del papà. Me lo ero dimenticato” (Braico 2015a, 115).

between the cover image and the book's text, and another between the text and readers (2011). Modifying the correlation between the cover image and the text inevitably changes the interaction between the text and readers, whether intentionally or not. I suggest this reworking of the cover had the intention of creating a different interpretation of the text as a product. This complete modification of the cover was undoubtedly motivated by aesthetic intentions and marketing reasons.

Angus Phillips (2007) proposes that one of the stages in the marketing strategies of books is positioning the text in the customer's mind by hinting at its genre and the type of experience the reader can expect. Similarly, Sonzogni (2011, 22) argues that "the cover should engage first and foremost with the *genre* of the book and then with the *content* and, if relevant, with the *setting*."²⁹ The second edition's cover achieves this far more effectively than the first. The image and tagline of the second edition offer an accurate depiction of the text's emotions and intentions. The cover prepares readers for a text that deals with serious themes and emotions, without giving away too much information. There is still ample room for various interpretations; readers still must come to their own conclusion about how the title and tagline relate to the image. For instance, they must postulate whether it is the father's or the son's life that is on the line. Sonzogni (2011, 28) suggests that "the most successful cover is that which, within the limits of selection and space, encompasses as many layers of meaning of the text and thus of interpretative options, as possible." The English translation of the text will lead to the creation of a third book cover, thereby offering another layer of source text interpretation and creating a new reading through the target text.

While it is true that book covers are generally created by the publisher, there is the possibility that I could self-publish the translation. This would offer the opportunity to propose how the book cover of *FL* may be edited to accompany the English version. There is nothing stereotypically Italian about the cover page of the source text's cover, yet this could change in translation. Batchelor (2018, 38-39) suggests "that the use of cultural stereotyping through paratexts is a common – perhaps even default – strategy in the marketing of foreign texts, rather than being something that is reserved for distant (exotic) cultures." While this may be perceived as a negative phenomenon, I believe that it could also be used as a positive – to highlight the cultural associations of the text. For example, the photo on the cover of *FL* could take on an Italian identity (such as in Figure 6).³⁰

²⁹ Italics in original.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that while publishers favour the inclusion of foreign aspects in target-text book covers, the insertion of a translator's preface is not desirable (as I will explore in a later section of this exegesis). From a marketing perspective, this suggests that readers are drawn to explicitly foreign, exotic books, yet are not aware of their linguistic and cultural implications, and of the difficulties that inevitably arise throughout the translation process.

In my translation, I am linguistically striving to maintain the text's Italian cultural features as much as possible, and to inform the Australian target readers about the current social, cultural and political environment of Italy. Constructing a cultural association by manipulating the book cover (e.g. editing the blurb, selecting a different cover image) is a logical and effective way of portraying the source text's Italian identity, and reframing the novel for the Australian readers. Sonzogni (2011, 4) suggests that "book covers reveal the cultural assumptions of their designers, of their authors and of the readers of the text." Although this may often misrepresent a particular culture, the opposite could also be true; we can intentionally use the book cover to represent the image of modern-day Italy portrayed in the text, keeping in mind the assumed interpretations of the target readers.

Returning to the central goal of the paratext, Genette highlights that functionality and achieving what the author set out to achieve is the key aspect of the paratext's characteristics (1997, 407). In this case, one of the functionalities of the translation is to attract foreign readers to the text and providing them with a cultural experience. Adapting the book cover for the English translation, making it more appealing to Australian readers, is a strategy in line with the overall goal of the paratext. I propose that this can be achieved by creating a book cover that is more suited to the Australian readers' perspective and context, taking advantage of the text's foreignness, a norm in marketing translated texts (Batchelor 2018). Encapsulating the Italianness of the source text in the target text's book cover (a feature not currently present in the source text's cover) could generate more interest in the text, thus informing readers (and potential readers) of its origins. The cultural elements and the association with the Italian project is one of the more unique aspects of the text (ahead of the theme of illness etc.), which is why it is at the foreground of recreating the translations' paratext.

In order to replicate what might happen if this text were self-published (as was the first publication of *FL*), I commissioned an artist friend of mine to create two proposed book covers. The artist, Lodovica Paschetta, lives in Turin and is familiar with Braico and his story. I provided her with some brief guidelines and ideas about what the two images may include (such as an Italian coastline, lemons etc.).

Figure 6 is one image I propose for the book cover of the English text. Similar to the source text, it depicts the protagonist's son, Gabriele, yet the background is a typical Italian coastline: uneven, colourful buildings, archways and churches. The element of water remains, yet the lemon tree suggests the importance of that fruit in the story, which I discuss in more detail in the next section. Lastly, the large red circle behind the buildings could be interpreted in varying ways – in addition to it representing a sunset or full moon, it hints at the concept of blood cells, an important theme of the story.

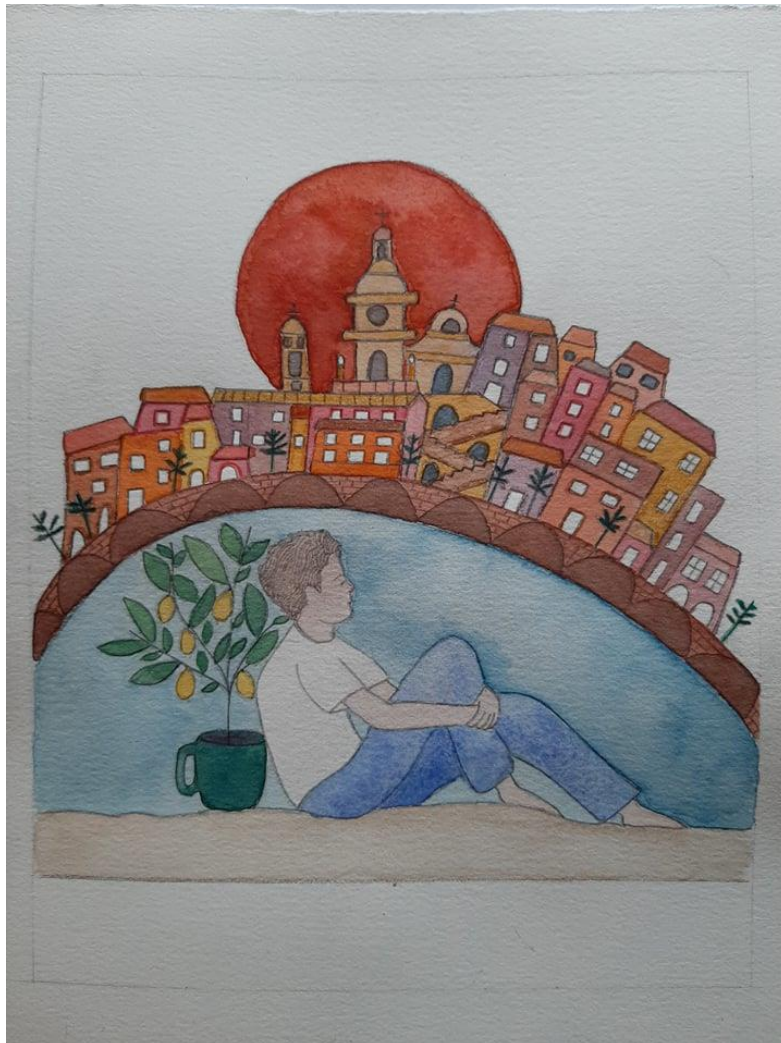


Figure 6: Proposed English book cover 1. Image reprinted by permission of the artist, Lodovica Paschetta. © 2021.

The second image I propose for the translated text, Figure 7, depicts the protagonist recording his thoughts in a journal (which essentially becomes the inspiration for the text itself); behind him is the well-known landmark of Turin, the Mole Antonelliana. This image creates a

more literal picture of the story, which may help fill in some of the missing epitextual gaps unavailable to the target readers.

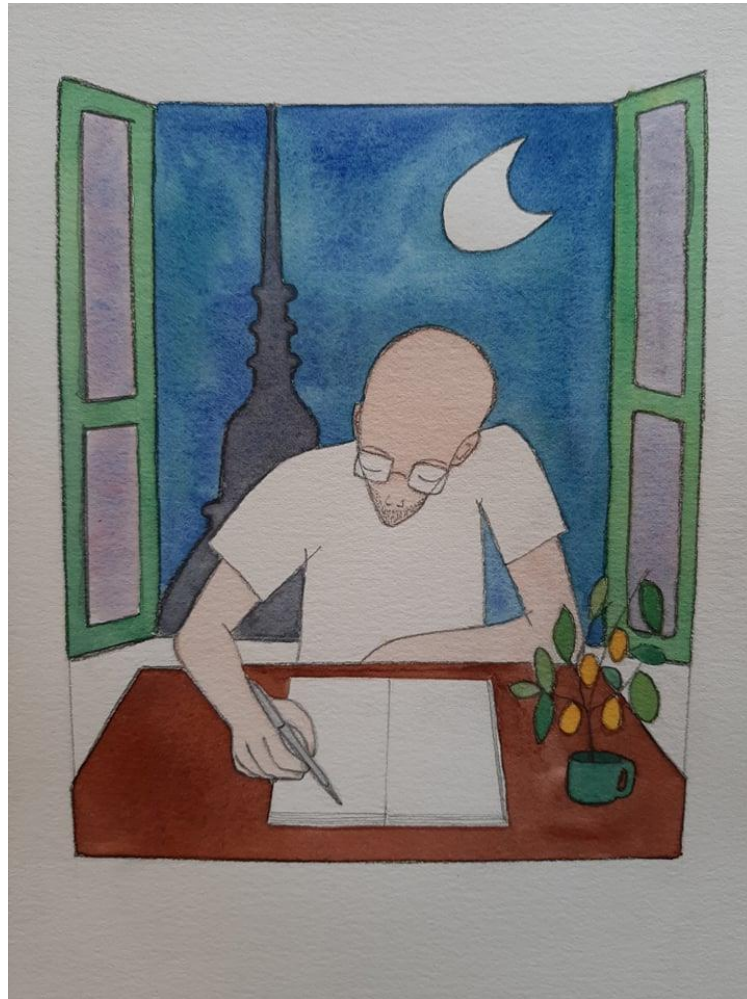


Figure 7: Proposed English book cover 2. Image reprinted by permission of the artist, Lodovica Paschetta. © 2021.

2.9. The book title(s)

While we may initially perceive book titles to be an element reserved for readers, or potential readers, this is not always the case. Genette (1997, 75) suggests that the title “is an object to be circulated – or, if you prefer, a subject of conversation.” He also proposes that titles are used predominantly for identification purposes. Depending on their function, book titles are either one of the following two types: “thematic” for those that in any way hint at the text’s subject matter, and “rhematic” for titles that refer to the text itself or view the text as an object (Genette 1997, 77-78). He states that these two words are taken from the terms “*theme* (what one talks about) and *rheme* (what one says about it)” (Genette 1997, 77-78). The link between the book title and text

itself may not always be clear, and often authors create this ambiguity intentionally, leaving the interpretation open to the readers. Genette (1997) states that the above labels are purely descriptive; to further understand the semantic purpose of titles, we must break this down further. Genette (1997) suggests that book titles may also have a connotative function (i.e. how the titles may achieve the thematic or rhematic function), whether the author or publisher intends this to be the case or not, and a temptation function (e.g. a catchy title), to entice the reader.

The title *La festa dei limoni* has both a connotative function and a temptation function; it reflects the novel's content, without giving away too much information, and simultaneously aims to draw in the reader, due to its peculiarity. The title is one of the few peritextual elements that remain identical across both Italian editions. I posit that one reason for this is to avoid any confusion about whether it is a different text or not, yet another is to maintain the same name as the project.

As titles can be deeply embedded in the source culture, their translation is not always straightforward. Ken Farø (2013, 3) analyses interlingual title issues based on his multilingual title corpus of Danish, German, and English titles. Although his research is not restricted to books (films, plays, songs, etc. are also included), his insights are nevertheless valuable and relevant as they highlight current practices in title translation. He suggests there are three fundamental ways of translating a title: 1. leaving the foreign title untranslated, 2. translating it directly, or 3. modifying it in some way. After analysing a corpus of titles, he identifies the tendency to simplify and explicate translated titles. Farø (2013) also suggests that titles become more formulaic, meaning that if they do not already conform with the linguistic patterns of the target language, then they will be adapted. He also notices that they contain more 'intertitularity'.³¹ A translator or publisher may exploit the titles of similar books to provide the target reader with a familiar reference point.

Transparency is also augmented in translating titles. By providing the target reader with extra information which was not given to the source reader, the likelihood of misunderstandings and misinterpretations, which may have otherwise arisen due to linguistic and cultural gaps, is reduced. Farø (2013) lastly suggests that translated titles are likely to be longer than their respective originals.³² The causes of these changes are various, although he proposes three main motives (2013, 13). The first two are intrinsic reasons, including "linguistic differences and preferences" (e.g. the need to add or omit articles) and "blocking effects" (the avoidance of an already existing title). The third reason is extrinsic, "market interests and general audience nursing." Although the

³¹ When a title refers to another title (Farø 2013, 7).

³² He highlights that this may be due to the titling norm (in some languages, including German and Italian) of combining an original title with a second explanatory part, connected with a dash.

translation of titles is here considered from a linguistic perspective, it must be acknowledged that publishers and agents quite often alter proposed titles (Farø 2013, 13).

The title *La festa dei limoni* has multiple layers of interpretation which all require a further explanation. It alludes to the annual festival held in the French coastal city of Menton. The original French name of the festival is '*Fête du Citron*' ('Lemon Festival'), becoming 'Festa del Limone' ('Lemon Festival') in Italian. The beginning of the novel is set in Menton while this festival is taking place; the narration opens with the protagonist, Gabriele, buying lemons. The lemon theme is constant throughout the entire story. There are five references to 'la festa dei limoni' in the novel, and another ten occurrences of the term '*limone/i*' ('lemon/s').

Braico uses the imagery of lemons to concurrently represent three elements: the French festival, his illness, and the essence of life, which they come to symbolise. About halfway through the novel the narrator, Gabriele, makes a statement that encapsulates the latter two elements: "Lemons now represent the essence of my life. We're all bald and yellow here, and nobody gives a damn about money anymore" (Braico 2015a, 119).³³ Here Gabriele relates the colour and the baldness of lemons to the effect that chemotherapy is having on his body, and recalls the exorbitant price of the lemons he bought at the festival in earlier (happier) times. Pages later, he links this change in physical appearance back to the lemons from the festival in France: "I'm yellow and shiny, just like a lemon. Those at the Lemon Festival in Menton are shinier but not as dark, and I'd go for a lot cheaper than them" (Braico 2015a, 125).³⁴

Considering the countless references to lemons throughout the text, it is important to retain the lemon element in the title of the English translation. I propose that the multi-layered construction of the source text title can be effectively reframed for the English translation. After much consideration and input from others, I titled my translation 'When Life Gave Me Lemons'. This was arrived at by recalling the common phrase 'when life gives you lemons' and adapting it to fit the context and the perspective of the narrator. I believe that steering away from a more literal translation (i.e. 'The Lemon Festival') and opting for a slightly more creative and catchy title would entice potential target readers. This title fits within Genette's above category of thematic, as it is suggesting what the book is about. The titles connotative function is the way in which it relies on the readers' (or potential readers') knowledge of the original phrase 'when life gives me lemons'. I believe my proposed title for the translation is effective as it hints that the text is about

³³ "Il limone è l'essenza della mia vita ormai. Qui siamo tutti gialli e pelati e dei soldi non ce ne frega più nulla" (Braico 2015a, 119).

³⁴ "Sono giallo e lucido proprio come un limone. Quelli della festa dei limoni di Mentone sono più lucidi ma meno scuri e poi io sono gratuito, loro no" (Braico 2015a, 125).

a character overcoming some sort of challenge, yet it also acknowledges the humorous and witty style of writing.

2.10. Prefaces and afterwords: Genette's typology

The preface is the familiar element we can often find at the beginning of a book (Genette 1997). If the aim of the cover and title is to entice the potential reader, it then becomes the role of the preface to engage them. According to Genette (1997, 196), prefaces have different roles depending on their type, which he divides into the following six functional categories: 1. the original authorial preface, 2. the original authorial afterword,³⁵ 3. the later authorial preface or afterword, 4. the delayed authorial preface or afterword, 5. the authentic allographic (and actorial) preface, and 6. the fictional preface. These categories are distinguished based on their temporality, agency and location. Temporality defines when the preface or afterword was published; this can either be original, simultaneous with the first edition; later, for a republication or translation; or delayed, when included after many years and often posthumously. Agency indicates whom the preface or afterword is written by: authorial refers to the author; allographic to someone other than the author; actorial is someone referred to in the text itself; and fictional is an agent invented by the author. The third and final defining feature is location, which simply refers to the placement of the text either at the beginning of the text (preface), or at the end (afterword).

The first (and most common) category is the original authorial preface (1), which exists “to ensure that the text is read properly” (Genette 1997, 197). This preface provides the author with an opportunity to frame the book within the readers’ mind, guiding them as to the perspective that should be adopted for the reading process. For example, the preface in Braico’s first publication of *FL* (2011b) can be labelled as an original authorial preface, because it was created for the first edition of the text, it is placed at the beginning of the book, and it is written by the author himself. Genette (1997, 221) proposes that the function of an authorial preface is for the author to define their “statement of intent.”

Particularly in the area of literature, asserting a work’s fictiveness or including a “contract of fiction” is also one of the many elements of a preface (Genette 1997, 215). This generally goes along the lines of “the characters and situations in this narrative are wholly fictitious and any resemblance to real persons and situations is purely coincidental” (Genette 1997, 217). The purpose is to disclaim the author’s responsibility for any potential offense caused, which nowadays

³⁵ Genette (1997) uses the label ‘postface’ which is interchangeable with ‘afterword’. In this exegesis, I use the term ‘afterword’.

also has a legal function. According to Genette, the inclusion of these autonomous formulations also suggests the book's genre, namely fiction.

In terms of *FL*, these observations support my decision to label the novel as autofiction, a combination of autobiography and fiction (Doubrovsky 1977). At the very end of his preface, Braico (2011b, 7) includes a statement intended to oppose the generic phrase mentioned above, by highlighting the truth of his writing: "I would like to point out that the facts, things and people that appear in this novel are not there by chance and I'm not going to rid myself of any responsibility for this."³⁶ The inclusion of this phrase aligns with the conventions of fiction writing, yet by reversing the meaning, he is demonstrating that this is not a work stemming from his imagination. Therefore, this paratextual information justifies the autofiction label, an amalgamation of two genres.

Prior to this statement is his explanation of the project and how the book eventuated; these elements are of course truthful, mirroring another one of Genette's proposed intentions of prefaces (1997, 206). The truth element is one of the key factors of Braico's book and project; it is thus essential to include this in either the preface or afterword. Alongside the truth aspect sits another function of the preface, "genre definition" (Genette 1997, 224). The following two sentences demonstrate how elements of the truth and genre definition can be included in a preface: "My memory didn't need any assistance, and the end result has left me proud and satisfied. The novel isn't for refined literary palates, but it's written from the heart and I'm sure it will be read that way too" (Braico 2011b, 7).³⁷ The fact that Braico relied on his memory to write this book confirms that there is a truth element. However, the key word 'novel', directly after that statement, adds in a fictitious element which again situates it in the blended genre of autofiction. In addition, by stating that the overall intention of the book was not to write eloquently and to be recognised for his writing style, but rather to portray emotions and his story, he is placing the book into a genre such as autofictional memoir, rather than fiction.

While they are not as frequently used, the other five categories of Genette's (1997) preface framework are worthy of a brief overview, as some of them are included in *FL*. The next category is the original authorial afterword (2) (Genette 1997). Prefaces and afterwords generally include similar content, and a text is therefore likely to have only one of the two, rather than both. The location of this peritextual element, either at the beginning (preface) or the end (afterword), reflects the author's or publisher's desired effect. If the aim is to guide readers into a thorough

³⁶ "Ci tengo a precisare che fatti, cose o persone che compaiono in questo romanzo non sono puramente casuali e non mi scarico di nessuna responsabilità" (Braico 2011b, 7). In the subsequent publication, he adds the following to the end of the previous phrase: "Non ci penso nemmeno" ("I wouldn't dream of it") (2015a, 218).

³⁷ "La memoria non ha avuto bisogno di aiuto e il risultato finale mi ha lasciato fiero e soddisfatto. Il romanzo non è per palati letterari fini, ma è scritto con il cuore e sono certo che sarà letto con il cuore" (Braico 2011b, 7).

understanding and interpretation of the text, then a preface would be the logical choice; however, if the goal is to offer the reader a more relevant reading and conversation with the author, now that they are familiar with the book's content and context, then the afterword is preferred (Genette 1997). In the second edition of *FL* (2015a), the prefaces have been changed to afterwords. As their location changes, their effect on the readers changes from preparing them for what they are about to digest, to offering them further insights into the text's real-life applications. Genette (1997, 359) suggests that interviews (and, I propose, other epitextual material as well) may function as an "advantageous substitute for a preface." I suggest that this change, from preface(s) to afterword(s), was made due to the rise in epitextual elements that were produced in the four years between publications. Braico's book presentations, school visits, media interviews, hospital donations, and word-of-mouth recommendations (which were simultaneous with the publication of the first edition) now act as the metaphorical preface. It is assumed that the general Italian readership is aware of the circumstances behind the book and the project which it is part of; therefore, the need to guide their reading was obviated.

For the remaining four categories, Genette (1997) does not distinguish between prefaces and afterwords, and the focus shifts instead to the agent behind the writing. The later authorial preface or afterword (3) refers to material published after the first edition, which for some readers may well be read as the original preface. An example of this is Braico's afterword in *FL*'s second edition (2015a, 217-218). Authors may use this opportunity for two reasons: firstly, to bring to the foreground any changes or corrections made between the versions, which is more likely to occur within an academic context. A second function is to take authorship of a text which they first disclaimed, more applicable for a literary context, although still less frequent.

The fourth category is the delayed authorial preface or afterword (4), which Genette refers to as being "a final preface" (1997, 247). It may have a similar role to the later preface, that is to occupy a previously blank preface position, adding in afterthoughts. However, the distinction lies in the temporal aspect; the delayed preface is likely to appear many years after the original or later preface.

The fifth category is the authentic allographic preface or afterword (5), which is written by someone other than the author (e.g. Eleanor Roosevelt's preface to Anne Frank's *Diary* (1952)). This category can potentially have two purposes: to present the book or provide information, and to praise or recommend the text (Genette 1997, 265). The first instance is likely used for posthumous prefaces, in which the preface writer may include biographical information about the author. The second, and a more common purpose of an allographic preface, is to recommend a book, generally implicitly. Actorial prefaces (or afterwords) are also included in this category; they

are cases “in which the ‘third’ party, [situated] between author and reader, happens to be one of the real persons discussed in a referential text” (Genette 1997, 276). This is the case for Doctor Busca’s afterword in *FL* (2015a, 219-221), which is included to praise and give positive weight to the text. While Braico has used a pseudonym for Doctor Busca in the text and has not made direct reference to him, the character of Gabriele’s primary doctor is clearly inspired by him and their real-life interactions.

The final category, fictional prefaces or afterwords (6), are those that “offer a manifestly false attribution of the text” (Genette 1997, 278). If an author writes a text from the perspective of a fictive author, they may choose to add a fictive preface to the text.

2.11. The prefaces and afterwords in *La festa dei limoni*

The first edition of *FL* included two prefaces, one written by Braico and titled “My preface” (“La mia prefazione”) (2011b, 7), and the second written by his transplant surgeon, Doctor Alessandro Busca, titled “His preface” (“La sua prefazione”) (2011b, 9-10). Braico’s preface explains the project and how the idea of writing the novel came about. He explains that he had initially attempted to raise money for hospital donations by personally asking people, yet soon realised that writing and disseminating his story of hope and lived experience would be more effective. The role of Braico’s preface in the first edition was to introduce himself and his project, contextualising the novel and providing the reader with the necessary background information. By reading this information at the beginning, readers could be in a position to interpret the text as truth, and attribute it to a larger cause. This was critical for the first version, as he was an unknown author and *FL* (2011b) was his first book.

Braico’s preface was followed by his doctor’s preface, which Genette (1997) would label as the actorial preface, given that Doctor Busca is also a character in the novel (albeit with a pseudonym). Doctor Busca’s preface is double the length of Braico’s and explores different topics. In the first half, he shares his experience of working as a transplant surgeon, and the reality of the hospital environment. He then continues by discussing Braico and his book, praising him for the way he conveys joy, hope and positivity. Genette (1997) suggests that in addition to the expected praising of the author and demonstrating one’s modesty, actorial prefaces can be used to fill in any gaps. In this case, Doctor Busca is filling in the gaps by informing readers about the real-life hospital environment, as this is a topic left out of Braico’s afterword. He addresses details of everyday hospital life, for example: “The fluid passing through the IV tubing with a continuous, endless flow, marks the passing of time which every patient – including the *professore* – uses to

project themselves into the future, almost as if it were a message of hope” (Braico 2015a, 221).³⁸ The Doctor’s actorial preface thus acts to validate and affirm Braico’s memory of experiences, adding an extra layer of truthfulness.

During the editing process for the second edition, these prefaces were changed to afterwords. Most of the linguistic content remained identical, yet the location shifted from the front of the book to the back. As mentioned earlier, this change of location is in line with Genette’s outline of the functional differences between prefaces and afterwords. It is also due to the rise in epitextual elements produced during the four years between the two editions. Moving this discourse to the end of the book, in an afterword, is a logical strategy. Many source text readers are likely to have picked up the book already aware that it is a true story and that there is a project attached. Therefore, the afterword becomes an additional conversation offered to the readers to complement their interpretation, now they have finished the text. The readers who are unaware of the epitextual story are left to their own interpretation of the novel; it is only after having finished the text that they will discover the project which the text is part of. While readers have a choice about what they read and in what order, the above suggestions are based on the logical – and perhaps most common – order in which a book would be read.

However, in Braico’s afterword, now labelled “My afterword” (“La mia postfazione”) (2015a, 217-218), he encourages the readers to purchase the book rather than borrow it, due to the implications that borrowing would have for the fundraising project. Considering this section is now placed at the back of the book, we can assume that the readers have long since made the decision to either borrow or buy the book, thus making this statement superfluous. Perhaps it was overlooked in the editing process for the second edition. It could also be a way of urging readers not to lend the book to anyone and to instead gift a copy.

Regarding Doctor Busca’s afterword, now labelled “His afterword” (“La sua postfazione”) (2015a, 219-221), only minor changes were made, to be grammatically consistent with the change in location. For example: “Now, the reader *who has followed* the path paved out by this book, *has probably figured out* how faith and joy can be found simply in the fragrance of lemons: what could be more natural” (2015a, 220).³⁹

As is often the case, it was the publisher’s decision to change the location of this peritextual element. When interviewing Braico (2019), we discussed the role of *FL*’s afterwords. I had to clarify to him where in the book this peritextual material was located, as he believed the second

³⁸ My italics. “La goccia che cade attraverso il deflussore della flebo con un moto continuo, perpetuo, scandisce il passare del tempo che ogni paziente, compreso il professore, proietta nel futuro, quasi fosse un messaggio di speranza” (Braico 2015a, 221).

³⁹ My italics. “Allora, il lettore che ha percorso la strada tracciata da questo romanzo, avrà capito come si possa trovare fiducia e gioia semplicemente nel profumo dei limoni: nulla di più naturale” (Braico 2015a, 220).

edition still contained prefaces rather than afterwords. This demonstrates a case in which the author does not necessarily have input (or perhaps an interest) in where this peritextual element is placed yet is aware of its importance. Although unsure of its location, Braico (2019) was able to highlight the content and purpose of this peritextual element: “There’s a part of the book that explains what is being done around the book, it talks about what has happened in Italy with this book.”⁴⁰ It is likely that he had not considered how prefaces and afterwords influence readers differently.

Although these afterwords are a peritextual component, they discuss epitextual elements connected to the text (e.g. the project). Therefore, a translator’s preface is useful (if not essential), to provide the (Australian) target readers with enough contextual content for them to interpret the text itself, as well as the afterwords and the wider picture (i.e. the epitext). In addition to mentioning the epitextual elements, such as the project, I use my translator’s preface to explain how an English translation came about, and to discuss my broad and overarching translation strategy (see Part Two of this thesis).

Braico supports this addition, suggesting I include aspects such as “how this [translation] project was born, how the enthusiasm around this project was born, why we had the idea to translate it into English and specifically in Australia” (Braico 2019).⁴¹ He believes that while a translator’s preface could be included, it is not as vital as the epitextual elements (e.g. book presentations): “You could write two or three pages, maybe also together with what has happened outside the book. But usually people do not read these things, they read the middle, they read the novel. These [other] things should be said in person instead. Without presentations and events, this book does not have the same value” (Braico 2019).⁴²

I do not necessarily agree with Braico’s above statement, that people do not read prefaces, yet I agree with the emphasis he places on the external elements. This suggests that his focus, as the author and founder of the project, is directed towards the epitext. As the translator, I can use the peritext to assist him in achieving his social intentions and goals. Although I may not be able to control whether the (potential) publisher would agree to include a translator’s preface, I would certainly encourage the addition of this invaluable peritextual element.⁴³ The translator’s preface is

⁴⁰ “C’è una parte del libro che ci spiega che cosa si fa intorno a questo libro, si racconta che cos’è successo in Italia con questo libro” (Braico 2019).

⁴¹ “Com’è nato il progetto, com’è nato l’entusiasmo intorno a questo progetto, perché abbiamo avuto l’idea di tradurlo in inglese ma in particolare in Australia” (Braico 2019).

⁴² “Due o tre pagine si possono scrivere e magari anche accompagnandole da che cosa è successo fuori dal libro. Però di solito le persone non leggono queste cose, leggono il centro, leggono il romanzo. Queste cose invece vanno dette a voce. Questo libro senza presentazioni, senza serate, non ha la stessa potenza” (Braico 2019).

⁴³ My current translation of *FL*, as it is linked to the academic purpose of a thesis and thus affords me more freedom, includes a translator’s preface in the creative component.

an element that is not discussed in Genette's (1997) preface typology, yet which is crucial to my case study.

2.12. The translator's preface

Peter Newmark (1983, 17) advocated that "a translated novel without a translator's preface ought to be a thing of the past." However, almost 30 years later, Ellen McRae's (2012) empirical study into translators' prefaces in literary translations revealed that only 20 percent of the 800 translated works she looked at included a translator's preface.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, "translators' prefaces to literary translations into English are still relatively uncommon today" (McRae 2012, 64). Within the academic translation studies context, they are beginning to receive the positive praise and attention they deserve (McRae 2012). If we were to continue with the above terminology and describe the translator's preface using Genette's terminology, it would be labelled as a later allographic preface. Later, because it is invariably published subsequently to the first edition (i.e. the source text), and allographic because it is not written by the author (in the strict sense). Although this is the extent of Genette's consideration of the translator's preface, this analytical groundwork has allowed later scholars to analyse the preface from the perspective of translation studies.

Ulf Norberg (2012) suggests that the inclusion of a translator's preface strongly correlates to the translator's literary capital, rather than the book's status. This is linked to the attitude of publishers towards translators' prefaces. Publishers appear to prefer not to include a translator's preface, as it may cause readers to question the legitimacy, the accuracy and the representation of the original (Dimitriu 2009; McRae 2012).

An increased translator's visibility is one of the key positive outcomes of translators' prefaces. Theo Hermans (2014) suggests that translators are always visible to some extent, yet paratextual elements such as the translator's preface may bring their presence to the readers' attention. For translators, and the field of translation studies, translators' visibility is no doubt a positive outcome. However, from the publishers' perspective, it appears to be negative, considering that "while reading translated fiction, readers are normally meant to forget what they are reading is a translation" (Hermans 1996, 26).

If a translator is fortunate enough to have the opportunity to include a preface, there are various purposes this preface could fulfil. Rodica Dimitriu's (2009, 195) analysis of Romanian translators' prefaces allows her to propose three specific functions of such a preface: (1)

⁴⁴ The term 'prefaces' here refers to any commentary before or after the text, excluding footnotes or endnotes.

explanatory, (2) normative/prescriptive, and (3) informative/descriptive. The explanatory function (1) is when translators rationalise their choice of text and author, and of their specific (intratextual) strategies for managing translation problems;⁴⁵ it therefore becomes a sort of commentary on the translation. The normative/prescriptive function (2) is aimed at other translators (or trainees), providing them with prescriptive guidelines and recommending translation strategies; these are often linked to the perpetual discussion of fidelity. The informative/descriptive function (3) includes analyses of the source text, from both a linguistic and a socio-cultural perspective.

Dimitriu (2009) advocates the study of translators' prefaces, as they provide invaluable information relating to translation theories and norms, and translators' ideologies. They can offer insight into the translation process itself which in turn allows for a richer translation criticism on the prefaced text.

A final, overarching function of translators' prefaces is that of connecting translation theory with translation practice; this can be achieved by highlighting translators' role as linguistic and cultural mediators, and encouraging them to share their theoretical work for it to be acknowledged in society (Dimitriu 2009). McRae (2012) carried out a similar inquiry into translators' prefaces. Among the lengthy and varied list of potential discussion topics to be included in prefaces, she found that the two most common are the cultural and historical background of the source culture and source text, and the translator's debts and acknowledgement to the author.⁴⁶ McRae's (2012, 65) study proposes three major functions of the translator's preface: "(1) foregrounding differences of cultures and languages, (2) promoting understanding of the source culture, and (3) promoting understanding of the translator's role and intervention." She advocates for translators and publishers to include a preface to foster intercultural understanding and communication, which is precisely my intention for the English translation of *FL*. My translator's preface for *FL* is a combination of two of Dimitriu's proposed functions of the translator's preface (2009). Discussing why I have selected this text and author (1) leads into a socio-cultural analysis (albeit brief) of the text and the project (3).

⁴⁵ These issues may include the following factors: linguistic, text-type/generic, cultural, ideological and text-specific. For further insights, see Dimitriu (2009, 196-198).

⁴⁶ The other topics of discussion are the following: reception of original and the author's status in the country of origin; treatment of names of people and places; introducing the author to English-speaking readers; style, register and tone; essential versus literal rendering; explanation of culturally specific items; dialect/slang; limitations of translation; translator as editor; universality of themes; grammatical conventions; choice; translator's introduction to author's work; limitations of translator; word play; readers' preconceived perceptions of source culture; exoticism or foreignness and hybridism; reader's responsibility; difference of languages; treatment of words in a foreign language in the original; American versus British usage; subjectivity of translator; aim to seem as if originally written in English; audience response to match original; and archaisms (McRae 2012).

2.13. Translators' notes

While translators' prefaces (if included) provide a useful reflection and perspective regarding the overall text, translators' notes offer a more succinct reading of the translator's voice (Hermans 1996). In the wider sense, Genette (1997, 319) defines a note as a word or statement "connected to a more or less defined segment of text and either placed opposite or keyed to this segment." Genette (1997, 322) labels the notes added to the target text by translators as "authentic allographic notes." Since this category also includes other agents' notes (e.g. editors), 'translators' notes' has instead become the adopted term in translation studies.

Translators' notes can be in the form of footnotes, endnotes or glossaries. Footnotes are placed at the bottom of the page, endnotes are placed at the end of a section, chapter or book, and glossaries are placed at the end of the book. Alexandra Lopes (2012, 135) labels this group of annotations as "allographic paratexts." However, again, since this term also includes other elements (such as prefaces and afterwords), using 'translators' notes' is preferred as it avoids ambiguity.

Similar to translators' prefaces, translators' notes render translators visible, exposing their own reading and interpretation of the text and its historical, political and cultural context. Lopes (2012) suggests that translators' notes highlight the new authority and authorship of the translated text. Through this peritextual element, "the translator can embed the translated text in a shell that explains necessary cultural and literary background for the receiving audience and that acts as a running commentary on the translated work" (Tymoczko 2012, 22). Consequently, in order to accurately reframe the source text and all its cultural connotations, translators work with these two textual levels simultaneously (Tymoczko 2012). As with the inclusion of a translator's preface, the use of translators' notes is generally decided on by the publisher. While there are no rules or regulations outlining which elements are to be included or excluded, the norm in literary translation in Anglophone countries is to use footnotes as little as possible (Xu 2012, 161).

Lopes (2012, 137) defines translators based on their practice, i.e. their usage of footnotes. The first category, "the translator as encyclopaedia", includes those that add extra information, sometimes unnecessary, written in a knowledgeable and reflective tone. The second category, "the translator as enthusiast", results from translators who use copious amounts of footnotes, clarifying elements that do not need clarification. These translators are, to an extent, claiming authority over the target text. The third and final category, "the translator as priest", refers to those (generally experienced) translators who attempt to shape the text by engaging with the author, rather than adding additional commentary, thus providing less peritextual information.

Including translators' notes in the English translation of *FL* could assist me in my role as the translator and cultural mediator. There are countless culture-specific Italian words and phrases that might require an explanation when transferred from Italy to Australia, to enable the new readership to interpret culturally connoted meaning. However, I have opted to fit within Lopes' third aforementioned category, "the translator as priest" (2012). By contacting Braico when clarification was needed, and translating the text from a reframing perspective, I have not included any footnotes.

Glossaries, the list of definitions of relevant foreign words at the back of a target text, have a similar function to translators' notes. At the beginning of my project, I anticipated including a glossary at the end of the text with Italian culture-specific words that have been italicised throughout the text (e.g. "*caponti*", a southern Italian pasta variety). For the purpose of explicating culture-specific Italian words, using a glossary would have been favourable over footnotes, to prevent distracting readers and interrupting the text's flow. Genette (1997, 324) states that footnotes are generally optional for the readers, providing them with supplementary or digressive information. As my translation progressed, however, I discovered that the culture-specific terms I decided to leave in Italian were accompanied by enough contextual information that no glossary was needed.

I had also considered using footnotes for dialect. There is a Neapolitan character in the text, Nunzia, who only 'speaks' in dialect. This creates a range of translation complexities for the English version, which are worthy of discussion yet are outside the scope of this section of the exegesis.⁴⁷ Using footnotes could have assisted in creating an accurate depiction of this character, as the linguistic aspect was one of the most marked features of her personality. However, I again opted not to include footnotes. Where there are significant amounts of text in dialect, going back and forth between the text and the footnotes may break the readers' flow. As Genette puts it, "incorporating a digression into the text might well mean creating a lumpish or confusion-generating hernia" (1997, 328).

2.14. Conclusion

Exploring the existing literature surrounding paratextual analysis has provided me with a theoretical framework for the translation of *FL*'s (2015a) paratext. Given the significance of the novel's epitext (i.e. the fundraising project), I have demonstrated why the text cannot solely be translated linguistically, void of its vital paratextual elements. Genette's (1997) paratextual notions

⁴⁷ I briefly touch on the translation of dialect in Chapter 3: 3.5.

together with Batchelor's (2018) application of those notions to translation studies, has provided substantial insights into the various paratextual elements and their relevance for the target text. Combining existing interdisciplinary paratextual theory with my personal interpretation of the novel's paratext, and with the author's perspective on these issues (Braico 2019), has allowed me to identify the most effective reframing strategies for the English version.

I have demonstrated how the peritextual material (specifically the book cover and the translator's preface) can be (re)created for an (Australian) English readership. Current norms and practices in translation theory and practice have also informed and shaped my approach. While I have highlighted the power that publishers hold in these paratextual considerations, my intention has been to illustrate how reframing *FL*'s complex paratext may best be tackled, showcasing all the strategies available to the translator. The following and final chapter dives further into the text itself, exploring similar issues from the perspective of the linguistic features embedded in Italian culture.

3. Translating culture-specific elements

3.1. Introduction

Literary translation, whether it be from a practical or a theoretical perspective, is inseparable from culture. Newmark defines culture as “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression” (1988, 94). He views language and culture as two separate entities, unlike Hans Vermeer, who proposes that “language is part of a culture” (2012, 192). Regardless of which school of thought one subscribes to, the interconnectedness of language and culture cannot be denied. Groups of people – whether determined geographically, linguistically, culturally, or by other means – have unique linguistic and cultural practices, and translation is required to facilitate communication, both on a linguistic level and a cultural level. Translation extends beyond the linguistic level and becomes a cultural act; it is “a special kind of transfer, one which is culturally determined, since culture forms a general framework within which any possible action is included” (Ros 2003, 4). From the perspective of translation studies, much has been said of the relationship between language and culture, and where the translator fits in. This chapter explores the strategies of translating culture-specific elements, using my English translation of *La festa dei limoni* as the case study. I provide a definition of culture-specific elements, then explore translation methods and strategies, and analyse how I have applied them in my case study.

3.2. Connecting language, culture, and translation

The concept of a translator acting as a mediator for communication dates back at least to the work of George Steiner, who suggested that “the translator is a bilingual mediating agent between monolingual communication participants in two different language communities” (1975, 45). This definition focuses purely on the linguistic side of the activity. The cultural element of communication later garnered interest among scholars, when Stephen Bochner first introduced the term ‘cultural mediator’ – defined as people “who function as links between diverse cultural systems” (1981, 6). He recognised how invaluable written translation is, yet began to hint at the problems which may occur as a result of incompatible cultural differences (Bochner 1981, 18). Following this, a Cultural Turn (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990) occurred in translation studies, and the focus was shifted from the linguistic aspects of a text in translation to the cultural, political and ideological context (Braçaj 2015). The concept of cultural translation, defined as “practices of literary translation that mediate cultural difference” (Sturge 2009, 67), subsequently gained attention within translation studies. This approach concentrates on the translator’s responsibility

to convey extensive cultural background of the source text (represented through dialect, heteroglossia, literary allusions, culture-specific items) within the boundaries of the target language. This can be paralleled to cultural anthropology; translators have the same challenge as ethnographers, who must first observe and understand what is happening and then convey the foreign in a familiar manner (Sturge 2009). If one were to view language as an element of culture, as Vermeer does, it would – in theory – be impossible to translate cultural elements due to the inseparability of the words and the culture (Newmark 1988). Instead, by acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between language and culture, the translator can attempt to convey cultural elements in a linguistically comprehensible manner for the target readers. While ubiquitous words such as ‘table’ and ‘star’ might not create major translation challenges, culture-specific words such as ‘*caponti*’ (a type of pasta) do, unless there is an overlap between the source and target languages and their respective cultures. The inevitable ‘gap’ or ‘distance’ between the source and target languages often gives rise to translational issues when there is a cultural focus (Newmark 1988, 95). The more cultural a text, “the less is equivalent effect even conceivable unless the reader is imaginative, sensitive and steeped in the source language culture” (Newmark 1988, 49). There are different levels which the translator must work on to address translational issues, as highlighted by Newmark: “Translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language” (Newmark 1988, 81). In the present chapter, I am concerned with the translation procedures, where the focus is on words, phrases and sentences expressing Italian cultural elements.

Theories have been developed in response to the question of how to effectively communicate culture-specific ideas between different cultures, and whether it is possible at all. The main arguments against translatability of culture-bound terms are from a linguistic perspective; for instance, a lack of symmetry between languages (such as Arabic having many synonyms for camel, compared with English). Scholars in favour of translatability, aware that language evolves naturally depending on its environment, introduced the notion of “relative equivalence” between the source language and the target language (Durdureanu 2011, 55). Eugene Nida, one of the most significant theorists of this concept, suggests that variations between languages can be clarified by working at the Saussurian level of *parole* rather than *langue* (Nida and Taber 1969). The widespread understanding of translation loss stems from the inevitable gap between two varying linguistic and cultural groups. The type of loss can be categorised based on the feature it affects, the contents of a literary text or its form and linguistic matter (Pedro 2000, 1413). Even when culture-specific elements in the source text can be transferred into the target text, they will be interpreted differently, given that the text is embedded in the source culture. These ‘cultural losses’ do not

only occur in relation to concrete culture-specific items, proverbs or metaphors; abstract elements such as humour or connotative meanings are also involved in this phenomenon as they, too, are culture-bound. With these issues in mind, Wright suggests that culturally-specific elements, which can also be referred to as 'local colour', are not so much a translation challenge as they used to be, as present-day (21st century) readers are more receptive to the concept of foreignness (2016). This does not mean that culture-specific elements will cease to be an issue for translators, or that researchers should disregard further investigation within this field; it does, however, suggest that current translation practices are likely to differ from those of the past due to the current understanding and acceptance of foreignness in today's global society.

3.3. Defining culture-specific elements

One of the issues with discussing and analysing the translation of culture-specific elements is the arbitrariness of the term, as well as the idea of permanency it evokes (Aixelá 1996, 57). "In translation, a culture-specific item does not exist of itself, but as the result of a conflict arising from any linguistically represented reference in a source text which, when transferred to a target language, poses a translation problem due to the nonexistence or to the different value (whether determined by ideology, usage, frequency, etc.) of the given item in the target language culture" (Aixelá 1996, 57). For instance, in a literary text such as *FL*, a phrase such as "prima liceo" (32) (referring to a grade in the schooling system) does not draw any particular attention within Italian culture. However, when it is being translated into English – and more specifically for an Australian readership – its culture-specific quality becomes evident due to the cultural gap between these two linguistic communities, which have different schooling systems and as a result, have different terminology. With this reasoning in the foreground, I adopt Javier Franco Aixelá's definition of culture-specific elements for my analysis: "Those textually actualised items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text" (1996, 58). This definition suggests that almost any linguistic item can be a culture-specific element, depending on its function in the source text (and source culture) and its acceptability in the target culture. Culture-specific references are inevitably dynamic and change over time with the cultural climate of the language groups in question. Therefore, the culture-specific terms I discuss below from my case study reflect the current linguistic and cultural relationship between Italy and Australia.

3.3.0. *Defining allusions*

An allusion is a linguistic element appearing “in either its original or a modified form [...] to convey often implicit meaning” (Leppihalme 1997, 3). For example, “[...] apparently they all turn into pumpkins at midnight,” in the text *Foreign Affairs* (Lurie 1985, 25) is an allusion to the fairy tale *Cinderella*. Allusions are often analysed within the field of literary studies, yet their culture-specific aspect also leads them to be considered from the perspective of translation studies. Recognising allusions is generally intuitive for source text readers, as the interpretation relies on the societal knowledge that surrounds them in everyday life. Allusions depend upon “a high degree of biculturalisation of receivers in order to be understood across a cultural barrier” (Leppihalme 1997, 4). Given that readers of translated texts cannot be expected to be bilingual and bicultural, the translator must act as the mediator and find a suitable strategy for transferring the allusion (Leppihalme 1997). The translator’s task is to be a competent reader and responsible text producer; they must consider the implicit parts of a message (contextual and referential) and decide whether it needs to be explicated in the target text (Leppihalme 1997). Translation strategies occur at a macro-level, in terms of structural and thematic use of the allusion, as well as at a micro-level, such as the lexico-semantic and stylistic levels. Ritva Leppihalme suggests that literary texts “tend to be impoverished if allusions are neglected” (1997, 23). Allusions require the translator to take a similar approach as with other culture-specific elements. At the beginning of this project, I had anticipated to find that many of the cultural references were allusions; however, as my translation progressed (and my research into what is categorised as an allusion developed), it became evident that the perceived allusions were simply culture-specific elements. In order to analyse the cultural themes in the text and to maintain consistency throughout the translation, I explore the categorisation of culture-specific elements.

3.3.1. *Categorising culture-specific elements*

Categorising cultural terms assists in identifying any predominant cultural themes present in a text, and in discussing the translation strategies and methods (from a terminological perspective). It also encourages consistency; for example, a translator may decide on one type of strategy for elements in one category, while using another for certain other elements. There are two main methods for categorising cultural terms: either by their semantic properties or by syntactic properties. Adapting the work of Nida, Newmark develops the following five cultural categories based on semantic characteristics: ecology (e.g. flora, fauna); material culture (artefacts, e.g. food, clothes); social culture (work and leisure); organisations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts (e.g. political, religious); and lastly, gestures and habits (1988, 103). This semantic approach to categorisation is

particularly productive when the focus is on identifying or analysing themes. For instance, in her analysis of Elizabeth Jolley's novel *Mr Scobie's Riddle* (1983), translator Anna Gadd Colombi explores various possibilities for translating source text realia, which are “‘real things’, words and expressions proper to a given culture” (2018, 17). She found Australian flora to be a recurring culture-specific theme throughout *Mr Scobie's Riddle*, and consequently this became one of the key categories in her analysis, as she strove to retain the Australian quality for the Italian readers. If the focus is instead on identifying linguistic patterns, or analysing a particular grammatical feature, then categorising terms based on their syntactic properties is a more productive approach. Aixelá proposes two primary categories for culture-specific items: proper nouns and common expressions (1996, 59). Given that these categories are rather broad, Hermans (1988, 13) divides the classification of proper nouns into two further categories: conventional names, which have no standalone meaning and are seen as unmotivated (e.g. a person's full name), and loaded names, which are motivated terms (e.g. a nickname) and can be placed on a scale from ‘suggestive’ to ‘expressive’.

Although there are benefits of employing an existing method of categorisation, there are also limitations. Firstly, they do not account for the uniqueness of a text's theme and cultural specificities. For example, one of the categories Newmark proposes is ‘ecology’ and while this may be relevant for a text which includes multiple references to nature such as Jolley's *Mr Scobie's Riddle*, it is not a prevalent theme in *FL*, where a category such as ‘medical’ is more salient and worthy of having its own category, rather than being embedded within an existing category. Secondly, there may be culture-specific elements which overlap across categories, or which do not fit into any of the proposed categories. Lastly, these categories focus on the source text and source culture and do not necessarily account for the target text and target culture; as mentioned above, the existence of culture-specific elements stems from the cultural differences between the source culture and target culture.

Developing a tailored set of categories, specific to the given target text and target culture and its relationship with the source language and source culture addresses these limitations. For example, one of the categories relevant to my translation of *FL* is terms of address. I have chosen to leave the following terms of address in Italian: *ingegnere* (engineer), as in: “Vede ingegnere, i ragazzi come Mattia hanno altri canali di comunicazione” (13) (“You see, *ingegnere*, guys like Mattia have other channels of communication”) and *professore* (teacher), as in “Professore, io sono dell'Inter” (13) (“*Professore*, I'm an Inter supporter”). These terms of address represent a cultural custom of addressing people by their profession, where appropriate, as a display of respect for authority. This is a recurring cultural element expressed in *FL* and is recounted through the

interactions of the protagonist, Gabriele, within the hospital and school contexts. For example, when one of the nurses addresses him using his profession, he narrates: “How the hell does she know what I do for a living? This amazes me, but it’s a nice twist for those stinkers sitting in front of me who, at the word ‘*professore*’ look at each other as if they were on *Punk’d* – also because I’m wearing short shorts, a pink Juve jersey and black sandals” (173).⁴⁸ Here, the term of address holds the expectation of acting in a respectable manner, rather than being a casually dressed patient at a hospital who refuses to get up off the floor. The way Braico weaves terms of addresses (particularly *professore*) throughout the novel to explain the context, characters and storyline makes it a significant element to consider for the translation.

Creating a category such as ‘terms of address’ is beneficial for two reasons: firstly, it explains why I am not retaining all instances of *ingegnere* and *professore* in Italian, only those used as a term of address, and secondly, it ensures that when I encounter other terms of address, I will be consistent with my translation and retain them in the source language, unless there are other contextual aspects to consider.

Categories inevitably change over the course of the translation process, further strengthening the need for flexibility and innovation, rather than one model for all texts. Some of the categories I proposed in my preliminary analysis of the culture-specific elements in *FL* included: food, settings, sport, familiar figures, stereotypes, organisations, terms of address, cursing, and idioms. However, following the completion of the translation and the editing process, some of the categories that I had initially perceived to be challenging for the translation – thus requiring further analysis and sub-categorisation – did not, in the end, pose the predicted challenges. Instead, the categories that required further consideration, due to cultural specificity, include the following: terms of address, allusions (such as song titles and lyrics), food, dialect, and setting. Creating categories relevant to *FL* and to my target culture has enabled my translation to be consistent. This is not to say that every term in a particular category has been translated the exact same way – as each cultural term has been analysed and assessed in its given context – yet it provides a basis for translation strategies and decisions. I initially intended to define the categories I would be using and include a list of their terms; however, as my translation progressed, and my approach leaned more towards transcreation, I naturally steered away from the concrete and fixed structure of these categories, and instead considered the contextual and surrounding information to be of more significance than any category it would be part of.

⁴⁸ Original Italian: “Ma come diavolo fa a sapere che mestiere faccio? La cosa mi stupisce ma fa il mio gioco nei confronti dei fetenti seduti davanti a me che al termine ‘professore’ si guardano come se fossero su *Scherzi a parte* anche perché ho pantaloncini corti, maglia rosa della Juve e infradito nere” (173).

3.4. Translating culture-specific elements

When transferring culture-specific elements, translators have a range of strategies at hand. A translator may make subconscious decisions – selecting a translant without pondering the explicit approach – or conscious decisions – actively choosing to follow a particular translation method. Although not specifically constructed for culture-specific elements, Newmark has proposed several categories of translation procedures providing a basis from which a more tailored list of strategies for cultural references can be created. He developed the following list through an analysis of contextual features (e.g. a text's purpose, setting, readership, etc.): transference, naturalisation, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, synonymy, through-translation, shifts or transpositions, modulation, recognised translation, translation label, compensation, componential analysis, reduction and expansion, paraphrase, couplets, notes, additions, and glosses (1988, 81-93).

Since Newmark developed these procedures, other translation scholars have constructed their own categories specifically for cultural elements. These can be placed on a scale depending on their degree of intercultural manipulation. Zsuzsanna Ajtony suggests that “minimum change” and “intervention” are two predominant strategies for dealing with culture-specific items (2016, 84). Within “minimum change”, there is a further distinction: official equivalent (into the target text) and retention (from the source text). The “intervention” strategy is further divided into three: specification (by addition and completion), generalisation (hyponymy and paraphrase), and substitution (cultural and situational) (Ajtony 2016, 84). This model is adapted from Jan Pedersen's taxonomy of subtitling strategies (2007, 31). Although Pedersen's (2007) analysis of the transfer of cultural references examines subtitling in movies, the findings are nevertheless valid and valuable for literary translation. One method, and the least marked way of handling extralinguistic cultural references, is to replace the source text reference with a transcultural reference; for example, in the Danish subtitling of the American dramedy *M*A*S*H*, a cultural reference to *The Three Stooges*, was replaced with a transcultural reference which back-translated as *Laurel and Hardy* (Pedersen 2007, 32-33). This strategy is in line with Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence and Newmark's (1988) notion of communicative translation. If this strategy were to be adopted as a macro-level choice, the outcome would be in line with Gideon Toury's idea of standardising (1995, 267); by centralising the cultural references, the text (or film in this case) becomes more accessible yet it also loses part of its original 'flavour'. Another, more marked option, is to replace the source text cultural reference with a target text cultural reference, removing the foreignness from the source text and essentially aligning with a domestication strategy (Pedersen 2007, 35). Certain domains may naturally lend themselves to this approach, such as the governmental sector, the

educational system, and food and beverages (Pedersen 2007, 35). Although here we are dealing with how culture is linguistically expressed, its impact does not occur on a linguistic level, either in the source language or target language; it exists on a third level which arises from the intersection of two diverse cultures (Álvarez and Vidal 1996).

Another strategy for translation is to identify the purpose of the cultural references and match that purpose in the translated text (Savić and Čutura 2011, 144). Vera Savić and Ilijana Čutura analysed source texts and target texts of Serbian and English literary texts, translated in both directions, which include different cultural references. Focusing on the translation strategies for these references, they identified that the source text references were employed for different purposes. One of their uses is to portray ‘culture units’ of the source language and culture, for example, *prepenčnica*, a Serbian high-grade plum brandy employed in the Serbian text *A Guide to Serbian Mentality* (Kapor 2006). Another reason is to demonstrate how the source culture interacts with various other cultures, such as referencing the Hungarian food *perkelt* (Kapor 2006). Finally, cultural references may also be included to mirror the entire heritage of human civilisation, as Savić and Čutura (2011) suggest is the case for Ezra Pound’s use of an intertextual quote (*Idmen gar toi panth, os eni Troiè*) from the *Odyssey*, in the poem ‘Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’.

Bruno Osimo (2004, 95) suggests that there are nine possible ways to approach a given culture-specific element, through various combinations of source-oriented, target-oriented or standardising, each with a generalising, specifying or neutral aspect. Returning to Gadd Colombi’s case study of *Mr Scobie’s Riddle*, she employed Osimo’s classification model to categorise terms referring to Australian flora. For example, the Australian plant ‘bottle brush’ has (at least) nine possible translantants, ranging from a target-oriented and generalising term *fiore* and a source-oriented specifying translantant *fiore del ‘bush’ australiano* (Gadd Colombi 2018, 134-135). This approach guides the translator into constructing multiple possible translantants, from which they can then select the most appropriate for their overall translation method.

Through his personal translation practice, Jakob Kenda (2006) developed his own understanding of translation strategies. Kenda values Nida’s concepts of texts having ‘alien elements’ (source-oriented) or producing a ‘similar impact’ (target-oriented), but he argues that rather than considering this to be a dichotomy as Nida himself did, the two approaches can combine to become a ‘rewriting’. This view transcends the age-old debate over source- or target-oriented, Friedrich Schleiermacher’s concept of moving the reader or the writer, and Venuti’s (2018) concepts of domesticating and foreignising. For instance, in translating character names in Harry Potter from English into Swedish, Kenda was able to rewrite them in such a way that they were comprehensible (or had a similar impact, in Nida’s words) for the target audience, yet still

appeared alien. He was able to avoid the limitations of foreignisation and domestication by not being locked into a particular translation theory.

It is evident that much of this previous research in translation studies has focused on the source-oriented vs. target-oriented dichotomy as well as the foreignisation vs. domestication dichotomy. Source- and target-orientedness should not be placed on a strict binary as there is no clear opposition between them; they should instead be placed on a continuum to reflect the range of nuances that lies in between them (Gadd Colombi 2018, 16). More recently, the focus in translation studies has shifted away from the concept of cultural translation as an occurrence between a source text and target text, to provide space for creativity; we can view it as an activity taking place beyond interlingual activity, in a third place (Wolf 2002). “All of this makes translating a unique category of writing, one that takes place in the elastic space between two cultural spheres, where language and culture are always being quizzed and stretched” (Rose 2013, 14). Therefore, rather than deciding where on the source- or target-oriented continuum a word, phrase, sentence, or text is to be placed, we can view target texts and their parts as re-creations of source texts. Consequently, the focus may be on how much ‘local colour’ is emphasised in the translation to achieve the purpose of cultural mediation. This can be achieved by maintaining certain terms in the source language, where the translator deems it necessary, rather than applying a blanket strategy to every culture-specific element present in the text. For example, with kinship terms, Brigid Maher retained the Italian variation (e.g. *mamma*, *papà*, *nonna*, *nonno*, etc.) in her English translation, *The House in Via Manno* (2009), of *Mal di pietre* (Agus 2006), as it emphasises the setting of the novel as well as highlighting the fundamental role that family plays in the text.

An excessive focus on being either source- or target-oriented can also hinder the creative nature of translation. Kerstin Ekman (2003, 34) holds the view that a story is re-created each time it is read. She places her words and faith in translators’ hands by encouraging them to rewrite passages if necessary; for example, changing word plays, allusions, and references if they are problematic for the target readers. She views translation as a re-creation, or transcreation, based on the translator’s ‘holistic perception’ of the author’s intention. Anna Paterson (2006) uses Ekman’s writing as a case study for her enquiry into whether literary translators are writers. She argues that great writers are essentially transcribers of non-linguistic entities (such as nature, tribal stories, history, etc.) and that translators simply provide a linguistic step in spreading the thoughts the writer has already put into their own words. It must be noted that this discussion is centralised around texts of the expressive type, which is “the communication of artistically organised content,” such as novels and poems (Reiss 1981, 124). Different standards and practices are employed for the translation of other text types, such as informative (“the communication of content”) and

operative (“the communication of content with a persuasive character”) (Reiss 1981, 124). According to Newmark, for non-expressive texts, “a translator should not reproduce allusions, in particular if they are peculiar to the source language culture, which his readers are unlikely to understand. If the allusions are peripheral to the text, they should be omitted” (Newmark 1981, 147).

Similar to Gadd Colombi and Wright, I have steered away from focusing on the source- or target-oriented dichotomy and all it entails (such as domestication and foreignisation strategies); instead, my translation of *FL* is in line with the concept of transcreation. This perspective allows changes and modifications to take place on a case-by-case basis while remaining faithful to my interpretation of Braico’s intention, rather than being restricted by a particular translation strategy. My overall aim is to infuse the English text with Italian colour, rather than restricting myself to abiding by a strict source-oriented approach. I have considered the culture-specific elements individually and have selected a strategy based on the individual context. The following example of two teenagers speaking slang demonstrates the complexity of choosing where to be on the source- or target-oriented continuum: “Fuck, you’re stressing me out man, just chill, why are you already thinking about New Year’s Eve?” “You’re right, coz, first we’ve got to get smashed after exams, promise me that” (171).⁴⁹ Given that languages use slang and curse words differently, selecting a translatant is by no means straightforward – it’s about transferring the register, tone and intent. By viewing the target text as a re-creation, there is a certain amount of freedom to represent the source culture in ways that makes sense in the target culture.

As Lefevere points out, various factors – outside the strategies discussed above – heavily influence how aspects of a particular culture are translated, such as the source text’s status, the target text’s self-image and cultural scripts, as well as the intended audience (1988, 19). Explanations for why a translator may select one particular approach over another can be divided into the following categories: supratextual, textual, and intratextual (Aixelá 1996). Within the supratextual parameter, there may be a degree of linguistic prescriptivism which the translator adheres to in the target language. The nature and expectation of potential readers, or of the publishers, along with the working conditions of the translators (e.g. their professional training or time restrictions) also influence whether the translator decides to be more source-oriented or target-oriented. Translators do not often have the luxury of the time to reflect upon their strategies (as I am doing in this discussion). The textual parameters include material textual constraints, previous translations, and canonisation. Finally, the intratextual parameters include the cultural

⁴⁹ Original Italian: “Minchia che ansia che mi fai venire socio, stai rego, mo’ pensi a Capodanno?” “Hai ragione, cuggi, ci dobbiamo spaccare dopo la matura, promettimelo” (171).

considerations within the source text, the relevance or recurrence of the culture-specific item, and the coherence of the target text.

3.4.0. *Translating culture-specific elements in La festa dei limoni*

Discussing the above concepts in relation to my translation of *FL* allows a deeper analysis of how the theoretical insights inform the translation and vice versa. Many of the culture-specific elements in *FL* require a familiarity with Italian culture to be understood and interpreted. Some of the references are to people, such as “Rino Tommasi” (39) and “Berlusconi” (15); and others refer to songs, such as “*In auto suona Marzo di Giorgia*” (30)⁵⁰ (“In the car, ‘Marzo’ [March] by Giorgia was playing”). While some of these references may be more familiar to the readers of the translation than others (for example “Berlusconi”), and can therefore remain as they are, others required some intervention to clarify the author’s point of view.

In line with Aixelá’s explanation mentioned earlier, elements which I have highlighted as being culturally specific are only regarded as such when they are considered in the context of translation – when they need to be interpreted and understood by a culture different from the source culture. I have found that the existence and translatability of a culture-specific item is largely determined by aspects of the target culture and language. Given that English is the target language of my translation and Australia is the (principal) target culture, elements I have identified as being culturally specific to Italy result from the cultural gap between Australia and Italy. Suppose the text was also being translated into French; the list of culture-specific words, phrases and concepts would differ from the list I have identified. It is likely that the French translator would not recognise as many aspects as being problematic for translation as I do, given that the cultural proximity between Italy and France is closer than that of Italy and Australia. For example, the main character, Gabriele, thinks “[...] mi dà del tu pure lei” (75) (“[...] even she addresses me with the informal ‘you’”). The concept of “dare del tu” (giving the informal second person pronoun) can be faithfully rendered in French, as the French culture and language also includes the distinction between informal and formal pronouns (‘tu’ and ‘vous’). Therefore, the French translator may not even pick up on this element which I, as an English translator, view as being culturally specific and posing a possible translation challenge. This is a recurring issue that I have had to deal with in the translation. For example, there is a chapter that includes emails Gabriele received while in hospital, one of which is a group email from one of the classes he teaches at school. The letter opens with the phrase: “Caro prof, vogliamo essere divertenti e allora...ti diamo del tu (scusi)” (168); the phrase ‘ti diamo del tu’ would directly translate to “we’re addressing you

⁵⁰ Italics in original.

with the informal ‘you.’” However, to avoid the wordiness of this expression, along with relying on the source reader having some sort of understanding of the linguistic variations between Italian and English, I have opted to translate the phrase as: “Dear Gabriele, we want to be funny and so...we’re calling you by your first name (sorry).” The purpose of the students addressing him with the informal ‘you’ in the source text can be reflected with that of Australian English speakers addressing their high school teachers by their first names. Throughout the novel, I have remained consistent with this approach of replacing the explicit references to the variation in pronoun with Gabriele’s first name (as opposed to surname or profession). For instance: “[...] ma questo non vale certamente per lei-tu-lei” (169) (“[...] but this obviously doesn’t apply to you [formal]-you [informal]-you [formal]”), I translated as: “[...] but this obviously doesn’t apply to you, Mr L-Gabriele” to replicate the confusion and the self-correction the student resorts to when addressing Gabriele in an informal manner. A final example is between Gabriele and a group of doctors:

“On the way back home, the doctors offered me the privilege of addressing them with the informal ‘you’, [...] The only people I address with the informal ‘you’ are the psychologists who on my second day of admission asked me whether I preferred Molinette or the Sheraton in Dubai” (186).⁵¹

Again, I maintained a consistent approach and translated as follows:

“On the way back home, the doctors offered me the privilege of calling them by their first names, [...] The only people I call by their first names are the psychologists who on my second day of admission asked me whether I preferred Molinette or the Sheraton in Dubai.”

The focus of research into culture-specific elements has predominantly been individual words, or short phrases; however, cultural concepts can also be represented by longer sentences in addition to singular lexical elements. For example: “Com’è mai possibile che l’orario dei medici di base sia un sudoku? Solo due ore al giorno e mai le stesse su cinque giorni settimanali”(21) (“How come a GP’s hours are like a sudoku? Only two hours a day and never the same over the five days of the week”). In this case, there is no single lexical element(s) acting as a culture-specific item, instead, the entire two sentences reflect a unique aspect of Italian culture. Unlike in Australia, general practitioners in Italy tend to work individually and set their own hours. They do not necessarily have a receptionist, and they generally work on a ‘first come, first served’ basis rather than on a schedule of appointments. Italians, or anyone familiar with Italian culture, would not have issues in understanding and relating to the above sentences. Linguistically, the sentence does not present issues for my translation into English; however, Australian readers will not interpret the character’s

⁵¹ Original Italian: “Al ritorno i medici mi hanno concesso il privilegio di dare loro del tu, [...] Gli unici a cui darò del tu sono gli psicologi che al secondo giorno di ricovero mi hanno chiesto se preferivo le Molinette o lo Sheraton di Dubai” (186).

thoughts in the same way, as they have a different perception of how visiting the doctor takes place, due to their cultural background.

One method of approaching the translation of cultural references in *FL* is to follow the strategy outlined above by Savić and Čutura (2011) – matching the target text purpose to the source text purpose. For example: “*caponti*” (14), a type of pasta, “Editrice Giochi” (12), a children’s game company, and “robiola” (106), a type of cheese, can all be categorised as portraying cultural units of the source language. In this case, where the Italian cultural terms cannot be expressed in English, I have opted to maintain the Italian term. Similarly, when cultural terms are used to demonstrate the relationship with another culture, I have maintained the foreign word where possible; for instance, “*ma soeur*” (27)⁵² – ‘my sister’ – and “Hijo de puta madre,” (193) – a Spanish insult – are left in French and Spanish, respectively. Lastly, references to well-known people such as “Elvis” (113) and “Andy Warhol” (116) represent broader societal knowledge, and are left as they are, based on the assumption that they are universally known personalities. While this classification may be a useful practice to initially determine the function of the culture-specific item in the source text, it is not specific enough for my case study. Most of the cultural references in *FL* represent aspects of the source culture, thus fitting into the first category.

In terms of an overall translation strategy for *FL*, as mentioned in Chapter 2, I had initially intended to leave most culture-specific words in the source language and include a glossary at the end of the novel. However, throughout the translation process it became clear that most cultural elements could be transferred in some way or another. For example, the concept of “bidelli” (50) – people employed by schools who take care of various duties including cleaning, notices, and attendance – is very specific to the Italian school system. After considering various options, such as leaving it in Italian and further explicating the role, I opted to translate it as ‘caretaker’, a more general term. As discussed in the section on the paratext (see chapter 2), maintaining an excessive number of unnecessary source text words and including footnotes or a glossary can break the flow of the target text reading. Therefore, the terms I decided to italicize and leave in Italian are predominantly centred around food (such as “pizzeria” (106), “pasta e fagioli” (107), and “prosciutto”) in order to maintain the Italianness of the text, without troubling the reader to search for meanings of foreign terms. For some novels, readers may be willing to search for unfamiliar words or references (e.g. works of literature such as James Joyce’s), as this is part of the reading experience; however, *FL* is intended to be fairly light reading (as Braico himself states in the afterword), designed to connect with the readers on an emotional level, and it would therefore not be appropriate to include cumbersome (Italian) references requiring extra research and effort by

⁵² Italics in original.

the target readers. In some cases, the surrounding context provides readers with enough supplementary information to understand the meaning, and in other cases, additional information was required (for example, “la tiella” (90) became ‘Apulian *tiella*’). However, there are inevitably instances in which the intended source text connotation cannot be entirely transferred to English. For example, the Italian concept “avere le corna” (111) – literally, ‘to have horns’; metaphorically, to be cheated on – is used in *FL* with both meanings at once. The context of the phrase is a light-hearted discussion about deer and Gabriele’s neighbour; the Italian source text has multiple layers of meaning which creates a challenge for the translation of the following section (which is a literal translation):

Giovanni told me that deer grow new antlers each year. Their horns fall off every year and then grow back every year. Like what happens to Mr Falaschi, from the third floor. His wife is a beautiful woman and the characters picking her up and dropping her off outside in luxurious cars change every year. Like her husband’s horns. I often tell this story to year twelves. The one about the infrared camera, not about Mr Falaschi from the third floor, especially since being beige isn’t an accurate nor sufficient basis to determine whether you have horns (110-111).⁵³

The word play and the double meaning, linking the conversation about deer with Gabriele’s neighbour’s wife, is inevitably lost in my English translation. I had to select which connotation I thought most important in the given context and adapt the translation accordingly. I opted for the following:

Giovanni told me that deer grow new antlers each year. They fall off every year and then grow back every year. That’s just as often as Mrs Falaschi, my neighbour’s wife, changes her lover. She’s a beautiful woman and the characters picking her up and dropping her off outside in luxurious cars change every year. I often tell this story to year twelves. The one about the infrared camera, not about Mrs Falaschi, especially since being beige is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to determine whether your wife is cheating on you.

The English translation required more explanation due to the lack of equivalence to the term “avere le corna.” As these examples demonstrate, rather than adhering to a one-size-fits-all translation strategy for transferring culture-specific elements, I have treated each instance on a case-by-case basis, considering the context, the significance to the story and the target readers’ assumed knowledge. I have attempted to maintain the text’s ‘local colour’ through a flexible approach combining generalisation, explication, and retention.

⁵³ Original Italian: “Giovanni mi ha raccontato che il cervo cambia il palco ogni anno. Gli cadono le corna tutti gli anni e tutti gli anni gli ricrescono. Come al signor Falaschi, del terzo piano. Sua moglie è una donna bellissima e i personaggi che guidano auto di lusso e si presentano sotto casa per prelevarla e riconsegnarla cambiano tutti gli anni. Come il palco del marito. Spesso in quinta liceo ho raccontato questa storia. Quella della videocamera a raggi infrarossi, non quella del signor Falaschi del terzo piano, anche perché essere beige non è una condizione né necessaria né sufficiente per avere le corna” (110-111).

3.5. Dialect and dialogue

Dialect is another culturally embedded linguistic feature. It is often viewed as being impossible to translate, yet Newmark challenges this idea, by proposing translation strategies depending on the type of text (1988, 106). The dialect used in fictional works is often “not presented simply for mimetic value but crafted for purpose” (Mandala 2016, 9). The translator’s priority should be to identify the function of the dialect; “usually, this will be: (a) to show a slang use of language; (b) to stress social class contrasts; and more rarely (c) to indicate local cultural features” (Mandala 2016, 195). Laura Lori (2018) suggests that the use of dialect in literature can represent a character’s sense of belonging and their identity. When this is the case, it is important to replicate that in one way or another in the target text. One method for retaining the symbolism of dialect is to replace it with a dialect from the source culture; however, this raises the issue of localisation, potentially creating a misrepresentation of the source culture. The focus should be on the effect of the language and text; if the author has intended to challenge the reader in the source language, then it must be maintained in the target language.

Camilleri, one of the most internationally renowned Italian authors, is known for the way he cleverly interweaves standard Italian with regional Italian and Sicilian dialect in his novels. This has paved the way for scholarly discussions on whether this stylistic feature of linguistic structure can be reproduced in translations. Margherita Taffarel (2012) analyses the presence of geographical and social dialects, as well as colloquialisms in Camilleri’s (1996) novel *Il cane di terracotta* (*The terracotta dog* (2002)), comparing it with the Spanish translation *El perro de terracotta* (2005), translated by María Antonia Menini Pagès. Taffarel identifies how these linguistic features are employed for characterisation purposes, and consequently she highlights the challenges these linguistic variations create for translators. Even though the number of speakers of Italian dialects is decreasing, dialect is still an important feature of daily life in Italy, particularly in cinema, theatre, and literature. Stephen Sartarelli (2004), the English translator of Camilleri, highlights the challenges of translating the Montalbano novels for an English-speaking audience. Not only does Camilleri employ linguistic varieties to differentiate characters, but also to highlight various social contexts; for instance, Montalbano talks to his colleague in Sicilian and regional Italian, yet he uses standard Italian with his partner (Taffarel 2012). The complexities of why and how an Italian dialect is used, is what makes the translation challenging. Italian dialects are clearly embedded within the history, culture, and traditions of the country, thus when taking the text across to a Spanish-speaking audience, the cultural baggage does not transfer. Italians use dialect for various reasons, whether as an act of belonging to a particular social class, an adherence to cultural traditions, or as a representation of their geographical identity; dialect may simply represent the language of habitual

use. Therefore, not only does the translator have to face linguistic challenges, but they must also understand why it is being used in each instance (Taffarel 2012).

A widespread view on the part of scholars is that it is impractical to try to translate dialects in literary works due to the inevitable losses that occur as it is transferred across cultures; this may create an unnatural reading in the target text, along with cultural shock for the target text readers (Rabadán 1991; Newmark 1988; Mayoral Asensio 1999). John Catford (1970) and Basil Hatim and Ian Mason (1990) are more in favour of employing dialect in some way or another, stating that translators can strive to select equivalent dialects in the target audience, or ‘play’ with a non-standard use of language. However, the use of dialect is not only restricted by specific translational issues, but also by how accepting the target readers, editors and publishers are regarding non-standard language. For instance, Sartarelli (2004, 214) points out that North American publishers tend to make texts conform to a prescribed standard, both stylistically and grammatically, in order to make the text more familiar and comprehensible. Two translations of Camilleri’s work *Il birraio di Preston* (1995), one into Spanish (1999) and the other into Catalan (2004), employ different methods. Taffarel (2012) analyses and compares the translators’ strategies for representing the characters’ use of dialect in the text. She finds that the most common strategy for translating geographical dialect is borrowing, whereas for the translation of dialect with a social function or of colloquialisms, equivalence is the preferred method. To take some examples from my translation of *FL*, in maintaining the Neapolitan term “Nient dottò” (Braico 2015a, 134) I deploy borrowing, whereas I aim for equivalence when replacing the colloquial Neapolitan phrase, “M’hann fatt’ morì ’ca ’n terr” (134) with “Idiots scared me to death.” In the two translations Taffarel (2012) analyses, borrowing is predominantly used for forms of politeness (e.g. titles like ‘doctor’), for food and for place names. While she finds both translators tend to eliminate dialect terms and standardise them, the Catalan translator favours the use of dialect more than the Spanish translator.

In Leppihalme’s (2000) case study on how translators deal with regional dialogue, standardisation is the most common strategy. The effects of such techniques are also explored, to question “how detrimental is it to the literary quality of a text and hence to the reading experience offered?” (Leppihalme 2000, 247). Her case study is based around the well-known Finnish author Kalle Päätalo, in particular his novel *Koillismaa* (titled *Our Daily Bread* in English), in which a combination of dialogue and dialect are integral parts. He wrote in a literary dialect of his own to accurately describe country people. The narrative and descriptive sections of the novel are written in standard Finnish, while the dialogues are written in dialect, or a literary version of regional Finnish. There is a much higher frequency of non-standard words in the source text than in the

English target text. In the first two chapters of the source text, there are approximately 160 lexical regionalisms, plus phonological markers and syntactic variation, whereas in the target text there are only 11 non-standard words and practically no phonological or syntactic variation (Leppihalme 2000). However, a strategy employed by the translator was to leave some words in Finnish and append a glossary. The translator must consider the functional importance of regionalisms; “the more important a feature, the more loss there is if the translation downplays it” (Leppihalme, 250). Regionalisms in *Koillismaa* are often translated into standard English, meaning that the linguistic identity which Päätaalo created is lost. The translator of Päätaalo’s novel, Impola, adopts the strategy of standardisation, with his global strategy being domestication (Leppihalme 2000, 261). In order to compensate for lost overtones, translators may include additions; for instance, adding mild expletives in the target text to adequately portray the assertiveness of the source text (Leppihalme, 262).

3.5.0. *Dialect in La festa dei limoni*

Although dialect is not consistently present throughout *FL*, there are four chapters which include utterances in Neapolitan dialect; for example: “Guagliò, devi mangiare, sinnò t’ n’ vaje. Nun fa’ o sciem” (178) (“Kid, ya gotta eat, otherwise you’ll die. Don’t be an idiot”). In line with Taffarel’s (2012) findings regarding Camilleri’s use of dialect, Braico employs dialect for characterisation purposes. Nunzia, a Neapolitan nurse, is the only character whose narration includes dialect; her use of language shapes her character as well as her interactions with others. She is portrayed as being less elegant and formal in her mannerisms and speech than another Neapolitan nurse, Ingrid, whose voice is represented in standard Italian. The clear contrast between the characters’ names supports the characterisation; Ingrid is a classier foreign name while Nunzia is a very traditional, religious name. The challenge of translating Nunzia’s dialogue into English results from the cultural specificity of her language. The role of dialect in Italian society cannot be transferred to the context of Australia, given that the linguistic landscape is immensely different. However, there are various translational strategies I can employ to re-create the use of dialect in order to minimise the inevitable loss that will occur.

When I discussed with Braico the complexities I was encountering in translating this dialect, he suggested the following: “You could put it in dialect as it is, in italics, and with a note in English you could explain what it means.”⁵⁴ I decided against this strategy as I believe it would have taken away from the flow of the reading. In addition, I did not believe it to be necessary to retain the

⁵⁴ Original Italian: “Tu potresti metterlo in dialetto così com’è, in corsivo, e con una nota in inglese puoi spiegare cosa significa” (Braico 2019).

Italian dialect for the purpose of characterisation in this story, as Nunzia was not a central character to the storyline. I also decided against replacing Nunzia's Neapolitan dialect with a specific Australian English variety; firstly, as there are no Australian English varieties that can accurately illustrate the role of the Neapolitan dialect in Italy, and secondly, due to the character misrepresentation that would occur if Nunzia were, for instance, to use thick Australian slang. Instead, I have used non-standard English, including expletives, to represent Nunzia's character and how she interacts with others, as in the following example: "Nothing doc, these four fuckheads are just watching the match. Idiots scared me to death" (134).⁵⁵ Here, my translation practice and decisions were prompted by my readings of what other scholars have done. This strategy is in line with the approach of Sartarelli (2004, 214) outlined above.

In addition to Neapolitan, Gabriele makes explicit reference to a phrase used in the Piedmont region of Italy (where the story is set). The source text states: "*Per nen disturbé... si dice in Piemonte*" (174)⁵⁶ which I have translated as: "*Per nen disturbé* – so as not to disturb... as they say in Piedmont." In this case, I decided to leave the phrase in dialect – a strategy Taffarel labels as "borrowing" – for emphasis and to remind the target text reader that the narrator and protagonist is Italian, and more specifically, that he is currently living in Piedmont. It was also important to leave the phrase in dialect (and add in an English gloss) as Gabriele makes explicit mention of it as part of the sentence. The other option I considered was to remove the reference to Piedmont entirely and translate the phrase simply as: "So as not to disturb"; however, given that the macro strategy of my translation was to highlight and maintain the Italianness of the text, this was an ideal opportunity to transfer that local colour.

3.5.1. *Dialogue in La festa dei limoni*

Re-creating the author's and characters' voices using the target language is another challenge for translators, as they, too, can be embedded within the context of the source culture. A strategy for portraying a voice located in, say, a lower-class or villager society, may include using features of colloquial spoken English, without necessarily focusing on one variant, so as not to exclude other potential target readers. This is the approach Bill Johnston employs for *Stone upon Stone* (2010), his English translation of the Polish novel *Kamień na kamieniu* (Myśliwski 1984). In order to render the main character's peasant speech in translation, he focused on using "certain linguistic felicities as a point of entry in constructing the voice" (Johnston 2013, 49). While his target audience is English

⁵⁵ Original Italian: "Nient dottò, sti quatt strunz stann' guardann 'a partita. M'hanno fatt' morì 'ca 'n terr'. 'Sti scem" (134).

⁵⁶ Italics in original.

speakers, there are many differences in marking a character's voice with American expressions as opposed to British, or even Australian, expressions. To overcome the issue of excluding target readers by selecting one variety of English, Johnston used stylistic features to mark the text as spoken English rather than written English. For example, he included elisions, such as *I've*, *he'll* and *they'd*, and omissions, as in "you forgotten?" and "turned out I was right" (2013, 53). In the context of a fictional text, a variety of voices can be present such as those of the implied author, narrator(s) and characters (Alvstad 2013, 208). Each author and translator has their unique literary voice, including phraseology, repetition, use of metaphor, irony, rhythm, syntax, stylistic levels, cadence, and shifts in rhythm and tempo (Qvale 2014, 56). It is the translator's task to identify and interpret the voice or voices of the source text and reproduce them for the target readers.

Dialogue is a key feature of *FL*; the voice not only of the narrator, but also of the individual characters, must be accurately rendered in the English translation. To convey orality, Braico employs non-standard spelling, punctuation, repetition, and colloquialisms; for example: "Prooof. Ma checcifà qua?" (171) (*Proff* Whatcha doing here?), "Wooooow, bravooooo" (184) ('Woohooo, well done!!!'), "Gooooooooool!" (133) ('Gooooaaaaaall') and "Ciao tut...ti [...] grazie! Grazie, nasi rossi!!!!!!!" (184) ('Hi every...one [...] thank youuuuu! Thank you, red noseeeeeees!!!!'). As demonstrated in my translations of these phrases, retaining the sense of orality and voice is possible, through spelling and punctuation. Striving to be faithful to the representation of voice and orality in the text is a way in which the target text may be able to 'gain' what is inevitably 'lost' in other culture-specific elements.

3.6. The translation web

The translation of cultural elements is a complex web involving various agents, languages, and cultures (as demonstrated in Figure 8 below). The source text (ST in the diagram, in this case *La festa dei limoni*) is the starting point, and it is intertwined with the source language (SL), source culture (SC), and source readers (SR). The author – in this case Marco Braico – is also a key branch from the source text and is connected to all the source elements. The target text is a separate item, from which lines are drawn to the target language (TL), target readers (TR), and target culture (TC). The source text and target text are not isolated and individual entities, they are connected, yet they must travel through the translator first. The translator, who is connected to everything, is the binding agent between the source text – and all that it contains – and the target text. The diagram below also highlights the challenge of translating culture-specific references; cultural elements are items embedded in the source language and source culture and are not connected to any of the target text elements, therefore, the translator must use his or her knowledge of the

source text elements to enable the cultural references to be received in the target text. Exploring the theory and practice of identifying, categorising, and translating culture-specific elements aids in re-creating the source text reading experience for a different and distant readership.

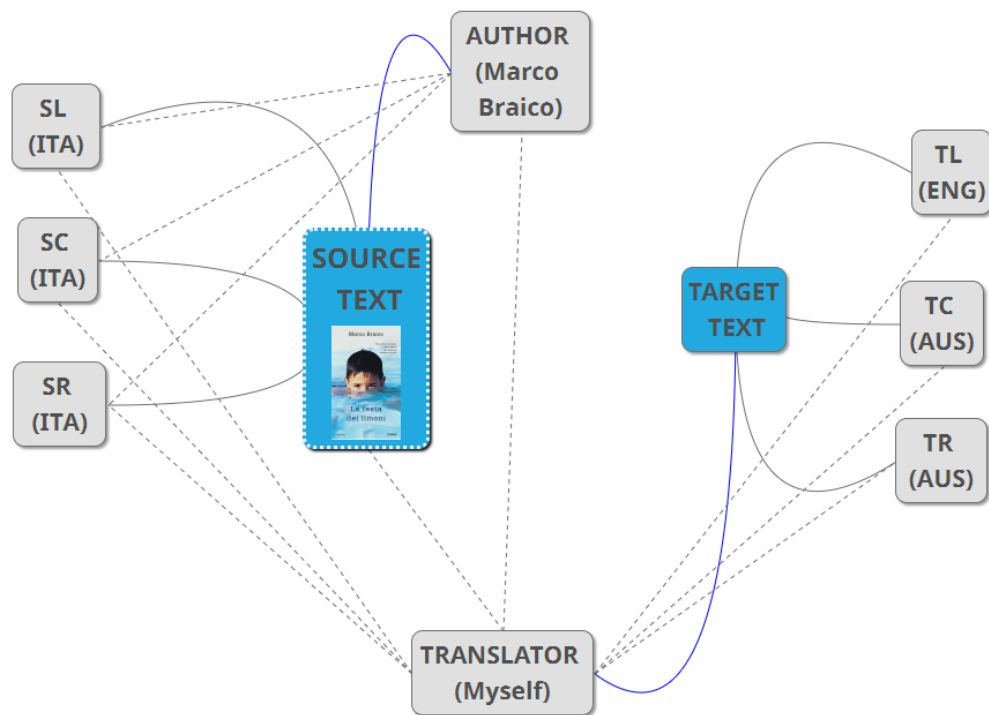


Figure 8: *Translation web*

Conclusion

It appears that in Australia, there is still a divide between translators' art and translation scholars' observations. Although translation commentary is becoming a common avenue through which translation is explored in universities, much of the focus is on the linguistic elements, rather than the wider context in which the source text exists and which the target text is introduced. The combination of macro topics in Chapter's 1 and 2 (translators' subjectivity and the paratext of the book) combined with the micro topic of Chapter 3 (the culture-specific elements) offers a holistic perspective on combining the art of translation with scholarly strategies.

While the two activities (practice and theory) are distinct in how they are approached and in their outcomes, they inform one another and both provide valuable insights. A range of factors contribute to this divide, such as translators' own perception of their role. Translators tend to view their practice as being predominantly a creative endeavour, parallel to that of the source text author. As discussed in Chapter 1, although translators have individual processes for transferring the text, they largely rely on their individual interpretation, research, experience and subconscious decisions in composing their translation. While carrying out the translation of a text, they are often not concerned with abiding by theoretical concepts and strategies; of course, their theoretical understanding may influence their decisions, but it appears this is achieved on a subconscious level, rather than through a conscious effort to connect theory and practice. In turn, the role of translation scholars is to break down the decisions and analyse the strategies and consequences of translation decisions, on a macro and micro level. However, translation scholars often analyse and critique existing translations, without proposing concrete alternatives. Given that scholars are generally analysing someone else's work, they rarely have the benefit of insights from the actual translation process. I have demonstrated how the thought processes and decision-making strategies of the translator offer a deeper level of analysis to existing translation theory.

Another factor contributing to the divide between translation practice and theory stems from how literary translation education is structured within the university environment. The practical and theoretical aspects are often taught as separate subjects, as if they were on a binary with differing goals (this was certainly my experience as a student of Translation Studies). Wright (2016) suggests that this divide in the teaching structure makes the relationship between theory and practice unclear for students and encourages the idea that theory is something which must be applied onto practice. An alternative approach, and the one I have used in this project, is to combine various existing translation strategies with concrete translation practice. This is in line with Boase-Beier's proposal that theory is a "creatively constructed (and shifting) view of practice" (2006, 48). Translation is not only a matter of linguistic knowledge; it combines with the

translator's artistic and ethical purpose, resulting in unique and individual texts and methods for writing them (Wright 2016). The creative nature of translation benefits from a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, way of theorising. As Kenda (2006) proposes and practices, this methodology uses the act of translation to guide the theory. He highlights the value of not relying on theory for his translation which allows him to slip into an "altered state" in which his translations take place. However, the theory must not be misrepresented as a hindrance to the creative aspect of literary translation; rather it can be seen as "an aid to creativity" (Boase-Beier 2006, 56). Kenda (2006) proposes that theory should be avoided at the beginning of one's practical translation endeavours, and then come into the foreground later to support the strategies already developed. After several years and translation projects, his translation practice led him to explore what translation theory had to offer. He discovered that Steiner's four notions and Nida's concepts of equivalence expressed what he had already found through his practice.

The aim of this practice-based thesis has been to contribute towards breaking down this divide between theory and practice and demonstrate how the two sides of translation can merge into one, co-existing and complementing each other. Initially, this project was steered by the practical translation – given that it was the motivating factor and the starting point for the research – but soon the two parts became intertwined, each receiving equal weight and attention. Since translation and theoretical research require different approaches and types of focus, I naturally became completely immersed in one of the two activities for a period (of generally a few months), to allow the depth of creativity or investigation to be fostered. Challenges I encountered during the practical translation were then pursued in my theoretical research, as I questioned what had previously been observed regarding the issues. For instance, when translating the afterwords of *La festa dei limoni*, I began to wonder whether it would be more appropriate for these to be positioned at the front of the book, given that the topics discussed in them are related to elements external to the book, and the target readers would not have the same background knowledge as the source readers. I then explored what had been proposed in the literature regarding this question (and paratexts more broadly). In the end, I have opted to maintain the afterwords and include a translator's preface to fill in those potential gaps. This is just one of the multiple ways in which the translation and the exegesis became enriched by one other, each offering new avenues to explore and resulting in tangible outcomes.

I must emphasise that the final translation appearing in this thesis is simply one possible outcome. While every word, phrase, sentence and reference has been carefully selected, at times many months' consideration and internal debate was resolved simply by being decisive so that a clean copy would be produced. I have sought to justify and explore my translation decisions (from

a macro and a micro perspective) in the exegesis. I began with a wide lens, highlighting my own subjectivity as a translator and exploring the thoughts of other translators. I gradually narrowed the focus to be centred around my case study, *La festa dei limoni*, exploring the many internal and external (as well as visible and invisible) elements and how these could be transferred to the target language and culture. The focus continued to narrow as I highlighted the challenge of translating culturally specific terms and expressions, offering solutions and examples from my translation.

One of the unique contributions of my project is the fact that I have selected a popular fiction text for my case study. Most work in literary translation studies, and those including a translation commentary, deal with canonised literature or literary fiction. Working with a text such as *La festa dei limoni* has offered new insights regarding how a work of popular fiction (which has not yet been translated and which does not yet have a presence outside of its source culture and language) can be effectively transferred to a target language and culture. The emphasis of literary translation studies is often related to respecting and retaining the complex literary language; however, my choice of a text in which the author explicitly states that using literary language is not his goal, has provided opportunities to explore other issues. Given that a large part of *La festa dei limoni*'s success is related to the accompanying project (i.e. to factors external to the writing itself, but very central to the life of the author), this naturally led to exploring these concepts from a theoretical perspective. In the years to come, an awareness of extratextual factors is likely to become more and more relevant, as social media, celebrity and influencer culture, as well as self-publishing, become more and more prominent. Another important contribution of my study is its research into the translation of autofiction, memoir and illness narratives. These genres have been researched from the perspective of literary studies, yet little has been explored from a translation studies perspective. My project has demonstrated how translation scholars can navigate the blurry line between fact and fiction on a practical and theoretical level.

There are undoubtedly elements of this project that warrant further investigation, and additional avenues of research to which this project could lead. Related to the topic of translators' subjectivity, it would be interesting to explore the translator's role in conveying emotion, given the affective dimension inherent in the practice of literary translation. Literary translators have the complex role of perceiving emotional material in the source text, regulating their own emotions, and expressing the source text emotions such that the target readers have a similar reading experience to that of the source readers (Hubscher-Davidson 2018). While "literary translation bridges the delicate emotional connections between cultures and languages", the subjective nature of emotions leads to a complex and multi-layered transfer on the part of the translator (Hubscher-

Davidson 2018, 35). This in turn has an impact on how the translator's own emotional subjectivity influences the practice of translation, as well as the resulting target text.

My study suggests many future avenues of research beyond this specific case study by suggesting themes and topics to explore through practice-based research in translation studies. My approach of combining a translated text with a critical analysis can be replicated and adapted to other texts and across other languages. The topics of focus could certainly be modified or replaced, to suit the selected text and aim of the research. The depth of the study could also be expanded or reduced to suit other projects. For instance, to reduce the scope, the text for translation could be a poem or a short story; to increase the scope, the text could be multiple pieces of work by the same author (or comparing texts by different authors). In undertaking this project for a doctoral thesis, I hope also to have encouraged other doctoral candidates to consider practice-based research as an insightful and viable pathway to pursue.

References

- Agus, Milena. 2006. *Mal di pietre*. Italy: notttempo.
- . 2009. *The House in Via Manno*. Translated by Brigid Maher.
- Aixelá, Javier Franco. 1996. "Culture-Specific Items in Translation." In *Translation, Power, Subversion*, edited by Román Álvarez, M. Carmen-África Vidal and André Lefevere. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Ajtony, Zsuzsanna. 2016. "Cultural Interchangeability? Culture-Specific Items in Translation." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Philologica* 8 (2): 79-92.
- Alighieri, Dante. 1993. *Dante's Inferno: Translations by Twenty Contemporary Poets*. Edited by Daniel Halpern. Hopewell, N.J: Ecco Press.
- Álvarez, Román, and M. Carmen-África Vidal. 1996. *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Edited by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Alvstad, Cecilia. 2013. "Voices in Translation." In *Handbook of Translation Studies*, edited by Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer, 207-210. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Andrews, Chris. 2014. Interview with Chris Andrews. edited by Michael Schapira: Full Stop.
- Baker, Mona. 2019. *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. London: Routledge.
- Bassnett, Susan, and André Lefevere. 1990. *Translation, History, and Culture*. London/New York: Pinter Publishers.
- Batchelor, Kathryn. 2018. *Translation and Paratexts*. London: Routledge.
- Bellos, David. 2012. *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?: The Amazing Adventure of Translation*. London: Penguin Books.
- Bialystok, Ellen. 2011. "Linguistics: Tuning into translation." *Nature* 477 (7366): 536.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/477536a>.
- Blair, Jon. 1995. *Anne Frank Remembered* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.
- Boase-Beier, Jean. 2006. "Loosening the Grip of the Text: Theory as an Aid to Creativity." In *Translation and Creativity: Perspectives on Creative Writing and Translation Studies*, edited by Engenia Loffredo and Manuela Perteghella, 47-56. London/New York: Continuum.
- . 2011. "Theories and Practices." In *A Critical Introduction to Translation Studies*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Bochner, Stephen. 1981. *The Mediating Person: Bridges between Cultures*. Boston, Mass: G.K. Hall; Schenkman.
- Braçaj, Morena. 2015. "Procedures of Translating Culture-Specific Concepts." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6 (1): 476-480.
- Braico, Marco. 2011a. "La festa dei limoni." [Website]. WordPress. Accessed 27 September, 2019. <http://www.lafestadeilimoni.it>.
- . 2011b. *La festa dei limoni*. Torino: Effatà Editrice.
- . 2011c. *La festa dei limoni*. E-book. Torino: Effatà Editrice.
- . 2013a. *Gli angeli non hanno le ali: Un racconto di Natale*. Torino: Effatà Editrice.
- . 2013b. *Metà di tutto*. Torino: Effatà Editrice.
- . 2014. *Cuori di panna: Un romanzo tra i dolci*. Torino: Effatà Editrice.
- . 2015a. *La festa dei limoni*. Milano: Edizioni Piemme.
- . 2015b. *La festa dei limoni*. E-book. Milano: Edizioni Piemme.
- . 2017. *Teorema del primo bacio*. Milano: Edizioni Piemme.
- . 2019. Interview with the author of *La festa dei limoni*. Interview by Allira Hanczakowski. 3 July, 2019.
- . 2021. *Le cose belle sono curve*. Milano: Edizioni Piemme.
- Brenner, Rachel Feldhay. 1996. "Writing Herself Against History: Anne Frank's Self-Portrait as a Young Artist." *Modern Judaism* 16 (2): 105-134.

- Bryer, Elizabeth. 2019. The Garret: Writers on Writing. Interview by Astrid Edwards. 8 August, 2019.
- Bush, Peter. 2006. "The Writer of Translations." In *The Translator as Writer*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, 23-32. London/New York: Continuum.
- Cachucho, Maria Celina. 2017. "An Examination of Translators' Subjectivity in Literary Translation." MA (Language Practice), North-West University.
- Camilleri, Andrea. 1995. *Il birraio di Preston*. Palermo: Sellerio.
- . 1996. *Il cane di terracotta*. Palermo: Sellerio.
- . 1999. *La ópera de Vigàta*. Translated by Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale. Barcelona: Destino.
- . 2002. *The Terracotta Dog*. Translated by Stephen Sartarelli. New York: Penguin.
- . 2004. *L'òpera de Vigàta*. Translated by Pau Vidal. Barcelona: Edicions 62.
- . 2005. *El perro de terracota*. Translated by María Antonia Menini Pagés. Barcelona: Salamandra.
- Catford, John. 1970. *Una teoría lingüística de la traducción*. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. 1605. *Don Quixote*. Francisco de Robles.
- Deane-Cox, Sharon. 2014. *Retranslation: Translation, Literature and Reinterpretation*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Dimitriu, Rodica. 2009. "Translators' Prefaces as Documentary Sources for Translation Studies." *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 17 (3): 193-206.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09076760903255304>.
- Dobrovsky, Serge. 1977. *Fils*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Durdureanu, Ioana Irina. 2011. "Translation of Cultural Terms: Possible or Impossible?" *The Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education* 4: 51-63.
- Ekman, Kerstin. 2003. "On Translation and Being Translated." *World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma* 77 (1): 34-39. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40157781>.
- Emmerich, Karen. 2017. *Literary Translation and the Making of Originals*. Edited by Brian James Baer and Michelle Woods. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Farø, Ken. 2013. "Dänische Delikatessen. Linguistic Changes within the Translation of Titles." In *Authorial and Editorial Voices in Translation 2 – Editorial and Publishing Practices*, edited by Hanne Jansen and Anna Wegener, 109-28. Montréal: Éditions québécoises de l'œuvre.
- Flynn, Chris. 2020. Presentation by author of Mammoth. Hosted by Clare Wight. 30 July, 2020.: Geelong Regional Libraries.
- Frank, Anne. 1952. *The Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Doubleday.
- Gadd Colombi, Anna. 2018. *Translation as Criticism: Elizabeth Jolley's Mr Scobie's Riddle*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Genette, Gérard. 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldstein, Ann. 2016. Interview: Ann Goldstein and the Art of Translation. Interview by Sarah Kanowski.: ABC Radio National.
- Goldstein, Ann, and Mary Norris. 2020. Interview with Ann Goldstein and Mary Norris on 'Broadly Speaking'. Interview by Caro Llewellyn. 29 September, 2020. The Wheeler Centre, Melbourne.
- Gregor, Katherine. 2020. "Translation as a Dance." Los Angeles Review of Books [Webpage]. Accessed 7 August. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/short-takes/translation-as-a-dance/>.
- Grossman, Edith. 2010a. Radio Interview with Edith Grossman on Why Translation Matters. Interview by Ramona Koval. 30 March, 2010. ABC Radio National.
- . 2010b. *Why Translation Matters*. Yale University Press.
- Harpman, Jacqueline. 1996. *Orlanda*. Paris: Grasset.
- . 1999. *Orlanda*. Translated by Ross Schwartz. New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Hatim, Basil, and Ian Mason. 1990. *Discourse and the Translator*. New York: Longman.

- Hermans, Theo. 1988. "On Translating Proper Names, with Reference to De Witte and Max Havelaar." In *Modern Dutch Studies*, edited by Michael Wintle, 11-24. London: Athlone.
- . 1996. "The Translator's Voice in Translated Narrative." *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies* 8 (1).
- . 2014. "Positioning Translators: Voices, Views and Values in Translation." *Language and Literature: Journal of the Poetics and Linguistics* 23 (3): 285-301.
- Hubscher-Davidson, Séverine. 2018. *Translation and Emotion: A Psychological Perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Hugo, Victor. 2017. *Les misérables*. Translated by Julie Rose. New York: Open Road Integrated Media.
- Hyland, Ken. 1998. "Persuasion and Context: The Pragmatics of Academic Metadiscourse." *Journal of Pragmatics* 30: 437-455. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166\(98\)00009-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166(98)00009-5).
- Johnston, Bill. 2013. "Szymek from the Village and Joe from Missouri: Problems of Voice in Translating Wiesław Myśliński's *Stone upon Stone*." In *Perspectives on Literature and Translation: Creation, Circulation, Reception*, edited by Brian Nelson and Brigid Maher, 47-55. New York: Routledge.
- Jolley, Elizabeth. 1983. *Mr Scobie's Riddle*. Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Modern Classics.
- Kaindl, Klaus, and Karlheinz Spitzl. 2014. *Transfiction: Research into the realities of translation fiction*. Vol. 110. *Benjamins Translation Library*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kapor, M. 2006. *A Guide to Serbian Mentality*. Belgrade: Dereta.
- Kenda, Jakob J. 2006. "Rewriting Children's Literature." In *Rewriting Children's Literature*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, 160-170. London/New York: Continuum.
- Koster, Cees. 2002. "The Translator in Between Texts: On the Textual Presence of the Translator as an Issue in the Methodology of Comparative Translation Description." In *Translation Studies: Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*, edited by Alessandra Riccardi, 24-37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kovala, Urpo. 1996. "Translations, Paratextual Mediation, and Ideological Closure." *Target* 8 (1): 119-147. <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.8.1.07kov>.
- Kuitert, Lisa. 2010. "The Publication of Anne Frank's Diary." *Quaerendo* 40 (1): 50-65. <https://doi.org/10.1163/001495210X12561886980275>.
- Kung, Szu-Wen Cindy. 2010. "Network and Cooperation in Translating Taiwanese Literature into English." In *Translation: Theory and Practice in Dialogue*, edited by Antoinette Fawcett, Karla L. Guadarrama and Rebecca Hyde Parker, 164-180. London: Continuum.
- Lefevere, André. 1988. "Holy Garbage, tho by Homer cook't." *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 1 (2): 19-27.
- Lefevere, André. 2017. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Routledge Translation Classics. Oxon: Routledge.
- Leppihalme, Ritva. 1997. *Culture Bumps: An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*. Edited by Susan Bassnett and Edwin Gentzler. Clevedon [U.K.]: Multilingual Matters.
- . 2000. "The Two Faces of Standardization." *The Translator* 6 (2): 247-269.
- Lopes, Alexandra. 2012. "Under the Sign of Janus: Reflections on Authorship as Liminality in Translated Literature." *Revista Anglo Saxonica* 3: 129-55.
- López Guix, Juan Gabriel. 2006. "The Translator in Aliceland: On Translating *Alice in Wonderland* into Spanish." In *The Translator as Writer*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, 95-105. London/New York: Continuum.
- Lori, Laura. 2018. "Come un'acrobata sull'acqua: Ubah Christina Ali Farah's Narrative between Languages." Symposium presentation. Exploring and Translating Stratified Multilingual Landscapes, La Trobe University City Campus, Melbourne.
- Luis de Juan, José. 2020. *Napoleon's Beekeeper*. Translated by Elizabeth Bryer. Sydney: Giramondo.
- Lurie, Alison. 1985. *Foreign Affairs*. London: Michael Joseph.

- Maher, Brigid. 2014. "Sardinia Comes to Australia: Finding Spaces for Mediterranean Writing in Translation." *Journal of Australian Studies* 38 (3): 304-313.
- . 2018. "Literary Translation and the Transcultural Circulation of Italian Stories." Conference presentation, Living Transcultural Spaces, Melbourne.
- Mandala, Susan. 2016. *Twentieth-Century Drama Dialogue as Ordinary Talk: Speaking Between the Lines*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Mayoral Asensio, Roberto. 1999. *La traducción de la variación lingüística. Monográficos de la revista Hermeneus* 1. Soria: Uertere.
- McRae, Ellen. 2012. "The Role of 'Translators' Prefaces to Contemporary Literary Translations into English: An Empirical Study." In *Translation Peripheries: Paratextual Elements in Translation*, edited by Anna Gil-Bardají, Pilar Orero and Sara Rivira-Esteva, 63-82. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Minford, John. 2017. Translation as a Performance Art. Interview by Clement Paligaru. In *Ear to Asia*. Melbourne: The University of Melbourne.
- Minor, Wendell. 1995. *Art for the Written Word: Twenty-Five Years of Book Cover Art*. Edited by David G. McCullough. 1st ed. San Diego: Harcourt Brace.
- Müller, Max. 1861. "Buddhist Literature in India and China." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 11 (280): 246-248.
- Munday, Jeremy. 2009. *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Myśliwski, Wiesław. 1984. *Kamień na kamieniu*. Krakow: Znak.
- . 2010. *Stone upon Stone*. Translated by Bill Johnston. New York: Archipelago Books.
- Newmark, Peter. 1981. *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press.
- . 1983. "Introductory Survey." In *The Translator's Handbook*, edited by Catriona Picken, 1-17. London: Aslib.
- . 1988. *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Nida, Eugene Albert. 1964. *Toward a Science of Translating: With a Special Reference to Principles and Procedures involved in Bible Translating*. Leiden: Brill.
- Nida, Eugene Albert, and Charles R. Taber. 1969. *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Norberg, Ulf. 2012. "Literary 'Translators' Comments on their 'Translations in Prefaces and Afterwords: The Case of Contemporary Sweden." In *Translation Peripheries: Paratextual Elements in Translation*, edited by Anna Gil Bardají, Pilar Orero and Sara Rovira-Esteva, 101-116. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Nord, Christiane. 2018. *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Second ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nottingham-Martin, Amy. 2015. "Thresholds of Transmedia Storytelling: Applying Gérard Genette's Paratextual Theory to The 39 Clues Series for Young Readers." In *Examining Paratextual Theory and Its Applications in Digital Culture*, edited by Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon, 826-851. Pennsylvania: Information Science Reference.
- Osimo, Bruno. 2004. *Traduzione e qualità. La valutazione in ambito accademico e professionale*. Milano: Hoepli.
- Parks, Tim. 2014. *Translating Style: A Literary Approach to Translation - A Translation Approach to Literature*. Second ed. Oxfordshire, England: Routledge.
- Paterson, Anna. 2006. "The Alien Made Known: The Compact of Writer and Translator in Kerstin Ekman's Writing about Nature." In *The Translator as Writer*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, 149-159. London: Continuum.
- Pedersen, Jan. 2007. "Cultural Interchangeability: The Effects of Substituting Cultural References in Subtitling." *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 15 (1): 30-48.
- Pedro, Raquel De. 2000. "Translation Loss." In *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English*, edited by Olive Classe. London: Fitzroy Dearborn.

- Pei, Denghua. 2010. "The Subjectivity of the Translator and Socio-cultural Norms." *English Language Teaching* 3 (3): 29-34.
- Pellatt, Valerie. 2013. *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Pessoa, Fernando. 2011. *Livro do Desassossego*. São Paulo: Editora Schwarcz S.A.
- Phillips, Angus. 2007. "How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover." In *Judging a Book by Its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers, and the Marketing of Fiction*, edited by Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody, 19-30. Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Popovič, Anton. 1976. "Aspects of Metatext." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 3 (3): 225-235.
- Pym, Anthony. 2011. "The Translator as non-Author, and I am sorry about that." In *The Translator as Author: Perspectives on Literary Translation: Proceedings of the International Conference, Università per Stranieri of Siena, 28-29 May 2009*, edited by Claudia Buffagni, Beatrice Garzelli and Serenella Zanotti, 31-43. Berlin: Lit.
- . 2020. "Translator Ethics: From Cooperation to Risk and Trust." Translation Seminar Series. Hong Kong Baptist University [online event], 24 September, 2020.
- Qvale, Per. 2014. *From St. Jerome to Hypertext: Translation in Theory and Practice*. Translated by Norman R. Spencer. London: Routledge.
- Rabadán, Rosa. 1991. *Equivalencia y traducción*. León: Universidad de León.
- Rabassa, Gregory. 1989. "No Two Snowflakes Are Alike: Translation as Metaphor." In *The Craft of Translation*, edited by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, 1-12. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2005. *If This Be Treason: Translation and Its Dyscontents: A Memoir*. New York: New Directions.
- Reiss, Katharina. 1981. "Type, Kind and Individuality of Text: Decision Making in Translation." *Poetics Today* 2 (4): 121-131. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1772491>.
- Robinson, Douglas. 1991. *The Translator's Turn*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rockenberger, Annika. 2014. "Video Game Framings." In *Examining Paratextual Theory and Its Applications in Digital Culture*, edited by Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon, 252-286. Pennsylvania: Information Science Reference.
- Ros, María Íñigo. 2003. *Cultural Terms in King Alfred's Translation of the "Consolatio Philosophiae"*. Valencia: Universidad de Valencia.
- Rose, Julie. 2009. A new Translation of *Les Misérables*. Interview by Peter Mares. ABC Radio National.
- . 2013. "The Art of Hearing the Voice." In *Perspectives on Literature and Translation: Creation, Circulation, Reception*, edited by Brian Nelson and Brigid Maher, 13-30. New York: Routledge.
- Sanconie, Maïca. 2007. "Préface, postface, ou deux états du commentaire par des traducteurs." *Palimpsestes. Revue de traduction* (20): 177-200.
- Sartarelli, Stephen. 2004. "L'alterità linguistica di Camilleri in inglese." Il caso Camilleri: letteratura e storia, Sellerio, Palermo.
- Savić, Vera, and Ilijana Čutura. 2011. "Translation as Cultural Transposition." *The Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education* 4: 125-265.
- Schwartz, Ros, and Nicholas De Lange. 2006. "A Dialogue: On a Translator's Interventions." In *The Translator as Writer*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, 9-19. London/New York: Continuum.
- Scott, Clive. 2006. "Translating the Literary: Genetic Criticism, Text Theory and Poetry." In *The Translator as Writer*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, 106-118. London/New York: Continuum.
- . 2018. *The Work of Literary Translation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sonzogni, Marco. 2011. *Re-Covered Rose: A case Study in Book Cover Design as Intersemiotic Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Steiner, George. 1975. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Sturge, Kate. 2009. "Cultural Translation." In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha. London/New York: Routledge.
- Taffarel, Margherita. 2012. "Un'analisi descrittiva della traduzione dei dialoghi dei personaggi di Andrea Camilleri in castigliano." in *TRAlinea* (Special Issue: The Translation of Dialects in Multimedia II). <http://www.intralinea.org/specials/article/1843>.
- Tahir-Gürçaglar, Şehnaz. 2014. "What Texts Don't Tell: The Uses of Paratexts in Translation Research." In *Crosscultural Transgressions: Research Models in Translation: v. 2: Historical and Ideological Issues*, edited by Theo Hermans. Manchester: Taylor and Francis.
- Toury, Gideon. 1995. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Tymoczko, Maria. 2012. "Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation." In *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, 19-40. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Venuti, Lawrence. 2018. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Routledge Translation Classics. Oxon: Routledge.
- Vermeer, Hans J. 2012. "Skopos and Commission in Translation Theory." In *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, 191-202. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Vignol, Mireille. 2010. Translating Australian Fiction into French. Interview by Ramona Koval. ABC Radio National.
- Weaver, William. 1989. "The Process of Translation." In *The Craft of Translation*, edited by John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, 117-124. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, Rita. 2005. "Eco Effects." *Meanjin* 64 (4): 119-123.
- Wolf, Michaela. 2002. "Culture as Translation – and Beyond: Ethnographic Models of Representation in Translation Studies." In *Crosscultural Transgressions: Research Models in Translation Studies*, edited by Theo Hermans, 180-92. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Wright, Chantal. 2016. *Literary Translation*. London: Routledge.
- Xu, Minhui. 2012. "On Scholar Translators in Literary Translation – A Case Study of Kinkley's Translation of *Biancheng*." *Perspectives Studies in Translatology* 20 (2): 151-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2011.554610>.

Part Two: Translation of *La festa dei limoni*

Marco Braico

When Life Gave Me Lemons

Translator's Preface

When Marco Braico first asked me to translate this book, I laughed it off, thinking it was a joke. But the seed had been sown and it started to consume my thoughts and dreams – maybe it's not such a crazy idea, I thought to myself. Our paths crossed at a high school just outside of Turin, the *Istituto d'istruzione superiore Majorana*, in early 2015. I was volunteering there as a teacher assistant the day Braico came to present his book to the school. I listened among the students, attentive and captivated by his story and the way he dealt with a serious topic in such a respectful yet entertaining manner. He shared how his lived experience of beating leukaemia had inspired him to write a novel and establish a fundraising project. The overarching goal would be to donate equipment to Italian hospitals to make the patients' experience a little easier, as well as to spread a message of joy and hope to those affected by the same illness. I think it was his integrity, honesty and sense of humour that struck me the most, all before opening the first page of *La festa dei limoni*. I left Italy with a copy of the book and the possibility of a translation bubbling inside me.

I have kept in touch with Braico over the years and I always make sure to pay him a visit when I'm in Italy. He has always been supportive and encouraging, and I feel extremely lucky to have been trusted so whole-heartedly with the translation. After my initial reading of the text, I knew that translating it would be the perfect challenge; I began to wonder how I could convey the culture-specific elements, the Italianness, the contemporary view of Italy, to Australian readers. I have endeavoured to interpret every word, nuance, conversation and character as deeply as possible. Translation is about research, discussions, decisions and doubts. This end product you are reading is one possible version, consisting of final decisions between synonyms, word play, puns and other expressions that involve much more than replacing the word. I have kept you – the reader – in the foreground throughout the process, striving to find the balance between leaving cultural references alone, explaining them, or adapting them when they would otherwise have caused confusion. I have striven to act as the bridge between the two languages and two cultures, so that your reading experience is as enjoyable as it has been for the countless Italian readers.

There will be times in which particular words or expressions remind you that you're reading an Italian book; and while I have opted not to include a glossary, italicised words may encourage the curious reader to follow up a foreign word. The initial goal of the translation was to help spread Braico's story and expand his fundraising project; however, it has become much more than that (particularly now that the project has ceased to exist). The goal of this translation is to provide you with company, joy, and the gift of travelling to Northern Italy through the pages of this book.

Allira Hanczakowski (The translator)

To Paola, Fabiana and Marianna.
To the doctors and nurses who recognise themselves
in these pages.
To my past, present and future students.
To all those who find themselves reading, laughing
and breathing...
To you...

PART ONE
SPICY SALAMI
AND CRACKED OLIVES

This is the true beginning of a new story

1.

Today is Sunday, here in Menton the sun is glorious, and behind me I hear the sound of the local farmers' market selling lemons at a very high price: they look so appealing that I can't resist and buy a kilo for four euro. I don't think I could possibly get through the day without the honour of having them in my bag and so I'm looking for an excuse to buy them and have a taste. Got it. Over there you can see a permanent stand, in masonry, the kind that is washed properly in the evening and then is left there, alone in the dark the entire night. It's selling fish. I buy some mussels which are smaller than the ones you find back home in Turin, and above all else, they are extremely expensive, but a very classy gentleman buying some next to me assures me: "They're local. Once you have a taste, you'll be back to buy them," and so I brighten up and happily pay the price, and plus...it's Sunday. Now we've got a perfectly good reason for having bought the lemons and we can easily plan a feast on the beach, Apulian-style. You can keep your sushi and *plateau royal*.

Stefania, our son Roberto, and I are sitting on the sand together with Michele and Nicoletta, facing towards the sea, almost wanting to give ourselves a common point of reference. I'm a maths teacher and in that field, reference points are important. I remember one day, I was in a year ten, stream A class, and I was beginning to explain analytical geometry to those easy-going, sluggish sixteen-year-olds: it was 8:20 in the morning and they were about as attentive as a group of sedated patients from Alcoholics Anonymous.

All of a sudden Martini, second row near the window, pipes up and confidently says to me: "But why can't we make the x and y axes go from right to left and top to bottom?"

Nooo...how was I meant to respond? I decided to say to him: "Yes, Martini, go for it, you're the only one in the world to do so, but go ahead, just don't get angry if we put you in the coffin upside down when you die, as a reminder of all the crap you've said in life."

There must be a reason why everyone who goes to the beach looks at the sea and the horizon but not at the hills behind them or the train station, right? There must be a reason why everyone who goes hiking in the mountains looks at the peak and not at the valley, right?

It's not hot, it's the 2nd of March, yet three children are swimming, braving the freezing water of the French Riviera. The water of the French Riviera is lighter and clearer than it is in Western Liguria, but it's colder, and this simply happens crossing the border between Italy and France, just as the language spoken changes too, not only among the citizens but also on the radio.

The Lemon Festival is this afternoon; I had heard about it, but I must admit that seeing it in person is something else entirely, it feels like you're on TV. Large structures, built entirely from yellow and orange citrus fruits mounted with wire, zigzag through the streets. The overall effect truly is impressive. It feels like you're taking part in the float parade of any old Carnival, but the

liveliness of the few, yet bright colours and the fullness of the structures encourages entirely different emotions.

The actual festival starts mid-afternoon, but I won't see it because I don't like chaos. I prefer walking around the markets, maybe looking for a nice flower stall, even if I don't really like flowers either, they make me feel like I'm at a cemetery...maybe at the funeral of Martini, from the year ten, stream A class.

It's inevitable: my mind keeps going to that annoying little pain in my left hip.

2.

Roberto's happy and he's playing in the sand next to a little French girl who is very proud of the hole she cleverly created with her wonderful little hands, which turned into real caterpillars for the occasion. She seems sweet and has soft features wrapped in straight, fair hair, but she already has those typical French manners and she's looking at Roberto with superiority, as if wanting to declare that her crappy hole is more of a hole than his, and that regardless of how much he tries, he will never be able to dig a hole in the sand like that. I really can't stand the French.

The little devil's dad adds the touch of class, he looks at me with a pitiful and defiant smirk, hinting at what the French can do on one hand, and what the Italians can do on the other. That little girl will become a true Frenchwoman and she should immediately be taught modesty and love for Italy and Italians, wine included, and she'll have to be the one to bring the Mona Lisa back to Italy. Watching them play in the sand makes me think about all those engineers from *Mattel*, *Editrice Giochi* and other similar companies, who struggle to find something that excites children's interest, continually coming up with new products; maybe they too would be better off playing in the sand and with their children.

On Thursdays, in the second hour of classes, I meet with my students' parents, or rather, the lawyers of the teenagers who each morning enter the classes I teach. One of these meetings revealed the sharpness of engineers. Mr Ghirada, an engineer, had hoped to convey solidarity to me, regarding my extremely negative opinion of the progress of his son, Mattia. He told me that the previous week Mattia had crossed the line and so he, the engineer, called him in, or rather he got his secretary to call him in, to his office and asked him to take a seat over where his employees would get 'anointed' by his reprimands. He said to me: "You see *professore*, you and I understand maths and he needs to understand it like we do, otherwise he'll just get thrashed in life. So, I gave him some medium and long-term goals."

The engineer had given his son some goals. That's exactly what he said. I was sitting right in front of him and I couldn't believe it, even though I was quite used to it. I let the phase of persuasion pass, which involved the engineer wanting to win me over, and when it seemed like enough, I took the floor and said to him: "You see, *ingegnere*, guys like Mattia have other channels of communication, your company's boardroom may not be the most suitable place to connect with your son, try taking him to the stadium; Juventus are playing on Sunday, how about just the two of you go along and it will all be easier."

"*Professore* Longo, I'm an Inter supporter," he replied. Well, war it is. Failing Ghirada in June.

It's lunchtime now so we all head up towards the Winter Palace, which is an old Russian residency, now subdivided into small apartments. A delicious lunch is waiting for us there. There's no denying that my sister Nicoletta can catch the culinary attention of anyone, particularly if she ventures into the delightful world of homemade pasta. Where my family was born, in Lucania, now known as Basilicata, they produce first-class food, but there's one that beats them all: *caponti*. The recipe is simple but effective: it's a matter of combining durum wheat flour with water, and the entire art lies within the word 'combine'. When your hands feel that the dough has reached the right consistency and amount of moisture, you make it into sausage shapes as thin as your little finger, and from these you break off small strips the length of your little finger (the other one); these are then stabbed with three fingers and you roll them towards you, pressing them along the edge of the wooden board. Studying solid and cylindrical shapes helps us in situations like these: maths = art. Making the sauce is very simple: a few ripe tomatoes, slightly cooked, together with garlic and very fresh basil. You drain the *caponti*, add them to the sauce and while a cloud of steam engulfs it, you mix it all on a high flame. The result is a triumph. A+.

Nicoletta has the same surname as me and she's the littlest of my three sisters, little in every sense but huge in the kitchen. She doesn't have what most women have. She doesn't have 'little time for cooking', she has little time for anything else. While Nicoletta prepares lunch, Michele, my brother-in-law, and I linger in the beautiful park at the entrance, admiring the variety of flowers and palm trees. The palm trees are standard, but in this garden there's an extraordinary concentration of them, and given the steepness of the land, you get to enjoy a lovely view of them. They really are beautiful. Roberto keeps drawing patterns on the gravel path with a stick, while the two of us 'rearrange' the new government and we get into a great game: predicting the fate of a world 'with us in charge'. The question is always the same: "What are the people saying?" Of course, we're referring to their approval of Berlusconi's government. How can you respond to a question like that? "There are only two answers," I tell him, "and both are on the border of the truth, which only the people know." He looks at me curiously, yet eager to give his own answer. "You see, Michele, I'm going to tell you the truth which you don't want to hear, but I know very well that you agree with what I'm about to say." At this point he lets go and concentrates on my words.

"Come on, let's hear it," he retorts.

"Michi, my boy, people don't give a shit about politics, get over it my friend, let that weight go and start enjoying the soccer league, that's where you'll find a lively debate. It's the culture of the 2000s."

These words are like a knife in the heart to him. He lowers his gaze, almost wanting to banish the idea that the passion which has fuelled his life and brightened his nights wasn't able to soak into other people's minds, but rather it's dissolving, even in those few who had once embraced it. Michele grew up plagued by good politics, which is favourable and perfectly rational, but it's like having a parasite that takes away your nourishment and keeps it all for itself.

"But politics is everything," he insists, "how can people not give a shit about it?"

I can't help but think about my students, or should I say, the students who I try to teach after educating them about good manners. When they're in their final year they always have a little booklet in their bag which they cherish the same way a Jew cherishes the Torah: their driver's license handbook. Why would you expect them to be thinking about politics? When I ask them: "This year some of you will officially become adults and so you will gain a very important responsibility. What is it?" The answer is: "Learners permit, *prof*!" Your response is similar to that of someone who has just avoided a head-on accident. You get an adrenaline rush, followed by cold shivers and feeling faint!

Michele is gazing towards the ground again; this is the mind's meagreness. The mind becomes smaller or larger depending on the quality of relationships and conversations. A small mind thinks in an essential and unique way, it dedicates itself entirely to a single theme, losing perspective, but it also has a shield against the big lies of public discourse. A small mind is the source of good health and it produces pure ideas, with no fat around them.

All of a sudden Michele's face changes, almost with resignation, he looks at me intimately, tenderly, rationally, and asks me: "Are you going to the hospital to get yourself checked out tomorrow? Go on, just in case." At that precise moment the fate of the world comes to mind, my world.

3.

Just the other day, on Friday afternoon, during one of those maths tests preparing the year twelves for their final exams, I kept feeling a distinct little pain in my right hip, which would magically reappear at the command of a breath. Explaining the intensity of pain isn't easy. Physicists and doctors haven't invented a *pain-o-meter* yet, but we'll get there sooner or later, seeing that TV companies already invented and started using an *applause-o-meter* a couple of years ago. (As I was writing my notes in Word, I was shocked when the word 'pain-o-meter' was underlined in red by auto-correct, while 'applause-o-meter' got through.)

You can attempt to make other people understand the pain you're feeling, by giving them a basis for comparison, and out come phrases such as: "It's like getting stabbed," as if the person talking had ever been stabbed. In any case, I try. Imagine running a long distance. After a few metres a significant discomfort, enough to be considered pain appears beside your spleen, then it increases and affects your pace and if you persist, it even forces you to stop. There, that's him. Now divide that in half, and then in half again, and you roughly have that damn discomfort which was keeping me company on Friday afternoon. A really tiring afternoon, but one with a great case study.

It was 3:15, and it was one of those afternoons when I run mock exams for the second written exam. That's right, because one of the things that students need to get used to is time management. In class, in the mornings we have two hours maximum, while the exam is six hours. Managing time for the exam is different and plus, it's good for them to come across challenges as they go, like figuring out how to actually use a scientific calculator, and get from DEG to RAD. Calculators are shared between siblings, passed among each other and borrowed between classes, so they barely know how to use them. Just like iPhone engineers.

The front runners of maths started to hand theirs in. This category of people is divided into two subgroups. The first consists of the *experts*, those who wish to leave the teacher with an image of Japanese-like efficiency: fast and reliable. The second subgroup is that of the so-called *rockets*, those who consider staying back for an afternoon to do a maths test in preparation for the exam to be a massive hassle. They are well aware that they don't understand anything anyway and that one hour more or one hour less won't change anything. Plus, Friday afternoon is sacred to them, and they definitely won't let that jerk of a teacher receive their thanks for staying back late to "give us the shits," as they say. I don't know why I do this – prepare, supervise, and correct these mock maths exams that take up four hours of after-school time, but I let myself be tricked by the idea that preparing, or rather, training my students is the right thing to do. I'm convinced that the usual two, 50-minute hours available (which, said like that, seems like a scam at the expense

of the state and in part it is), isn't a true mock exam. The rockets leave almost straight after the start of the extra time (at least three hours) and they ironically say goodbye: "Seeee yaaaa, *proof*..." They basically propel themselves outside with a great sense of victory over those who stay and slave away.

That Friday, Elena left after four brief hours of work: she belongs to the first subgroup. My amazed look fell on Giorgio, a rocket, who was planted there for the final few hours which are reserved for the good kids and some poor, lone kid wanting to clear their conscience by at least using all the available time. His perseverance for writing surprised me and I decided to find out how come in the first two hours his eyes were wandering from one window to the next, and now they were fixed on the sheet of paper. In response to my question: "Why are you looking around? Work!" he said: "I'm thinking, *prof*." But now he seemed like a scribe devoted to transcribing sacred texts. I got closer and observed the wide array of notes in different handwriting and ink colour which was credited to our friend, seated right next to the exit of the classroom. In particular, I noticed a note written with a fountain pen, one of those generally used by girls; it was mixed in with his other notes which were written with a very miserable, light and fine-tipped, blue Bic on graph paper. That trickster, he wanted to fool me. I looked at him and thought: "*What the fuck are you doing? You haven't understood anything over the past five years and now you want to screw with me?*" When he saw me, he didn't even try to say anything, he doesn't have what it takes to be a tough guy, he just lowered his little head. I didn't say a word to him. Giorgio was the 'waste paper basket' for Elena's rough notes. I picked up all the sheets and decided to hold off on my decision. I certainly would be giving a useful message to the others as well.

I never find comfort and pleasure in catching them. If anything, I often put two of them close together in the hope that they'll help each other, but I just wish that at nineteen years old they would have a little bit of self-respect, as though to say: "*This modest effort is the result of my work and the skills I've acquired over these exhausting years.*" As a teacher and an educator this will never be a utopia. Though it did provide a wonderful distraction on that Friday afternoon. My pain was nevertheless there, and I couldn't bear the idea that it wouldn't disappear, yet these pains, which we sometimes label as 'annoyances', eventually go away. Yeah right, it even...squeezing myself I felt a little bump on my right, but...what? *What the hell is it?*

And so it begins, a process which I still experience to this day. My brain and my thoughts split in half and one part cultivates worry with abundance and continuity, just like that proverb: "It is human nature to dwell on one's misfortunes." This is exactly what happens.

At 4:34 p.m., I collect the last few tests of those who used all the time available, mixed with those who hoped for me to be exhausted and for some 'rough' draft to be sneakily passed

from the people who had already gone home, so they could copy. Like Giorgio, that genius. It was very cold and so dressed like a warrior, I left school and went home on my motorbike. I often talk about riding a motorbike, even though it's only a 200cc scooter. The reason I do it, is essentially to be entertained by the swift change in expression of my current *opponent* when I tell them that I have a motorbike. I become cooler.

My mind kept going there.

Even though today's Sunday and I'm here in Menton, I look for him, that little pain, and he responds as punctual as a Swiss watch. Damn. I'm a southerner and in the South punctuality is an offence and a moral pressure on others.

I'll go back to Friday's memory.

Suddenly, between one set of traffic lights and the next, it comes to my mind that Doctor Giacosa has appointments on Friday afternoons. Here, still, my thoughts keep on generating and the reflections feed on each other. How come a GP's hours are like a sudoku? Only two hours a day and never the same over the five days of the week. Of course, the answer makes sense: to give everyone the opportunity to access medical services. No objection, but why not make one day with an evening time, maybe from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Instead, there's a labyrinth of reasoning and the hours change in a twisted way: Monday 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.; Tuesday 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.; Wednesday 2:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.; Thursday 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.; Friday 4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

To anyone who is currently trying to find some logic, I welcome you and give you a loving pat on the back. There is no logic, or way of remembering them, not even for those who handle numbers daily.

I instinctively decide to make a detour. Scooters have that advantage, of allowing you to shorten the distance between saying and doing, reducing it to zero. Everything is simpler.

I saw that the lights were on and was very satisfied in realising that my method of memorising the doctor's consultation hours had worked. Open. There are still people waiting. In the booth where they organise the patients and the final versions of the prescriptions, I noticed a new young lady sitting at a desk no larger than a tray. "Good afternoon," she said to me, even though it was now dark. I replied so painfully politely: "Good evening, may I have a number?" I asked her. With her look of expertise, she asked me inquisitively: "Did you make an appointment?" It sounded much like an objection and that's when I just fell apart. Not only had I not made an appointment, but I was also convinced that if your GP's consultation hours are from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., and it's now 6:15 p.m., you are in the right *even if you didn't make an appointment*. I got it together and fought back. She asked me, kindly: "Are you not well?"

Now, in response to such a question made in the situation I just described, anyone would be tempted to smile because it may seem obvious that if I go to the doctor's then I'm obviously not well, but this is not always the case. In fact, many people love the game of going to the doctor's surgery to chat about fickle and freakish aches and pains without thinking about that poor graduate dressed in white who has to put up with them five days a week. So, the young lady's question was reasonably legitimate.

"No, I'm not well and I would like to see the doctor," I answered, insisting on an undertaking which now seemed colossal seeing that the other four people waiting would already oblige the doctor to work overtime. I'm not the type of person who insists when it comes to schedules and rules. Under different and ordinary circumstances, I would have ruefully taken a step back and with a muffled: "*I'm sorry, I didn't know you had to make an appointment,*" I would have gone home. Perhaps a little annoyed, but nothing more. I'm not sure what came over me, but that day I insisted.

"What's your name?" she asked me, almost to move on and give me some slight hope. She noted down my name and went into the control room. When she came out the response was positive: "He will call you," she said, even a little pleased with herself for having shown me and the rest of the room that, after all, she did have a certain amount of decision-making power when it came to breaking the rules. Today's a good day for breaking the rules.

When have I ever been to the doctor because of an insignificant little pain? When have I ever insisted with a worker who had denied me a service? When have I ever been this determined? Life is strange. I sat down, and the sense of guilt towards the other patients, or presumed patients who were waiting, increased; and so, my knowing brain gave the command to my face, which started to make grimaces of pain, almost as if to justify this privileged parade in regard to the expected, indeed compulsory damn booking. Soon after that, the fateful moment arrived: "Longo, Gabriele Longo." At this point, what happens to many people happened to me. When it's your turn for a doctor's appointment and your name is called, you're hit with an adrenaline rush which makes you hurry, run, and get your coat and folder of exam papers in a muddle. It's a way of not making the doctor wait, but also a behaviour which you hope can put you in a good light in front of the person who will have to decide about your health. It's an affectionate awe rather than a feeling of inferiority due to the doctor's qualifications. No one reacts with such diligence when their name is called out by the deli worker. Nor does the deli worker affect your health. I stood up, tucked my coat under my arm and went towards the room. A fed-up voice informed me: "Sir, your helmet!" Shit, my helmet. For a fraction of a second, I considered leaving it on the waiting room seat, but my damn mistrust made me go back and get it. "Thank you very much," I said,

smiling. I entered, and the helmet slipped out of my hands. Shame hit me hard, but the rush to enter dampened down the embarrassment.

“Good evening, doctor,” I said, a little bit out of breath, convinced I had an understanding man in front of me, who had looked at the ground when my helmet’s thud broke the religious silence that was engulfing the waiting room. He was professional and greeted me with a smile. “Good evening,” he said to me and with a clear and polite gesture he invited me to sit on the chair opposite his desk. The sick patients’ chair. “Thank you so much doctor and I’m sorry that I didn’t make an appointment, but...”

He responded, still polite: “No problem at all. Go ahead and tell me, what happened?” I was relieved and was leaning against the backrest of the chair, but still had my coat folded on my knees, my helmet on top, and my bag of schoolwork between my ankles. I started to tell him about my afternoon.

4.

I had spent Friday afternoon trying to make sense of my pain, just like any true scientist would. Students sometimes ask me whether there are any overlaps between what we study and real life. My response is that what we study isn't that useful because much of it is soon forgotten. What actually counts is the method we learn during our studies. It's our ability to dig them up that provides us with a different and greater critical capacity. If you were to devote yourself to physics, as I have with my life, you would certainly get used to being a mini-scientist even when it comes to evaluating the little things.

One of the best lessons you learn at the start of a physics degree is about the history of the experimental scientific method, which Galileo Galilei drew on to set in motion the transformation of the world. This comically named man abandoned the idea that the human brain was powerful enough to have all the answers, and, in looking for the rules that govern nature, turned to nature itself. Observing natural phenomena from an analytical perspective provided hints as to how he could start using his brain in a whole new way, and only the replication of the experiences could give actual scientific weight to the law he was trying to deduce. Pure speculation in the 17th Century was no longer sufficient. Galileo Galilei was once a genius, now his ideas are as common as muck.

For the entire afternoon I was thinking, *If I'm sick, I need to be able to tell the tale. In that case, I'll analyse it and explain it.* Unfortunately, my pain was replicated and so it was a fully-fledged scientific fact.

Doctor Giacosa is a well-mannered man and exudes great expertise. He doesn't wear a white coat, nor does he have the fed-up face of someone who has had to deal with a shit-talker coming and interrupting his appointments over some hypochondriac obsession. Lanky with salt-and-pepper hair, his eyes blinked behind little glasses as he searched my face, trying to remember who I was. His silence sounded like an order, so I began relating my story, describing a very slight soreness on the top of my left side when hiccupping and breathing deeply. I told the doc that the pain my body produced every time was a bit of a shock and I was therefore a little worried. He seemed quite interested. Too interested. Doc-shock, what a shit rhyme. Things began in earnest; he stood up from his chair and started fiddling around on a little table covered with steel objects: "Please take off your jumper, shirt, and whatever you have underneath, and lie down here, on the gurney." He actually said 'gurney' and maybe if we kept this up, he'd soon say 'jab'.

After feeling my stomach, he commented that my pain could be the result of an accelerated intestinal transit, a poorly executed shit, basically. According to him, I also had a slightly swollen spleen. A bit unsure, he asked me: "Have you had diarrhoea in the past few days?" How dare he

ask me these things? With the expression of someone who's scanning the recent past, I replied that no, I hadn't had diarrhoea, though I should have replied: "No, doctor, unfortunately no diarrhoea." Thoughtfully, Giacosa peered into his tiny, brown leather bag. A doctor's bag really is unique, and it's different from a lawyer's bag, which is also leather, but bigger and not as bulging. It's also different from the bag of an extremely competent engineer, which is usually made of black fabric and has a long strap. The style of a doctor's bag tells the recent graduate that the moment has finally arrived, to show off the fruits of the last ten years sweating over anatomy and pathology books. I can't imagine a lawyer defending a case with a doctor's bag, though the thought makes me laugh.

From that leather bag, he pulled out an ampoule containing a threatening, transparent liquid and with a very calm tone, for him but not for me, he briefed me: "I'll give you a jab of Voltaren, so that you won't be in pain tonight, then I'll refer you for an ultrasound. Make sure you get this done as soon as possible. I'll even note on the referral that it's urgent, so you will be able to go to the Emergency Department."

"When should I go?" I asked him.

"Tomorrow," he replied, dreadfully decisive. *Tomorrow, that means right away.* That's it, the damage was done and the following day I was supposed to go to Menton, to take my little family to the beach and finally see *ma soeur's* new house.

I decided to go to the Emergency Department that same night, because surely there would be an evening sonographer in the largest hospital in Turin, right?

Unbelievable, you get so used to uneventful evenings after work: cooking, eating, tidying up and ending up either sitting down in front of the TV or with a good book. Then suddenly, you find yourself having to do things that are extremely emotionally taxing, so you activate a completely new energy reserve. You get in the zone and you move with purpose, dismissive of the difficulties. You're a new man, you're capable and in charge of your own life. It's great!

I arrived alone at the Emergency Department of Turin's Molinette Hospital, and after walking up the access ramp usually reserved for ambulances, I approached the window immediately to the right. A young man with a dark complexion was positioned in a tiny little room called E.R. Triage, a name suited to a reality show from last season's pay TV. He greeted me with a big smile and got me to sit down on the sick-patient's chair. With a keyboard at his fingertips, he politely started questioning me about my symptoms. He didn't once look me in the eye, because obviously the screen with my admission form was more captivating. He sent it to the printer and handed me a slip. In the bottom left-hand corner, next to the word 'symptom', was an incomprehensible term: '*splenomegaly*', which I later learned basically means '*enlarged spleen*'. He

indicated a blue path on the ground, made of little dots, and said: "Follow the blue path and wait until your number is called." My number was 911, clearly highlighted on the slip with a little red circle, like those the famous tennis commentator Rino Tommasi used to draw when a point was impressive. I waited. Waited. Waited, and it was 10:33 p.m.

The individuals filling up the waiting room were quite strange, among them maybe only I and a few others were actually sick, otherwise it could have been the departure lounge of Pescara train station at two in the morning. Pescara is the only station open at two in the morning because it's a mid-way stop for the trains that run South-North and North-South. For those damn Southerners like me. A large woman with long hair and black leggings was fighting with her partner, presumably – a thin, grey-haired, unshaven man. They both seemed deprived of methadone. A man whose age was completely indeterminate was sitting comfortably on one of the chairs. He was sleeping with his filthy, bearded chin sinking into his coat, which was also putrid. He was wearing a woollen hat. A short woman was arguing with her tall daughter. The tone of their dispute suggested a considerable amount of social hardship. A classy gentleman wearing a grey suit and polished shoes was hugging his teenage daughter, almost wanting to protect her from these embarrassing yet completely harmless individuals.

Then there was me, in a lit-up corner, alone and afraid.

It was at this moment and in this situation that something bad happened: at 10:38 p.m., I saw a disturbing long, black box coming out of the doors in front of me, mounted on a trolley as if it were a gurney. Behind, in procession, a small man in his seventies was supported by a crying woman in her fifties. Another man and woman holding hands ended the procession. They were the relatives.

I made the sign of the cross and like a volcanic eruption, the night of December 30th, two months earlier, came back to mind, when in that same room and in that same box, lay my mother. The relative following was me. A violent rush of adrenaline. I got up and went back to triage. "Excuse me, I'm leaving. I'd rather just go." No sooner said that done. I signed the discharge form and went home.

5.

It was December 30th, the day before New Year's Eve, and that afternoon, I took Roberto to my Mum's house. I remember it like it was yesterday – we'd received a 'no' from childcare, so my mother had offered to look after Roby even though she was very tired. She was flourishing again, and I often found her down on all fours playing with Roby in the evenings. But not on that day – she uncharacteristically withdrew the offer to look after him. "Gabriele, darling, not today, I'm tired."

It wasn't a problem, but I was worried, so I called my sisters. That same night, Mum called me to apologise, crying from the guilt.

4:03 a.m., the phone rings, it was Graziella. I understood straight away: "I'm coming, wait at the door," I told her. I didn't cry, because I wasn't able to, but I rushed. I went down to the garage and got the car, awake and alert like never before. Let's face this thing with a sense of responsibility, I thought. In the car, 'Marzo' (March) by Giorgia was playing. At her front door, we hugged without saying a word. It was all a big rush, we needed to get to over to Molinette to be with her, so we had to hurry.

Unbelievable, Mum had called the ambulance herself at 3:12 a.m. When they arrived, and the paramedics pressed the buzzer, she put on her coat and went down the stairs, so that they didn't have to come up – she was determined not to be a nuisance to those people on night shift. She got into the ambulance and went off to die in silence, without being seen and without making a noise. She was like that. My blood has never lied. We are like that.

I go back home and think of her: "...Come with meeee, I will take youuuu...", Giorgia is still singing.

March, 3rd of March, I fall ill. No violent symptoms, just a diligent trip to the doctor over a trivial pain in my side on the same day I felt it. I had never been to the doctor before. It was her, Mum, I know it was and I'm crying as I write these lines.

6.

Lunch with my little sister and my political little brother-in-law at the Winter Palace is sensational, and the return trip back from Menton passes by very pleasantly. Having your wife by your side, someone you can talk to for four hours without getting bored, is lovely. Yes, my wife Stefania has a great gift: listening. I, Gabriele, have a great defect: explaining. She always manages to give me witty responses, which are never the answer, yet they are great tools for reaching the answer. She knows the paths I take and doesn't have any desire to change them, though what she does take control of, is time, and consequently, my speed. Yes, I explain to my year eights that to obtain speed you divide the distance covered by the amount of time it has taken to get there, and Stefania doesn't put obstacles in the way to slow down the clock's hands. She asks questions, the questions make me reflect and time expands, as if we function as the twins of my zodiac sign. One of us daydreams, the other one doesn't and in the end, we find ourselves with different experiences from the same elapsed time. I explain this at school as well.

Once we're home, we get ready to tackle the week of the 3rd of March, which for me, starts with the Carnival holidays. It's true what they say: teachers never work – they have two months of summer holidays and another between Christmas and Easter! However, this begs the question: “Why don't all those people who make this pronouncement become teachers themselves? Why?”

School is strange, you're able to organise additional days off for an unlikely long weekend. I take advantage of this and decide to go to the Emergency Department again because that little pain isn't going away and plus, I think Carnival sucks at the best of times, imagine now.

Just as I promised myself, here I am on my scooter in front of the Emergency Department of Molinette, a hospital-city where there's never a lack of 'customers'. I go to the same triage room that I ended up in three days ago and sign myself in. The nurse is very attractive, and she assures me that the average wait time is: "Just a couple of hours." Guaranteed.

An ancient loudspeaker is calling out numbers as if we were playing bingo and every now and then it alternates with an internal announcement: "Paolo to the nurses' station." On the tenth attempt, I think to myself: a) Paolo is on holiday today; b) he ran away; c) I bet it was him in that long black box.

My turn arrives after 10:00 a.m. Two sweet, smiling doctors greet me in room number one and out of the blue, one of them asks me what I do for work. "I'm a teacher," I respond, noticing her name tag thanks to her obvious hint. After matching her name with her profession, I realise that she's the sister of three of my best students. Mariangela Tinazzi. What a lucky bastard I am (so to speak).

Those kids were insane. The first one I met, in year eight stream B, was Oscar Tinazzi; a serious, polite and quiet boy. His glasses suggested he had a certain familiarity with books. His pimples dampened his ambitions towards the opposite sex, almost wanting to make him shy and reserved; in reality, his attitude was magnificent and over the course of five years of high school, his intellectual ability was able to emerge with impetus. Now he's a doctor. I've run into him on multiple occasions in the corridors of Molinette with a closed lunch box, carrying human lungs or other body parts. I'm proud to have been his teacher. Yeah, they were a good vintage, that class. When they were in year twelve, we went on a trip to Barcelona, and I witnessed what everyone was telling me: Oscar was a natural, non-genetically modified athlete and talented at all sports. We played a friendly soccer match on a dug-up little playing field, mapped out to us by the Power Ranger at the hotel reception. Myself, my colleague Biagiotti, and them. Oscar ran like the devil. His classmates called him Tyson. Even today, he's still Tyson to me.

His sister, Margherita Tinazzi, was even shyer. Her entire body would be practically hunched over from the discomfort of speaking to a new teacher; but I said and did everything I could to make it clear to her that she could trust me. It worked perfectly; we became good friends. I could devote an entire chapter to the friendship between teachers and students. The parent-teacher interview with Mrs Tinazzi was revealing. The first time we met, she listened to me with the kind of politeness and calmness that was unusual for a mum, but then it made sense. The students I had from the Tinazzi family were only three of eleven, so I had enjoyed only a little taste. She was an expert in these interviews, also because I only taught her last three; the others were all already

doctors, apart from an engineer who we'll skip over. After the initial moment of dismay upon hearing about such a large family, which I wasn't used to, the interview continued with praise for Margherita and some comparisons between the three siblings, inappropriate at the very least. Then I couldn't resist, and I asked her, eagerly: "But *Signora*, how do you make pasta for so many people?" She responded with a placid smile: "First of all, we try to eat together every day. And secondly, the process is the same. I boil the water and then put in the pasta, lots of water and lots of pasta." Simple, extremely simple. Margherita had blue eyes. I remember those eyes as if they were the ones making me feel uncomfortable, not the other way around. Now she's a doctor. The last of the three was Daniele Tinazzi, a mountain running champion. His average grade in maths: A. His handwriting was unbelievably messy, but consistent. He never once changed the pen that he used for five years, so the intensity of his ink was indistinguishable from the checks on graph paper. What a pain it was to correct Daniele's few errors. His biggest flaw was his arrogance, but he was polite enough. I couldn't put him in the corner. He would always react and prevail. Now he's a doctor.

Doctor Mariangela Tinazzi makes sure to tell me that I'm not just anybody and that she's almost honoured to be able to look after me.

"*Professore*, would you mind taking off your shirt and lying down on that bed?" Her eyes are blue as well, like her sister Margherita's, but lighter. Not dark blue. I stop daydreaming and comply, in a completely obsequious yet relieved way; and after a good squeeze they confirm that my spleen is indeed enlarged, and so is my liver. The other one, the head doctor, is filling out a little red form and says to me: "Listen, *professore*," – even she uses my title – "for now wait outside, then they will call you for an ultrasound of the upper and lower abdomen."

"Alright. Thank you," I respond, and after dressing hastily, I leave and take a seat in the waiting room. Never has hurrying been so unnecessary.

I put on my headphones and press play on Paco de Lucia: *Concierto de Aranjuez*, then after one short minute, it returns: "Paolo to the nurses' station."

8.

My turn finally arrives when the clock reads 12:41 p.m., and they send me off for the planned ultrasound. The doctor is blonde and very cute, and although I'm anxious about what's happening to me, I give it a little thought – *a good hunter may not always shoot, but he still takes aim*. After slopping ice-cold gel on my stomach, she spreads it on me using a gadget similar to a hair shaver, white and shiny. She strangely lingers on my liver, so I ask, concerned: "Something wrong, *dottoressa*?"

"Well, there are swollen lymph nodes," she responds.

"Oh my God!" I exclaim. At this point, with a smile on her face, the little blonde one turns to me and reassures me: "Don't worry, *Signor Longo*, they're the result of an infection, not a tumour. I know when we speak of lymph nodes, you lot think of a tumour."

Who is *you lot*? I think, and I feel like saying it, but I don't. I take a deep breath to calm myself down. My breaths are so short that I need to take a lot of them, to get enough oxygen. Right, I'm ready now, I'm calm and determined. I think that I've finished, but when I go back to the waiting room and it's my turn again, the two doctors hand me yet another small form, green this time, and they send me to have a chest X-ray: *evaluation of mediastinal mass*, states the fourth line. What the hell is that? Okay, let's do this, onwards and upwards, I keep repeating to myself.

It's torture, and it's already six in the evening when they finally call me for the fourth time; the two doctors must have received the X-ray. Panic rushes over me. *And what if their shift ends? After all, they've been here for nine hours, too*, I think. I enter, exhausted, they're both still there. The older one tells me that the ultrasound and X-ray results are 'clean', but there is definitely a bacterial or viral infection present and that their suspicion falls on glandular fever. Mariangela looks at me mischievously and says: "It's also called the kissing disease, prof..."

I almost feel uncomfortable, *shit, they caught me*, and I smile. Another little form and another blood test. Holes, gel, X-rays, palpating. Mum, where are you?

I proceed, still cooperative. This new examination is called a mono test and after exactly one hour, they inform me that this one, too, is negative. What damn luck, I don't have glandular fever, my kisses are safe and so are hers, Stefania's.

It's 9:07 p.m. when they finally let me go home, with words that will scar me for life: "Listen, *professore*, the routine tests from the Emergency Department haven't highlighted anything. You have a significantly high white blood cell count and a rather low number of platelets, do you see?" She shows me a red form, the fifth one today, with a list of acronyms on it and numbers next to them. Highlighted with a red circle, like Rino Tommasi's tennis signature, the following stand out: WBC 20, 000 and PLT 65, 000. Very politely, she continues: "Tomorrow morning, at 8:30, report

to the department you see written here.” With these words, she shows me another acronym: SHOC. Carrying on with the user guide, she attracts my gaze, now lost in space, back to the little form. “A colleague of mine, Doctor Segno, will be expecting you. I spoke to her on the phone not long ago.” So meticulous, I think. She continues, unstoppable: “Don’t be alarmed by that name. SHOC is an acronym that stands for Subalpine Haematology and Oncology Centre. But you know what? It’s just that they have more extensive testing methods. Take care and try not to worry about it.”

Oncology? Oncology? Shit, she actually said ‘Oncology’. I keep telling myself to stay calm, but I think this polite doctor is starting to piss me off a little.

Mariangela Tinazzi, clearly exhausted, walks me to the door and then, still in complete shock (but not yet in SHOC), all I manage to say is some crappy: “Give your mother my regards, doctor.”

9.

As I say goodbye to her, the parent-teacher interviews with her mum come to mind. It's a form of escape; my mind wanders to school, volleyball and the stable things in my life, which are Stefania and Roberto above all else.

For years now, my students' parents have been coming to see me on Thursdays. It's a wonderful ritual that can be interpreted in various ways and should be considered from three different perspectives, connected at 120° as if forming a perfect circle.

There's the point of view of the student, who can't stand the whole ordeal. It's as if they're trying to prevent the truth from being revealed. Students have a much better understanding of their own merit than their grade reveals. Yet the truth that they declare to their parents is far from what they perceive their merit to be. At the high school where I teach, the so-called interview must be booked to avoid overcrowding; it's always obvious when a student is about to advise me that their parent wants an appointment, it's written in their body language. At the end of class, once the bell has rung and no one is looking, they approach the teacher's desk and say: "*Prof*, mum has asked if she could come and talk to you next Thursday."

Their face is filled with regret, almost as if wanting to get on my side by implying: "*What can we do, it's the way she is, just bear with me and see her.*"

The day of the appointment arrives and, on these mornings, both before and after the meeting, the student looks at you like they're awaiting sentencing. After listening a lot and saying very little to the parent, I usually return to class. The student victim acts like the relatives of a patient whose surgeon has just come out of the operating theatre. He comes towards me and stares at me, trying to read my expression. I confront him with a stock phrase I've developed over many years of teaching: "Don't worry, everything went well, you'll be fine. Maybe just don't go home for lunch, stay around here and have a pizza instead." I especially like doing it with the good students, you can see the panic in their eyes. I absolutely love it and so do they, the other students that is.

The parent's point of view, typically the mum's, verges on the unbelievable. She has three fundamental goals: find out the truth, provide the necessary justifications, and judge me, in that precise order. Her posture on the chair is so unsettled that it seems uncomfortable. Only the front part of the seat is occupied, dare I say it, by *half an arse*. Her knees, sometimes chunky and other times not, are together and her feet are up on their toes. Her head is slightly tilted, as if wanting to emphasise that she's attentive, unlike her child. She throws around smiles and after the usual

pleasantries, which I hate but which work with everyone: “Your child doesn’t put in enough effort, he could do more,” she slumps down, enough to reach the backrest of the chair.

The second part of the meeting is handed over to the mum, who explains things and waves around a complete series of typical phrases:

✓ *And yet he studies all day.*

✓ *He has everything he needs.*

✓ *His dad has been sitting down to study with him since Christmas.*

✓ *He never goes out.*

✓ *Last night he was studying for the English test until two in the morning* (I teach maths).

✓ *His father is an engineer, but he doesn’t remember these things* (love it, he’s probably also an Inter fan).

✓ *He’s home alone all afternoon while we’re at work, and he even cooks for himself* (I should hope so, I think).

✓ *He’s always in front of that damn computer* (you can unplug it, you know?).

✓ *I don’t know what he does on that computer, does he talk with classmates, chat online!?* (seriously? Wake up).

✓ *He has to get his driver’s license* (what do you mean, has to?).

✓ *Do you think this is the right school for him?* (often regarding year eleven students).

✓ *He gets home late in the afternoon, then rests for a couple of hours, but after that he studies* (a couple of fucking hours?).

✓ *He doesn’t talk to us* (well, do you talk to him? And more importantly, do you listen to him?).

✓ *Will you tell him that he needs to study, he doesn’t listen to us* (of course he doesn’t!).

✓ *And yet he often meets up with Giorgio* (usually the smartest in the class...want to bet that it’s now Giorgio’s fault?).

✓ *He’s so tired, prof* (oh darling!).

✓ *There’s that young girl he’s crazy about but, you know, they’re young* (just as well).

✓ *They have too much to study* (there are always alternatives, like becoming a coal miner or a petrol station bum, dear *signora*!).

✓ *And yet he admires you* (what do you mean, ‘and yet?’).

✓ *He always talks about you.*

✓ *But how is the rest of the class going?* (fine, the rest of the class is going fine...).

✓ *I spoke with other parents too; the test went badly for everyone* (they always try this one but always lose, because I open up the marking book and show them the B's, A's, and A+'s of their son's lunch buddies).

✓ *Should we get somebody to follow him?* (what is he *signora*, a thief?).

✓ *But professore, what can we do?*

My tact goes out the window with this last question and I come back with: "What could you have done, *signora*. What could you have done. Anyway, rest assured, your child will get what he deserves!" Her expression changes. *Get what he deserves?* Shit. She doubtfully starts questioning herself, and this is where the faith in her glorified and protected child, which previously included threatening phrases towards me, inevitably collapses. Hardly any mums interpret that phrase in a positive sense. They all consider it a threat but it's not. What a wonderful world it would be, if we all got what we deserved!

My heart is at peace.

These meetings aren't something I enjoy, mainly because I'm not able to connect with the parents like I can with their children. Though I can pick out which student belongs to the parent in front of me, just by looking at them. The opening scene of *101 Dalmations* often comes to mind, where different types of dogs are walking in the park with their respective owners. Aggressive with aggressive. Cute with cute. Elegant with elegant.

I try to be reassuring, and I promise to provide guidance with homework tasks, to propose catch-up programs and projects, but I often realise that the parents' goal is to speak rather than to listen. Their eyes scrutinise me; they observe how I'm dressed; they assess the correctness of my elocution. They peek at the open marking book in front of them, as if they don't trust what I'm saying. Sometimes they even check everyone else's marks, almost wanting to see whether I play favourites towards another student compared to their little baby. Most of the time, parent-teacher interviews, or the so-called 'school-family relations' are such a pain. I prefer the relationships I build with the students a million times over, they're honest. They're slackers, but honest.

Hooray for students, boo for parents.

But this is only my point of view.

10.

Leaving the hospital, I find myself tired and a little anxious. My motorbike is locked up in front of the main entrance, like the others. There are nowhere near as many as there were this morning; obviously some belonged to employees who don't do shift work, like the administrative staff and the people in charge of the Day Hospital service. At least the weather is nice. For everyone outside of the hospital, it really has been a lovely sunny day, what you would call a good taste of spring. I go through the usual motions of unlocking my chain and putting on my helmet and gloves. Very slowly, I head towards home. I'm inevitably worried. Actually, my mood is a mixture of worry and relief. For one thing, kissing disease is very common for those who work in schools, like I do. Students kiss a lot, although the next day they often won't even hold hands. I spend the evening reading a single-volume health encyclopaedia, which I had taken to unburden my mother-in-law from her compulsory Book Club purchase. My reading is guided by the test results given to me by the two doctors at the Emergency Department. I come across everything, from glandular fever to Leukaemia. I'm partly scared and partly curious to read about all the symptoms and therapies. Eventually, late in the evening, I start yawning and decide I can't be arsed and go to bed. I nod off straight away, sleepy and serene. It's now 7:34 a.m. on Tuesday, I want to be on time.

I take my motorbike as planned, and after half an hour of light traffic, I park exactly where I had found a spot the day before, as if I had never left. After ten minutes of briskly walking through the very long corridors past the main foyer, I'm at SHOC. I enter and feel a clenching in my stomach. The rooms are filled with nice things. There are paintings, and blue and yellow chairs. In front of me, there's even a little rock garden, like those you see at Spanish train stations. I must admit that the psychologists have made a huge effort to turn what's usually tough, touchy and traumatic into something tender. There are four windows, just like at the post office. You have to take a number, and this is the first stumbling block. Which number should I take? Who am I? A sick person just like all the thin and bald people I see here, or someone who is just here for the day and will then leave? I turn to the Power Ranger in uniform: "Good morning."

"Good morning, can I help you?" he responds very politely.

"Yes, I'm supposed to see Doctor Segno, she's expecting me." I didn't even get the chance to finish my sentence. He looks down at the counter and picks up the phone, giving me a nod to wait: "Doctor, the gentleman you were expecting has arrived."

I think and reflect. I feel a big old sailor's knot in my throat just thinking about it. My expression must have changed for the worse. I try to read the expression of this extremely kind man, to figure out how I'm meant to act and behave. A tall lady with short, salt-and-pepper hair, who I immediately recognise as *my doctor*, appears from a small corridor. There are many different

roles for employees in hospitals, but those that interest us are the doctors and nurses. They know that patients, in the true sense of the word, could get confused so they mark their territory through their clothing, especially the doctors. Though not always. Here are some examples:

- ✓ Tall man with white coat, stethoscope around his neck, and several pens in his pocket: doctor;
- ✓ Tall man with pastel green coat: volunteer;
- ✓ Woman with coat below her knees and stethoscope around her neck: doctor;
- ✓ Woman with white trousers, white clogs and blue hem: nurse;
- ✓ Woman with white trousers, white clogs and red hem: head nurse, usually a bitch;
- ✓ Woman with white dress and white veil: nun, usually a super-bitch;
- ✓ Man with white trousers and white jacket: nurse;
- ✓ Man with blue or green trousers and blue or green jacket, hairy chest: doctor, often a surgeon;
- ✓ Man or woman with white trousers, clogs, and light blue striped jacket: person in charge of cleaning and distributing food, usually a real treasure and, if male, often a Juventus supporter;
- ✓ Man with blue jacket, blue trousers and white coat, finished off with a blue tie: Power Ranger in charge of surveillance or giving information;
- ✓ Woman, short or tall, with white coat and stethoscope around neck: medical student intern, usually a real cutie.

The dress code situation is much more complicated in high schools. Because if we were to mirror hospital policy, the principal would be in a suit and tie, and the caretaker in clogs. But it's not actually like this. The modern-day principal is a confident, casual jumper wearer, and so he should be. The male teacher, although few and far between, follows the principal's casual style but he often tends to get lazy and repeat the same colours and items. A philosophy teacher from my school holds the Guinness world record – certified by the year twelve stream B class – for having worn the same blue, V-necked jumper for the entire winter. That's a whopping ninety-seven days. Documenting the record was thoroughly planned the previous year and was recounted on Facebook with photos and all the details. Sometimes male teachers try to assert their political stance through their dress code. It's not uncommon to associate the teacher with the scruffy jeans and un-ironed shirt with left-leaning politics. My typical back row student, the one near the window, would be quick to label him as: "a filthy communist." The teacher who wears a suit and

tie for a variety of reasons, whether it be for elegance or to demonstrate his entrepreneurial side, is easily placed on the right by the most attentive pupils: “He’s a damn fascist.”

Female teachers are a whole different ball game to explore. Let’s begin with the first group, composed of miserable and minimalist teachers, who usually wear baggy items that are several years old. They don’t wear make-up and don’t take care of their hair.

The second group is made up of middle-aged women. They show off their black or bizarre-coloured suits, high heels and leather bags stuffed with scrap paper. Their hair is carefully tended, but it’s not the least bit suitable for a woman of the 21st century (in Rome they call it ‘the beehive’). They are often the target of wry comments from both their male and female students. Grey streaks are plentiful down the middle of their hair due to pitiless regrowth, the result of a dye job that’s several months old.

Then there are those who consider school to be a runway and they get themselves ready like a sumptuously laid table. Age is entirely irrelevant in these cases. Miniskirts and heels are matched to perfection, provoking an unbelievable hormonal outburst from the younger male students who, during their afternoons of little studying, wear themselves out in the bathroom or bedroom.

The last category is made up of so-called normal women, where every female teacher who has read the previous lines, wants to be placed. However, it consists of a small minority. Anyone who went to an academically focused secondary school, or indeed any type of high school, and wants to fish out their own memories, is welcome to prove me wrong.

The caretakers are the bosses of Italian schools.

The males are usually Southerners, convinced they found their calling when they obtained that government position where effectively, they can do literally nothing all day. Their clothing is unknown because it’s hidden under a coat which is worn for the entire shift. The short bursts of work in between all the smoking in pairs, don’t require any particular dress code. Especially since laziness is widespread, not only in their greetings when they pass someone in the corridors, but also in their physical movements.

The female caretaker, more correctly termed the *school assistant*, doesn’t do all that much assisting. Her dress code starts with slides and sometimes ends with a blue school smock. At the high school where I work, they don’t like wearing the school smock. Nor do they like wearing a hoodie with the school logo: they say that it doesn’t match their skirt. You can bet their slides match brilliantly, and they work perfectly well for distinguishing a caretaker from a teacher just in case neither of the two opens their mouth; of course, if there’s dialogue, the distinction is crystal clear.

The school staff is made up of pleasant, educated and underpaid people. But in some cases, they find themselves in situations in which their looks and personality don't do them any favours. These few situations stick with you and give many people a slanted image of the school system. In the same way a surgical procedure gone wrong ends up on the pages of every newspaper, while the thousands of miracles and cures are never talked about or seen in the news.

It's one of the worst mistakes that a society can make.

11.

The tall doctor has a sweet face and a very reassuring voice. She doesn't seem like a doctor because she looks me in the eyes while talking to me. She's not one of those *please, take a seat* doctors, like many that I've met over the past few days. She came up to me, giving me a smile that was professional and actually quite genuine.

"Mr Longo?" she asks me.

"Good morning, doctor," I respond, stretching out my right arm to shake her hand. She invites me to follow her. "Come with me" she says, turning towards a number machine to avoid standing in the queues. She hands me a number printed on a little triangular piece of paper and points out the queue: "They will call you to the window with this number. They will give you a form which you have to use to go and pay the processing fee, and a new number for you to take to that waiting room," and she indicates a room full of empty blue chairs. All the instructions make you realise that you're new. When you don't need to be told what to do anymore, it means that the sky is cloudy and full of rain.

"They will call you after 9:00 a.m. to take more blood tests," she says. "I will see you again when the results arrive, around 11:00 a.m. See you later, *professore*," she smiles at me again while walking away. Why *professore*? What's happening? Everyone knows everything about me. Is everyone talking about my job or...my situation?

I get in line and meticulously follow all the instructions. I go to the *yellow zone*, kind of like an ATM that is indeed yellow, where you can pay the hospital service fee. I pay the 18.36-euro processing fee and help two elderly people pay their contribution. They are terrified by the monster that looks like a TV. I receive smiles and appreciation, though I didn't do anything special. Only later will I realise that it's the smallest of gestures that make the difference between nothingness and hope.

When I reach the waiting area outside the blood testing room, I pull out my book, *The Pillars of the Earth* by Ken Follett, and try to relax with a bit of reading. I always keep a book in my bag or in my motorbike, because it's like a faithful friend who tells me stories I've never heard before. It makes me feel good, even when they're not true. Especially when they're not true.

It's not easy. The blue chairs start to fill up with thin, bald people, wearing little paper masks over their mouths and noses. They're accompanied by relatives who look sad and tired. The patients rest their heads on their relatives' shoulders and hold their hands for comfort. I'm trying my best; I read twenty pages and phone a few friends.

My turn arrives. On a black screen, a giant red number 76 appears, the same one that's printed on my little triangular ticket. I enter and say hello with what's left of my voice. I even let out a little coughing fit, more a result of discomfort rather than phlegm.

"Take a seat," the pretty nurse says to me, indicating a chair in front of her. It's next to a little table which has a small cushion on it, covered with sterile green paper. She has beautiful lips and a bursting smile. She turns around and starts reading from a sheet of paper that's full, very full, of stickers that have my name on them, as well as a barcode and other incomprehensible words that end with '-ine' or '-ase'. Then she turns to a colleague with a questioning look: "Wait, do we use green or purple for this one?" pointing to one of those stickers. What do you mean? Isn't it the same for everybody? What do I have compared to the hundreds of people who have been in before me? Colour? I think she's referring to the colour of the tubes. I'll discover later on that the tube's colour indicates which testing lab it's sent to. My battle will be with the light green ones.

"Nestor," the other one replies.

What does Nestor mean, I wonder? Then I get it, it's the name of the head of the department where they do that type of analysis. This triggers a deep and distressing reflection. They don't know which label to use, so I start thinking to myself: "What test do I have to do that's so rare?" They proceed; they look for my vein, and because I'm thin, they find it easily. They pierce it with a needle, controlled by some kind of dark blue butterfly. They repeatedly attach various coloured test tubes, which fill up thanks to the pressure gradient between the blood in my veins and the emptiness of the test tubes. Physics is fascinating. It seems like they use no less than eight tubes. Shit, there's also a black one. "Hold this," she tells me, indicating with her eyes the wad of cotton fixed with masking tape onto the hole in my left arm. "Take a seat outside. We will call out your name later, either to room 6, 7 or 8."

I get up, say goodbye and while holding my arm, I head towards a blue chair. A different one this time. Between one phone call and another, I wait for Doctor Segno – the tall one – to call me.

It's now 11:00 a.m. and I'm starting to get fed up.

A face catches my attention. She's very pretty. She's staring at the floor. The turquoise silk scarf she's wearing on her head as a bandana, to hide her baldness, is the same colour as her eyes. Her shoes have a slight heel supporting her elegantly exposed and crossed ankles. I reflect on how illness can hit anyone, how it doesn't ask for ID or your tax return before springing into action. Our eyes meet for a moment, but mine flee immediately. They're unable to maintain her gaze. I feel awkward but I'm waiting for the right moment to lock eyes with her again.

An internal struggle begins. I start playing out the scene in my head, where I find a way to talk to her and inspire a smile which she won't get from staring at the floor. I take my book and my bravery and move towards her.

"*Ciao*, can I sit here or is it taken?" I ask, pointing at the chair next to her.

"Go ahead," she responds, moving her bag out of the way. She lifts her gaze too, offering me a smile; it's mixed with a questioning look, yet still very sweet. I have already forgotten everything: where I am, the illness I potentially have, and a bunch of other things. I'm on the tunnel of love, like Dire Straits, although I'm just at the entrance.

"I'm a bit worried about my appointment and I just can't stand being alone over there with all of this entertainment happening around us." As soon as I finish my sentence, I get a hot flush. *What the fuck are you saying, Gabri? Are you crazy?* She bursts out laughing and says to me: "I'm afraid to say that tact clearly isn't one of your strengths! Speaking about entertainment here really is not gentleman-like," she says, and I'm worried that she actually means it. I try to redeem myself but now the embarrassment has knocked me down and it's only thanks to her reaction that I manage to get through it.

"I'm Danielle," she says with an unfamiliar accent, offering me her hand.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Gabriele. Excuse me for being an idiot. It's my first time here, I'm quite nervous and also frightened."

"Don't worry, Gabriele, I'm all too familiar with the effects of this hell, but you get used to it. You get used to everything." She pronounces my name so well, with the 'r' of a French accent.

"You're not Italian, are you?"

"No, I'm from Belgium. I was born in Bruges, my grandad was an Italian miner, but I've lived in Italy for two years, first in the South and now here in Turin." Perfect, I get ready to pounce. Just as Danielle asks me what I'm reading, I hear a female voice yell out my surname. I hurry in that humble manner a patient normally has towards the doctor, almost not wanting to hurt their feelings in any way. I'm unable to hide my awkwardness as I race towards that voice, taking my coat and saying goodbye to that very attractive woman. I didn't even get the chance to ask whether I had provided her with a bit of joy for the past ten minutes. Maybe I'll never see Danielle again. There could have been something magical in Bruges, but it dissolved right away, like snow under the sun. The wind changes when you least expect it, and she goes with it.

The first plot twist happens. I go into a different room than everyone else. Why? Why are all the other patients entering the rooms halfway down the corridor, while I have to enter the one at the end of the corridor? Number eight? What are they going to do to me, or rather, what are

they going to say to me? I enter and find three female doctors looking at me, almost smiling. They direct me to the chair. “How do you feel?” asks Doctor Segno.

“Great!” I respond with enthusiasm.

“Good, could you please take a seat?” she says, indicating the gurney in front of us, which is being set up with new paper by one of the two very little and very young female doctors. Two cuties.

I sit down with my legs dangling. This is where the check-up starts: stomach, throat, armpits, groin, then they let me get dressed. Silence. They sit down. Silence and stares. The tall doctor in the middle, with the other two by her side, says to me: “Unfortunately some problems have shown up in your blood.”

Words are invisible but sometimes they can be devastating, like fire, wind and water.

Smiles are devastating, as are eyes fixed on the ground. Memories are devastating, even the pleasant and sentimental ones. Regrets are deadly.

Having regrets is a mortal sin.

12.

Everything is falling apart. Today is March 4th, 2003, as if to summon an old song by Lucio Dalla with a similar title. I'm all alone, there's no one I can make eye contact with for comfort. This is how it should be. You don't go for a blood test accompanied by the police force's marching band.

I'm wearing an orange jumper which stands out amongst all the white. I'm thinking about the tennis match I have to play to make the semi-final of the Loano Banca Popolare tournament, in Liguria on Saturday. The three of them are looking at me, analysing me and almost pitying me; though I don't ever sense pessimism in their looks. "What is it?" I ask.

The answer is dry and doesn't leave room for any interpretation: "*There are immature cells in your peripheral blood. We need to carry out a bone marrow examination to find out more. Do you have children, brothers or sisters?*" Look at the mess these three bitches are putting me in. Are they being serious or is it just a joke? Unfortunately, here, they only ask you whether you've got siblings if they want to carry out a transplant, not because they'd like to snog them. No, they're not joking.

At this point, I take matters into my own hands and ask: "Do I have Leukaemia?"

"Yes."

What do you mean yes? Fuck that! "Can I go and pee?"

"Of course, *professore*, we'll wait here for you."

Of course, professore, we'll wait here for you. Wah, wab, wab.

13.

My father, a worker in the noblest sense of the word, always said to me: a person's weight and the thickness of their skin are measured by how they go from words to actions. And the higher the price to pay for putting promises into action, the greater the weight and the tougher the skin. There are real men, little men and nobodies.

I'll fight back. I must fight back! Iron and steel may break my bones, but not my desire to still be here for Stefania and Roberto. It's true that the human brain can react in unexpected ways. It has endless resources at its disposal, it's just a shame to have to call them to into battle only around external stimuli. I've always maintained that in dangerous and extreme situations you must remain calm. I can't stand people who get caught up in panic, almost as an excuse to not face challenges. Calmness can bring clarity. It's when the sea is calm that you can see the land, not when it's rough, especially if we're the ones churning up the waters.

But this time it's rough. Really rough!

Be brave Gabriele, apply your own theories if you can, I repeat to myself while sitting on the edge of the gurney in consulting room number eight. It may sound unbelievable, but I really did it. I asked if I could go and pee, almost with a smile on my face. I needed time to constructively plan out my reaction. I go back in. I ask if I can call my wife, and I do so. The phone rings three times followed by her voice: "Hey there, so? All good?"

"No, darling. There are some problems. Come as soon as you can and I'll tell you all about it."

"Oh God, I'm coming. Do you need anything? Tell me where you are."

"No, just hurry. I'm down the end of SHOC, room number eight. Bye."

"Bye." The bare minimum!

The three angelic doctors give me the chance to ask all the questions I want. So, I jump right in: "Can I try and recover? How long do I have left? What's my chance of recovery? Am I contagious? Does my son have a genetic predisposition to becoming ill? Is there a chance that I'll die within the next month?"

My burst of predictable questions is immediately softened by Doctor Segno: "*Professore*, slow down. We don't have the facts to answer all your questions. You're a scientist, and you know very well that we need data. So, after a bone marrow aspiration and biopsy, we'll definitely have a much better idea. Either way, we'll have to admit you."

There, I knew it: "Admit me?" Goodbye semi-final.

"Okay, for how many days? Two, three?"

“At least a month, *professore*.” Boom, I immediately think that this woman is a little bitch, but deep down, I know very well that I’m in the right hands and I really appreciate her frank manner. I respect her and I’m already fond of her. Damn bitch!

“Are you able to tell me where the best place is to be treated for this kind of illness?” I ask.

“The protocols are the same all over Europe and here or in Nice would be just the same. It’s up to you, whatever you prefer. We’ve got a bed for you here.”

A bed? We’re already talking about serious stuff. I think fast and I’m very scared. At the moment, anywhere else seems like a cemetery. At least I know these three.

“Alright, let’s do what we have to. But I would like to ask you all a question.”

“Ask away, *professore*.”

“So, if I hadn’t come in just for the sake of it, when would I have realised? What would have happened?”

“You probably would have come in within about three weeks, livid and exhausted with fatigue, and you would have gone into a coma within a month.” I swallow dry and sour saliva. Holy shit, heavy stuff!

The little doctor with glasses – I’m fairly sure her name is Valeria, because I try to catch everything they say when they talk among themselves – comes towards me and in a very faint little voice, she invites me to lie *face down*, as they say very often, on the gurney. She’s sweet and treats me as if I were a child. I go along with it in a cooperative manner. I don’t have the slightest idea of what lies ahead of me, I’m travelling towards an unknown enemy. While they expose my back and touch the area directly above my sacrum, which has something to do with the word iliac, I’m overwhelmed with thoughts and I start thinking about my life.

In a situation like this, I’d have thought my mind would have travelled towards the important things: my son, relatives, or even Stefania, who, when we go (from today on I’ll have to say, *went*) to bed, gives me a good night kiss and cuddle.

But that’s not the case. I think about Lance Armstrong, the cyclist who won everything, in particular, a multitude of Tour de France events, after announcing to the whole world that he had cancer. I don’t know why I find these thoughts comforting, but I know that it makes me feel like a warrior and I immediately get the urge to fight back. His yellow jersey climbing the Col d’Izoard mountain pass comes to mind, as does the famous Italian cyclist ‘The Pirate’ Pantani’s. I think to myself, Lance Armstrong is a fighter and he conquered his battle against cancer. I guess I can, too. Be positive, I tell myself.

Whether I win or lose won’t be determined by living or dying. What will make me a winner is my desire to fight, for myself and for those who love me, regardless of what Jesus decides.

The prick of the needle with which Doctor Valeria pierces me is intense. Very sharp indeed. The liquid anaesthetic burns as it enters, but luckily it doesn't last long, only a few seconds. It makes my fingertips shake at a fast pace. I think this is meant to accelerate the medicine's absorption. I close my eyes and wait, while holding onto the bars of the frame supporting the gurney. The doctors are fiddling around. They're unwrapping transparent bags, taking out colourful tools. Unfortunately, I see the stainless-steel needle which is going to pierce my bone to obtain the marrow. It's a long needle with a threatening diameter and resembles a Coca-Cola straw. There's a handle at one end to manoeuvre it, similar to the knife used to shave off parmesan cheese. A fat handle. I feel pressure, not pain. Then a dull sensation, from the straw being screwed into the bone clockwise and anti-clockwise with reasonable pressure. I immediately sense that it has successfully made a hole in my bone. I examine the situation with my eyes closed, and like a blind person, I'm well aware of what's happening to my now-sick body. The fat handle is unscrewed and a plastic syringe, with a very long but thin needle, appears. I get it. The steel straw will serve as a guide for the long and threadlike needle, which will pass through it until it reaches the inside of the bone. Engineers are just brilliant – they really know what they're doing.

"Now you'll feel a little sting," Valeria, the little doctor, announces.

"Don't worry, doctor."

"Ready?" she asks me.

"I'm ready, I'm ready," I respond fearlessly. As if I'm fearless! I'm shitting myself like a child and I clutch the bars under the gurney even tighter. Everything's stinging, from the back of my head down to my ankles. It's an excruciating pain and I want to grimace, but I'm embarrassed so I hold it in. I allow myself an almost-silent suction noise, like those that uncultured people make when they take a bowl and tilt it up to finish the final bit of soup. The pain lasts about twenty seconds. They aren't normal seconds, like those a three-year-old child would count. These are long, dreadful seconds. They last minutes.

"Have we finished?"

"Unfortunately, no. I still have to take a little piece of bone for a biopsy. It will take a few more seconds." What are you doing? You're taking a little piece of bone? You're crazy! She, Valeria, fiddles around a bit more and then finally announces that it's over. She puts a little gauze ball on the hole with masking tape, and then covers it with patches, like the ones used on bicycles when the tyre has a puncture.

"Turn over onto your back and try to stay still. We've finished." I'm not in pain. I try to breathe like normal people do. Impossible, my breath is short and laboured. I'm scared and I feel

so alone! Am I in a film or something? I wonder: “*Is there even a chance of surviving? Is there anything I can do?*”

Yes, I tell myself. Come on Gabri, be strong, come on.

14.

Many things and faces are going through my head. I look behind me, the door is closed. I've been deep in this shit, with no way out, for twenty minutes now. But I haven't yet swallowed any of it. I don't think I will swallow any of it, and if it were to happen then I'll stomach it!

Memories are pouring in. When I was at university, and would go on holidays with friends, it was nice; we didn't have any dark thoughts and we absolutely loved hanging out together. Sometimes it was fun to spend the nights fantasizing about things. Perhaps by the sea, sitting on that part of the rock that doesn't hurt your backside. One of the most entertaining games was imagining our future, by analysing what our past had reserved for us. We would think about whether we were part of someone else's dream, and what would happen if that someone was to wake up. Maybe we would study, play sport, have sex with the first person we met, or cry... And it would all be up to that person. They were the one whose dream we were living in. Then around three in the morning, the philosopher on duty would turn up saying: "And what if we were the ones that were dreaming about him? Or if he were from someone else's dream? Maybe an Arab or a Chinese? What would happen?" In response to these words, with the utmost nonchalance, one of us would calmly send out a loud 'fuck you' and we would all go to sleep. How wonderful were those years of being students, when you learned to smoke and make love.

Right now, though, I'm wondering what that fat pig must have eaten to put me in a situation like this: maybe a big wake-up would work for me. Nope, it appears that everything is real. You need to face reality, regardless of how hard it may be, you must face up to it. No waking up. No dream.

We hear a knock at the door: "Come in," says the tall doctor. The door opens and Stefania, my wife, enters. Her face is tense, with a friendly and polite smile. "G-good morning. Is Gabriele Longo here?" she asks, circulating her eyes around the room. She sees me before the doctors have a chance to respond. She rushes towards me, almost running into me. I'm still lying on my back on the stretcher, with the loaf of gauze under my back. Her eyes are staring with a questioning look. It's the look of disbelief, one that goes well with the fear of death. I lower my eyes, then I confess: "I have Leukaemia, Stefy." I throw myself towards her in an embrace and burst out crying, while squeezing her tightly and pressing my lips onto her neck, which is now soaked from my tears.

"What do you mean Leukaemia? Are you sure?"

"I'm not, but they are." I pull away from her, hinting at the three doctors with my eyes. They are gathered at the back of the room, immersed in a polite, and silent awkwardness. Very

professionally and discreetly, they leave the room: “We’ll give you a moment alone,” says Doctor Segno, very sweetly.

The two of us are left alone: I’m sick and she’s wounded. We can’t tell who’s suffering more. She transmits positivity to me: “It’s alright,” she says to me, “we’ll get through it. This is the true beginning of a new story, Gabriele.” Stefania’s eyes are swollen, not yet red, but I see expressions of hope and encouragement on her face. She’s a remarkable woman.

“We dealt with the death of a son; we can deal with this as well.”

It was 1997 when Stefania, six months pregnant, called me. I was in Pomigliano d’Arco, near Naples, on a business trip for the company I worked for before I became a teacher. “I don’t feel him moving anymore,” she said to me. The following day, she delivered him stillborn. He was an 800-gram baby. We never saw him. Then, a little over a year later, Roberto was born. He carried the beauty of both.

Her optimism, together with mine, makes me stop crying and allows me to calmly and rationally turn towards Doctor Segno, who has now returned: “What can I do, doctor?”

“You must stay positive, that’s very important. You also have to eat everything that is offered to you. You’ll feel very nauseous and you’ll vomit a lot. But it doesn’t matter, something will always stay down, you must force yourself.”

“Okay, doctor. I’ll try my best and no doubt I’ll recover. I’m sure of it.”

“That’s the way, *Professore*.” *Professore* my ass, I think. I’m dying. I take a breath and drink straight from a nearby bottle of water, without the slightest idea of whose it is. I look Stefania in the eyes and gather the courage: “I promise you that I’ll recover, darling.” Patrizia Segno’s words come to my mind: “There are good chances that you’ll see your son grow up, Gabriele.” Now she’s being kind. I burst out crying just at the image it evoked in me.

The boat has left the coast for a long journey that Hemingway wouldn’t have known how to narrate. All in all, it seems fairly easy. I feel quite comfortable in my role of a strong man sick with cancer. I reflect on the set of circumstances in my life that always make me the centre of attention, something I adore, so what better opportunity than this?! Then I think that these reflections are best left to the highlands of Tibet, to the monks there, the bald, orange ones. Oh crap, I said bald, what am I trying to do to myself?

15.

The data collection phase has begun; they now have some of my bone marrow and an actual piece of my bone. My back and my heart are hurting like hell. The thing I'm most concerned about is the pain I'll cause others. Maybe that's just me being arrogant, or maybe not.

"Can I go home, doctor? I'll get myself sorted and pick up some pyjamas and a book."

"No, *professore*, you can't. We'd lose the bed, and plus I don't really feel comfortable discharging you. We must take immediate action."

"I just want to go and give my son a kiss."

"Unfortunately, I can't let you," she has made up her mind. A hand strokes my shoulder, it's Stefania. "It's alright, Gabriele, it's alright, don't worry. Let's do what the doctor says." She's here and willing to face life with a sick person by her side. Although maybe not forever, I think.

"Okay. I'm sorry, doctor, I don't mean to insist. Can I make another phone call? Just to let my sister know that I'm here, and perhaps I can get her to bring me some pyjamas and a book. They're two things I can't live without." What the hell is my brain doing? It's decided that the most important thing right now is having pyjamas. Unbelievable.

I call Nicoletta. She's at my dad's house today.

Since my mother died, my three sisters often go to his house to keep him company and to fill the void that haunts him. The three of them are older and more important than me. Although I continually say that I'm their little brother, I feel like I'm their son now. Also, having lost my mother, the bar is now raised, and I want three mothers. Mamma Nicoletta, Mamma Graziella and Mamma Rosalba.

"Hi Nicoletta, I need to tell you something. I'm at the hospital, I have to get some tests done for that little pain I had the other day in Menton. Do you remember?"

"Oh yeah, I remember. So, what is it?" she responds in a voice that slowly trails off.

"Unfortunately, it's bad news. Some problems have shown up in my blood. Anyway, I wanted to ask if you could get me some of dad's pyjamas, since Stefania is staying here with me. I'm at Molinette. Give me a call when you get here, and I'll explain where to go."

"Alright sweetie, don't worry, I'll be there soon. Put Stefania on."

"Later, Niki, later. Bye."

"Okay, bye." I didn't like treating her as if she was a nosy parker, but Stefania really wasn't in any condition to hold a mini press conference about my condition. It's the first sign of abnormal behaviour. The patient, or perhaps a better way of putting it, the sick person, is stronger than their close relative. Later, I would often take on the task of comforting whoever was visiting me. They would come to visit me but then they would be the ones who ended up crying, for God's sake,

those wankers. Nicoletta arrived within an hour, together with Michele – the politician hungry for illusions. I took his arm and invited him to go for a little walk towards the VIP area, where the real cancer patients are. The other cancer patients. I had already eaten my first meal there: Sardinian pasta with tomato, which congealed into one big clump of pasta on the plate. It was all or nothing.

“Listen, Michele, promise me one thing while I’m still able to think straight, because from what I’ve seen around here, soon only a rough outline of me will remain.”

“Relax, what is it?” He’s worried about the hefty promise. He’s the only one I know I can trust. He taught me so much when he used to come to our house as Nicoletta’s boyfriend, back when I was a child. He would take me to the cinema, we would play chess and he even took me to Puglia so we could jump off the rocks and collect sea urchins with a plastic knife. Today it’s my turn to take him somewhere. Hell, that’s where I’m taking him.

“Promise to always tell me everything, Michele, don’t ever keep me in the dark, whether it concerns me or someone else in our family. Please, even if it’s bad news, we’ll be able to deal with it.”

“I promise, Gabriele. Just try to stay calm and determined. I’m sure you’ll win this battle.” Michele is my coach. He has been for my entire life and I want him to continue to be. Maybe one day our roles will reverse, like what’s happening with my father and my sisters.

I return to my audience, now all three of my big sisters are there. Nicoletta, the smallest (not only in age difference), is sixteen years older than me; Graziella, the middle one, eighteen, and Rosalba, twenty. Three women, empty and parched of tears. As soon as they see me, they greet me with obliging faces full of smiles, but they’re suffering inside. They’re suffering like they have never suffered before. Two months ago, they lost their mother and now they have found out that they could lose their little brother who they have coddled for the past thirty-five years. I reassure them. I’m doing it again.

A nurse arrives from the VIP area. She’s wearing a white uniform with blue trimming at the bottom of her sleeves. I have learned how to distinguish them all. I’m already in character and I take a step forward. “Here I am,” I say, as the seminarians say when they are ordained priests. She smiles at me, everything about her is cute.

“Hi Gabriele, I’m Sonia, you ready? Let’s go, follow me.” She sets off towards the main corridor, warning me that we’ll be walking for a couple of minutes. I follow her, she’s got a nice arse. My procession follows, because I’ve got a nice arse too. It’s the journey of those going towards sickness: all the way to the end, then turn right and finally cancer. The sick person with his loved ones in tow.

We arrive in front of the door to the Haematology Ward 2, where professor Gatto is the consultant. We go through the main corridor then the one on the right for almost a kilometre, and then we reach the edge of the hospital, the annex. Just like food in the intestine, before it gets shat out. The nurse, Sonia, rings a bell. What is this, some secret place? Why does she need to ring the bell?

“Yes?” blares a croaky voice from the loudspeaker.

“It’s Sonia!” I memorise the name, you never know.

Click. It opens.

Shit. Click.

“Only your wife can join you, I’m sorry,” she turns to face the entire group of relatives.

I turn around as well and look at everyone. I smile, clenching my lips and lowering my head to the side as if to say: *I’m sorry, I have to leave you behind.*

The only one crying is Nicoletta. I turn towards her and give her a big hug.

“Don’t worry, I’m sure that everything will be fine.”

“I know, Gabri. I know.” She’s crying way too much. As much as I would like to turn around and leave, I need to keep moving forward.

Through me it leads to the city sorrowful.

Through me it leads to the eternal pain.

Through me it leads among the lost people.

Justice inspired my maker above.

It was divine power that formed me,

Supreme wisdom and original love.

*Before me no thing was created except things
everlasting. And I am everlasting.*

Leave every hope behind you, you who enter.

16.

I enter the corridor the way you might enter a museum you're not interested in seeing, like on a school trip. I'm silent and my breathing is uneven. The knot in my throat is like a boulder, and that polite smile I painted on my face a few hours ago is starting to strain. A very pretty nurse comes towards me. I immediately notice her dark lips and elegant glasses. "Morning Gabriele. Follow me, I'll take you to your room." Oh god, she's being friendly with me too. She already knows my name and wants to take me to *my room*. I don't have a room in this place. I don't *want* a room in this shitty place. Nevertheless, I obey, setting off while trying to be as quiet as possible, like in a library. As we walk along the pale blue corridor, I glance into the rooms on the way to mine. The scene is disturbing. They're all in bed. They're all thin, and white or yellow. They're all bald. Some have oxygen masks and others have gas masks.

Jesus Christ, I can't breathe anymore, I'm already dying a little bit.

I enter my room. The bed in the middle is the vacant one, labelled 'Number 15'.

"Good morning, hello," a man in pyjamas says to me in a powerful voice. He then moves to the side as a sign of respect.

"Hello, good morning," I respond, my voice breaking from the lack of oxygen.

From her dark lips, the nurse casually informs me: "Here, this is your bed, this is your bedside table and this is your wardrobe," without entertaining the thought that I might not want to consider that bedside table, that wardrobe and above all, that bed, mine. Not now, not ever.

Laboriously, and with Stefania's help, I start to fill up the little wardrobe, but I absolutely refuse to put my pyjamas on. That's what sick people wear. I keep hoping that there has been a mistake, like what happens when babies are swapped in the nurseries of neonatal wards.

It is possible that someone swapped the tubes, I think.

I sit on the bed, but I keep my shoes on, my feet dangling above the ground. A male nurse comes into the room holding an enormous syringe, with an extremely long needle, and asks loudly: "Where's the new guy?"

"That's me, over here, good evening," I respond. The inconvenience in his voice makes me ache. What the fuck does this idiot want? The new guy? What am I, a troublemaker who has been sent off to boarding school?

"Who do you support, Juventus or Torino?" he asks me seriously.

"Juventus," I respond, almost smiling. Unbelievable, he's pulling my leg, he's not a dickhead, he just made me smile.

"Perfect. In that case, I'll be taking your sample, with this," he shows me the massive syringe with the needle pointing up, spraying out water or some other colourless potion.

“Don’t worry, I’m just kidding. It’s a fake needle. I’m Antonio, a die-hard Torino supporter.”

“Hi, I’m Gabriele.” We shake hands.

It may seem unbelievable, but from that moment on, everything felt different. Antonio and I became such good friends that a few months later I would act as a go-between for him and his sweetheart who worked as a nurse in the major transplant ward, who I also liked a lot.

Antonio places three pills on my bedside table, well secured by a square gauze pad. “Take these as soon as you’ve settled in. The red one is a broad-spectrum antibiotic, the white one is a cortisone and the blue one...the blue one...shit, I don’t remember. Just kidding, the blue one is an antinauseant.”

“Okay. Thanks.” I obey. I like this guy, let’s hope he’s here often. Stefania comes closer and says to me: “Listen, darling, I’m going home with your sister so I can get some spare clothes. Don’t worry, I’ll come back as soon as I can. Mummy will be back soon, yeah?”

“And Roberto?”

“He’s with my mother at the swimming pool, don’t worry.”

“Alright, here’s the plan: I’ll wait for you here because I don’t really feel like going out in the traffic; and plus, you’re not my mummy. My mum was a better cook, she used a lot more sauce than you do.” We smile and burst out crying. As soon as Stefania leaves, Carlo, the person in the bed to the left of me, next to the window overlooking Corso Unità d’Italia, steps up.

“Come on, don’t be like that. It lasts a week, then you get used to it and it’s not a big deal anymore, not even when your hair falls out.”

“That’s kind of you. When exactly will my hair start falling out?”

“It depends which chemo you do. What you got? Leukaemia or melanoma?”

“Leukaemia,” I respond, almost proud to have the more famous disease of the two.

“So, you’ll have to do six rounds over a month,” he announces with great experience. Six cycles in a month sounds like a real killer. “They’ll shave your head tomorrow or the next day, otherwise it makes a mess when it falls out!” Not my hair! I throw myself onto my bed lying face down, with my hands under the pillow and my face buried in it. I cry, I cry a lot, and I can’t stop. It’s already 6:00 p.m. and starting to get dark outside. Well, it looks like I’ll be spending the night here. And who knows how many other nights too.

If it has come to this, let’s hope I’ve got many nights ahead.

17.

Crying is comforting. It's one of our body's defence mechanisms. Your face floods with grimaces and your voice changes, it becomes like a child's. Then, if you're really suffering, you start doing a kind of crying cough, almost as if someone else is warning you that things really are serious. You're not whinging, you're not emotional, you really are crying. The liquid discharge from your eyes and your nose increases.

I wonder why when you cry, you have to wipe your nose as well as your eyes?

But there's a beginning and an end to everything. When you reach the stage of blowing your nose, it's almost over. The consolation of your body has been successfully completed.

It's like a storm. The rain starts slow and light and then goes crazy in a downpour of wind and water. The distant, dull thunder gets closer. Then a loud clap arrives, piercing your stomach and scaring you, no matter how old you are. After that, everything dwindles. You know that it's over, you can sense it. Another couple of downpours, which is the sky wiping its nose, then out comes the sun's smile, the one you always see in children's pictures.

We're just like the sky. When the electricity inside us becomes too much, we comfort ourselves with anger and tears. But the sun always comes out and that's what I have to keep in mind. Sometimes it burns us, but it always warms us up!

18.

Stefania returns during the evening visiting hours with pyjamas, a tracksuit, wooden clogs and toiletries. They've told me that personal hygiene is very important in order to avoid infections during the phase of aplasia.

The phase of aplasia!

It sounds bad, as do all the words I've heard over the last few hours. But then they explain to me that it's the period following chemotherapy and is characterised by a decrease in the number of lymphocytes, or white blood cells in other words. The soldiers who defend the castle from invaders are away for two weeks. I must be sure to wash my hands and mouth well. I'll follow their orders.

I ask if there's a gym by any chance, so I can do a bit of exercise during my hospitalisation. They laugh! "You won't have much time to exercise, Gabriele. Yeah, let's just call it 'time'..."

Why are they talking to me in code?

When I explain physics to year eights, I encourage jokes so that things are both fun and understandable. *What's the difference between the following two situations? a) A walking funeral procession; b) Running away from an insect that's chasing you. Simple. The first involves a steady, straightforward motion, moving at a constant speed, and if you're lucky you'll be following the hearse, otherwise you'll be in it. In the second case, understanding the characteristics of a steady, straightforward motion is totally unnecessary.*

Case b) is a different motion, in which speed and direction change with time. In this case, you're ahead of the insect and you're the one to determine the average trajectory. In the event of an allergic reaction, you could end up back in case a) as a guest in the Mercedes station wagon, covered with a white satin cloth. They – my students – laugh, but in the meantime they're learning. This means speaking through models and metaphors. It doesn't mean speaking in code, and it certainly doesn't mean making jokes about the future punishments of people who have just been cast in the role of leukaemia cancer patient. I get it, no gym.

Watching patients getting dressed is amusing; for whatever reason, they always seem to be in a hurry. Everything must be done swiftly, especially since you feel like you're being observed by your roommates. They are experts in the field and won't miss an opportunity to provide you with suggestions about the layout of your cubicle either. While they're at it, they'll share a little bite of their illness story with you, which deep down they are very proud of, especially if it's more severe than yours. "...Ah, but mine is the myeloid sort, the worst!" the fellow on the right tells me. He wants to belittle my acute lymphoblastic Leukaemia, known as ALL, of which I'm the proud owner and at this point even its number one supporter. Mine's worse, damn it!

I get undressed quickly and then pick up my pyjamas, just as fast, which Stefania had unfolded with love and kindness. Illogically, I rush and manage to make myself appear decent within a few minutes. Once I'm finished, I sit on my bed. I get up and then I sit back down. I wonder why I'm in such a hurry. Why would an inmate with a life sentence ask another lifer: "What time is it?"

"Stefy, shall we go for a walk up the corridor?" I ask her.

"Alright. Have you already eaten?"

"Yeah, vegetable soup. A massive stock pot."

"Is that all? Look, they said you've got to eat."

Here we go, the worrying has begun. This is just the beginning and there's no chance of it stopping. Everyone has become anxious. I can't stand them, it's like an army. I can't stand their protective ways. I'm fine!

Night-time arrives. My first. They turn off the lights at 10:16 p.m. I cry myself to the point of exhaustion. I fall asleep praying. I hadn't prayed for a long time, and it had been even longer since I'd done so as a believer.

Jesus, I'm begging you, give me another chance. I know you're punishing me for my flaws and my weaknesses, and that's fair, but think of Roberto. Speak to my mother, you'll find her there in Paradise. She'll tell you that I'm a good person and that I try my best to be a good father. Punish me with pain but don't deprive Roby of my presence. Hold off until he's older. I'm not devout but I've always been inspired by your values and I want to have the opportunity to do the same for my son and guide him towards you. Carry me along this journey and remove the suffering that I'm causing others. Put it all on me. And just one more thing, since I'm here: thank you for all the happiness you've given me over the years and sorry for not talking to you very much. While I'm here, maybe I could ask you to think again about next year's Scudetto. Come on Juve, and down with Inter, Milan and...Toro.

My energy diminishes and only sleep can restore it. Horizontality brings different thoughts than verticality. They are deep thoughts, stretching far in time, both forwards and backwards. The images of an entire life follow one another, like in a movie created by editing random clips together, from thousands of black and white, and colour films. My generation will be the last to have black and white memories mixed in with colour ones. Hidden and unwelcome memories appear. You sense a fear of death not for how it will affect you, but for how it will affect your son and the people who love you. Their pain kills you, not yours. That's how it works: the positive energy of the waking person is replaced by the empty or negative energy of the resting person.

The total amount of energy lasts forever. Nothing is created and nothing is destroyed.

As Galileo Galilei didn't say.

These are the memories. These are the dreams.

Final exams had finished. We set off on our first holiday alone. It didn't matter where we were going; I was hooked on the idea that going on holiday with Edoardo, who I sat next to in class, was such a privilege. We went to Abruzzo with our two-man tent and my dad's white Fiat Uno. "My last car...", he had said when buying it, and so it was. At the time it was new, and I was worried about the weight of this permission, but then again, a man who never made it past year one of primary school and who ends up with a surveyor for a son can't avoid lending him the new white Uno for his graduation week. Edoardo was a good-looking guy; he was bubbly and all the girls liked him, more than they liked me, but I did my best to keep up. During our final year of school, he had become very close to me, though perhaps it would be more correct to say, 'reliant on me'. We studied together and he managed to pass, thanks in part to me and my donated notes, which I gave to him in the same spirit with which I'd give someone a light, no sacrifices, just sharing. I was so proud! During the trip we called the school and found out that we had both passed the year, even though he scraped through with a low mark, 40/60. I recall hiding my high mark from everyone so it didn't put him to shame, but then luck went his way in life. Edoardo now lives in a villa in the hills of Turin, near the Agnellis' mansion; and he travels between his town, Collegno, and Montecarlo in a high-speed black Porsche Carrera. More importantly, I never told anyone that I did his topography paper for him, which was handed in for the exam. We arrived on the Tremiti islands, in Puglia, and after a day, he was already rubbing sunscreen on two topless tourists' breasts. What an honour it was to be there with him. I would observe him with admiration, as he did things which I never had the courage to do. I thought about the day that we would be going to Scalea, where my parents had a house, and that's where I would get a little bit of revenge: I would introduce him to Emilia. She's from Torre Annunziata, in Naples, and had beautiful lips which I'd managed to kiss the previous year, before receiving a nice "...Gabriele, it's better if we don't..." But that year, after final exams, I was ready to conquer. Emilia was there again, and I showed her off to Edoardo as you do a nice new pair of shoes, but with that sense of ownership typical of someone who has been wanting them for so long. He confirmed that everything I had told him about Emilia over the winter was true. The words *boly shit* coming out of his mouth were enough to show me his appreciation. My classmate had a succinct way of putting things. We drove to the beach at Marina di Maratea, where the water is coloured light green. We spent the day there all together, before making our way home, baked by the sun. A short stop halfway in San Nicola Arcella, a quaint little village, I lost sight of them. I looked for them and...I found them against a white wall. They were very busy, too busy.

The return trip was horrible, they were hand in hand, and I was next to them. *Vivere una favola* (living in a fairy tale) by Vasco was playing in my ears, through the walkman headphones.

I wake with a start, at 6:09 a.m. The dream I've just experienced has nothing to do with the place I currently find myself. I'm sweating. It's another day. The second of hundreds. I want Roberto. I want my son.

Roberto is a calm child. It's difficult to single out his passion because he's easily ignited by new things. Whenever I propose new activities to him, he responds enthusiastically, as if to tell me that it's my job to think up the next activity, because he appreciates keeping busy with new tasks. The terrible world of television has always captivated him, but the difference between him and his peers is the type of programs they watch. He's into documentaries and music. Since we bought a satellite TV package, a new and truly fascinating world has opened up to him. There are programs that explain the production process of an accordion, or of a skyscraper in Dubai. These programs are his daily bread, some programs even teach you how to make bread. He watches them and re-watches them, and he might come and ask me what the principle is behind sea water not freezing at zero degrees. One day we were watching a show where they were demonstrating how to make American-style pancakes. Roberto decided that we should experiment, that same night: "Dad, can we make them? Actually, can I make them?"

"Sure," I responded.

"Okay, I'll go on the internet and print the recipe."

"Which site will you get it from?"

"From *Casa Cucina*, that show we were watching. On the homepage there's a search engine where you can put in the key word, like 'pancake', and it shows you the recipe given on TV. Come on Dad, what world are you living in? Do you get it or not? Are you connected?" I've brought a monster into the world, I think. To regain some authority, I decided to throw one of our challenges at him.

"Roby, I feel like if we follow the recipe, it will make too many. How about this: we'll halve the amount and you can do the math to work out the correct quantities."

"Okay, yep!" he responded with a superiority that was somewhere between confidence and a hidden concern. Everything goes perfectly, 300 g of flour becomes 150 g, 100 g of sugar becomes 50 g, and so on. I knew where the enemy lay: halving three eggs. An unnecessary concern. Roberto solved the problem, with some advice from his mum; instead of dividing a yolk and its respective white in half, together they decided to destroy my rationality in favour of taste. The decision was final. Two yolks and one egg white. The big revelation in Roberto's brain happened when it was time to cook them in the pan. Roberto asked me a year twelve exam question, to which half of my students would have responded with the usual sheer guesswork.

"We can use the same pan as in the recipe, the 20 cm diameter one, right? We don't need to halve the diameter just because we halved the measurements, do we? Halving the measurements only means less pancakes."

“You’re ten years old Roberto, how will I find something to explain to you when you’re 18? We’ll only be able to talk about women and soccer!”

They were delicious, apart from the maple syrup which, like peanut butter, can only be appreciated by the English and the Americans, because the maple is a tree and you’re not meant to make syrup out of trees.

Roberto can’t come and visit me anymore, he’s not allowed.

You become aware of a child’s capabilities from how they play their cards on the table, which also reveals their way of reasoning. Being a teacher, I often have to describe my students’ psychological qualities and aptitude. I have some experience in such practices. The best time to fine-tune your technique is during the excruciating afternoon parent-teacher interviews. It’s like a parent’s version of Christ’s torturous journey on the way to his crucifixion, as they walk between the classrooms where the unfortunate teachers reside. I once managed a record-breaking feat, holding as many as 70 interviews in a single afternoon. I wouldn’t rule out the possibility of unconsciously mixing up the descriptions of the year eights with the year tens, the males with females, and the blondes with the brunettes. On these occasions, two special phrases are repeated, which act as wild cards whenever you don’t remember who you’re talking about: “She doesn’t do much work at home.” And the other excellent one: “He has more of a literary mind, so maths is a bit of a struggle.” It conveys the message that there’s some sort of problem, without offending the ‘lawyer’ mum.

A tried and tested method.

Roberto has a wide-ranging intellect. He solves maths problems with the same curiosity he uses to complete a written comprehension test. I must find a way to ease his suffering.

Having a dad with cancer kills both father and son.

21.

I keep my eyes fixed on the door to my new little room and as if by magic, a tanned, female doctor appears, wearing lovely red lipstick, as any woman should. She's friendly, and politely asks me to follow her to her office. I wonder what she wants? Is she going to give me more bad news? "Have a seat," she tells me, "it will only take a few minutes. We need to fill in your admission form." She may be dressed in white, but she's not a doctor after all and, for better or for worse, she doesn't have any news for me. We complete the form together and then say goodbye with a complicit look, which I'm sure is foreshadowing a very tight bond, though it may have just been her typical Apulian manners. I've got a good feeling about this.

"Thank you, *signora*."

"*Signora*? You can call me Santina, I'll see you later," she smiles, revealing how awkward she feels in these kinds of interactions. She's too sensitive, her politeness is a giveaway. She's probably a good cook, perhaps she makes Apulian *tiella*, with rice, potatoes and mussels.

It's 8:52 a.m., the doctors come in.

The other two patients in the room, the ones who are actually sick, greet them warmly and respectfully. I don't, I keep quiet and hug my legs close to my chest, showing off my short, white socks – the sort that sick people wear. The team consists of two tall doctors. One has a white shirt and a big, friendly face; the other is dressed in blue and has matching plastic clogs. He has a bald patch on the top of his head and a grey beard. The head nurse, who is a bitch from what I've understood, is on holiday.

The second doctor, the one with the beard, seems shy and doesn't speak much. Though he still puts my mind at ease. There's another little man who's listening, also with a beard, yet he doesn't give the impression of being well-informed or of playing a key role in the situation. He's the consultant, and his face is kind and reassuring. He looks over the chart at the end of my bed. I'll later discover that this is where they note my temperature, the volume of liquids and the weight of solids. Then he asks me: "Where do you teach?"

"Here in Turin, at the high school that specialises in science near the music conservatory," I respond, surprised. He's aware of my existence, I think.

"Oh, that's where my daughter went!" What are the chances! There might be a priority lane here, I think, but then I feel ashamed. We should all be treated equally.

"Really?" I ask, feigning interest. "How long ago?" I continue.

"Oh, it would have been about eight years ago. Is Mr Solaro still there? He was great, he taught maths."

Yep, I know the one: “He is, except now he only teaches a few hours. Actually, I took over his classes, I suppose I’m like his successor. I’ve got big shoes to fill.” I’m enjoying myself.

“Right,” he cuts me off, then turns and addresses the doctors next to him: “How are things going over here?” he asks the doctor without the beard, clearly referring to the patient in the next bed. They’re done with me. They didn’t say anything clinical, they just wanted to put a face to the name; but I know that they know the meaning of my chart, even if I don’t know whether they know that I know, and that annoys me a little bit.

“I’ll see you soon,” says the doctor in blue with the beard. He then lowers his shy gaze and leaves, together with the other two. How exciting. The excitement of new beginnings. The excitement of curiosity.

The Ligabue song goes, “*be happy with what you’ve got*,” and if he says it, then it must be true. Here we go. The routine has started and, as with marriage, everything starts off wonderfully but soon enough the emotional challenges begin. I get the feeling that this will be the same, but to a lesser extent. The start isn’t wonderful at all, it’s rather bleak. Actually, it’s a piece of shit. Then my scientific curiosity steps in. I start wondering about the things they’ll do to me and which I’ve always heard about, like chemotherapy and radiotherapy. I’m even curious about vomiting and losing hair. How will I look when I’m bald? Will I go bald down there, as well? Amazing, my willy will look like a three-year-old boy’s...and not just in length now.

The doctor in blue arrives. I sit up straight so he’ll feel more at ease and will treat me better. This is what everyone does, apart from a few patients, whose patience is long lost.

“Good morning, Mr Longo, do you have any news for me?”

“What can I say, doctor? We’re here, in Heaven’s hands.” It’s a typical, southern catchphrase, like my mum’s saying, ‘all in all, I’m fine.’

“We have the initial results from the bone marrow aspiration you had yesterday. It’s T-cell acute lymphoblastic Leukaemia. A nasty piece of work: it’s the same type that the Juventus soccer player had, I think his name was Fortunato. If you’d come in here ten years ago, we would have given you a room and just waited, unable to do anything at all. Now things have changed and given your good health at the onset of the disease, I truly believe you’ll make it. You’ve got about a 50% chance of recovery. If you hadn’t come to the Emergency Department so promptly, and if we weren’t able to make such an early diagnosis, you would’ve had twenty days to live, before ending up in a coma.”

Holy shit, how lovely to hear...

Nasty piece of work, Fortunato, twenty days to live, early diagnosis.

“Perfect, I agree with you, I think I’ll make it. Just tell me what to do and I’ll do it,” I say.

“Very good. Firstly, you must think positive, and secondly, you must eat as much as you can,” he says, smiling and satisfied with what I’ve said.

“Alright doctor, I promise. You’ll never have to complain about me, just wait and see.”

“Okay, well I’ll come back later and bring you today’s test results. That’s what I usually do, is that alright with you?”

“Absolutely. I really want to be kept in the loop about everything, whether it’s good or bad. Oh, one last thing, would you be able to find me a textbook on clinical haematology, so at least I can study my disease?”

“Yes, of course. It’s not easy stuff to digest, but you’re an educated man, and it’s a way to pass the time. If you want, I can show you the slides of your cells, so that you can understand what we’re talking about. Come with me.” He sets off towards the corridor and instead of turning right towards the doctors’ lounge, he turns left. I interpret this as an invitation. I get up quickly – I wouldn’t be able to do that with such strength a few weeks later – and follow him. What a wonderful offer. We enter a little room which has a microscope and a series of blue-stained slides. Doctor Paoletti later explained to me that the blue stuff was a contrasting liquid to help produce a clear view of red and white blood cells, and platelets. The supply trucks, the soldiers and the bricks. I saw red blobs, white blobs and tiny little flakes. Just like what you find in a bunch of confetti, in which some are circles and others are squares; presumably they’re made from the scraps of industrial hole punches. When I’m in position and the image of the slides is in perfect focus, he starts speaking: “So, those little square things are the platelets and they’re used to repair blood leaks, like silicone to stop a shower cubicle leaking. Those red blobs are red blood cells and they provide nutrients to the cells in our body, they feed us. Those white ones with a red blob in the middle are lymphocytes. You guys call them white blood cells because they aren’t as red as the red ones, but they’re actually red as well. Confusing, right? As you can see, unfortunately most of your lymphocytes don’t have a red blob in the middle. It’s as if you have eggs without yolks in your veins and your marrow. The frittata would end up flavourless. Only 16% of your white blood cells have yolks, the others are good for nothing, unless you’re making a meringue. These cells protect us from diseases and intervene to protect us against invasions. You don’t have any more bodyguards, Gabriele.” We have a comedian on the ward, I think. Then he continues: “Those cells, let’s call them the empty ones, have no use. It’s as if they were plain water. They’ll never produce anything that could fight a disease. That’s why we must prioritise maximum hygiene, both of ourselves, and of those who come to visit. All your visitors are life-threatening enemies. They come and visit you to feed their egos, unaware that they could kill you.”

This bullshit, on a constant loop. Who does this guy think he is, Doctor House? He doesn't have the slightest bit of tact, yet I get the distinct impression he's telling the Holy Truth. It's harsh, and so is his manner, but it's for the best. He respects my intelligence, such as it is. I thank him, I'm glad to see what's killing me. I'm not just an impatiently sick man, I'm a scientist.

I've come up with a fabulous way to engage Roberto and maintain a stable relationship with him on a daily basis. I'll ask him to record my blood values, which they give to me each day anyway. I'm sure he'll be eager to do it; plus, he's better at using spreadsheets than most of my year eights and their parents. He's definitely more capable with a computer than half of the schoolteachers at work. Just last month, in February, I gave some of my female colleagues a lesson in computer literacy. And when I say 'literacy,' I mean that I began by saying: "That thing next to you may look like a shoe box standing up on its end, but it isn't. I'm aware that a portion of a woman's brain is reserved for shoes, but there are honestly no shoes in there." Uproar. "In reality," I continue, "it's a container that stores all of the computer's files and memory. Then you have a keyboard and a little plastic rodent, known as a mouse. Take the mouse and go to the bottom-left corner of your screen. Click on the START button." The unthinkable happened. The cute, young English teacher placed her mouse on the display screen, and while repeatedly clicking, she furiously said to me: "It's not working."

"What's not working? This electronic brain, your biological one, or that of the person who hired you and who pays your wages every month?" I respond cruelly, convinced that she wouldn't take offence because, being a bit of a jokester, I can get away with anything. I hold nothing sacred. To be honest, she was a bit offended and accused me of misogyny, but she's got it wrong because I'm really fond of her.

Roberto is very good with logic and he'll be in charge of the spreadsheet formulas and their corresponding cells. I'll send daily messages with my haematological levels to Stefania's phone, and he'll use them to create graphs. He'll plot the trend of each value, in terms of its daily rate of increase or decrease. He knows how to make line graphs and bar graphs based on time values. I taught him how to do that a year ago when we opened a savings account for him to put in all the money he was receiving on various special occasions. "So now you'll be able to see how rich you're becoming," I told him at the time.

"Yep, I'll become rich and I'll give half of my money to poor or sick kids. Maybe I'll write a book, use this money to print it and then with the money I earn from selling it, I'll buy an incubator to care for babies that are born early, like Simone, and I'll donate it to the hospital."

What's the saying? *Like father, like son.*

The first few values I report to him are quite good. Not the white blood cells, they're crazy and useless, and would never protect me against illnesses like viruses and bacteria. Basically, the important *people* (in my blood), those who are in charge of my body's fate, have gone to shit, just like our government. Right from the get-go, Roberto gathers the data and draws up the charts. He

clearly understands that the graphs he's created, with a bit of help from me, update automatically. Whenever he notices something unusual, he calls to warn me: "Daddy, how come the fibrinogen is so high today?"

"I don't know, Roby, I hadn't even realised. I'll ask the doctor and then call you, don't worry, everything's going fine. I'll be home soon, and we'll go to the movies," I say to reassure him. I cry and worry about that high level of fibrinogen, because it causes bleeding in the hole where my central venous catheter is inserted. Roberto's helping me, but he's making me face reality, in every sense, whether it's happened yet or not.

I don't know anything about Roberto's life right now. Teachers usually call you in to tell you that your son has been acting strange for a while. Maybe he's stopped playing with others, started drawing strange pictures, doesn't eat much, or has become aggressive. None of this. Stefania tells me that he's fine, but I don't know anything.

Roberto responds to all the new attention with dignity. He knows his dad isn't well, but he can't understand why everyone is drastically changing their behaviour. People have suddenly become sweet and supportive, speaking in gentle tones. He's almost annoyed by all the pity and he responds with silence. As an only child, he's used to playing by himself both at home and at school, where they call him teacher's pet and make fun of him for being shorter than everyone else. His resilience switch has worked perfectly well and has controlled how he feels about his dad's absence. The only thing that really helps is the bond we share over our two passions: sport and science. Lots of people treat him like the son of a sick person, and that gives me a nagging pity-ache.

One moment I'm crying at the thought of being absent from his life, and the next...psychologists are coming to see me. What the fuck do they want?

23.

I wake up early, it's 4:36 a.m. I snuggle down, put my headphones on and listen to the radio, my only solace. My thoughts travel slow and fast, depending on the tunes I'm listening to. At 7:02 a.m., a radio show with Fausto Terenzi begins, which used to broadcast from Radio Monte Carlo a few years ago. I used to enjoy listening to it on the way to uni. I decide to call up and talk live on the show.

"Hello, good morning, who've we got on the line?"

"Gabriele, I'm calling from Turin."

"Oh, the lovely Turin! Where are you at the moment Gabriele?"

"Uh, I'm in hospital," I respond vaguely.

"Are you a doctor or a nurse?"

"I'm a patient. You know, there are a few of those in hospitals too. I've got Leukaemia..."

"Gosh, that's terrible to hear. But from the sound of your voice, you seem to be in good spirits. Just think – a soccer team made up of DJs once played a charity match against a team made up of former cancer patients, and got a sound beating...Bye Gabriele, get well soon."

He hangs up on me without asking any questions. Out of embarrassment – his, not mine. I'm fine with it. How cool, I spoke on live radio, but I do think that his awkwardness was quite inappropriate. It's not as if I have leprosy? "It's not as if I have *leopards!*" my grandad would say to me when I didn't want to sit on his lap.

After breakfast, two charming, young people wearing scrubs and fake smiles enter the room. The guy has a goatee, the girl is hot, like really hot, but the way she carries herself puts me off. "Mr Longo? Good morning, we're from the psychology service for cancer people. Could we have a chat to you?" he says. What did you call me, you little shit? CANCER PERSON? Go and call your sister that. No one calls her by her name anyway, everyone calls her 'library' because she's open to the public.

"Sure, go ahead," I respond, in the same tone I would use when answering those dinnertime calls from Vodafone asking whether I have ADSL.

"We were wondering if you could fill in this questionnaire. We'll come back next week and talk about it. How does that sound?"

"Alright," I respond politely, and reach out from my bed to take a ten-page document. Damn my habit of always putting the speaker at ease. I check the first question, since there's not all that much to do around here – the Sheraton offers little in the way of entertainment. The survey leaves me speechless. Luckily the shrink and his hot colleague have left, because I explode after reading

the following words: “Express your opinion, on a scale of 1 to 10, about how happy you are to be in this ward”

“How about a FUCK...OFF to the power of ten! Does that work?” I tear it up and turn onto my side. I feel used and abused. These people want to know everything about you, and then they make their money coming up with statistics about your misfortunes. Besides, they’re all separated and drink too much. I’m sure that sooner or later I’ll find a psychologist who might actually help me, maybe a woman, that way I can practise all the bad habits I’m struggling to give up. Yep, I can picture it already: a beautiful woman with a posh name, who has two daughters with unique names, and a husband who’s a saint of course.

As the days pass, I realise that it’s not looking good. The big moment arrives. Cristiana enters. I’m sure it’s her because I recognise her eyes, they’re deep and blue, like the distant sea. To be honest, I usually recognise her breasts, but not today, because she’s wearing thick, blue scrubs. She’s wearing a different mask than usual and she’s even wearing a blue cap. What strikes me the most are her gloves, which are also blue, but made of rubber instead of latex. They’re like the ones my mother-in-law uses to wash dishes in the mountains, where water and ice feel like the same temperature. I could say that Cristiana is matching from head to toe to make a point. She’s holding a pouch, completely covered with tinfoil, silver and shiny like a sea bass.

I immediately ask her: “What’s in there? A sea bass?” pretending to be curious. I’m well aware that it’s the day of my first chemotherapy session, which I’ve heard about from so many families I know. Everyone has a loved one who’s doing *chemo*.

“This little fish is for you, young man. You’ll take two different types of medicine today. One’s inside this bag and it’s ruby red, the other comes from a very beautiful flower that grows in the mountains, called periwinkle, and it’s in that syringe on the trolley. You’ll get pins and needles in your fingertips and you won’t have regular bowel movements. How does that sound? Pretty romantic, huh?”

“What do you want me to say?” I answer back “The only romantic things around here are your eyes, the ruby and the periwinkle. We’ll skip over the pins and needles, and I wouldn’t make any far-fetched predictions about my crap, seeing that I’m usually responsible for applause-worthy performances. I can even manage six free throws in one sitting.”

“Ah, you’re a funny guy, Gabriele. You’re the first person I’ve ever seen to tackle chemotherapy in such spirits. Good work, I like it.”

Meanwhile, as she hooks up the medicine to the little transparent tubes that go into my chest, I look at her with fearful eyes, both because I’m not sure what awaits me, and because I’m worried about the pain and nausea I’ve always heard about. I ask her: “Cris, will I feel nauseous straight

away? And tell me the truth, when will my hair fall out? And also, why are you wearing those rubber gloves?”

“Relax, it will all happen in good time. Your hair will start falling out in two weeks, which is why we’ll cut it off tomorrow. It’s not guaranteed that you’ll feel nauseous, especially since we’ll give you a strong antinauseant every six hours. And I’m dressed like this because if a drop of the red liquid falls on the floor, it’ll burn the lino.”

She was exactly right. Not even a hint of vomit, just some tiredness, and worrying about the liquid that eats away at the lino but not my veins. Over the next few days, Doctor Paoletti explains to me that the chemotherapy drugs actually remove everything, the good guys and the bad guys. They re-format my bone marrow. My white blood cells are likely to reduce to a few dozen. It’s aplasia, the phase of immunosuppression. I guess this is the dangerous period, because I’m not allowed to go anywhere, and I could die just from sticking a finger up my nose, even if it’s my own nose and finger.

I eat with gusto and I eat everything, just as I was asked. I also laugh, just as I was asked. I do what I’m told because I don’t want to have any regrets. Yesterday, Andrea from bed 18 said something which really got me thinking: “At the end of the day, I’ve done all kinds of things in my lifetime and I’ve made many mistakes. But there’s one thing I’m happy about: many mistakes but no regrets. When you’re dying, you only think about the regrets. They hurt at the time, and they hurt now as well, on your final day. That’s why they’re called *re-grets*, because you’re forced to feel that hurt again and cry over it. As for the mistakes, sometimes you end up laughing about them.”

Andrea was a carpenter, like Jesus’s father and Pinocchio’s. Now he’s in heaven.

24.

A new frying pan. That's my wish. That's the wish of someone who loves a woman. When you love a woman and you're happy with her, you feel like cooking delicious meals to share. You can cook by her side, or you can cook for her, without letting her enter the kitchen. You must sit her down and amaze her with the aroma, which has engulfed the surrounding rooms in the meantime.

You must amaze her with the colour, after you've prepared the plates out of sight and then placed them on the table. You've arranged every dish with utmost care, garnishing the plate with a drizzle of oil to add artistry and freshness to your work. The table is decorated with wildflowers placed nicely between two new wine glasses, which you bought for the occasion, possibly the only chance you'll have with her. It's your dinner even before it's hers. You must think about what's needed in preparation. You must go and buy the finest ingredients after having scrupulously planned the magic. You must peel the vegetables and weigh the rice, which must absolutely be Carnaroli if you want to add value to your version of risotto. Everything should be laid-out on the kitchen bench, on various clear or transparent saucers. They should be arranged by colour according to the food they hold, from red to purple, in ascending order based on the frequency emitted from solar radiation, much like a rainbow. You must sharpen your knives very carefully, so they cut like razor blades. The chopping board must be large enough to hold everything you rapidly chop up, like they do on TV. The sounds are part of the preparation too, they must be strong, sharp and shrill; nothing should be left to chance.

You must choose the wine based on her taste, without her having the slightest sense of having suggested it to you. "How lovely, this is my favourite kind of wine," she should say. If it's white, it must be cold and opened in front of her; but you can't just use one of those corkscrews they have at pubs: the one that looks like a little man with a triangular head, who raises his tiny arms. It must be one of those that sommeliers use, which you screw in by hand and then pry against the neck of the bottle to remove the cork and make that celebratory sound. You must use a second-class lever. If the wine is red, it should be opened at least an hour before and poured into a decanter to allow the right amount of oxygenation. It should be the same temperature as the cellar. You must guide her to the table, offer her a seat, then sit down with her and savour everything, as if she had prepared it for you.

That's how you make love when you're in love.

But there's none of that here. I'm sitting on bed number 15, now familiar with the daily rituals I've been shown. I have to fill out the little card to order my meals for the following day. The little card is red, of course, and it has four sections: starter, main, side and dessert. In each category there are alternatives, none of which are appealing. I promised myself and my family that

I would eat everything, except for the Sardinian pasta with ragù, it's like eating damn slugs. The cold food is the best, like the *stracchino* cheese, fresh or baked apple, fruit salad, yogurt, and chocolate pudding. The boiled chicken thighs and *minestrina* aren't too bad either. The purées and the vegetable soup must by all means be avoided. The boot in Charlie Chaplin's soup is nothing in comparison. Next, we have the rules and exceptions. Yogurt is in the fruit and dessert section, while *robiola* cheese and *prosciutto*, whether raw or cooked, substitute the meat option of the main course. Bread is an alternative to breadsticks, but if you want, they'll give you the leftover breadsticks from the room next door. There's always a supply of Billy fruit juice, but only apricot, and I prefer peach or pear.

I mean, it's even worse than RAI Television's terrible staff canteen, which one of the other patients has told me about.

Each evening, the smell announces the meal's arrival. It's always the same smell, regardless of which hot meal is dominating the trolley that day. Everything is kept in white ceramic pots with dark yellow lids, which are then kept in an insulated trolley whose broken and noisy wheels are now square from wear and tear. This ritual is repeated every day, at 12:03 p.m. and at 6:36 p.m. Every goddamn day that Jesus gifts us with. Amen.

On Mondays, Nicoletta sometimes comes to visit and brings me a pizza. She goes to the *pizzeria* early and begs them to make a margherita before they're even open. I don't think the pizza maker does it out of pity, knowing it's for me. I'm more inclined to believe that when my younger sister wants something, she's like a lion and always gets her way. She's had her claws in the pizza maker's flesh on many occasions. This is what Nicoletta does for her little brother almost every Monday night. I love my sister.

Pizza is the most appreciated meal among the patients in the Haematology Ward 2 of Turin's Molinette. One night, my roommate Sergio, the person to my right, was seen carrying his meal tray with nothing but a paper napkin and a packet of breadsticks on top. I thought we'd have a chuckle over it, but instead, he acted as stropky as a toddler in front of Margherita, the lady responsible for serving meals. His tone of voice and the woman's discomfort made me feel embarrassed, and in response, I started laughing and making fun of him. I hadn't known him for very long. We became great friends. He used to work at the television company RAI. He was a manager and had spent his working life in the world's nastiest canteen: the one at RAI on Verdi Street, in Turin.

I want to go home. I want to go and cook for my loved ones. I want to cook *pasta e fagioli* like my mother used to make for me.

Tonight, I want to dream of having a woman to love, and I want to give her a new frypan.

They've taken away the woman I love and will continue to love forever. I can't cook for her anymore. The people here don't want me to spend the night with her. The doctors have to take care of me now that she's not here. She needs to take care of Roberto. Above all, mums have their children and then they have us. Among every person worthy of love, there's one special night. The night when you believe *true love* exists. On that night, you feel the enormous magnitude of little things. If it only lasts for one night, then it's a one-sided perception. The words 'I love you' have only one voice. It lasts a lifetime if both of you perceive the scent of true love. The words 'I love you' have three voices which are to be whispered into an ear, in quick succession and without adding any words in between. Indeed, they become one indistinguishable voice, because diamonds are all identical. When two people love each other, they don't look into each other's eyes, even children can do that. When two people truly love each other, they both look in the same direction.

Today's her birthday and there's no chance of celebrating it with her the way I'd like to. I'm not allowed. And that's how it should be.

Now for the little card and the excitement of food: caught, cooked and served; boiled chicken and fresh *robiola* cheese, then chocolate pudding.

My stay here at the Sheraton has now lasted a fortnight and I must say, my personality makes things much easier. I met the head nurse a few days ago. Her name is Serena, though she doesn't seem the least bit serene. She's dressed in an official uniform with red trim, and her matching short, dyed-red hair makes a real statement. She's petite and has the appearance of a head nurse. She doesn't talk much, and I'm scared of her, but today I must be brave because she's asked to speak to me. "Listen, *professore*, we would like to adjust the air vents, will you be the guinea pig?" she asks me.

"Sure. I don't think I have much of a choice anyway. Also, are you a nun? The women in charge at hospitals are always nuns, and they have short hair like you."

"Oh, give me a break. Sleep in the bed near the window tonight and tell me if you feel cold air. If you catch a cold, we might not mount the air diverter." Great! So now the nun's trying to kill me. My face must say it all. "I'm joking. You can sleep in your own bed but try and help us figure out how this thing works." Everyone around here seems to have a great sense of humour and I wonder how this happens. How is it possible to have such exceptional state employees, yet such shitty politicians? Last night, Giovanni, the person beside me in bed number 16, was discharged. His story is astonishing.

Giovanni was a forest ranger in the Cuneo Valleys for forty years. He told me that his job essentially involved monitoring activities in the wooded areas of mountains. Tree planting had to be regulated and comply with the laws of repopulation, almost as if to control births and deaths like a state registry office. My favourite story was the one explaining how deer are counted. I thought counting them would be impossible. There aren't many of them in relation to the size of the area where they live and where Giovanni worked. Nevertheless, he counted them.

"How do you know whether you've already counted a particular deer or not? They all look the same, beige with antlers. And what happens if you spot one at night?" I ask him, even though I'm well aware that this assumption is necessary but not sufficient, because not all those with antlers are beige.

"Imagine picking out your own children among a class of thirty kids. It's the same kind of connection," he answers. It seems like a bit of a far-fetched comparison, but I accept it. Giovanni then explains to me that, in reality, there are methods which make extensive use of technology. What amazed me the most was discovering that counting animals in the forest happens predominantly at night, when the dark hides everything from the infrared camera, apart from life forms, especially animals. Through infrared, a deer moving around at night looks like a faded green horse with antlers. The stories about deer antlers were fascinating as well. Giovanni told me that

deer grow new antlers each year. They fall off every year and then grow back every year. That's just as often as Mrs Falaschi, my neighbour's wife, changes her lover. She's a beautiful woman and the characters picking her up and dropping her off outside in luxurious cars change every year. I often tell this story to year twelves. The one about the infrared camera, not about Mrs Falaschi, especially since being beige is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to determine whether your wife is cheating on you.

The year twelve physics syllabus includes electromagnetic waves, and this can be taught in two ways. The first is through formulas, in which case Maxwell equations are perfectly suitable. The second is through its use in daily life. I cover them both. Infrared rays are effectively those with a slightly weaker energy than that of light visible to the human eye. Red light is the last kind that we're able to see. We can't see anything below the frequency of red light (*infra*-red – below red). And if red light represents the lowest value we can observe, the maximum value is represented by purple light. Radiation immediately above that level is called *ultra*-violet. Simple: it's that purple light that makes clothes in nightclubs glaringly white. Infrared rays are emitted by a living being and we perceive them through the sensation of heat. Bodies that are warm compared to a cooler environment release heat through IR (infrared) irradiation. That's why in the bombings of Baghdad you could see those green roses releasing deadly hot petals in the sky. Infrared cameras have monitors which depict green light. It would have been easier if the monitors used red lights, but then Mr Longo's physics lessons wouldn't have been as entertaining.

At night, deer are green, like the roses in Baghdad. Giovanni would recite poems to me. I try to share poems in class, physics lends itself to poetry.

It's March 19. Giovanni is no longer with us. He came back to hospital a few days ago, due to an aspergillus infection. He left me yesterday morning, just like that. He betrayed me and went to the place where they say everything is nicer than on Earth. I closed his eyes with my fingertips, and I cried, pissed off at him and at this shit in our bodies. He wasn't supposed to leave me like this.

Last night, in place of Giovanni, a round and rough man arrived. He speaks loudly and cries a lot.

"Hi, I'm Gabriele," I introduce myself.

"Di Domenico, Sabbatino Di Domenico." He pronounced it as a double b.

"Wow, Sabatino Di Domenico, is that right?"

"Yep, that's it. My father was Sabbatino and my grandfather was Sabbatino. But my great grandfather was Domenico Di Domenico. What can I say, we're southerners, that's just what we do."

“Fair enough,” I respond, and then think about how nice it is to talk to people and smile at people. Even in the haematology ward of a hospital where people are dying, Sabatino had been in America, in Chicago, for twenty years and now he was living in Alba Adriatica, in Abruzzo. His slang was a mix of American English, with the pronounced ‘r’, Italian, and Abruzzese. A lethal cocktail, especially since he would speak it at one in the morning, when chatting to his daughters in Chicago, where it was 8:00 p.m. and they were having dinner after their respective days at work. Speaking at a reasonable volume and respecting other occupants of the room were completely obscure concepts for Sabatino. I really loved that man.

But today is his second day in hospital – or rather, his second day this time around, because Sabatino Di Domenico has already had a series of heart operations. He proudly boasts two heart valves from some Brazilian guy, which his body tolerates thanks to the intake of a little pill which he shows off with just as much pride. The glory of his illness would emerge in his stories. It’s a bit like how those patients who have just been operated on must impulsively show off their wound to their first visitor, despite his or her strong opposition.

His morale is pretty low, a bit like mine was for the first few days, but his reason is completely different. He has to shave his hair. Elvis with his little quiff was an amateur compared to Sabatino. But just minutes later, his dreadful mop of hair, cultivated over many years like some kind of luxurious house plant, would be gone. This is generally a female concern; us men care less about our hairstyle. Not Sabatino Di Domenico, he cared more about his hair than the valves of his heart, and that says a lot. The combination of his enormous quiff together with his sheer size – almost 120kg – was a sight worth seeing. I try to boost his confidence, especially since I was the one feeling down in the dumps just thirteen days earlier. They cut your hair before it all has a chance to fall out by itself from the effects of chemotherapy. It’s also to stop it taking over your sheets, pillows, and perhaps any open wound. Apart from being annoying, his hay-like-hair is really unhygienic, and it gradually starts to fall out over a few days. “Sabatino, you know that you’ve got to cut it off sooner or later. Crying like that is pointless,” I tell him.

“I know, you’re right, but it’s been fucking years.”

“How about we cut some off every three days, shorter and shorter. That way you’ll get used to it, and it won’t be as big of a shock as going from Elvis Presley to George Gregan in a matter of twenty minutes. Besides, it’ll be fun and it’s a good way to pass the time.”

“Alright, come on, go and get the scissors from them.”

He seems convinced. Our room has a shared bathroom with another single room.

I’ve heard that they put the most serious cases in the single rooms, and indeed, I’ve never seen the guy in the room next door, though I hear him when he goes to the bathroom. I’d like to

go and tell him that if he wants to use the bathroom, then he better go now, because we'll soon be setting up a barber shop, but I don't have the heart. If he turns up, we'll figure it out. I go to Giovannina, the nicest assistant on the ward, and ask her for scissors and the electric haircutter, although it's called a beard trimmer. She comes right away, equipped with a sheet to put under the chair to collect Sabatino Di Domenico's hair. I hadn't thought about the sheet. I clearly lack experience, but I'm learning on the job.

He gets undressed and I do the same so that I don't get covered in hair, which wouldn't be very hygienic given the situation I'm in. We're ready. Chair in front of the mirror and looking the part. The only thing missing are the comic books, the ones I used to read as a kid when I would go along to hair appointments with my friends: *Zagor*, *Tex*, *Lanciostory*, *Intrepido*, *Lando*, etc. I would either read them or just look at them, since some only had pictures. They were great travel companions for everyone in my generation. I start walking around him, touching the hair on the back of his head and checking out my moves in the mirror in front of us. I'm perfectly suited to this role.

"Oh, don't cut it too short or I'll kill ya," the client orders me.

"Don't worry, sir. Rest assured that by the time we're finished, all the nurses will be falling at your feet."

"Might get laid tonight!" He lets out a big, hearty laugh. I'm happy, I made him laugh, we're friends. The job is almost done when my phone rings.

I drop everything in my rush to answer, stumbling between sheets covered with hair, the drip trolley, and the infusion pump. "Hello?"

"Hi darling, are you looking out the window?" responds Stefania, who left the hospital just two hours ago.

I look out the window. In the car park in front of Molinette, towards the Po River, Stefania and Roberto are holding out a very long banner that says: "HAPPY FATHER'S DAY PAPÀ, I LOVE YOU."

All the patients from the ward are at the window, including doctors, nurses and assistants. Some with tears in their eyes, others in silence, looking down at their hands before lifting their gaze back up towards the hill.

It's March 19, 2003. Father's Day, I had forgotten.

Days pass by and habits settle into place. It's time for the daily report; my son should be home by now. Since I've been here, Stefania has been picking him up from school every day. That used to be my job.

"Hi Roberto, I've got the latest test results, you ready to write it all down?"

"Yeah, Dad, just hang on a second, I'm watching the end of a cartoon. Can you call back in five minutes?"

"Sure, buddy, talk to you then." I'm a bit disappointed because I get the impression that he's settling into this new routine. I suppose we can adapt to anything.

Art helps us express our ideas. At the Modern Art Gallery of Turin, the GAM, there's a piece of art by Andy Warhol, though I don't remember its name, not because it's difficult but because I revel in a profound ignorance in that field. A series of images depict the same newspaper photo in which an overturned car is pictured with a corpse underneath. In each reduplicate, the image becomes more faded, eventually disappearing and leaving the last square white. I'm worried that this is what's happening to Roberto, getting used to me fading away.

I went to the GAM last year with a group of year twelves. I remember them all sitting in a circle on the floor. They were listening to the cute guide who was trying to justify the art work's ridiculous price, which was up around a million euro. I looked at Bacci, long hair and blue eyes – we all called him Jesus. He's great at maths and has been cultivating this passion since he was little. He studied calculus in year eight, when everyone else wouldn't study it until year twelve. "What's bothering you, Antonello?" I asked him.

"Nothing's bothering me, *prof*, but this is crap. That lady over there will never convince me," gesturing with his chin towards the girl, a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts, who had probably gone through a rigorous selection process only to now find herself in front of Antonello Bacci (Jesus). She was trying her best to pass on her passion for art and for her job, yet she received nothing but hasty judgements about the thing she loved the most. Young people are like that...maybe I am too. "Forgive him," I said to her, "he doesn't know what he's saying or doing. He hears voices and has been seen wandering the streets of Turin carrying a bottle in a paper bag on more than one occasion, while chuckling and stumbling." Much laughter followed from his classmates, who had already heard this joke in class. They really were a great group of year twelves.

The phone rings, I reject it and call back. It's Roberto.

"Hello, Dad? I'm ready, can you give me today's numbers?" I feel emotional, he's still by my side.

“Yep, just hang on a second, I’ll get them.” I lean over and grab the green diary containing all my notes, and I read him the values that Paoletti has just shared with me.

“So, white blood cells: 2, 300; haemoglobin: 9.4; platelets: 120, 000; AST: 120; ALT: 140; GGT: 70; bilirubin: 4; creatinine: 0.9; neutrophils: 46%. Did you get all that?”

“Yep, I’m on the computer. Your bilirubin is double what it was yesterday, how come?” He’s worried!

“I don’t know, things are always changing here, don’t worry, I’m sure it’s just an error with the machine. Besides, we’re all mushroom eaters in this family,” his laughter is genuine, mine’s fake. “Thanks, kiddo, I’ll talk to you tonight before bed.”

“Yep, bye Dad. Have a good afternoon.”

Have a good afternoon, sure, I’ll try and make it as good as possible.

Roberto understood that something wasn’t quite right, and he went to the kitchen to tell his mother that yes, Dad was fine, but one of the readings had doubled since yesterday. Stefania froze without turning her gaze. After a few seconds she turned around and smiled at her son, who was wide-eyed and craving certainty. She dried her hands with the closest tea towel in sight. She bent down, took hold of Roberto and pulled him tightly towards her chest. In that moment, she was first a mother and then a wife. Destiny was putting her in a very complicated situation. She understood that every burden had to be absorbed, managed and alleviated, first and foremost for the sake of her son. “It’s alright, darling, I’m sure that’s completely normal. Dad’s a strong man.”

“Yeah, but can we look up what bilirubin is on the internet?” says Roberto.

“Nooo, there’s a whole heap of rubbish in that TV!”

“It’s a monitor, Mum!”

“Right, a monitor. Listen know-it-all, I’ve got a problem! I feel like eating pizza, but I don’t have a gentleman here tonight, do you know of one?”

“What about me, Mum.”

“But you don’t have any money!”

“Yeah, I’ve got the money from my *nonni*. Pretty please, can we go?”

“I’ll put on some make-up, and you get the chariot ready. I’m tired, can you drive?” She talked about make-up, going out and eating. It worked like a charm, Roberto was beaming and so was she, even though...

Weeks go by and I’m already familiar with all my medications: the antibiotics I take are also given to dogs, the antinauseants don’t work, and the high doses of cortisone are triple what’s given

to horses and a thousand times more powerful than the betamethasone given to children for a cough.

On the day I take a leave pass from the hospital, so I can go home and spend a night with Roby and Stefania, I have to take a record twenty-four pills. I doubt whether they all would've been able to fit into a teacup. I'm already acquainted with lumbar punctures, where they inject clear stuff directly into your spinal marrow – which is different from bone marrow – between vertebra x and y. My spinal fluid was crystal clear. I had to sit on the bed, hunched over a pillow with my legs dangling. I felt the doctor's thumbnail searching for the best spot and then it began, twenty seconds of excruciating intensity. On the day after the lumbar punctures, the back of my neck would be so painful. It's equivalent to having an iron ball thrown on your big toe from twenty metres away. Sharp and constant. The third chemotherapeutic drug wasn't pleasant either and it had a strange name: asparaginase. It was injected into the skin of my deltoid, first left and then right, on alternate days. I'm already up to my fifth round and I have to do ten. It burns like hell; its name only vaguely sounds like asparagus and it doesn't make my pee stink. I wouldn't mind having a nice little bunch of asparagus for lunch, steamed and simply seasoned with salt, oil and lemon. Lemons now represent the essence of my life. We're all bald and yellow here, and nobody gives a damn about money anymore. We look at the bare essentials as drops of life. Smiling, walking a metre, eating an extra gram of food. A plate of asparagus will be my version of a lemon festival tonight. Dreaming is free and the price of my dreams is now bearable. Eat, sleep, poop... this is my life.

Looking at myself in the mirror today, I saw exactly why the nurses have been making fun of me. For days, they've been saying: "Your eyes are like a toucan's, as yellow as a capsicum, it's your liver's fault." It's true, my scleras – which I call the egg white, so Roberto understands – are really yellow, like a yolk. I find the sight a bit of a shock. I'm now bald all over and my face is a little swollen thanks to the cortisone. I start pulling faces in the mirror. I turn to the side, smiling and making funny noises, and I look at my yellow eyes. When I'm done, I lower my gaze in defeat. I'm not myself anymore. I'm sick. And it's true what they say, you can't shit here. Your stomach is bloated, and you can't shit. This type of chemo baked in foil inhibits defecation. Let's hope it takes away my Leukaemia, this disease is really starting to piss me off. Leukaemia, I write it with an uppercase out of respect.

It's time to have a shower, if the drip trolley that follows me everywhere on a leash lets me. That's right, because it never leaves my side and it's always carrying two or three upturned, labelled IV bottles. When relatives go and visit sick people, they read the labels on the bottles out of embarrassment, pretending to be experts. Then they check the rate at which the drops are falling.

I'll be dreaming about the pace of that dripping for many years, because I've still got many years to live. I'm sure of it!

Easter Saturday was a long day for Stefania, and it was filled with messages which weren't all that positive. They weren't written messages, nor were they spoken. They were messages written all over the faces of people and over the things that had been wearing her down over the past few days.

In your story, the faces of the main characters can change your destiny, as well as the destiny of those living around you.

As she turned the keys in the lock of our front door, a new setting was created. It was that of the loneliness of someone who enters a house to find himself all alone, or even worse, as in Stefania's case, to find herself all alone. The others were gone; Roberto was in the mountains with his *nonni*, and her husband wasn't there either. She missed his shoes being scattered around the house and the silence of him hunched over working at his desk in the study. It was these sensations that she longed for the most, the ones she thought she hated just a few months earlier, which now created a devouring and indescribable void. It was that particular time of the evening, when the light is fading, and you receive phone calls from people who believe they're part of your 'inner circle'. They would call to find out the latest news which they could then pass on to people in your 'outer circle.' Politely as usual, she would smile and comfort others, as only a strong woman is able to do. "You know what? He actually looked better today," she would say. "Tomorrow they're doing this, that and the other to him..." She would give them all the details and keep the emotions and fears to herself.

She looked in the fridge for something ready to eat but she had little appetite, so she decided to skip dinner. She sat on the couch to see where the Gulf War documentary was up to, and whether the Americans had decided to attack or not. As her eyes closed, her negative thoughts were carried away. Her dreams embraced her, as did the blanket that was pulled up by her restless hands. She spent the night in a deep sleep, interrupted only by a touch of devastating serendipity. It was six in the morning when she realised that she had fallen asleep on the couch. She was wide awake. She decided that on that Easter Sunday, she was going to prepare the finest meal for her husband and take it to him, together with the photo of a house she had seen nearby which looked just like the one they had always dreamed about. It had an impressive terrace and would be their goal immediately after he moved from the long-stay ward to the Day Hospital. Like Gabriele, she too had established micro-goals, and like him, she knew that everything would be okay.

If there's a solution to your problem then crying is pointless, and if there's no solution, crying is still pointless!

She defrosted some meat, minced it and cooked the best *ragù* for lasagne that a wife has ever made her husband – who was now fifteen kilos lighter and could only stay awake for two hours a day. She knew this Sunday would still be the most romantic day ever. Just the two of them, together with several stories of hope.

Stefania is the Sun and I revolve around her, like Saturn.

I'm barely awake these days, and above all else, I lack the clarity to understand what is and isn't consciousness. If it weren't for the natural light, knowing whether it's day or night – or whether it's Easter or Christmas – wouldn't matter anymore. The only thing I look forward to are visits from Stefania, but I haven't seen her today. Boiled chicken thighs are my new favourite food, mainly because I put lemon juice from a silver sachet all over them. She was supposed to do this for me because I really can't sit up anymore. The only privilege my doctor now allows me is the third click on the angle of my bed, thirty degrees from horizontal. I give up because the chicken is now cold, Stefania hasn't shown up, and I don't have any desire to call and find out why she's not here. I'm not worried, I'm irritated. Pissed off!

She appears at the door, dressed as if she were going to the theatre. She has fresh make-up on and is wearing her only pair of high heels. Her skirt is short and she's holding a bag containing something that resembles a heatproof bowl, like the ones for making *parmigiana* or *pasta al forno*. When she notices my astonished and vacant look, she flashes a very embarrassed smile. "How come you're late?" I ask her, watching her expression shift from good to bad.

"It's 12:00 p.m., Gabri, like every day!"

"Why are you dressed like that? Where have you been?" I ask her abruptly, like a true asshole.

She lowers her gaze, looks at her fingertips and lets out a little cough, before providing a response: "Gabriele, I've been at home, today is Easter," a dark line begins to run from one of her eyes, "and the only reason I'm wearing this silly dress is because I'm lonely, Gabriele. I've been by myself for over a month," now she's crying, "and I thought you might like it, because you've always said that I look good in heels, but obviously I'm wrong. Sorry, Gabriele."

"It's the cortisone, Mrs Longo." The voice belongs to Doctor Paoletti, who was leaning against the doorway and had reluctantly witnessed the whole scene. "Come with me for a second." What follows is a mixture of medicine and psychology.

When someone gets sick, many people get sick. Minds and bodies are weakened. Possibilities may fade away, but you can always expect the silent wave to hide the shore when it hits. It will raise us up to provide renewed strength and a better view of the world in front of us. When Stefania comes back into the room after talking to the doctor, she finds Gabriele on his knees.

It's love that apologises. If it were up to us, we would be devoured by pride.

This is an ‘incalation’, a reverse escalation. I can’t walk anymore, I’m tired and I sleep almost all day. My bilirubin levels seem to have gone crazy and they continue to increase, day after day. I’m yellow and shiny, just like a lemon. Those at the Lemon Festival in Menton are shinier but not as dark, and I’d go for a lot cheaper than them.

Stefania only works part-time now, thanks to the kindness of the Buzzi family – the owners of the company where she works – and she regularly comes here for lunch. Her route from work to the hospital has been the same for days, and the parking guy has stopped asking her for a tip because he’s realised what’s happening. He smiles at her to offer comfort and that’s how he gets his euro out of Stefania, who insists on giving it to him. Now he nods when he sees her, they’re almost friends. When she appears at the door I’m beaming, and although I only show it by closing my eyes, she knows... My favourite thing to do while she’s here is to go to SHOC, which is a few corridors away. If I get better, I’ll get treatment there in the Day Hospital, which means I’ll go home each evening like everyone else. I’ll look out the window of my own house, I’ll sleep on my own pillow and I’ll sit down and eat a meal someone has prepared for me. It’s going to be amazing, coming home like I used to and like you all do.

Everyone else lives on the outside, yet they don’t enjoy it like I will, now that I understand how lucky they are. They’re always pissed off! I’ve even witnessed people at the bus stop who anxiously lean forward from the footpath and check their watch, irritated by a mere ten-minute delay. I’ve seen this scene many times before, but now I’m paying attention. It’s different, very different!

All I’m asking is to be able to go to a different hospital, where you still have chemo, but then in the evenings you get to put your legs under the table in your own kitchen, rather than sitting in a bed, continually tormented by call buzzers placed above the headboard of every sick patient. When Stefania comes, I ask her to push my wheelchair over there, where people are dressed normally.

I can’t walk anymore.

“Where are you being taken?” Doctor Marmelli asks me, politely as usual.

“I’m going to SHOC,” I proudly respond.

“Don’t you have anywhere better to go? Get her to take you to the café for a custard-filled brioche,” he says, smiling at my wife.

“No, I want to go to SHOC because that’s my next mini-goal. Once I get there, my dear doctor, I’ll be on the final stretch of my road to recovery and this wheelchair will go so fast that I’ll jump out and run towards my new life.”

“You should be writing a book of poetry instead of teaching maths. Have a nice walk, *professore*.”

I thank him and we leave. In the corridors, everyone looks at me awkwardly. Some people change their path, like when electrons enter a magnetic field and divert due to the Lorentz force. I don't blame them, I've even been in their position before, freezing in the corridor when I see a hospital bed carrying a passenger go past.

Days pass by and everything is repeated, but a constant increase in haematological values related to my liver starts to become worrying, both from an analytical perspective as well as for the physical sensations I feel. Exhaustion prevents me from getting out of bed without someone else's help, and I prefer not to get up. I pee in bed, and as for poop, let's not even go there. I sleep, I sleep a lot. One day after lunch, which I can no longer sustain due to exhaustion, I fall asleep while Stefania is still with me. Towards four o'clock I feel a firm touch on my feet. I wake up and see a white nun at my bedside. An aura surrounds her face. I sit up suddenly, drawing strength from who knows where. She smiles at me and says my name:

“Hi, Gabriele, how are you?” she asks in a sweet little voice.

“Holy fucking shit. Am I dead, sister?” I ask her.

She bursts into a high-pitched laughter. “No, Gabriele, you're alive and kicking. I'm Sister Vittorina, a friend of your parents, I've just come to visit. You can relax.” A sigh of relief makes me forget my tiredness.

Despite being a nun, she's a nice and pleasant person. She tells me all about my family's life. When we arrived in Turin, from Basilicata – in Southern Italy – we didn't have anyone to whom we could turn. I think my family owes a lot to this nun, who is still a woman after all, and I'd even say a great woman.

That evening, I hear from Roberto and I try to talk to him about our graphs.

“Do you like numerically analysing my blood results?” I ask him.

“Yeah, Dad. But there's one graph that's changing, the bilirubin one, and also the ALT and AST ones, quite a lot you know?”

I respond calmly so that I don't worry him, knowing very well that everything coincides with the sharp deterioration in my health, now easily labelled as suffering. “I know Roby, this is just the way things are.”

“No, Dad, they don't have to be like this, you've got to tell the doctors. I looked at the date when the green line changed. It was the day that they gave you the asparagus, that's what made you sick. Remember when Mum used to cook them for us, and our pee would stink? If you're feeling sick, it means they're poisonous. Like mushrooms.”

“No, Roberto, sweetheart, it’s not asparagus, it’s a medicine with a similar name, called asparaginase.”

“Okay, but whatever it’s called, that pill still makes you sick, Silly Billy,” that’s what he calls me.

It’s not a pill, but there’s no point in being stubborn now. I say goodbye to him and roll onto my side. Roby is right, I have to talk to the doctors about this coincidence: my liver function tests shot up when I started taking that medication.

One of the doctors, who is a friend of my nephew’s, recognises me during our daily walk to SHOC.

“You’re not Sandro’s uncle by any chance, are you? How are you? Actually, I know how you are because I checked with the doctors. You’re a little bit yellow, aren’t you?” she says.

I know that I’m yellow and I don’t look like myself, but I’m not loving the fact that people are constantly reminding me. Quite the opposite – it drives me crazy.

“Yeah, my bilirubin keeps on rising, unfortunately it’s almost at twenty,” I respond from below in my wheelchair, tilting up the brim of the South African rugby cap Giulio Astengo gave me.

“Damn, and to think that poisoning from a death cap mushroom leads to a bilirubin level of around seven or eight,” she replies discouragingly.

“No shit,” I feel like saying to her, “and do you feel better now that you’ve told me that, you little princess in a white coat?” In reality, it’s just my anger coming out, because she’s actually really sweet to me. I’m changing for the worse, I have to get my smile and sense of humour back, otherwise I’ll never recover. You can’t get better without a smile, you can only get worse, though not as bad as when you’re red with anger (when I was little, I used to think that being red with anger meant menstruation because the women I knew would always throw tantrums a few days beforehand).

In the afternoon, Doctor Paoletti, who is clearly worried, informs me that they’ve asked a hepatologist for advice because they have no idea how to tackle the situation: “Listen, Mr Longo, things aren’t exactly going very well, so we were thinking of giving you a leave pass this afternoon. It might be a good idea to go home and take care of financial matters. With regard to bank activities, give all rights to your wife. I hate to say it, but it needs to be done. You must be back here in the hospital at 7:07 p.m., hang in there.”

Oh shit, this is it!

Aldo says that he's the manager of Banca Sella, but he's actually just the most experienced person at the small branch of Orbassano, where I live. The branch is small, he's small, and maybe he's an Inter supporter since he hardly ever laughs. He has four children and every time I go to withdraw money (I never make deposits) he chews my ear off, telling me all about the eldest one's poor progress in maths, the second one's improvement in artistic gymnastics, the third one's blue eyes, and the last-born being a pain in the arse during the night. When I go to see him, I'm privileged enough to enter into his separate little shiny office. He has tried to emphasise his role by placing a MANAGER'S OFFICE sign on the door, except there is no manager. I call him from the hospital: "Hi, Aldo, It's Longo, the maths teacher, do you remember me?"

"Yes, of course, how are you? I heard the bad..."

I interrupt him: "News? Yeah, it's all true. I have a huge favour to ask you."

"Go ahead, if there's anything I can do..."

"Could you drop by my house this afternoon, I'm coming out because... I'll tell you later. Can you?"

"Of course, I've got your address here. Tell me what you need so that I can bring the paperwork with me." He's an expert.

"I need to sign everything over to Stefania."

When I finally see the balcony of my house, I can even make out Roberto's silhouette, waiting for me with his *nonna*. His gaze is silent. The reality of my condition is confirmed by others, because I keep thinking that everything is alright and that I'll be fine. My son's discomfort feels like a stab in the heart, especially when he awkwardly hugs me, and also in the way he reacts to my smiles and jokes: "So, champ, how we doing? You've grown so much, let's see those muscles. And how about Juventus?"

Outside the front door, in the car, Aldo – the 'manager' – is flicking through some documents. He saw me arrive, but politely stayed where he was. Stefania nods at him and shortly after we find ourselves sitting around a table. "I hate to do this, Gabriele, but I think the doctor is right." With this, he hands over a bunch of forms with little crosses where I have to sign. We get through everything without even taking a breather between one signature and the next.

Roberto starts to relax and tells me that his time for the 100-metre breaststroke is now under two minutes, that he has been invited to a party and asks if he can stay over his friend's house. He tells me that his friend's Mum has invited him, and since he'll be their guest, they're planning on going to the beach in their campervan the following day. He begs me three times for permission.

It's a rhetorical request but he wants my permission, because I'm his father. Roberto still wants to have a father he can ask for permission to do things.

After an hour and a half, I say goodbye to him with a massive hug, our faces over each other's shoulder so that he can't see my tears.

I say goodbye to him forever: "Roby, go ahead and sleep at Luca's house, then go to the beach and put your feet in the water for me, too. I love you so much, buddy, don't ever forget that. Go Juventus."

"Go Juventus, Daddy!" he's crying.

I walk downstairs with the help of Stefania's shoulders. My sister, Rosalba, is waiting for me on the street with the engine of her moss green Fiat 600 running.

It's 6:38 p.m. and I'm on my way to die.

31.

What an excellent evening of sports. The Champions League is showing on *Italia Uno*, and the Juventus game will be on at 10:36 p.m., after the Inter one. Carlo, the person in the bed next to me, invites me to go and watch it, almost begging me. There's a little common room for us sick patients, with a TV that has a great plethora of channels: *Retequattro*, *Italia Uno* and *Telecupole*. If I'd had better luck in life, I would buy eighteen TV's – one for every room of this ward. I convince myself to go. The nurses help me, and I sit down on the brown, faux-leather couch, which reminds me of the seats of my uncle Peppino's Fiat 124 Sport. The lights in the ward are already dim. The Inter game is still on TV and they're losing – which I enjoy, because I'd rather support my team than show sportsmanship. When Ajax beat Toro and everyone in the stadium was singing 'We are the Champions' by Queen, that was my peak – because I'm a certified Juventus supporter.

The Barcelona-Juventus game starts, and after being behind 1-0, we're even, then Marcelo Zalayeta scores with a right-footed volley off a cross from Birindelli, 1-2.

It's now well past midnight when we all yell, "gooooaaaaaall!" It's a huge mistake and we pay the price. The nurses on duty – who were in the nurses' room – run towards us, a loud ambulance alarm goes off and when they appear in the common room, clearly worried, they ask: "What happened? Who was yelling?"

"Us," I respond, "Juve is in the lead and there's only a minute to go. We're through to the semi-finals, we're beating Barça, can you believe it?"

At this point, Nunzia, the Neapolitan nurse, turns up. Due to her size, she's out of breath from running – anxious and in slides – the twenty metres along the corridor from their little room to the common room. She looks at me and says: "Oh fuck off."

To make matters worse, we hear a man in clogs running towards us, it's Doctor Diganno. "What's happening? What's wrong?" he asks, to which Nunzia, the Neapolitan, immediately responds: "Nothing doc, these four fuckheads are just watching the match. Idiots scared me to death."

"It's Juve-Barça, right? They still at one all?"

"No, doctor, Zalayeta scored, it's two-to-one, to us," responds Carlo.

The doctor's reaction is spectacular, he makes a fist and yells: "C'monnnn! Thanks Carlo," then he goes back to the doctors' lounge and the volume of his voice gets fainter, "Yesss, go Zala..."

The other nurse bursts out laughing and says, while looking Nunzia in the eye: "Well, since you lot have finished all those cracked and spicy green olives on the table that Carlo – the other

one, from bed fourteen – brought, I'll go and get the spicy salami my aunt brought me from Sicily, that way you can celebrate in style." Nunzia's furious eyes open wide, then she walks away.

"Come on, Nunzia, get back here!" I yell out laughing.

"Fuck off!" she answers cheerfully.

We go to sleep with hearts full of joy, and it doesn't seem real, given the afternoon spent amidst tears and bankers.

The arrival of Doctor Orcelli, the consultant, is long-awaited and delayed. Stefania came early to witness the outcome of the consultation. He arrives around 11:09 a.m., and after half an hour spent with my doctors inside the doctors' lounge, he comes to see me. A good-looking guy who looks the part. He feels my liver and under my throat, then he says to us: "Listen, there are three things we can do here. In this order: 1) take a drug that's called blah blah blah, which is a liver detoxifier or – to put it bluntly – an antidote to paracetamol; 2) a liver biopsy that is carried out with a probe inserted under the clavicle, allowing us to check whether there are any issues with the sample taken; 3) the last resort is a liver transplant, let's hope we don't have to go there."

Yes, let's fucking hope not, I think, without worrying too much about my facial expression. Stefania disappears and so does Silvana – the nurse she's closest to and the one who gave her flowers on her birthday. Stefy's crying and Silvana's crying.

The new doctor continues: "We'll start with the drug tomorrow and then we'll go from there. Goodbye Mr...?"

"Longo, my surname is Longo," I respond, my eyes and voice are lowered.

My doctor, Doctor Paoletti, lowers his gaze too, and sighs: "See you soon, Mr Longo. I won't be here for a week. I'll be back after Easter."

After Easter? What a worthless traitor. Here I am with one foot in the grave and he's going on holidays? Who will look after me now? Who will give me my blood test results? Who will reassure me?

Two hours pass before Stefania heads home, and after a three-hour afternoon nap, I cheer up. It's not Doctor Paoletti's fault, and he has the right to take holidays. This is a job to him, after all, just like a railwayman, a salesman, or a maths and physics teacher. And at the end of the day, us teachers get three months of holidays, after failing a number of kids and throwing their families into misery.

Three months of holidays. At least that's what everyone says!

I woke up and grabbed my phone without thinking twice.

“Hi uncle, it’s Gabriele, how’s it going?”

“Fine, how are you?” He responds in a croaky voice, typical of someone who has a dry mouth. He’s my mother’s brother, and since he’s a carpenter, he built the furniture in my house – obviously following my designs, given my ego. I’ve never forgotten this first step in my education to become a surveyor. “I’m fine. Listen, I’ve decided that when I’m out of here we have to change all the kitchen cabinets, can it be done?”

“Yes, Gabriele, I promise. Take care and come home soon.”

Then, in the background, I hear my aunt’s voice asking him: “What happened? Who’s calling at this time of night?”

“Gabriele, go to sleep. I’ll go to the workshop and check if I have any cherry-wood!”

It’s 4:12 a.m., I curl up into a ball, unconvinced.

I tell Nunzia, the Neapolitan, about this when she comes to check if the man next to me is still breathing (he breathed for another three days).

“Oh, sweetie, it’s your fucking liver’s fault. Makes you crazy when it’s not working. One time, we had an architect in here and he had liver cirrhosis and started smearing his shit all over the walls. Get some shut-eye now darling, tomorrow’s an important day.” She rubs my feet for half an hour until I fall back to sleep. Nunzia is quite an incredible human. Why do these people get paid the same amount as school janitors?

It’s 7:00 a.m., the nurses change shifts. Antonio arrives, he’s the nurse who’s a fervent Torino supporter. He’s generally in charge of my enemas, which he calls ‘bombs’. I won’t go into details. “Hey, you little shit, have you finished making phone calls in the middle of the night and annoying your uncle? You really are a little shit.”

They obviously talk amongst themselves, I think. I smile because of Antonio’s attitude and because I feel loved – they talk about me. How wonderful! He puts a hand on my shoulder: “Hey, buddy. What I’m putting into your drip-feed, is the medicine that Doctor Orcelli recommended. We’re using it to detoxify your liver, it’ll be good for you.” I’m moved by how much humanity these people have.

I’m moved as I write these words now because I remember everything so clearly!

“Thank you, Antonio. Let’s hope it works, at least for him,” I say, pointing to the end of my bed where I’ve stuck a photo of Roberto. My Roby. I cry and wait for it to enter my bloodstream.

I have to stop writing, I’ll continue tomorrow.

Lunch today is shit. The electronic brain of the CSL (Centre for Shit Lunches) mixed up the orders on the little card and dished me out the Sardinian pasta with the disturbing *ragù*. I eat everything, because that's what I need to do for Roberto and Stefania, but ten minutes later I vomit. At least I don't have those slugs inside of me anymore. I'm a bit disappointed about not getting the *robiola d'Alba* cheese, but I ordered it for tomorrow and the next day anyway. I fall asleep before getting the chance to say hello to Stefania and show her the drip-feed containing my saviour. By now I'm sleeping almost twenty hours a day. I can't do this anymore. Around 3:04 p.m., Doctor Marmelli stops by and attempts to weave in a conversation about what he and his wife should do to convince their 17-year-old daughter that studying is important. "What do you think we can do?"

Bloody hell, I'm even asked this question here? As if being asked it at school wasn't enough. "I don't know, doctor. I don't know your daughter. This is a difficult age, maybe she will mature as she grows up." Either that or she'll get worse, I think to myself. "Listen, doctor, there is something I want to tell you. It may sound a bit crazy, but I believe it. My son Roberto is recording and organising all my test results that you and Doctor Paoletti give me each day. He has been making graphs since day one and has sent me the results. He claims that my liver toxicity problems started in correspondence with the intake of asparaginase. Since that date, my ALT, AST, GGT, and bilirubin levels have increased significantly," I say in a serious and authoritative tone.

"We have already thought about that as well, but there is no evidence in the medical literature regarding such a high amount of liver toxicity; and plus, *professore*, your son is only ten years old."

"Sorry, doctor, you are right, but my son's age isn't the problem. The problem is my liver and my life. I will not take the remaining four doses, and if I have to sign something, I will. Sorry for being so stubborn and inappropriate, but I won't change my mind." I burst into tears.

"Alright, Mr Longo. I'll bring you the form. It may be a good call; you have the right both to make this kind of decision and to take responsibility for it."

What an intelligent person, I think. I actually do it; I sign the form. Roberto won't let me down, and nor will my intuition. My intuition has never let me down, not even with women, who are worth their weight in gold in my life.

33.

I eat dinner with little appetite and strength. My phone has remained switched off for a few days now, I no longer want to see anyone or hear voices other than those of the doctors, the nurses and Stefania. My roommates don't bother me at all, if anything, they provide me with comfort, like we're on the same team. You really experience another dimension in here, where age, gender and professions no longer exist. What immediately loses importance is money. You don't need it anymore, apart from a couple of euro to give to the volunteer dressed in a light green shirt who offers to go and buy me the paper each morning, which I can no longer read, or a croissant fresh out of the oven. My roommates' voices keep me company. When I was still able to get out of bed and walk, I would go and see Carmine, who was in the next room, near the common room. He had Leukaemia like me, but in addition, he was gifted with a nice case of pneumonia. Though it wasn't just any pneumonia, because it was caused by aspergillus – a bastard of a bacterium – which often lurks in dust and is difficult to get rid of.

When I'm in class, I turn my back to the students because as a maths teacher, I need to use a fundamental resource: the blackboard. This explains why Sara, from a year twelve, stream A class, confessed the following to me once she had graduated: "Sir, can I share a secret with you? Do you know we've had an English nickname for you over the past five years?"

"Go on, spit it out." I said to her.

"Golden Bottom."

Oh boy.

When I turn around to face them, it's to see whether my explanations are clear. It wouldn't make any sense to continue if what I was explaining hadn't been understood, it would just be rambling to feed my own ego. I make eye contact with the clever students to get confirmation, but they often know more than me and they could get away with not coming to school at all. I look the others in the eye. Their eyes are a dead giveaway, especially if they are absentmindedly looking out the window or at the ground. I never teach my lessons sitting down, because I would put everyone to sleep. I remain standing, and I wander around the desks. What I see isn't always suitable for prime-time television. A delightful display of dirty tissues collected under their desks, writing on their desks which they use instead of good old-fashioned scrap paper. There's a variety of writing on their satchels, which these days have been replaced with backpacks: I LOVE YOU ROMY (written from one girl to another); ILYSSM JO; ILUVU; SON OF A B...(I won't continue); 80% FOR ENGLISH, AN HISTORIC DAY.

When they're sitting down, their low-cut jeans reveal their underwear, which have the strangest designs and a range of words on them, not to mention the colours. One of my science

colleagues has started a petition against green thongs, which are also plentiful and increasingly similar to dental floss. It's best to avoid making comments, so that you're not accused of paedophilia, but I must admit that it's not always easy to keep my mouth shut. It annoys me when they're ostentatious. Those who pick their noses irritate me, but I don't have the courage to call them out. Those who come back in after PE are terrible; they invade the classroom after having showered without soap, or not had a shower at all. Mainly the males. The equation is simple: there are around twenty-five teenagers with their respective armpits, backs, groins and feet – which are wearing the same socks as those used during sport. That comes to seven per person; $25 \times 7 = 175$. We're talking about 175 sources of unpleasant biological gas under our noses, in a 40m² room, without any hope that one of their little brains would think to open just one of the now steamed-up windows. I enter, and always say the same sentence, with a disgusted face: "It's like a stable in here. Open some windows because right now I feel like I'm inside a cow's mouth." They laugh and they smell. They smell and they laugh. When I see them biting their nails, I throw chalk at them and yell: "Noooo! There's aspergillus under your nails. You'll die of pneumonia."

Carmine has another complication: he suffers from anal fissures and can't sleep or lie down on his back. I always find him with a pillow under his stomach, his bottom in the air and his arms and legs open wide like a star. What annoys me the most is that he doesn't eat anything but he smokes like a chimney. And he does it right there, in the bathroom near the common room, the one that's meant for the use of patients' relatives, not for smoking. One day the head nurse got fed up and blocked the window. She caught him smoking a joint with Mimmo, one of the nurses. Carmine bluntly responded: "With all the chemotherapy that's soaking into me, what's a little bit of Mary Jane going to do? You want some?" The head nurse had to act tough but deep down she knew very well that he was right.

Carmine loves little custard-filled croissants, so I get my sister Rosalba to bring me some. She's convinced that they're for me. When I take them to Carmine and he heartily bites into them, I notice his sister – who never leaves his bedside – cry with joy at the sight of him eating. This is how you cope in here; these are the valuable things in life: emotions and surviving. To everyone on the outside, where certain pleasures are overlooked, believe me, this is heavy and precious stuff. The past few days had been rough – with the constant consults, signatures, and worrying prognoses – but there was a whole lot more to come.

It's 9:00 p.m. and the ward lights are strangely dim when Barbara, a beautiful, tall, blonde assistant, enters my room and comes and sits on my bed.

"You're crying. What's going on?" I ask her.

“This is the first time it’s happened to me, Gabri, I haven’t been working here for long. Angelo died.” She bursts into tears with my arms wrapped around her.

“What do you mean, he died? Like properly died? But... he was in the bathroom a few moments ago,” I point out to her. Angelo was in the single room, the one adjoining mine. Four of us shared a bathroom.

“Yeah, Mimmo gave him CPR for half an hour but he didn’t make it.”

I try to comfort her, but I’m starting to panic. So, it’s true: there’s no way out of here. The adrenaline gives me renewed strength and I manage to get up. After a while, I reach the corridor and I see Mimmo sitting on the floor with his heels tucked under his bottom and his head in his hands. The scene is too overwhelming, so I hurry back towards bed, my new home.

Starting from tomorrow, I’ll try harder. Otherwise here... this isn’t good. Tonight has changed me. Forever.

I wake up late, and even then it's only because of the disrespectful noise the nurses are making this morning. Antonella is singing Laura Pausini at the top of her lungs, seemingly oblivious to being in a hospital. *Listen to your beaaaaart...* she sings, while making Carlo's bed. He's doing laps of the corridor with his walker in the meantime. "Wake up Mr Longo, it's 7:30 a.m., you sleepyhead!" Antonella says, as if nothing had happened the night before.

I sit up and say to her, without the slightest regard: "Anto, as a friend, can I tell you to shut the fuck up?"

She grins and points out the cup of tea and biscuits on my bedside table. "Have some breakfast, *professore*, today is a new day."

"You're so lovely, Antonella," I smile at her. Everyone here is so lovely.

As I have breakfast, Aurora – a quiet, butch nurse – appears next to me. She has come to pierce my veins and take my daily blood sample. She doesn't speak much, she's new on this ward.

"You don't have to be so antisocial, you're allowed to say a few words, you know, something like: 'How are you? How did you sleep?' What did I do to you to deserve the silent treatment? It's because I'm a maths teacher, isn't it?"

"Don't be silly, come on, give me your arm," she answers back timidly.

"Listen, can you explain something to me? Why do you have to stab my arm every goddamn day, can't you take blood from here?" I point to the venous catheter coming out of my chest, which attaches to the drip feed. "After all, you put everything in here and it all goes into my veins, surely you could do the opposite. Eject instead of inject."

She happily answers. It's almost as if no one has ever given her a chance to chat. "The blood that comes of there would be diluted, and also polluted with medicines still in close proximity to that vein. Make sense?" Aurora was smiling, how nice. It did make sense.

The tests will come back around 9:30 a.m. so we'll have the initial results on the effects of the new medication – the one that's meant to cleanse my liver. Let's hope that it detoxified properly. Hepatically speaking, of course. Much to my surprise, I feel like standing up, like what happened when the first apes evolved. I feel more awake than usual, so I do it, then I realise that I've already been awake for two hours and I don't even feel like sleeping. Wearing my clogs, I get up and appear in the corridor among the other residents who are out walking at the time. They respond with a roar.

"Look at the *professore*, he's been let loose today. He got up all by himself," says some bald guy.

I smile happily. “You lot are taking the piss, but soon my wife will be taking me out dancing, and I’ll be thinking of you sitting on the loo trying to make something happen. You bald lemons!”

Fiorella comes in from the other end of the corridor, where the entrance to the ward is. She’s one of the three doctors who informed me of my illness on that morning in early March. She’s carrying some papers. I try to read her expression. As soon as she looks up, she notices me, and makes the best gesture I’ve ever seen in my life: she raises her right hand with her palm facing the ground, and moves it downwards, smiling and revealing her bright, shining eyes. I immediately understand: after days of continual increase in an arithmetic progression, my bilirubin has gone down. The new meds have worked. I’m crying with joy, and after looking at the sheet with the test results, I run – so to speak – towards my phone that hasn’t been switched on in days. I call Stefania.

“Gabriele, I’ll call you back, there’s a managers’ meeting now,” she hangs up. I call back. “Sweetheart...” she responds with a whisper, “I can’t...”

I interrupt her: “Stefy, it’s working, my bilirubin has gone from twenty-two to nineteen, it’s going down, darling.”

She doesn’t say anything, she’s crying silently so that no one realises, and she stays on the line: “...Well done Gabriele, well done,” she snuffles and hangs up.

It wasn’t me that did well, I think, it was them – the doctors, the nurses and the free national healthcare system!

This is what Jesus wanted.

On the first day of the school year, I sometimes meet new classes made up of people I don’t know and who don’t know me. My reputation often precedes me, and the expectations are already clear. I’m well aware that the face they see coming through that door, along with the first words I say, will be crucial in forming the student-teacher bond. I pay attention to these aspects, especially if it’s a year eight class, where behaviour and discipline are very important in order to create a calm learning environment. If it’s a good class, I take the liberty to explain a fascinating topic to them right from the beginning: using the story of the increase in my bilirubin to explain the concept of arithmetic progressions.

If we take a number and add two, we get a new number that’s two greater than the previous number. Then we add another two, and we obtain a third number that’s four greater, and so on, seven, nine, eleven, thirteen...twenty-one, where we’ve always added two. The ‘two’ in this case, is called the *ratio* of the progression. My bilirubin had risen in an arithmetic progression with a ratio of almost three (and we consider normal values to range from zero to one): 0.7–1.8–4.7–7.1–10.2–13.0–16.4–19.0–22.2 and then today was eighteenpointseveeeeeeen. Fuck yeah! Go Gabri.

I couldn't resist explaining all of this to Roberto, so I asked him to make five arithmetic progressions starting from one, with a ratio of 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and then add the first ten numbers. "Add together the five numbers obtained from each progression and tell me what it equals. If you get it right, we'll go on a boat ride when I'm home. We'll lie down on the deck, look towards the sky and lick our finger to decide which direction we should turn the rudder, depending on the wind. Like we did last year. You and me."

He's eager to do it and an hour later he calls me: "How cool, Daddy. The first one equals 100, then 145, 190, 235 and 280, and the overall total is 950. The difference between each total is 45; but we changed the ratio, so why does that happen?"

Shit! I have to think about it.

I'll get out of here, I'm sure of it, and I'll go on a boat ride with my son. I love him so much.

THE DREAM

Carlo and I are still discussing the horizontality and verticality of humans. “*Professore*, it’s like people are divided into two main categories: those who are horizontal, and those who are vertical,” he explains to me. He’s right, but it’s not clear which is the better option. If you’re vertical, then you follow the rules and do what people expect from you. You take up minimal space and the sight of you isn’t annoying. If you’re horizontal, you’re as calm as the sea, but you strike fear. You get to know God and can communicate with him. Vertical things don’t interest you as much, and they don’t bother you. Vertical people feel awkward around the horizontal ones – they’re almost afraid of them – and the horizontal people envy the vertical ones, because they too were once vertical.

The days that follow are a triumph of positive emotions. Everything seems to be improving, I’m starting to get my appetite back and I’m staying awake longer; I’m up to eight hours of awake time each day. I move my bowels – which feels like a dream – every day after breakfast, just like my father-in-law. It’s the first of May when I fall asleep happily, at the same time as they turn the lights down, like little birds do, around 10:13 p.m.

A nurse informs me that a young woman has arrived in room one, and she’s strangely serene. No panic and no tears.

“She’s asking for you, Gabriele. Go and see her.” I’m curious and I set off, dragging the trolley with a sense of urgency. I see her at the opposite end of the corridor, her shoulder leaning against the doorframe of room number one.

Her arms are folded, she’s wearing a purple bandana and clogs. Her ankles crossed; one foot has the entire sole on the ground, the other is barely touching it with the tip of her clog. She laughs and her blue eyes sparkle, it’s as if she recognises me. She swiftly lowers her chin and closes her eyes, inviting me to join her. When I’m three metres away from her she turns around and enters the room, leaving the door slightly ajar. It’s an obvious invitation.

“Would you mind closing the door?” she says to me. Of course, I close it, but I’m unable to say a word to her, she’s too pretty. She turns around, comes towards me and hugs me with an intensity I’ve never felt before in my life. She’s inhaling my scent, going from one side of my neck to the other. She’s craving my scent. She brushes her forehead against mine. Her legs slide between mine, allowing me to feel her skin on my right leg. Her delicate nails scratch my back, under my t-shirt. I inevitably find myself against her warm, soft lips. She embraces me and I feel like I’m on another planet. She invites me into bed and rolls onto her back, I’m seeking her sweet fragrance

and her taste. My fingers intersect with hers, and as I kiss her neck and behind her ears, I'm inside her. My energy is boundless once again, and the pace increases, among the whispered words and melodic voices. Sighs and sweat become fused. I've never made love like this before; I stay inside of her for as long as she wishes, with a sense of glory like no other.

We reach the peak together, again and again, and then lie on our side in an embrace for the rest of the night. Then, in an eternal instant, she turns over: "I have to go, Gabriele. You and I will never see each other again. Farewell, Gabriele!"

"At least tell me what your name is, please."

"My name is Leukaemia."

I wake up yelling at the top of my lungs, covered in sweat. Angelica, the nurse with the dark lips and stylish glasses, hurries to my room: "What's going on?" she asks, concerned.

"Nothing, sorry, I was having a nightmare. A lovely nightmare, Angelica."

She looks at me and says nothing, I think she knows...

Three hours later, at 8:24 a.m., Doctor Paoletti arrives and for some strange reason, he doesn't stand by my bed. He takes a chair from the back of the room, by the closed window, he brings it close to me and sits down. He looks at me with an unfamiliar intensity and gifts me with the most amazing thirty seconds of silence of my life. "We have a donor, Gabriele. It's your sister, Graziella. Her bone marrow is perfect for the transplant. All that's left to do is to try it."

Three hours earlier I had a dream about love. It was love who came and told me this, in the blink of a moment that lasted an eternity.

Each year, in the second week of June, I have to go through a separation process. I don't think I'll ever get used to the moment I have to say goodbye to a bunch of year twelves. I've known them for three years, sometimes even five. They were just children, and now they're men and women. I'm infatuated with many of the girls and I consider the guys to be true friends, though I can't tell them this. I feel guilty in times like these. I always feel like I haven't given them enough, like I don't know enough about maths to be able to teach them as they deserve. We have been through a lot together but have never acknowledged it. For the last ten minutes, on the Saturday before the shouts of excitement, I sit on my desk and chat to them.

I quote a passage from the Gospels that talks about the master selecting cornerstones for a house. I urge them to further their studies, and to study hard, so that they're not just stones for show, all identical. "Be the type of people who get chosen and don't be mistaken for anyone who could potentially take your place," I tell them in a breaking voice. The silence of these moments is unlike anything else we've experienced over the many years we've spent together. Many of them are touched, but at their age they don't want to show it, so they lower their gaze or quickly dry their tears. Some of them adjust their glasses and scratch between their eyes and nose, acting like there was a bug in their eye at that exact moment. The person sitting next to them susses out what they're doing and takes it and runs with it, by using the opportunity to burst out laughing in their face to hide their own embarrassment.

One year, Andrea Canalis from a year twelve, stream C class, impulsively burst out laughing and triggered a fit of collective laughter from the class – myself included – which was equally impulsive. His laughter soon turned into a flood of tears, with his head resting between his arms on the desk, and with Sergio Battaglin – the class bully – consoling him by patting him on the back, he too, with tears streaming down his spray-tanned face. Girls with dry cheeks were nowhere in sight. These images are unforgettable. The janitors wearing coats and smoking in the hallway may receive a higher salary than me from the state, but that money is merely a bonus compared to the big hearts of 'my' kids. Andrea Canalis is now my son's dentist, and Battaglin sells wood flooring for his dad's business.

I'm nervous, but happy about what Paoletti just told me. I call Stefania and tell her everything, including the dream, with a spark of rare intensity. Then I call Graziella, Nicoletta and Rosalba and ask them all the same thing: "Would you all like to come here this evening? So we can have a chat..." and I leave it hanging, not responding to the continual demands for explanations. I don't want to ruin the surprise. I have a plan.

All three of them arrive, looking like the Muppets. They enter the room together, hot and flustered, breaking all the rules in place to protect me and also those who sleep next to me. “Hi, darling,” Rosalba says with a smile – she’s the most mature one of the three, so to speak.

“Hey there, take a seat, if it’ll hold you,” I joke, and then I begin my performance: “I wanted to tell you that I spoke to the doctors this morning, and after having cleared up my current situation, I’ve decided to discontinue chemo.” I said it just like that, nice and dramatic. Despair is painted on all three of their faces.

“What are you talking about, Gabriele? You have to keep fighting,” said Rosalba, as Nicoletta and Graziella lowered their gaze, disheartened.

Being the bastard that I am, I continue: “Can I be left alone with Graziella, please? Could you two go and get me a gelato?” Upset yet compliant, they agree and head off. Graziella has a questioning look and can’t seem to make sense of why I wanted to split her up from the other sisters.

“Gra’, I have a very important question to ask you. Just so you know, it’s something that’s only between the two of us.”

“Of course, don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone, I promise, sweetheart.”

“It’s not a matter of telling or not telling, but of giving or not giving.”

As I say it, I hand her a sheet of paper with numbers and nasty words on it. Two lines are highlighted in fluorescent green. The first is my bone marrow type and the second is hers. The lines are identical. I explain this to her, and she stares at me blankly and silently, while a single tear – the most beautiful tear in the world – rolls down her cheek, her puffy red eyes unable to contain it.

Then she explodes: “Of course, darling, I’ve lived my life anyway!”

“What the fuck are you saying, it’s not as if they kill you!” I respond.

“I know, but you know, maybe if they operate on my marrow then I’ll get Leukaemia as well.”

“What are you talking about, you idiot. Firstly: you donate your stem cells to me, not your marrow. Secondly: they don’t operate on your marrow – as you put it – they draw your blood on one morning in July and that’s it. Thirdly: yes or no?”

I get up effortlessly and we hug each other. She’s crying and I’m jovial. In the meantime, the other two crones come back, each holding their little gelato, their eyes widening at the scene before them. I explain everything and Rosalba, irritated, bursts out crying and laughing, saying: “I wanted it to be me. I knew it, it’s always her, ever since we were little, she always had the best things.”

I up the ante now: “Apart from the fact that you’re being ridiculous with these belated claims, and everyone is watching you cry, Graziella will be taking some big risks, because they have to...operate on her marrow...I’m not sure how enviable this is.” They turn towards Graziella.

“Your brother is a dickhead; he always has to make everything a joke. Nothing will happen to me.”

We make a toast. Gelato all round.

“I’ve had it up to here with you dickheads,” the yelling is coming from the corridor. Nunzia, the friendliest and most foul-mouthed of the three Neapolitan nurses, is furious. We’re overcome by the sound of shattering glass, followed shortly afterwards by a thud that announces a full-scale crash of the medicine trolley against the door of the doctors’ lounge. The doctors must have really pissed her off.

“Nunzia, come here. Don’t be like that, after all, we agreed on it a while ago,” says Doctor Rocca, one of the most senior and most experienced female doctors on the ward.

“We didn’t agree on anything. I chose the right numbers for the Naples lottery: thirty-eight, forty and seventy-one. You lot have gone and changed them so now fuck you. I’m not playing with you anymore.” She says all this with her back to them, shuffling along and banging whatever gets in her way. This is more entertaining than opening night at La Scala.

“Come on, Nunzia,” Paoletti and Marmelli say, snickering next to Doctor Rocca.

“As if! You shitty doctor,” all of a sudden, she turns around and looks at me.

“And what do you want, *professore*. Tomorrow morning you’re getting out of here and leaving me with these arseholes,” she smiles at me and gives me a wink.

That’s how I found out that I was going to be discharged – in a rather informal way, you could say.

It's the big day, and it looks like my white blood cell count is high enough for me to take on the other blood cells, which – they've finally managed to convince me – can be potential killers as they are carriers of viruses and bacteria. My liver is now back to normal. A figure of speech typical of Bari comes to mind, when you want to inform someone that it's time to get real: "Do whatcha gotta do," in other words, prepare yourself properly for whatever you must face. That's what life is about.

The doctors stop by to visit at 9:07 a.m. and they give a favourable verdict, while smiling at me. "The time has come, *professore*, today after lunch you can go home and tonight you can eat with your son, the mathematician. Of course, you will have to continue coming to SHOC for your check-ups, every other day I believe, and you will now be in the hands of the transplant team, in room 23."

Yay, vamos! How wonderful. "If you say so, doctors, you're the ones in the white coats, it would be rude of me to argue. I might even send you some flowers."

They smile and I can see the victory in their eyes. I have no doubt that this would be the highlight of being a doctor; like when a referee is (occasionally) congratulated by the losing team at the end of a game. It only happens occasionally for doctors as well. I'm almost happier for them than I am for myself. I didn't let them down.

Stefania's day at work began with a new glow. There were no phone calls or meetings, but instead a constant checking of the time and making sure her phone was working properly. She got up from her chair often to go to the window and look at the sky, and unlike every other day, she was wearing heels that were echoing under her feet. Gabriele's phone call arrived while she was on another call with a client. "I'm on the phone," she answers, "just say yes or no."

"Oh sorry, yes," he responds, beaming.

Gabriele hears in the background: "Hello, Laura, I have to go ...yes, I know, I'll explain later...you're right...tomorrow, tomorrow..." then she hangs up and says to him: "Give me six seconds and I'll be there!" Then she speaks to someone else: "Daniela, he's coming ouuuuuuuut." Click.

My wife arrives at one o'clock. She flies in with the good news written all over her face. I had told her everything over the phone when the doctors stepped out of the room. She has an empty bag with her, the one I use for tennis. I'm wearing the red Levi's that I made her buy me for the occasion, from one of my students' shop. I feel my heart start to race and take control of

me. My emotions are running high and suddenly something incredible happens – an intense and harsh sadness strikes me. I’m overcome with an enormous sense of guilt, as I look at my roommates who – sitting motionless – are watching me get ready to return to life. They remind me of those dogs at the pound when you don’t choose them. I don’t want to leave them. I’m crying, I go over to them and hug them, like what happens when a love story is cut short on the platform next to the train tracks about to carry a cruel train away. I say goodbye, messing around with the nurses. Giovannina touches my bottom and looking at Stefania, she says: “Your husband has the best bum in the world, even if we’ve slimmed it down a bit.”

I go to Cristiana, take her head in my hands, and give her a smacking kiss on the lips, right in front of my wife, who’s laughing happily together with the whole group of nurses. I go into every room and say goodbye: “I love you guys, come on, once we all make it out of here, we’ll have a good feed.” They say goodbye, nodding out of politeness but looking sad. Nunzia isn’t around, she must be in the bathroom avoiding all of this...

I exit, turn left and take the staircase. I carefully take my first step, holding onto the handrail, but still manage to slip. One false move – just as the proverb says. I stumble and fall, but I don’t bat an eye. I get back up and look at Stefania – she’s absolutely terrified. I close my eyes to reassure her: “It’s A-OK,” I confirm. I’m so happy and I don’t feel any pain. We arrive at the car and, for once, I’m forced to give her the driver’s seat. I’ve never once let her drive me while sitting next to her in the passenger seat – I usually call it ‘the death seat’. She looks at me in disbelief and I smile back, trying not to forget that date.

It’s the 7th of May 2003, Nicoletta’s birthday – my little sister.

We’re almost home when the greatest emotion of the day rushes over me: the turn-off to my house. After turning right, I see my apartment building and I know that this is where I’ll be sleeping tonight, and the following night and the one after that. Each evening, everyone goes through the motion of turning the corner and seeing their home, but they don’t reflect on how lucky they are to do so. Every. Single. Evening.

I enter and reach the couch, leaning on Stefania’s shoulder. How awesome is my house?! Roberto’s not here because he’s with his *nonni*, but I can see his stuff and feel his presence. Before I got sick, I would often come home late after various sporting activities (I like volleyball). I would walk into his room without any shoes on and sit on the floor so I could listen to his breathing, then I would get closer – as if to give him a kiss – and I would smell him. Roberto is my blood. Nooooo, I said something stupid, my blood is no good.

They told me that I can’t just eat whatever I want, especially when it comes to raw food, because it’s full of bacteria and I’m immunodepressed; it’s only my immune system that’s

depressed, though, because right now I wouldn't even know how to spell the word 'depressed'. I catch Stefania crying with her forehead against the glass door that leads out to the balcony.

We call Roby at his *nonni*'s: "Roberto, Dad's home," Stefania says to him, "are you excited?"

"Yep, I know," he responds, "so can we buy some Chantilly cream puffs?"

"Sure Roby, we'll get a lot of them. Hurry home." I'm well aware that they are tears of joy, even though in the back of her mind she's thinking about what lies ahead in the near future: my bone marrow transplant.

I only eat things that are cooked, and preferably, hearty. Pasta, meat and...chocolate pudding.

PART TWO
THE YMCA GLOVE DANCE

A new life

I've already been home for two weeks now and have gradually stopped using the wheelchair in favour of improving my physical condition, one day at a time. I've progressed from the early days of the couch-to-chair journey, needing support to stand up, to attempting to make my own way up the stairs to the tenth floor of the building. I surprise myself, especially considering the fact that I take twenty-two pills a day, which are even colour-coded and come in various shapes. My steps increase and my pills decrease.

I come across Mr Di Lorenzo from the fifth floor who greets me with a look of pity, more embarrassed than if he'd been caught farting in the dentist chair or in a lift. "*Professore*, how are we doing? Look at what they've done to you. The doctors at Mauriziano Hospital wore down my mum as well, those bastards," he comments, trying to show off. He wants me on his side, but that's not going to happen. "Well, actually, I was at Molinette, not Mauriziano, and I must say that the doctors were truly exemplary, both in their professionalism and their humanity. What you see – my skinniness, the struggling to walk and the bald head – isn't their fault, just like it's not my fault if I get stuck talking to a petty, shit-stirring arsehole while going up the stairs." When you want an honest answer, go and ask either a child under the age of four, an elderly person over eighty, a mathematician, or a dying cancer patient. I'm perfect.

I need to come to terms with reality. I'll soon be turning thirty-five and as time goes by, I realise that I'm becoming a man, and what's worse is that I'm very far off the man I dreamed of becoming. There are some things that I really like about myself: my honesty, that I'm a man of my word, my joy of living, and my love for Juve and for maths (Juve comes first).

Plus, I've discovered that I like nurses.

The day after being admitted, I had gone home for a few hours and I ran into our family doctor, Doctor Giacosa, who had been so kind as to stop by my place without having even been called. Overcome by courage, I'd sent an email to all of my Outlook contacts: "Hi everyone, I want to let you know that I've just found out that I've got Leukaemia, and for this reason, I won't be able to continue any commitments I've made, whether for work, sport or simply for friendship. I wanted to tell you myself, to prevent people from sugar-coating the words or trying to make them more palatable. It will be a tough battle, but I'm convinced that I'll win. Pray for me, dear friends...I love you all, love one another too, because life's too short to live it badly. Gabriele."

Today I'm looking over the few replies I've received in the meantime, and I save them, just like I save the cards from my students. High quality music, made all the sweeter by the spelling and grammar mistakes...

Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them.

Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain, but for the heart to conquer it.

Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield, but to my own strength.

Let me not crave in anxious fear to be saved, but hope for the patience to win my freedom.

Grant that I may not be a coward, feeling Your mercy in my success alone; but let me find the grasp of Your hand in my failure.

Rabindranath Tagore

Hello, professore, this is a poem I read every night before bed, as if it were a prayer. I would like to dedicate it to you, because it really makes me think, and if I recite it from the heart, it fills me with strength! I want to wish you a nice Easter. With every part of me, I hope you're getting better and that you can slowly restore your peace and get your whole family back together. We think of you every day, and almost every day we hope that it will be you who walks through the door for our maths and physics class instead of Mr Solaro – as if it were all a bad dream. Now more than ever, I realise how much I have grown as a young woman. Over the years, a tight bond has been formed, with our classmates, our school, and even with our teachers, and it's great because you guys –all of us – are a great team! WE LOVE YOU!

Simona Porta, year twelve, stream A (your 12A).

And another...

Dear professore, everything is going well here, apart from maths lessons which aren't the same anymore... While our substitute teacher is great, he is really 'heavy' (not only physically) and he completely changed your way of explaining things; and by the way, he doesn't try on the girls' earrings and jackets like you did, so lessons aren't as fun as they used to be... Anyway, we're hanging in there because we know you'll be back soon, everyone is sure about it! We went on a school trip a week ago, and although the program was EXHAUSTING and there were WAY too many things to visit, we really enjoyed ourselves – even though 'Bobo' (Mr Bolanga) bailed on us. We thought you would appreciate a postcard. During the evenings, we wandered around Mantova but couldn't find a decent bar, and although the female teachers would have loved to go wild at a nightclub, the places were too seedy!!! Don't worry about your hair, Mr Bolanga has been bald since birth – or soon after, and it's the 'in' thing now. We received your letter; it goes without saying that it was very touching, and we recommend that you don't look at the nurses too much...! We really miss you and we think of you often. Although you're going through a lot right now, don't give up, we'll always be by your side. Sincerely, your year nine, science-specialist class. We love you.

And another...

Dear professore, good morning, although it might not always be a good morning, although life doesn't always go the way we'd like, although sometimes you just want to leave everything behind and give up...you must carry on. I must admit that the first day I met you, I didn't really like you, I even shed many tears over my terrible marks, but this helped me gain respect for you and then I hated myself for having ever said certain mean things about you and now I really miss you. Everything at school is fine, apart from the fact that we always drive Crabbi crazy! Last week we went on an excursion and we had so much fun, I'll send you some photos as soon as possible. I hope chemo is going well, we think of you often...I dedicate everything I do to you, don't give up, do it for me. I hope that you like this letter, I wanted to write to you personally.

P.S. I know that this won't help, but when Mr Barbarini read out your letter, I shed a tear. I miss you so much... With love, Chiara.

And another...

I had been thinking about writing this letter to you for a while, but I wanted to give it to you at the end of the year. However, since I have the opportunity to give it to you as the class representative, I have chosen to do it now. Something that I love doing, for better or worse, whenever I finish a task – whether it's big or small – is an evaluation, to see how much I gave, how much more I could have done and above all, how well I did. This long journey of school is drawing to an end and the thing on the top of my list is you, you've meant so much to me and you continue to mean a lot. It is amazing how much you have managed to give me, often unintentionally! It has been so nice learning everything, and having your strong nature put me and my pride – which was so big, but fragile and often hurt by your words – to the test. This did me a world of good, and these are now all experiences engraved in my soul. I am very upset that school is finishing, and I am telling you this because I know how much you care about the rapport with your students. With school ending, I hope the tight bond and friendship can remain because it's something that's always useful in life. If a certain teacher of mine's theory is true, it's the outcome that matters, and I really believe that the outcome has been remarkable. I feel the need to express to you my gratitude, towards your job (...and what a job it is). I hope you put the same amount of fighting spirit into this, as you did into our classes. Valeria Maria.

And another...

Fuck you, Gabriele, fuck you very much. You're making me suffer. From your colleague Silvano, sent from the Perugia trip, where you were meant to be as well. Fuck you with all of my heart, dear friend.

And another...

For the attention of Mrs Longo,

Dear Mrs Longo, I am the mum of Enrica and Giada di Julio, who are lucky enough to have your husband as a teacher, one in year eight and the other in year ten. Forgive me for taking the liberty to write to you at such a difficult time for your family, but when faced with such a situation, I can't help but express the support and sympathy we feel. I am sure that you will all get through this, despite the fact that it can't help but be a long and difficult road. Professore Longo is always full of energy and determination, and he's got a great sense of humour — he will overcome this. In the meantime, please let him know that his students miss him terribly. I doubt this will be of any use to you, but my husband's father is a consultant and he was a specialist at a hospital for a long time. If you have any questions then please give us a call (four phone numbers follow), we might be able to help you as many of our friends are specialists at Molinette. Hoping to meet you one day, sending a hug to your son. Rita Shering.

And another...

Dear Gabriele, we want to be funny and so...we're calling you by your first name (sorry). We've decided to write one line each.

It's a pleasure to write to you;

We did the practice exam, we're not up to standard as you always say;

We wrote a song about you to the tune of 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm' but we're not going to send it to you, Mr Lon- Gabriele;

In class, Giacchi does one silly thing after another and Simone sprained his ankle showing off;

Valeria has cut her hair and she's even thinner than before;

The five-a-side soccer tournament is still happening, and your team continues to win even without you... 'Gabriele' (sorry);

Alfo's team is on 4 points and Olly's is on 6, but we thrashed them at volleyball;

Class photos have been developed, they look terrible and the principle got shi—;

Bobo continues to explain things, but no one listens to him;

Brother Gabriele continually encourages us to pull out of the exam out of respect for our Lord;

The song by Venditti says that maths will never be my profession, but this obviously doesn't apply to you, Mr L- Gabriele;

Today I solved a problem, incredible but true (the problem);

I can't do it without you, I miss you (Giulia);

I want to keep opening my eyes up to the world, come back, please;

Back to Madrid, next year — I'll pay;

I can't call you by your first name, I can't be funny, I miss you;

Lorenzo finally did it with Laura. Praise the Lord;

I can't believe that I've grown fond of a man;

*Hey there, you chauvinist, Giusy;
Do you still want my lip gloss?;
We have to go and watch a Juve match together. Your bro, Frank;
Bianchi has put on weight, Gabriele;
Matteo's mum is sexier than ever and it's pointless for you to keep denying it;
Watch out for the night-shift nurses, Gabriele;
Things are no longer the same as they used to be, we were better off when things were worse, come back Gabriele.*

And another, a certificate on parchment paper that says:

This certificate confirms that you will ALWAYS be our teacher.

And another...

I have been a bit angry with you lately, I will explain everything when you come back, so hurry up, also because I cannot learn maths without you. Besides, you had promised to take me on a visit to the Maths Department at the university, time is running out and I can't do it without you. Maura.

I tie them together with some green string and I store them away more carefully than I did my degree certificate, which is still proudly hanging above the toilet, in the guest bathroom.

Today I'm going to school to say hello; my mobility allows it, and since it's the last day of classes, I want to give them a nice surprise. I pass through the corridor of my class and I see Paolo and Vincenzo, crouched down in front of the fire stairs by the emergency door, stealthily smoking a cigarette – after having convinced the teacher in charge that they both had a meeting with their sports teacher and absolutely had to go during that class. I know them too well.

I eavesdrop: "Fuck, Paolo, New Year's Eve is in five months and twenty days," the first one comments with his head down.

"Fuck, you're stressing me out man, just chill, why are you already thinking about New Year's Eve?"

"You're right, coz, first we've got to get smashed after exams, promise me that."

They talk in their own slang, which I've gotten used to. All in all, it's appropriate because now I use it too, with them or with other friends my age – the age at which we begin to reap what we've sown, my Dad would say.

I intervene: "I bet you're meant to be in Bolanga's class right now."

They look over but don't recognise me, then Paolo suddenly gets up, almost standing to attention: "*Prof!* Whatcha doing here? Oh my God what a surprise!" He then runs towards the year twelve, stream A class and flings open the door without knocking: "Oi, Longo's here!"

With that, everyone gets up and without worrying about poor Bobo, they run out of class. As soon as they see me – bald and as thin as a rake – they suddenly stop, almost frightened, or perhaps out of respect, more towards cancer than towards me. I walk up to them to save them the embarrassment and give a bunch of high fives to the guys and double-cheek kisses to the girls. I'm fifteen kilos lighter than when they saw me last, when I weighed sixty-five kilos. Giulia is sitting at the back of the classroom with her head in her hands. Bolanga shakes my hand and then nods in her direction. I go over to her, weaving around the others, and I sit down next to her; I don't really know what to do. I see that she's got her maths notebook open on the table. She was doing homework while Bobo was explaining the Impressionist movement of Monet and Renoir. I take a pen and underline a mistake with the derivative of a logarithmic function. "No, Giulia, here you have to multiply it by this..."

"Okay, *prof!*" She sniffles and starts laughing: "Thank you, I'm sorry." It's nice when someone laughs through their tears.

After I got home, the rest of the morning was like flying around on a dragon overlooking the lush green hills of Scotland.

For the past two days, Stefania has been complaining about her eyesight. She tells me that she can't see the outline of things out of her right eye, and since the short-sightedness of her other eye is quite pronounced, it's a rather worrying situation. She definitely can't drive in this condition, so I try to convince her to see an eye specialist.

"Let's wait a little longer, it could just be from crying too much or maybe it was from my fall in the bathroom yesterday."

"I don't think we should wait at all."

Although it's Sunday morning, I call Doctor Lastri's mobile – he's the father of Carlo Lastri, one of my year eleven students. He's also one of the best eye specialists in Turin and he's very familiar with my whole story. He won't mind me calling. Obviously, the worst awaits us: on Monday morning, Stefania goes into surgery in the hope that Doctor Lastri's team can reattach the retina – which came off at least two days ago – to her healthy eye, otherwise it won't be long before she'll lose her vision.

Luck just keeps coming our way...!

I want to be here for this, even though Saturday's lumbar puncture is still causing me agony – it feels like I'm being stabbed in the spine. My spot is right outside the door from which the surgeon will exit, like on an American TV series. I can't stand up because my neck is stabbing me with every movement, so I decide to lie down on the floor of the waiting room. I don't give a shit about everyone else and I'm completely oblivious to the irritated looks from those four arseholes who are sitting comfortably in their blue chairs. The marble floor is cold, but it's hard enough to support my bald head. I'm still wearing a mask over my nose and mouth, so I repulse everyone else who doesn't have one. A nurse arrives. Someone has informed her about the disturbing scene unfolding in the waiting room.

"*Professore*, what are you doing lying on the floor? Come with me, we'll give you a gurney, your wife will be in there for another hour or so anyway."

How the hell does she know what I do for a living? This amazes me, but it's a nice twist for those stinkers sitting in front of me who, at the word '*professore*' look at each other as if they were on *Punk'd* – also because I'm wearing short shorts, a pink Juve jersey and black sandals. "No, thank you, I'm not going anywhere. But obviously I'd appreciate it if you could bring the gurney here."

Stefania comes out of the operating theatre wearing a pair of black, wrap-around sunglasses which I got for her the previous day. She's fine and everything went perfectly. She squeezes my hands, not just to tell me that she's fine, more to encourage me to endure the pain that's written all over my face. Between some husbands and wives, words aren't needed; a feeling is enough.

I leave the hospital soon after, so that I don't give in to her continual attempts to give up her bed for me to lie down. She doesn't need it, she says.

For the next two days, I go back and forth between the eye hospital and Molinette at least six times – on the tram so as not to put anybody out.

Per nen disturbé – so as not to disturb...as they say in Piedmont.

On the day after being discharged, the 8th of May, I go to SHOC to meet my transplant team. I've reached my halfway goal: SHOC. I don't know anyone, but I've been given the room number where I have to present myself: number 23. I'm greeted by a man with refined manners and a very charming voice. He has curly, white hair and two eyes that are as blue as the Cuban sea. He's holding himself up on two crutches and comes towards me in his own nonchalant way. I smile and give him a nod. "I'm Gabriele Longo," I say to him.

"Ah, the famous maths teacher. I used to really like maths. Please come in, I'm Doctor Lucarelli and that's Doctor Bussi," he says to me, pointing to a doctor who's tall enough to be a volleyball player.

"Good morning, *professore*, I've heard that you teach at my old high school – though I won't tell you how many years ago that was."

What's happening: *professore*, famous... Who are these new men that know everything about me? Doctor Lucarelli invites me to sit down and it's clear that he's perfectly familiar with my medical record. This is reassuring. This is professionalism. A big fuck you to the newspapers that speak poorly of public healthcare, these people are the best in the world. We arrange an appointment with Graziella for May 10, then they show me the maintenance therapies and the preparation for the transplant that I've got to look forward to. Dentist, cardiologist, pulmonologist, radiologist...and what...andrologist?! They're going to examine my dick as well...Basically everyone's involved!

At the end of the conversation, Bussi tells me what I wanted to hear as a man of science – I worked at CERN in Geneva, so we're not exactly here to pick daisies: "In the coming days, you'll also meet Doctor Failla. We expect the transplant to take place on July 24, with your sister's stem cell donation happening on the 23rd. This procedure has a complicated name but basically, we take blood from one of the donor's arms and, after having centrifuged it to separate the stem cells from the other cells – which have a different weight, you see – we re-inject it into her other arm. The whole thing will only take a couple of hours for your sister. For the three days leading up to it, she will have to get injections to boost, so to speak, her stem cell production; and she will have a bit of back pain, but that's the only discomfort she'll experience. Don't feel too guilty, we're aware of your reputation as a worrywart. Your admission date is set to be July 17, so for the next month and a half, try and regain some physical strength and mentally prepare yourself to be in complete isolation – apart from seeing us – for a period of time ranging from thirty to forty days. This is absolutely necessary if you want to get through this. Your chances of survival are good, but not guaranteed. You will have a very high degree of immunodeficiency which means that a minor

infection is enough to significantly increase your risk of death. I need you to sign these forms to confirm your informed consent.”

Risk of death, holy shit! Frank and clear, without right of appeal. I like this doctor. Again, I’m a scientist and I get caught up in the excitement of learning new things. I sign the forms and cheerfully say goodbye. I honestly feel like I’m in capable hands. The only thing I’m not convinced about is being a worrywart – what were they trying to say? They know what I’m like. I bet they know about that time at the dentist when I smelled a fart and felt guilty even though it wasn’t me? To this day, I have doubts as to whether it came from the dentist or the hygienist. What terrible manners! I should’ve gotten up from the chair and said to them: “Jesus Christ, excuse you! Who was it? Would you care to flush, Doctor?” Doctor, said to the dentist, would’ve been great.

Leaving room 23, I see photos hanging on the wall from last year’s World Transplant Games in Montreal.

I want to go there and swim the 50-metre breaststroke in under 50 seconds.

I've been coming here for days on end now, and the heat this year is truly terrible. At 7:56 a.m., I have my samples taken, then I wait until 12:04 p.m. for the results, which are used to modify the dosage of my pills. Given his track record, Roberto obviously records everything, and now he's even learned how to jazz up the tables and graphs. I hear someone screaming three rooms up, in number 20. I immediately recognise the voice, it's Nunzia's.

"Kid, ya gotta eat, otherwise you'll die. Don't be an idiot." It's music to my ears.

Although I'm at the Day Hospital, today I'm lying in a bed because I caught cytomegalovirus. Just the name makes me sick, not the 'cyto' but the 'megalo'. Couldn't I have had a less ambitious virus, I don't know, like cytotimidovirus or cytoquietovirus. No, I had to have a megalomaniac one, which if you don't recover from it, leaves you walking off into the distance...

I need to speak to Nunzia. I want to kiss every part of her, which could take a while given the size of her. There's only one way I can get her attention: "Nunziaaaaaa!" I yell from one room to another.

"Yeah...", she immediately responds and comes to my room. When she sees me, she rushes over and throws herself on me, almost unplugging my drip.

"My darlin'!"

Everyone in the room smiles and, as always, they're embarrassed. It's always them.

We chat a bit about ourselves and before leaving, she confides to me that she has a new boyfriend – he's married, Calabrian, a policeman and an asshole – who she loves very much. I want to introduce this woman to everyone I know.

Just after 11:00 a.m., there's another surprise. In the bed next to me, Carmine – the man with fissures on his arse who used to smoke joints in the bathroom – makes an appearance. "Hey charming Carmine, what a nice surprise. When did you get out?" Wow, what a question, we sound like a couple of jailbirds.

"A few days ago; things seem to be getting better, health-wise that is. Everything else is shit. Work has laid me off and my daughter has failed the year at school because of her maths teacher – a dickhead. Oh, sorry Gabriele."

"It's fine, buddy, I'm surrounded by morons, but there are some very capable teachers out there as well. Just like in here, it comes down to having a bit of luck."

"Unfortunately, Massimiliano passed away, the one from Susa Valley, did you hear?"

Well that's a knife to the heart. "No, shit, no!" I comment, but then quickly play the part of the optimist. "It is what it is, Carmine, it is what it is. This is just the ways things are. Massimiliano was a good man and he would've died with arms wide open, just like everyone who I've seen over

the past few months. When we leave, if we have good hearts, our arms will be wide open so that we can pass on everything we possess and know to the people who loved us. When we're born, our first instinct is to close our hands and clutch onto any finger we're offered. And that's the way it should be at that point. I loved doing it with Roberto, his instinct was immediate...Anyway, Carmine, other news?"

"Yeah, I've fallen in love with a very elegant woman, but I feel guilty about my wife and children. You know, I also feel guilty about her children and even her husband who – even though he's very rude – is still a good person. I write her poems and send her flowers, but there's no point, he's better equipped than I am."

"For fuck's sake, you're writing poems? Oh piss off, I know who it is anyway...we all loved her while we were in here. She's the prettiest nurse that will ever appear in your dreams." Then I lighten the mood. "Come on, I'll make you laugh, let's change the topic. Do you know the theorem of Braico – a colleague of mine – about the lack of symmetry in the universe?"

"Go ahead, spit it out, just don't make me do too many equations," his expression suddenly changes, now he's smiling.

"It's easy, you just have to answer some questions, got it?"

"I'm ready," he says, sitting himself down on the bed.

His drip-feed is now empty, he's finished the yoghurt.

"First question: if a woman gets with a lot of men, what would we call her...?"

"A slut!" he responds.

"Well done! Second question: if a man gets with a lot of women, what would we call him...?"

"A stud! A ladies' man!"

"Very good, and as you can already see here, things are different; it goes from negative to positive in the same situation. Third question: if a woman is betrayed by her husband, what would we call her?"

"A poor woman! A victim!"

"You're going very well; I can tell you smoke joints. Fourth and final question: if a man is betrayed by his wife, he's a...?"

"This is easy: a cuckold! Holy shit, that's incredible, I get it."

"Carmine...those words came from your mouth. But it's not finished. Now for the theorem's corollary."

"Coro-what?"

"Corollary, which is also a theorem because it has to be proved, but it derives directly from another theory that has already been proved correct: like what you proved to me by responding to

the four questions the same way as everyone else I've asked. However, what's coming, hasn't been proved by anyone yet, the population is divided. Get it?"

"Fuck, yes," he responds, excited.

"Here's the situation: a man finds out that he has been betrayed by his wife and out of dignity or anger, he leaves her, and they separate. Now, do you think that years later, people who know him and his story will still consider him a cuckold, or not?"

"No, if he broke up with her. Yeah. No, no, he's not anymore."

"Prove it to me, Carmine." We all burst out laughing, even those who were eavesdropping in the room. Sick patients, nervous relatives and that really cute student-nurse wearing green trousers and revealing a glimpse of paradise under her white scrubs. This is like the Lemon Festival, we're yellow, shiny and bald, but we possess a unique essence – knowing how to enjoy the little things capable of unleashing laughter.

People with joy in their hearts manage to have a laugh even when faced with his Eminence, Lord Cancer. It's the best way of trying to heal. Trust me. Succeeding isn't our job but trying certainly is!

Roberto and I prepare ourselves for an afternoon of fully-fledged learning. Now that I'm home, I want to see all of the graphs that he's created and understand how he managed to identify that sudden change in my bilirubin levels, coinciding with the intake of four new medications. I'm intrigued to hear the story of how he got there, and I want to give him some extra pointers, because when it comes to kids, you've got to strike while the iron is hot. I decide to explain the graph's straight line to him from a geometrical perspective, using the same tools as in our year ten science classes, but with primary school language. It's not an easy task, but I know I can give it a try. I take some spaghetti out of the packet and once I've created a ring around the pieces using my thumb and index finger, I release them onto the table, where I had placed a huge sheet of white paper. It's like we're playing Pick-up Sticks. "Look, Roby. These pieces of spaghetti have fallen into place at random and at different angles. Now let's take two markers and continue the line of each spaghetti up until the end of the table; but we'll use the green one to extend those going towards the furniture, when the marker is moving away from us, and we'll use the red one for those going towards the door, when the marker is moving towards us."

"And what about the ones that don't go away or come closer, which colour do we use?"

Go Roby! "Well done! Blue," I respond, more and more surprised by my son.

"Let's take away the spaghetti and look at the paper. The green lines are moving away. Do you remember how the bilirubin increased?"

"Well, on my fourth graph – the bilirubin one, there wasn't a straight line but a mountain that first went up and then went down. It's like there were two lines, first a green one and then a red one, right, Daddy?"

"Perfect, Roby, that change of colour was thanks to you and your graph; and just like the colour of the diagram went from green to red, my eyes went from yellow to white. You're a champ. Hi-five, buddy." And I went from death to life, I think to myself, but I don't tell him that.

It's the end of June when Doctor Gatto – the head of department and the person who admitted me – comes to visit me in the Day Hospital to ask if I would like to speak publicly about my experience: "You see, *professore*," he says to me, "next Tuesday there is going to be an event for those young people who dress up and go around as clowns on the ward – and who I am sure you would have met. The man behind it all, Patch Adams, will also be here in Turin. Would you like to come and share your story?"

"Absolutely, yes! Wait, the guy from the movie?" I ask.

“Yes, that’s the one, *professore*. Well, I’ll hold you to it, see you at the entrance of the auditorium. The head nurse will give you your pass. I don’t know how to thank you, but I think you’re definitely the right person for it; over four hundred clowns from all around Italy are going to be there, but after all, you’re used to public speaking, right? Goodbye.” He shakes my hand and turns his attention to a lady with an anxious look on her face, who is holding the hand of her extremely bald husband. He had never shaken my hand, man to man, before; this probably means that I’m recovering.

I enter the large auditorium of the hospital from a side door, the way you would enter church. The chair is waiting for professor Gatto – the consultant – to finish his speech, before taking back the microphone: “Now we’re going to hear from a patient who has experienced the other side of this journey,” he says, “and who is fortunately still here to tell us his story. Let’s thank him with a round of applause. Gabriele Longo!”

At that point, I stand up and an uproar breaks out in the packed auditorium of Molinette. The clowns start stomping their feet in the stands. Endless cheering: “Woohooo, well done!!!”

I completely freeze, something which has never happened to me before. When I start speaking, without having prepared anything, my voice trembles due to a clear lack of oxygen. “Hi every...one. I really don’t know what to say.” A second round of applause mixed in with stadium cheers and yells of exhortation overwhelms my stomach, but I continue. “I’d like to thank you for your dedication and enthusiasm, even though it wasn’t always easy to pay attention to you. Sometimes I found myself asking you for a balloon just to avoid the guilt I would have felt if I disappointed you. All I can say is thank youuuuu! Thank you, red noseeeeee!!!” It’s an uproar of sheer emotion.

I get off the stage and go and shake hands with Patch Adams, a very tall man in his fifties, with long, straight hair all the way down to the sole of his red shoes. The right half of his hair is white, and the other half is purple. A real-life clown, who created the clown therapy program and who established dozens of hospitals all around the world. What an honour to have had this opportunity.

Not many people get to have encounters like this in life. I should thank my illness. Thanks Leukaemia! Thanks darling!

Flying high with all this excitement, at the end of the conference, the doctors gather around me and invite me to go and have a meal with them at the hospital cafeteria. They're going to eat the same shit as we do, now that's what I call solidarity. And so it should be!

Halfway through the meal, they look at each other and give one another a nod. That means GO. The consultant looks at me and says: "Listen, *professore*, next Sunday in Milan there's a convention at which we were thinking about presenting your story. I'm talking about your liver toxicity that we solved with your contribution or, as it were, with the contribution of your..."

"Go ahead and say it – of my son who is only ten years old. That's no problem, I know you all know about it anyway. Maybe my determination was a contributing factor. You are all incredible and I owe you my life, for however long it's going to last."

"Don't be silly, this is our job. We're talking about a different matter. We would like to take you with us; it would be wonderful if you could tell your story first-hand. Unfortunately, in English, if you're up for it?" If you're up for it? Alright now you guys have pissed me off. Clowns, doctors, English, and worst of all, Milan: what the hell!

"I'll try, doctor. I'll try." Where there's a will there's a way, Gabriele. Milan? So be it.

The day was better than I could have imagined, I even enjoyed myself and plus, there were certain hostesses...maybe it was a selection of the nurses who have appeared in the dreams of sick patients. Judging from the look on their faces when they saw me with my mask, I don't think they all fell in love with me, but that's neither here nor there.

On the way back home, the doctors offered me the privilege of calling them by their first names, but I turned down their offer with all the courtesy I was capable of. "Sorry, I can't, you're too important to me. Too clever and also too attractive, rich, blonde and intelligent."

Hearty laughter filled the consultant's grey Mercedes. Then I continued: "The only people I call by their first names are the psychologists who on my second day of admission asked me whether I preferred Molinette or the Sheraton in Dubai."

We have a laugh and for the duration of the trip, we're friends.

I'm happy.

I live the week leading up to my admission for the transplant like a healthy person. My passion for volleyball takes me to Squinzano, in Salento, where the Under-16 boys' national finals are being held. I actively participate in the event and I meet some extraordinary people; none make me feel bad about my obvious state of weakness. I get involved in the activities and I rise to the challenge, especially since there's absolutely no pressure on me whatsoever. I'm proud to be there and I'm happy that the sporting commissioners in Rome – who were aware of everything – wanted to believe in me. We're all sizing each other up because no one knew each other before then. I eat with enthusiasm, though the portions I can stomach are minimal and this was a bit of a cultural problem: down there in the South, lack of appetite can cause offence, so I force myself to eat.

"Why aren't you eating this other sea bream, don't you like it?" a sporty-looking waitress asks me, then unbelievably, she takes my fork, sticks it in a hot, freshly grilled fillet and holds it out to me. "Come on, open your mouth, don't you see how thin you are?"

No shit I'm thin, if only you knew what I've been through! I think, but I go along with it. Seeing other people smiling is touching. People you've never seen in your life who give you the courage to fight Leukaemia. How great life is. Only sport can do this, good clean sport.

Speaking of clean sport, one day, during a day visit to hospital, they administered me with erythropoietin, commonly known as EPO – the performance-enhancing substance cyclists use – due to my haemoglobin being too low. The coolest thing ever. The effect it had on me was truly amazing. I was as happy as I was in Salento because when doing my stair workout, I went from struggling to walk up three floors one day, to strolling up to the tenth floor the next. The following day, I went back to Doctor Failla to ask him for a few more packets, which could be considered a modest personal dose, one for which you wouldn't go to jail. Those cyclists who rocket up the summit of Zoncolan at 23 km/h are onto something. I do the first leg at 8 km/h and then it's off to the bar for a beer.

The trip back to Orbassano was peaceful. I was ready to tackle what lay ahead of me: the stem cell transplant, for which I had to stay in a sterile and solitary room for a period of about a month. In complete isolation, like a serial killer. I thought everything would go according to plan, but I was wrong, of course. Two days before I'm admitted, Doctor Lucarelli calls me: "Good morning, Mr Longo. Listen, we have a problem. The room you were supposed to be in won't be free as we had expected it to be, so we have no other option but to postpone the transplant for a few days."

Why won't it be free as they had expected? What's wrong with the person who's in there now? Why extend their hospitalisation? Did they have some complications? My mind starts playing feature films far too easily. It's part of a sick person's neurosis! It's clear that in response to a statement like the one Doctor Lucarelli has just made, any person of sound mind would be over the moon, given the opportunity to stay home a bit longer. Not me! I've always been an instinctive and hasty person, so I fight back: "Okay, doctor, but didn't you tell me that the first week is only for preparation? Could you not ask if I can do this in the regular hospital ward, with the others, where I was before? I could call Santina, the receptionist, myself if you like. She loves me, you wait and see, I'm sure she'll find a spot for me."

"Of course, I'm not going to make you call her yourself. Apart from the fact that she loves me as well," he answers back ironically, "I hadn't thought of that option. If anything, I thought you would have liked to stay at home for a bit longer. We can give it a try. Keep your phone on, I'll be in touch later."

Stay at home for a bit longer? Sure, and when should I rip off the Band-Aid? I don't waste any time, I dial Santina's number right away. "Hello lovely, it's Gabriele."

"Hi darling, how are you?"

"Good, Santina. Listen, I'm supposed to be coming in for a transplant on Wednesday."

"Yeah, I know," she responds, surprised that I didn't know that she knew. They always know everything.

"The problem is that they don't have room upstairs, Lucarelli will probably call you soon. Can you put a gurney in the bathroom for me? That way, I can do that first week downstairs and then I'll only have to do three weeks in lockdown – provided everything goes well."

"Of course, darlin', we'll give you your bed, number 15, and do you want dancers and champagne with that? Where do you think you are, *professore*, at the market? Don't worry, I'm just joking, let me see how things are looking. Take it easy."

Everything in life is negotiable, even a bed. Especially a bed.

At 3:07 p.m., Lucarelli calls me back: "We have a bed downstairs, in the ward. You must be there at 8:02 a.m. Your bed is number 15. I'll see you in the afternoon, *professore*."

Santina the saint. We're off to a good start, a very good start.

I spend the final two days of freedom eating fish and drinking wine. I manage to make love again like in the old days, even with myself.

The big day has arrived: 17 July 2003.

Everyone tells me that's it's really hot, and considering their distressed faces and minimal clothing, I believe them. I don't feel it because my blood can't seem to warm me up. I'm always cold!

I leave home early, with sandals and a backpack. I put in everything on the list that Simona – the head nurse of the transplant clinic – sent me a few days ago:

- three pairs of pyjamas;
- four T-shirts;
- plastic slides;
- four pairs of white socks;
- toothbrush and toothpaste;
- a new book wrapped in plastic;
- mp3 player with new headphones, wrapped in plastic.

I don't pack any whisky, condoms, or cigarettes, and especially not a comb – that wouldn't be very proper of me.

As I walk down the main corridor wearing shorts, black sandals and carrying a backpack, I run into Doctor Lucarelli who's now in a dodgy wheelchair. He hits the brakes, says hello to me and comments: "Where are you going dressed like that? To the beach?"

"Is this not alright? What are you supposed to wear when going to get a marrow transplant? Blue suit, white shirt and a striped tie?"

"You really are a lunatic. They should write a book about patients like you, *professore*."

"They should write it about doctors like you. Not only would it be a bestseller but also an instruction manual!"

"I'll see you later, upstairs. Welcome, Gabriele." What a delight, he called me by my name. I think we're becoming closer.

We then go our separate ways. I head towards my old ward. That man is a role model for me, and he will be for my entire life, I'm sure of it. I may not be very close to him, but every time I run into him, I get caught up in his intelligence and his class. He's in my top five. Roberto Baggio is number one.

As I embark on the second-last leg of my journey, I'm struck with a terrible lump in my throat; my saliva has all dried up, which is exactly what I was warned about by the information

leaflets accompanying all the medicines I down on a daily basis. My mood is always the same: calm, but this time there are mixed feelings inside of me. I breathe in positive emotions, thinking about how this moment could mean the end of everything, for better or worse. As I look at the other beds accommodating new patients – with whom I’ve not yet built any solidarity – a sense of loss comes over me. I promise myself that, wherever possible, I won’t tell anyone that I’m only there for a week and then I’ll be moving to the transplant area, since *I’ve* found a donor and they haven’t. I couldn’t bear to see their eyes lower again, just like mine lowered when I found myself in their situation a few months ago. I claim the bed and set up my bedside table and wardrobe.

I’m in position again, but this time the challenge is different. Doctor Paoletti arrives by mid-morning to say hello to me, and he tells me that he’ll come back soon with Doctor Failla – the world-class transplant surgeon – to explain what my journey over the next month will look like. I feel oddly full of energy; perhaps due to the sense of having a possible solution. I start working on public relations with my roommates, who already know everything about me. Gossipy patients. The one on the left is very quiet, he’s newly arrived; the one on the right is in the middle of a phone call with South America, he’s presumably Peruvian and his tone of voice makes me think that he’s pissed off. Indeed, he hangs up and mutters: “*Hijo de puta madre*,” which doesn’t sound like a compliment, then he turns around and politely says hi to me.

I smile at him and ironically say: “I didn’t mean to upset you; they’ve told me that this one’s my bed...”

“No, sorry, it’s my brother from Peru who’s pissin’ me off. I’m Conan, nice to meet you.”

“I’m Gabriele.” Some names crack me up. We’re talking about a one-and-a-half metre tall Peruvian with the name of a two-meter tall Viking. That’s a difference factor of four.

It’s already 3:04 p.m. when the doctors arrive in full regalia to speak to me. “What did you have for lunch, Gabriele?” Failla asks. He’s the only doctor who makes friendly chit-chat with me. I noticed this at the beginning.

“All of the pasta, then some *stracchino* cheese, leafy greens and fruit salad.”

“You’re going to get fat. How are your bowel movements?” An ordinary question aiming to take the pulse of the situation, though the body part we’re discussing isn’t actually my pulse.

“Fine, doctor, they’re as regular as my father-in-law’s; he pops out an egg every day – or so he says,” I always respond to that question in the same way.

“Okay. Listen, this week we’ll be giving you a pretty strong medication – essentially a chemotherapeutic drug – and it’ll be administered to you in high doses. It aims to completely reformat you, like a PC; this is the only way you’ll be able to receive your sister’s marrow. Your white blood cell count will be so low that we won’t even be able to measure it, in that the readings will

almost be off the scale. That's why you'll have to transfer to a sterile room – but they've already told you about this. The Endoxan will make your shit runny and it'll give you a bit of nausea and tiredness, nothing out of the ordinary. Then you'll do six sittings of radiotherapy on your entire body – TBI (Total Body Irradiation) – which won't be painful, you'll just get some shivers. Yet it's nothing like the ten sittings of brain radiotherapy you went through ten days ago, those ones are worse because they last around twenty minutes, rather than five. After the sixth dose we'll take you upstairs and we'll wait for your white blood cells to decrease. On the 23rd, your sister will make the donation and your immune responses will be at their lowest; then on the 24th, the actual transplant will take place, which is when you'll be taking in the donor's stem cells yourself. And then we wait: if your white blood cells rise above five hundred, it means they've created roots, like plants do; otherwise, things will take a different turn. We're expecting that it'll be around mid-August before we before we can start to relax. I know, it's a lot to take in. Do you have any questions?"

"No, doctor, no questions. Thank you for the clarification, I'll do whatever I'm told." I respond rather respectfully, and obviously frightened, but I'm keen to get started.

"Great!" He gives me a nice pat on the shoulder, turns around and leaves, together with the other two. Paoletti looks at me – his shyness written all over his face – tightens his lips and says good-bye. At this point, he and I can understand each other with just a glance. That's a huge result for a doctor.

Everything is going the way I'm used to. The drip-feeds are slow, the nurses are pretty, the doctors have me hanging off their every word, and the Sardinian pasta sticks together in clumps just like protestors against the high-speed rail in the Susa Valley. I handle chemo well, despite needing to take constant and urgent trips to the toilet.

The big change is TBI, which involves radiation from radiotherapy going everywhere and deep. To do this, they take me towards the right wing of the hospital in a wheelchair, not because I'm unable to walk but because it looks cool. A big man with a very long, white beard – like God depicted in paintings – welcomes me and points to a metre-high wooden cube, with steps to reach the top. “Take your time to get up there,” and I silently obey, because if God tells you to ‘get up there,’ things aren’t looking good and it’s worth obeying. I’m alone and I think about how much my life has changed in the space of just a few months. Thirty-five years of oblivious happiness ending up in the hands of our Lord, in hospital, in a radiotherapy room... on top of a cube. In my underwear. Like a podium dancer at a night club.

Those of you who have good health, enjoy it, for the love of God (the real one!).

The process starts by climbing onto a seat that is a tiny square of cloth, suspended between two straps as if it were a swing. The radiation-sensitive patches have been stuck all over me by a physicist with whom I used to study and play volleyball. They fasten the straps, as if I were a horse, and they take away the cube from underneath me, like they do when executing someone by hanging, then God says to me: “We’ll be in the next room, try to stay as still as possible. You’ll see these huge cylinders move around you,” pointing to the machines, “it’ll be really boring, but you won’t feel a thing.”

I nod and wait, then everything begins, and I desire only one thing: David Gilmour singing *Cluster One* live, because sometimes only Pink Floyd speaks the truth. I feel lonely without them, now that they’ve become the soundtrack to my hospital life.

After twenty minutes of riding on the merry-go-round, everyone reappears. They untie me and let me sit down on a real chair. “We’ve finished, Mr Longo. See you this afternoon for the second round.” This is the worst thing that they’ve done to me. I walk out on my own two legs, now tiny and weak, and I find my chauffeur in the waiting room with the wheelchair. Her name is Maria, like my mother – who is always in my thoughts, through the intercession of Saint Bernard.

Back in my room I feel fed up, almost humiliated, by so much helplessness. I lie down and cover myself with everything I’ve got. The cold takes a hold of me, like on an evening after spending an entire summer’s day at the beach, from eight in the morning to seven at night. The other rounds, before the final one, keep on getting worse but I know that after the last one I’ll be

transferred to my final destination. I spend the time after lunch thinking about myself and my family. I'm no longer doing all of this out of a will to survive – I'm done with that – I'm fighting for them.

“We like having you around,” my loved ones openly tell me. They think that I create a joyful atmosphere. It's not arrogance but rather old-fashioned altruism, I'm sure of it. So, I'm fighting long and hard because I believe it's possible, and because I promised myself that I would be able to win this battle which many people consider to be impossible. Yesterday, after the fourth round, I found my sister Nicoletta in my room; she comes to Turin by train which takes three hours each way. I ask her to do me the favour of bringing me something nice to drink because my mouth's dry and I'm really cold, even though we're in mid-July. She gets me a can of Coke from the vending machines halfway down the corridor – the ones where you have put in the money and enter a number, then you hear an absurd thump at the bottom: *baboom*. She opens it up right in front of me – as you would with a hand grenade – and she pours it for me, happy to have helped. I can feel the side-effects of the TBI in my body. “It's warm and flat, Nico, where did you get it from, it's not even sweet,” I say after taking a big gulp.

She does the same, she drinks a decent amount and her face immediately says it all. My taste buds have been completely burned off my tongue. That Coke – like all other Cokes – was cold and fizzy, almost unpleasantly so, and as sweet as a sugar coma. Great, Gabriele, this is just the bitter truth, I think to myself with a play on words that contrasts with the sweetness of the Coke.

After the sixth round, they take me to my new room. Number five on the third floor.

I'm so happy, the marrow transplant is starting. I will be a transplant receiver, and everyone will look at me with admiration, how cool.

In life...

In life, extraordinary things happen, sometimes they're even unbelievable.

It's already been three days since I came here, to my little bedroom. I look around and try to figure out the architectural structure and design of the place. When I'm lying down in bed, my right arm manages to touch the wall just below the window. Yep, the window...I only understand later why it's locked; not to stop bacteria from entering, but to prevent suicides. To the left, there's a little table on which the IV drips are placed, then another thirty centimetres.

The IV drips are like shoe boxes full of bright lights and numbers, but if they get pissed off, they can also emit sounds similar to those that a car makes when you don't put your seatbelt on. Those boxes control the amount of medicine that falls by gravity from the drip-feed, enabling the right amount of substance to be released over time. It's a function of time, like I explain in class. Sometimes in my year eleven class, I explain the flow rate of liquids and I try to get them to understand the difference between laminar and turbulent flow. There is no shortage of examples.

We're in Turin, so we've got the Po River here which helps us to imagine laminar flow. I tell my students to try and sit on the riverbank and observe one of the many tree trunks floating towards us from Moncalieri, which catches our attention and then continues on. It's unlikely that it would rotate on the surface, and it certainly doesn't rotate by emerging itself underwater. The little terror whose turn it is, promptly points out to me that if it bumps into another trunk, one of them sinks. My usual reaction is to close my eyes for a second, take a breath and walk over to that little terror with my eyes wide open, pat him on the back and say: "Don't worry. We still love you even when you make comments like this."

Everyone laughs. It always works.

The laminar flow of the drip-feed's saline solution is simple to study, and the infusion pump regulates the frequency of its flow. I learned this right away, even Roberto would pick it up immediately.

After the little table, before the wall, you can fit two small-man's palms before reaching the right wall. That's as wide as it goes, and let's not forget the small sink with the little window above it that looks out towards the corridor. The doctors and nurses can watch me from there without having to don full protective gear – like in a jail or a mental institution. I'd rather be in a mental institution, if only for the company.

There's no bathroom, but you don't need one anyway because you have to pee into a little pan, and I'm not talking about kitchenware. One thing that cancer patients have in common with the kitchen is that their equipment can be rusty. You have to pee in the pan because they've got

to measure the amount in decilitres. Your poop is to be done inside a bag which is placed within a plastic bucket. It has to be weighed in grams. Units of measurement are important in physics and I'm well aware that the world is full of people who measure distance in minutes rather than in metres (I live ten minutes away from school), and weight in kilograms when it should be measured in newtons.

My bed is against the wall and in front of it, at the foot of my bed, that same small man wouldn't even be able to take a single step before reaching the end of the room. If he were to stand at the foot of the bed, above his head is a small, fourteen-inch TV with three channels: RAI1, RAI2 and *Retequattro* – Emilio Fede's domain.

That's everything!

The walls are made of stainless steel perforated with thousands of small holes the size of a grain of rice. It feels like you're in a colander, inside a cooking pot. I'm sure that this helps ensure good hygiene, but it's all rather disturbing. The purpose of the holes is to change the air, several times an hour – where 'several' ranges from fifty to one hundred and fifty.

I sleep a lot and I dream.

It's early morning. A fresh set of elegant, blue eyes enter. They blink to say hello to me. It's the only part of her I can see, the rest is covered by green cotton and paper. I don't know her hair colour, nor the shape of her hands. The only thing this illness allows me are those eyes and the melody of her voice. I'd never heard it before, but I'd always imagined it – it really does exist. She tells me that her holidays are over and that today she has decided to start her medication rounds with me. She has read my clinical report. Instead of thinking about the numbers that she's reading out, I'm thinking: she chose me first. She attends to the venous catheter coming out of my chest. Her gentleness is rare to find, and she carries out the tasks slowly, very slowly. She caresses me. She comes back four hours later and then again after another four. It's the day of the transplant.

Over the next few days, the ritual is repeated, and the duration of her visits gradually increases. I find an inevitable sense of pleasure in her movements. She can't resist and nor can I. We seek each other out. One day she strokes my bare hands with hers – covered by latex gloves. I lose my mind, I can't breathe, I'm bursting out of my body. Her first night shift is an explosion of feelings; we talk and we hug. She takes off one of her gloves and runs her fingertip along the back of my hand. "You're special, Gabriele." She tells me in a soft voice.

I don't want to leave this hospital anymore.

The following morning she's not there. I want to die, I want to know where she is, what she's doing and with whom. That afternoon, she doesn't come, and the sense of defeat begins to eat me alive, I go back to not breathing.

Three days pass, then the phone in my bedroom rings. "Ciao, Gabriele, it's me. I love you." She hangs up!

I wake up. It was only a dream, an illusion. Dreams don't eventuate. Dreams happen at night, far from daytime. Far from reality. You don't choose your dreams. Dreams don't repeat themselves. Ever.

In life...

THE TRANSPLANT

It's evening and Graziella is sitting on the balcony seeking out that tiny bit of cool relief, denied for many hours by an unusually warm summer. She is staring at the words on an open page of the novel in her hands. Not reading, just gazing pointlessly at the third sentence of the left-hand page, reading it over and over. She was thinking about that last dose of medicine designed to increase her production of stem cells, which she would be giving to her little brother in a few hours, seeking nothing in return. She's worried about him. She's afraid that her body – eighteen years older than his – won't be able to accomplish the task. Her back had only started aching the previous night and it was certainly manageable, especially since it proved that there was an abundance of new cells which were running out of room to move. They wanted to escape and thrive in the blood of her blood – Gabriele Longo, a Longo just like her. It was three in the morning when she managed to fall asleep on the most exciting night of her life. The night before her brother's new life.

It's July 23, 2003; there are many parallels between today's date and the date I was first admitted, March 4, 2003. It's a solemn day and Graziella calls me at 8:17 a.m., as punctual as a clock... a Swiss one, of course.

She's already in the basement of the hospital, at a place with an incredibly accurate name: 'the blood bank'. Among the millions of stem cells stored there in the vault, there are some which will be withdrawn – so to speak – today, from their rightful owner. "How are you feeling, does it hurt?" I ask her.

"No, I just had a bit of back pain last night, from the injections they gave me to stimulate the production of those cells I'll be giving you. How about you?"

"I'm fine, last night I had a temperature of thirty-eight but the little soldiers who come in to take my vitals and cuddle me every four hours aren't worried."

We chat another three times throughout the day, and the result of her stem cell apheresis – her blood sample, in other words – is positive: we've collected millions and millions of cells. Those soft, little red blobs will save my life; I can picture them, it's as if they're part of a group of fans waiting for their idol to appear. I'm their rock star and I'll give them a warm shelter for the rest of my life, which looks like it's going to be much longer than it seemed a few weeks ago. My brother-in-law's friend lived for another seven years after his transplant. Seven fucking years. Sign me up. Tomorrow's the big day, it's bone marrow transplant day, well, technically stem cell transplant day.

From this day forward, July 24 will be a national holiday in the Longo household. Today is T-Day!

Even today, I wake up early; it's 6:37 a.m. and my fever's gone. I'm a happy man, even if it's purely because I'll be the new owner of something I've always heard people talk about. As of today, I'll have a woman's DNA; let's hope it ends there. We shall see. One thing's guaranteed, I could commit a murder and there would never be any damning evidence against me in my DNA. I carry out my usual everyday routine, and my cup of tea doesn't even seem that bad today. A little bit of soul music with Joss Stone makes for a perfect transplant day, especially since I'm wearing the Juve jersey my students gave me. Del Piero signed it a few days ago: "Stay strong, Gabriele!" it says; and strong I will be, dear Alex.

Doctor Failla, being the joker that he is, appears behind the big window of my room, accompanied by a procession of three nurses – maybe hot, maybe not, but I think they are – and he shows me a bag of blood, swinging it around. That's them, my replacement parts. Completely new marrow, and it's high-quality because it's from my sister: blood of my blood; never has an expression been so accurate. It's 11:17 a.m. when the doctor comes in and personally attaches the blood bag to my cannula. A doctor has never done that to me before, those are things that nurses do.

I stop him: "Wait a second, I'm going to call my sister so I can give her a live update."

"Oh! You're so sweet, you'll give me diabetes. Come on then, hurry up, *professore!*"

"Hi Gra', it's me, Doctor Failla is next to me holding the bag which contains your cells, the ones that are going to try and save my life," she's crying and doesn't respond, I nod to the doctor to proceed. *"Okay, he's opened the valve and I see the border between the blood and clear liquid moving towards me, it's turning and racing towards my chest, okay that's it Gra', it's in."* I'm crying as well. *"We have to trust it. Everything will be alright. One last thing, Gra' – thank you darling!"*

After he'd turned the valve, the doctor left, partly out of discretion and partly out of divine pity towards the pathetic scene in front of him; but deep down he was very happy, even though he was well aware that we still had to wait and see. The happiness a doctor feels in having cured you is equal to the difference between your illness and wellness, obviously in absolute terms because it has to be positive.

Now we just have to wait and hope that everything goes well.

My days blur into one, consisting of necessary habits and occasional joys. I hardly notice when they come and take my vitals during the night anymore, but when they come in first thing in the morning, it's time to get up and start the scrupulous personal hygiene routine. All of my clothes from the previous day – T-shirt, pyjama shorts, and socks – must be replaced with clean ones, but only after a soapy sponge has gone over and thoroughly scrubbed my entire body. This routine takes more than an hour out of my day but it's not as if I don't have time or I'm in a rush. The doctors visit at 9:00 a.m., and it's always the same. First, "how are you?" then mouth, stomach and arms; my blood test is the only thing that matters anyway, but Doctor Paoletti isn't here to read out my test results. These other doctors look at them but then keep the results close to their chests, though if I asked them then they'd tell me everything, but I don't dare. I never dare to ask. From 10:00 a.m., it's all pretty quiet which means music time for me; it doesn't matter whether it's radio or CDs, the important thing is to have some company and good headphones. Lunch is already in the white IV bag, so I'm not hungry, but I have a peeled apple to refresh my mouth, it's something I always enjoy...then coffee and a liqueur to aid digestion!

Stefania's daily, one-hour visit is strange. I can't see her because she's covered from head to toe; I only know it's her from her voice and the fact that it's 2:00 p.m. Holding hands with latex gloves feels different from actual skin contact – and the comparison between latex and skin is instinctive, without necessarily wanting to be vulgar. When she heads off back to her solitude, I regain my solitude as well, but at least I talk to someone every four hours, she doesn't.

Not only is the news report on *Retequattro* annoying, but it also marks the approach of evening, when daylight starts to fade and gives way to thoughts of a completely different kind than those during the day. Stefania's goodnight call is a mixture of details about my clinical progress and stories about Roberto. It's now been a week since I've spoken to Roby. The only thing that matters is knowing he's going well with his cousins up in the mountains. Maybe he's building a treehouse or perhaps he's set on expanding the one from last year: let's hope that he keeps the receipts so that we can write them off as home renovation expenses next year. Yep, because I still want to be paying tax next year, and I plan on completing the income tax return form myself.

The only certainty is that the days continue to pass. In terms of progress and news, for the first ten days, nothing changes whatsoever; my white blood cell count continues to hover around zero, without ever reaching it. My main task is washing myself and listening to music. In the mornings, my cleaning ladies come and refresh my room by changing my bed linen and cleaning the steel walls until they're spotless. I change all my clothes and weigh my urine and faeces, as if I had to do a management and control report for an engineering company producing small parts. I

dance around in my underwear every time the nurses go past. Knowing this, they ask me to perform a dance to the Village People's 'YMCA'. My index figure glides from right to left. When my spirits are high, I even place a towel between my legs like a saddle and pretend I'm riding a horse. This is how you fight cancer in the Longo household.

The fever comes and goes, like a ghost that doesn't know whether to take me away with it or just give up. There I am, straddling life and death, so it's time to take stock. I've had a fantastic life. I've got a clever and charming son, and a wife I adore and who adores me back. I've had the best job I could ever have hoped for. It's perfectly in line with what I would've wanted to do when I was older and with what I had studied for many years. I've got a stable income that has always allowed me to have long-term plans and a high quality of life. I'd be home from work by two in the afternoon and enjoy long summer holidays. I own my own home, and I've enjoyed good health. And even now, I don't feel that bad, as in, I don't feel any pain.

I don't see the glass half full or half empty. I see a glass that's full to the brim!

51.

In my family and in my wife's family, we all love each other, and there's nobody who avoids anyone else, which is incredibly lucky. Then there's sport: I'm a Juventus supporter and to this day, I'm still proud that we've won the most *scudetti* of anybody (n+2). In the sport I used to play, I was one of the top five players in Italy; and I'm not ruling out the chance I might still be one of the best now, despite being bald and battered. Modesty isn't my strong point. I think about one of my best qualities: the fact that – all things considered and contrary to what my colleagues in humanities think – I'm quite cultured, and I can talk to anyone without worrying about what they do for work. I would gladly eat dinner with a bricklayer and a senator, without ever wondering who's who. I was a good tennis player. I was good at breaststroke. I was living well; and in the years to come, I desperately want to be able to say and write: "You won't believe it, but I was dying."

Everyone says that Saint Lawrence Day precedes the most magical night of the year: the night of the shooting stars. I won't see them, just like most people won't see them. But it's nice to mention it and it's nice to make a wish...I definitely have a wish!

KNOCK.

"Come in," I respond, surprised by the fact that no one had ever knocked before entering my room. Three nurses with lovely voices, bright eyes and a romantic manner come in. They close the door, stand side-by-side and give each other the go-ahead, all without saying a word. They take out six latex gloves from behind their backs, blown up like balloons. They've drawn eyes and big teeth on them with a black marker, and the fingers of the gloves act as ears. I'm laughing and crying as I sit curled up on my bed, hugging my knees. They're laughing and crying as well. Then it begins, a dance of makeshift puppets moving back and forth like a car piston. Maria – the Polish one with bags around her eyes from working a night shift – turns towards the sink where she had temporarily placed a seventh balloon and hands it over to me, her voice quivering with emotion: "Here, *professore* – congratulation!" Her Polish accent is coming through. It has the number 500 written on it in red marker.

I look at her surprised, in tears and as happy as a clam: "You girls are out of your minds! You need some looking after, young ladies."

"No, Gabriele, today your white blood cell count is at 500, which means your sister's marrow has taken hold. The transplant has worked! If everything goes as planned, you'll be going home by the 15th of August, in time for *Ferragosto*."

I grab hold of my nose with my thumb and index finger and cover my mouth with the other fingers out of sheer astonishment for what I've just heard. "You girls need to get laid; this isn't what nurses are meant to do!" I'm laughing while crying, and I'm crying while laughing – they're not quite the same thing. "I don't know what to say, girls, thank you. Thank you for everything."

"Don't cry, you should be happy," Simonetta says.

"I know, Simo, but I've learned to never get my hopes up, let's wait and see what the doctors say."

Sure enough! Doctor Bussi enters without knocking, I recognise him by his height. "Good morning, Gabriele, what's up with these ladies? One's laughing, the other's crying, did you fail them in maths?"

"I essentially suggested they go and get laid, but they'd actually come to announce that my sister's marrow seems to have done its work, it's made itself right at home in my body."

“Yes, I suppose it has. I agree with both the first and the second statement. In fact, the tests show that your marrow is 99.67% female. I’d say we’ve done it.”

“So, if I kill an Inter supporter, I’d be off the hook.”

He bursts out laughing without straying from his earnest demeanour. “You know what, I think there may even be a book about such a thing by Ken Follett,” he comments and then continues, “so, today is the 12th, if your levels increase tomorrow – and I expect that they will – we might get up to 1, 000 the next day, and perhaps we could think about discharging you in the afternoon. You obviously won’t be allowed to leave the house other than to come to SHOC every day, for the post-transplant tests and treatments, but it seems like a pretty good outlook to me, right?”

I take a deep breath and relish the thought of sleeping at home, then waking up in my own bed and having breakfast on the balcony on the morning of *Ferragosto*. “It sure does, doctor. Thank you so much. Thank you, girls.” They all leave, I turn onto one side and put on my headphones. I want my music. I want AC/DC live. I want the bells from *Hells Bells* because today they’ve promised me life!

It's the eve of *Ferragosto* and, as with most occasions, the eve is more important than the actual day. Jesus was born on Christmas Eve, before midnight, he told me himself during one of those trips I've taken with my head on the pillow over the past few days. Since I've been in here, he and I have been talking again.

Everybody celebrates New Year's Eve by eating sausage and lentils and setting off useless firecrackers. I won't celebrate it anymore because it will be the anniversary of my mother's death. I'll just go to the movies at 8:03 p.m. and have dinner at home with a candle lit in the middle of the table; and my sisters will do the exact same thing, perhaps we'll do it together from now on. The night before final school exams is always everyone's most memorable night, and not only because of the movies that have been made about it, or the songs that we sang on the beach. Likewise, from this year on, the eve of *Ferragosto* will have a very special place in my memory, the most pleasant one.

I wake up early, very early. It's still dark outside but I'm not sleepy anymore. I don't want to be sleepy anymore because I want to enjoy all of the life I've been given. After my morning ablutions, I leave everything in the hands of fate and wait patiently, without doing anything superstitious. Doctor Bussi enters, once again without knocking, and comes towards me. "How's it looking?" I ask, although I always dreaded asking him this question. We often ask questions knowing full well that we're about to put our head into the lion's mouth, and the answer is invariably the unfavourable one we could see coming; this happens when talking to women too, and it happened with her – the one from the dream.

Sure enough, the lion snaps its mouth shut: "Unfortunately we've seen an increase in your liver enzymes, I've got to give you a bit of cortisone and see how it goes. I can't send you home today. We'll wait a bit longer." Those words feel like a slap in the face, the kind that takes your breath away and makes you lower your gaze. Damn liver enzymes! The liver's fault yet again! It's pissed off once more, we're back at the beginning. Shitty bilirubin. Roberto, my boy, you have to help me again.

Doctor Bussi says a very cool goodbye, without giving me any hope. In his place, the nurses enter, not saying a word – that's a bad sign. They know something that I don't, maybe they've seen this all before. I have to wait until tomorrow and spend an additional eve consoling myself with tears and music. If I didn't have music, I'd already be... Fuck you, wretched liver.

I decide to call Stefania and get her to read some of the letters from my students, just to get my tears flowing – they don't come out by themselves. I know that I always feel better after a cry.

She comforts me but her voice is shaking. This is just the way things are, but it could be worse, the roof could be leaking.

Silence!

It's 3:42 p.m., I ring the bell above my head, like I do whenever I need to do something, even when picking my nose – an activity that used to be reserved for waiting at a red light. Almost immediately, Ingrid arrives, a very polite Neapolitan with whom I've established a very special bond. "I need a massive favour and you're the only one I can ask," I say to her. I can only see her eyes.

"Of course, I'll help if I can, tell me what it is, Gabriele."

"When you leave, can you please go across the road to the supermarket and buy a kilo of lemons? Put them in three bags, one inside of the other, so that germs definitely won't get in. I'm not going to open them, but I need to have them here with me. I want to spend the night with them."

She lowers her head, and without asking me for an explanation, two hours later she gets a colleague to deliver what I'd asked her for. *The lemon festival* is going to last the entire night. If I'm not around anymore, their fragrance will remain, along with the joy I've put into the fight. I started with lemons and I want to finish with lemons.

I stay awake and pray. My mp3 player has died and I don't have any spare batteries. I continually turn it off and on, hoping there might be hidden power. I can't do it anymore; I've done everything I can.

The doctor on duty enters at 10:22 a.m., it's Doctor Lucarelli aboard his buggy. "Today's test results are all good *professore*, the cortisone has worked. Go home, Gabriele!"

I throw my head into the pillow and within an instant, my energy comes back and it's even greater than before. It's the extraordinary power of hope, together with the joy of living, that breaks through all obstacles.

I dry my tears and get up, bouncing around like I'm inside a pinball machine. The nurses detach everything from me and invite me to pack my things. I call Stefania and tell her everything, skipping over the details, I don't have time for that; she's going to wait for me outside the front door at midday. At 1:09 p.m., I go towards the corridor with my bag on my shoulder. I take the first step of my new life; I see a nurse's face, not just her eyes but also her nose and mouth. It's the first face I've seen for a month, I don't recognise her and I flinch – as if I'd entered a bathroom, seen a naked woman and violated her privacy. I step back and retreat to my room, like a snail. She calls me and I recognise her voice. "Sorry," I say to her, "I'd just never seen you like that before..."

“Don’t worry, *professore*. Go home champ, and remember not be too mean to your students,” she says.

I smile and say goodbye in an uncharacteristically reserved manner, then set off down the stairs. Stefania is sitting there waiting for me. She stands up smiling and comes towards me, almost at the speed of light. This moment contains all the colours of the rainbow. We hug for the length of an arpeggio played by our little angel in heaven. Our first-born son who didn’t make it.

Together, hand in hand, we head towards the exit of the hospital. I step outside and almost a minute later, I take a breath. This is my rebirth. The other time, thirty-five years ago, it was my mother who was happy and suffering. During that birth, my first breath took a minute to arrive, and then the cry of life burst forth. Right now, my breathing is loud and fast, then I start crying as I laugh like mad, while simultaneously applauding the world with a slow yet powerful and deafening rhythm.

These are tears of joy. These are the tears of a second chance.

MY AFTERWORD

We've all thought about writing a book, robbing a bank or opening a restaurant at some point in our lives. A robbery is alluring and decisive, but too dangerous; as for the restaurant, I'm still developing my skills. But with this book, I've fulfilled a dream. It has been kept in the right-hand side of my left-leaning chest of drawers for far too long, and then the universe decided it was time. After trying to raise money to donate equipment to hospitals and to those who are not so lucky, I decided that something more was needed. A message of real-life hope was needed, that could simultaneously assist in raising funds to purchase machines or equipment which I would personally obtain and deliver. This was the best way to achieve both goals. My memory didn't need any assistance, and the end result has left me proud and satisfied. The novel isn't for refined literary palates, but it's written from the heart and I'm sure that it will be read that way too. That's no small goal.

Given what I've written above, it seems obvious that this novel should be purchased rather than borrowed; though even if readers take the second option, I'm sure they would realise the intentions of the book and respect them by gifting a copy to someone else. Otherwise you can do whatever you like with it. Part of the proceeds will go towards the cause; I will only be left with joy and vanity. I swear this on the Juventus line-up that time they played in Bilbao and made a dream come true.

I would like to point out that the facts, things and people that appear in this novel are not there by chance and I'm not going to rid myself of any responsibility for this. I wouldn't dream of it.

Marco Braico

HIS AFTERWORD

I've been dealing with bone marrow transplants for twenty-five years now – or haemopoietic stem cell transplantations, as it's more correct to say today. I started off with children then I moved on to adults: the scale changes but the feelings, the 'emotions', remain the same.

The question I've been asked the most over the past twenty-five years, almost as if it were imprinted into my interlocutors' mind and vocal chords, is without a doubt: "How do you cope with seeing Leukaemia patients who are ill and suffering, every single day?"

At the beginning, my interest in a relatively new area of medicine was paramount; the appeal of dealing with transplants was definitely the main reason, it was the 'fuel' that powered me to move ahead in such a tough field. I vividly remember my first stem cell transplant from a voluntary donor: I went to London to personally collect the marrow, and for me, this was like winning a gold medal at the Olympics, it was like standing on the highest step of the podium, the only thing missing was the Italian national anthem!

Then, over time, while the appeal and interest in this profession remain unchanged, other feelings came into the picture. Time has a way of maturing our experience as well as our way of thinking. So, if initially I used to respond to the recurring question, "how do you cope with seeing Leukaemia patients who are ill and suffering, every single day?" with the enthusiasm of a child who has just received a Christmas present, now my response is that my job has taught me a lot, actually a great deal; but one thing above all else: balance.

Balance – or a sense of moderation, if you prefer – is what I've learned over the past twenty-five years of work, and this is the fuel that allows me to go to the hospital and enter the transplant centre every day. My job has taught me to give things, loved ones, passions, and ideas the right amount of importance: everything is important to some extent but believe me, giving it the 'right amount of importance' is quite a difficult task.

Marco Braico's book is a precise written transposition of the concept of balance. Besides, who could explore this topic better than him?

Therefore, the reader who has followed the path marked out by this novel, has probably understood how to find faith and joy simply in the fragrance of lemons: nothing more natural. Nothing more 'essential' than the simple fragrance of a fruit can represent happiness. But this journey requires the strength to strip yourself of everything superficial, vain and irrelevant: this is what an illness as devastating as Leukaemia makes you do.

And then there are the countless dreams of *professor* Longo, the protagonist of the novel. Freud observed that the most evident externalisation of that part of the soul that's immersed in darkness is found in dreams; he defines the study and interpretation of dreams as 'the path to

understanding the soul'. This is exactly what happens in the story about *prof.* Longo's illness: "I'll be dreaming about the pace of that dripping for many years, because I've still got many years to live. I'm sure of it!" The fluid passing through the IV tubing with a continuous, endless flow marks the passing of time which every patient – including the *professore* – uses to project themselves into the future, almost as if it were a message of hope. This novel is, without a doubt, a huge message of hope and love. One sentence struck me the most: "When we leave, if we have good hearts, our arms will be wide open so that we can pass on everything we possess and know to the people who loved us."

From tomorrow onwards, I'll be mindful of this as well... Thanks *prof*, I've learned something new.

Doctor Alessandro Busca