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Armido Cremaschi

Chronicles from limbo
COVID-19

*To my family, scattered but connected,
to my fellow rescuers
of Verolanuova and Cremona,
to the Doctors, the Nurses and all Auxiliary staff of
Spedali Civili and Domus Salutis of Brescia
Thank you*

*Sono i giorni degli insetti tornati
lo scarabeo cammina
già stanco tra le margherite
tutto ronza in giardino
le formiche che cercano riparo in casa
perché di sopra hanno spruzzato
il veleno due o tre che esplorano
il pavimento
mentre ancora sussulto
alla solita sirena*

*These are the days of the bugs come back
the beetle walks
wearily among the daisies
everything buzzes in the garden
ants seeking shelter in the house
because poison was sprayed upstairs
two or three exploring
the floor
while I once more flinch
at the obsessive siren*

*La vita immaginata, by Giovanni Peli,
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Foreword

2020 will forever remain in the collective memory as the tragic year of Covid-19 pandemic.

For those who died for the disease, only remains the sorrow of friends, of familiars who were not there for a last farewell, of doctors, who tried with science and heart to save them.

Those who, like me, survived, carry within, besides psycho-physical after-effects of varying gravity, the memory of weeks and months of illness, spent in suspended animation, in a limbo of confused existence, nuanced in colours, sounds, flavours, often without a proper collocation in time and space.

During the flashes of lucidity of the first days, I remember having made the promise of describing, after recovering, sensations and nightmares, fears and dreams.

At the time, I had no fear that, in my case, the disease could possibly have a fatal outcome.

However, after witnessing so many gurneys leaving the ward, with a blanket draped over yet another unfortunate, I became acutely aware that this fate might befall on me too, that I would be unable to go back to my family, to my projects, to my life.

This thought convinced me to put aside literary intents, unrealistic at most, focusing my perspective on the “here and now”. I don't think it was the outcome of a rational process, more likely an instinctive retreat behind the barricades, trying to escape an implacable foe by minimising my footprint.

The rational explanation I give myself now, after the crisis, confirms a substantial recovery of my analytic faculties, a fortunate nature's endowment. On the other end, it has become an incentive to trying to fix on paper some of the many experiences I lived during several long weeks in Intensive Care, in Post Intensive and Rehabilitation, linked to vital support lines and to more than vital Professionals, who catered with all they could to my needs.

These few pages serve two purposes.

The first is to provide to the Clinicians, who took care of me and are still following my recovery, a first-hand description of my near death experience, and to justify some of my “bizarre” words and behaviours of that period, trying to dissolve at least some of the many therapeutic doubts of this pandemic with “clinical” data.

The second is to reciprocate, at least in part, the love of all who sustained and supported me, primarily my family, friends and fellow rescuers.

Background and developments

I just turned 69, have a wonderful family with my wife, children and grandchildren. I am (was) a retired professional, active as a social volunteer, in good physical and mental health, with the presumption of still having a lot to do, before quitting for good.

During a transport by ambulance on 19th February 2020, I got the SARS-CoV-2 infection from a cancer terminally ill patient, who died few days later. I developed the first symptoms on the 23rd: high fever, saturation in constant decrease, asthenia, articular pain.

I was hospitalized at the Spedali Civili in Brescia, with alleged COVID, on Friday the 28th, and the infection was soon confirmed.

After several days in a segregation ward, I was relocated to an Intensive-Care (IC) unit (05/03), due to deteriorating symptoms.

From there to another ward (Endocrinal-Metabolic), and again to Pneumology (11/03),

where I received respiratory support via CPAP, with no relief.

On 12/03, I was therefore brought back to IC, where I remained for 35 days, most of which in sedation, with tracheotomy, pronation and heavy pharmacological therapy (Cortisone, Chlorochina and others), fed by a nasal-gastric tube.

On April the 17th, I was taken back to a medical ward, soon to enter a new ordeal, due to several bacterial infections, which had easy life against a debilitated immune system, finding new points of entry, through the many intravenous accesses, applied for drugs, water and food supply.

After few weeks of “peeking over the brink”, I was unable to swallow, to talk, to walk, in addition of having lost most of the muscles, due to forced inactivity. I was still being fed through a nasal-gastric tube, with the prospect of having a direct gastro-feeding implant for months.

By the middle of May, with the assistance of a Speech Therapist, I was gradually able to recover the capacity of swallowing: by then, I had lost about 20% of my weight (from 75 to 58 kg), was unable to stand, even with help.

For long weeks, I was heard practicing phonetic and muscular rehabilitation, slowly recovering some mobility and feeding autonomy.

On June the 11th, I was finally discharged from Spedali Civili and sent to Hospice Domus Salutis, for neuro-motoric rehabilitation.

After 3 weeks, when I was finally sent home, I had gained some weight (60 kg) and mobility, using foot braces.

*In limbo: Messages & links, dreams &
nightmares*

23/02/20

18:23 – G.R. [*the Red Cross fellow rescuer who was with me during the transport of the infected patient*]
Ciao, I am G.R. I don't know if you have been informed, I just read on the "Provincia on-line" magazine that the patient we transported last Wednesday to Crema died, being positive to Coronavirus infection...

18:32 – Armido: No, I didn't know. Please inform the President immediately

18:33 – G.R.: Ok, I'll call now.

18:34 – Armido: The patient was in bad shape, but nobody was aware she was infected: this means that she got it in Cremona Hospital.

18:46 – Armido: I am reconstructing my close contacts. After M. did we carry someone else?

18:48 – G.R.: We carried back home M. e C., then M. to dialysis, that's all.

18:49 – Armido: Ok.

19:35 – Armido: [*to the WApp family group*] I just discovered that last Wednesday I carried the patient who died today in Crema Hospital, tested *post-mortem* positive to Covid-19.

Now I am waiting to be contacted for a test, for me, Mom and Laura [*my daughter*]. For now, no panic. I'll let you know.

19:36 – Fede [*my other daughter*]: Damnit. This last Wednesday? Laura still there than?

19:42 – Armido: Yes, now waiting a call from ASL, for testing all of us. No worry, anyway. My immune system seems to work as intended.

21:52 – Fede: Any news?

21:55 – Armido: No, still nothing. They tell me that the ambulances are busy. I think they may come tomorrow morning. Stay calm. Besides the inconvenience for Mom and Laura, I am fairly positive to being able to overcome the possible Covid-19 infection.

22:13 – Armido: [*to G.R.*] How are you managing? Stay calm, I beg you. Has anybody from SOREU contacted you, or still nothing? I just went to bed.

22:43 – G.R.: Still nothing! Oh, yes, a bit of stress, but I try not to worry too much...

24/02/20

06:36 – Armido: How are things? No news here.

07:34 – G.R.: All right at present... no news either.

07:40 – Armido: So be it.

09:47 – G.R.: Above all, my parents would need to have an answer about going to work... I might call the President, asking for advice.

11:25 – Armido: I just contacted her. She says to remain at home, if there are no other symptoms than fever. Now I have 39°C, but nothing else. I just took a fever pill. I hope you are still ok. My feeling is that the situation is going out of control. Maybe only those who shout loudly are taken care of.

12:30 – G.R.: At present I have 37°C and no other symptoms. Has your fever abated?

12:34 – Armido: It goes down 1 degree, whenever I take a pill, but it's ok. As long as you can bear it, the immune response is stronger. Of course, let's hope they soon come for the test, so that we can reassure our relatives.

25/02/20

13:02 – Armido: It appears they ran out of the test material in the first days of last week, using them indiscriminately to all accessing the Emergency facilities or entering the country by plane. Now they are sparing, but it's late. It took me over an hour just to talk with an operator at this number 02.857 *****. I gave him your name and telephone number also. Anyway, if you have no symptoms, you will probably be told to stay at home, in quarantine for 14 days. They promised to send somebody for testing us.

17:11 – Armido: Well, I am calm, now concerned more for Mom and Laura. The Covid-19 obsession mounts, and it doesn't help the fact that since last Sunday, when I first reported the alleged infection, nobody has shown up. In any case I have to stay put for at least 2 weeks, so, reading, reading...

17:12 – Franci [*my son*]: Yes, the collective panic is foolish: 130 deaths due to the flu, 0 dead due to Covid-19 (in Germany) and everybody is talking about that.

17:28 – Armido: Yes, unfortunately the press, for commercial purposes, is inflating, without considering the consequences. In Lombardy the rapid increase of the calls at the Emergency Units is unstoppable, at the first sneeze and few decimals of fever. Well, there isn't much we can do and anyway, better a redundancy of news, provided they are coming from reliable sources, than the censorship of totalitarian regimes like China.

26/02/20

13:44 – Angela [*my wife*]: This is the extraordinary message sent by the Principal of Liceo Volta in Milan, Domenico Squillace, to the school students, published on their website. Spend few minutes to read it: it's a masterpiece.

TO THE STUDENTS OF VOLTA LYCEUM

«The plague, which the health tribunal had warned could enter the Milanese country carried by the German troops, had indeed entered, as it is well-known; it is likewise known that it did not stop here, but spread and emptied a great part of Italy...»

The words quoted above are the incipit of chap. 31 of “I promessi sposi” (The Betrothed, by Alessandro Manzoni), chapter that, together with the next, refers entirely to the pestilence that struck Milan in 1630. It is indeed an enlightening account, of extraordinary present-day value, which I advise you to read carefully, especially during these bewildering times.

Inside those pages you can find everything: the belief of the foreigner's danger, the extreme clash within powers, the unrelenting search for the initial source of infection, the distrust towards the experts, the plague spreaders hunt, the uncontrolled news, the most ridiculous remedies, the plunder of staple goods, the health emergency... In those pages you will surely run into well-known street names, around our Lyceum, which, do not forget, is built at the very centre of what was once known as the Lazzaretto of Milan: Ludovico Settala, Alessandro Tadino, Felice Casati, just to mention a few. Hence, those words seem to pertain more to present-day newspapers than to Manzoni's masterpiece.

Dear kids, nothing new under the sun, I would say, but the school closure forces me to speak out. Our institution is among those few that mark the passing of time and the orderly flow of civil welfare, with its cadences and rituals. The forced closure of the school is not accidental, but is a feat that the authorities consider only in very rare,

exceptional cases. It's not my duty to discuss the convenience of the measure, I am no expert, nor do I pretend being one, I respect and trust the authorities and follow their indications with utmost care; what I want to tell you is: just keep calm, do not let yourselves be dragged along in the general frenzy, continue - with proper precautions - to lead a normal life. Take advantage of these coming days for a walk, a good book reading, there is no reason, if you have no symptoms, to remain segregated at home. There is no reason to plunder the food and drug stores, leave the face-masks for the sick, who most need them. The speed at which plagues can travel around the world is a consequence of our time, there are no walls capable of keeping them out. Centuries ago, they were spreading as well, just more slowly. One of the worst dangers in such circumstances, as Manzoni or maybe even better Boccaccio pointed out, is the poisoning of social life, of human relationships, the decline of culture. Our atavistic instinct, when one feels threatened by an invisible enemy, is to look at everybody as a risk, as a potential assailant. In comparison with the pandemics of the XIV and XVII centuries, we are equipped with modern medical science, with its knowledge and progresses, not a triviality, believe me. Let us use the rationality that generated it to preserve the most precious gift we have, our social tissue, our humanity. If we fail, the plague will really win. I look forward to seeing you back to school.

Domenico Squillace

26/02/20

18:03 – Laura: I am starting to get warm at last, under the covers and with a sweater.

19:20 – Armido: Me too, almost warm and no more shivering.

21:56 – Armido: I have just been called by the regional branch of Red Cross about whether I had any contact with the ASL. Earlier in the day I sent an harsh e-mail to the President of Cremona, because both my wife and my daughter are showing the first symptoms. On the advice of the Red Cross regional Chief medical doctor, I recalled the green number of Regione Lombardia, to refer about them. If by tomorrow nobody from ASL shows up, the Red Cross will see to it that the problem is solved.

22:09 – G.R.: You were right for the mail... I am sorry that all of your family have come down with fever. Let's hope that they will do something now... keep me posted! As for me, my quarantine is over, but I have to wear the face mask at any time (even in house), until I have a negative test. They honestly said it could take some days before that happens.

26/02/20

07:36 – Angela: Tonight the average for Laura was 39°C, 40°C for Dad, 38°C for me; now about 1 degree lower.

In a short time we are going to consult Dr P., since the (emergency number) 112 is so busy. The good thing about the 3 of us is that each has fluctuations of negativity, but at least one is cheering us up with positive considerations.

11:20 – G.R.: Just now I was called by Cremona Hospital for the test... did they call you too, or do you have to refer to Brescia?

11:39 – Armido: Yes, but it was the Legal office, concerned with preventing legal actions. They wanted me to go there for the test. When I informed them that I am quarantined since last Sunday and meanwhile my wife and daughter have also shown symptoms of infection, they curtly said it would not be necessary for me to go (somehow ridiculous, if it weren't so serious).

In the afternoon taken to Spedali Civili

22:53 – Armido: I am in Hospital, Infection ward. At last I was tested for the virus, and tomorrow I will have a chest X-ray taken.

22:53 – B.C. - [GVVS President]: Something is happening at last... Do you still have high fever?

22:53 – Armido: I was given a massive dose of paracetamol – now I am sweating.

22:58 – B.C.: I can imagine, the result is typical. Today SOREU has changed its policy: all doctors who refuse to visit patients at home are reported. They have exhausted the beds in Hospitals and the ambulances are parsed for the worst cases.

Late (I should say absurdly), but it seems a change. Yesterday I carried a patient with a story similar to yours; even if he was reporting contacts with people living near Lodi and high fever since Thursday, nobody had visited him... Good luck! Keep me updated.

23:17 – G.R.: At last the situation has changed. Keep me informed!

29/02/20

18:14 – Maria L. [my daughter in-law]: Come on, Armido!

18:35 – Laura: I don't understand what is happening, but it seems there is no record of our situation in ATS Brescia, even though you did it days ago... it seems a theatre of the absurd.

20:23 – Armido: Me without supper but no fever. Tomorrow morning, when I see a doctor, I'll ask to be discharged. For the whole afternoon I haven't seen a soul, I don't even know which room I am in, probably the farthest from the nurse's post. I like being alone, but this is a bit too much.

21:13 – Angela: After all you did for getting tested, now you want to get back home, without knowing the results, whether we are on the line of fire, directly, indirectly, at the right or at the left, whether we deserve the attention ATS is providing, or are we just a waste of time?

23:46 – Armido: I still consider inappropriate to occupy a room that costs several hundred € a day, waiting for results I can well read on my on-line sanitary file tomorrow.

01/03/20

18:35 – Laura: I get you, but it's not your responsibility, what is to blame is the failure of the sanitary organisation, in this emergency.

11:06 – Dr E.C. [my niece]: Hi! Federica informed me that you are in Hospital. How do you feel?

11:33 – Armido: Hi, E., it's a comedy. They obliged me to come to Brescia, for the virus and blood exams. They did the test two days ago, Yesterday chest Xray. Then, just before noon, a doctor told me they are moving me to a newly opened ward, “for those who are better”. It's been the last time I have seen a doctor. The fever goes up and down with peaks at over 39°C, checked using paracetamol. Again in the evening they forgot to supply not only the supper, but even a bottle of water. This morning I had a bout of diarrhea, which left me exhausted. I am taking my companion's and my parameters myself, to reduce risks for the staff, but my request of a glycaemic test, since I feel really down, has gone unanswered: they reply yes, but nothing happens. Now the fever has gone up to 39.1°C again, I just had a 500 mg pill.

The doctor is again nowhere to be seen. I am almost ready to ask to be discharged and to go back home. Is this the way to treat a patient?

11:38 – Dr E.C.: I am sorry to hear that. So you still don't know whether the virus test is positive? The truth is that no Italian Hospital is equipped to process these numbers. Many doctors are at home in preventive quarantine, because they may have been in contact with some unknown subject and those who are present don't know what to do, since they are moved around every day... If the Xray is negative and you are breathing well, maybe there is no need to keep you in hospital.

11:40 – Armido: I wish I could make them understand. Now Angela and Laura have high fever, and I am here.

11:42 – Dr E.C.: All of you are likely infected, but if there are no breathing problems or need for medical support for the fever, we are keeping the patient at home here in Emilia Romagna...

11:44 – Armido: Exactly. I am in auto-segregation since Sunday. They obliged me to come here for the test, quite an absurdity, putting an emergency team from Dello at risk. I intend to call the regional Crisis Unit of Red Cross, to carry me back home.

11:46 – Dr E.C.: Make sure the Xray is negative: after excluding pneumonia, it is much better to stay at home, eating and drinking adequately.

11:51 – Dr E.C.: Paracetamol 1000, trice a day, FANS if necessary, if the fever is not controllable... the usual things... drink a lot and eat normally.

12:20 – Angela: Before, we were angry, because of the delay in testing, now that you were tested, they are probably adopting the procedures they deem correct, in the circumstances... They have surely reasons to believe so.

12:22 – Armido: No, this is not correct, but absurd. Since it's been possible to be carried all the way to this place, now it must be possible to go back home. I feared something like this might happen.

02/03/20

06:15 – Armido: Now 37.1°C. Don't worry taking paracetamol. I have been able to ascertain that the high fever doesn't affect the Covid-19 at all. I was suspecting it, since one of the animals it infects is the camel, which I believe has a basal temperature well above ours, like the horse. Therefore it's useless to suffer the distress and the asthenia coupled with high temperature, so I am told here.

06:24 - Laura: But I don't feel so distressed... which means that the fever isn't a problem, but a drug is a drug... in any case, when and if it goes over 38°C, I'll take it.

06:47 – Angela: Good morning. You have been testing that theory for a week and we know how it went. Has any doctor informed you about a possible home therapy for the 2 of us, abandoned here?

06:58 – Armido: Yes, they consider harmful to stress the body with high fever, because the virus is hardly

affected. Send somebody to purchase yogurt and milk probiotics for you, besides Paracetamol. Nothing else. Drink a lot.

17:54 – Armido: The Head physician of the ward just came through: he told me that the virus is usually gone by the 8th-9th day after the infection. Tomorrow, if there are breathing problems, a new X-ray will be taken, together with new blood exams, in order to set-up a proper antibiotic therapy.

20:07 – B.C.: Ciao, don't worry, you'll soon be back in good shape, it takes much more than this to kill you. A positive thing is that none of your contact list has symptoms at present. Of course, in order not to alarm anybody, I have been very discreet.

02/03/20

04:32 – Armido: I am worried, since you don't answer. How is it? Yesterday night I was given a therapy based on Kaletra and quinine, which have been effective with SARS. The doctors try to minimize, but have no idea of how long a patient remains at risk. For brevity sake, after having realized that my saturation was going down, I asked for an oxygen tube and applied 2 l/min. It was a good choice, because during the night the temperature went up, so I had to take another 500 mg pill at around 2 am. After a huge sweat-out, now the temp. is 37.1°C, but the saturation is still low.

The doctor who visited us yesterday in the afternoon says that for the patients over 65 years, there is a

window of risk of pulmonary complications between the 8th and the 10th day from the onset. Which is happening exactly in my case. In the morning they may decide for a new chest X-ray. We shall see. What about you?

04:43 – Armido: K. needs to talk to you urgently. Mom has started with the wrong foot with her. K. now works for ATS Brescia and her job is to follow the families of the confirmed infected, in order to organize for your tests and keep you monitored. If you don't answer her calls, she worries, and me too. It's ok to sleep and drink/eat what you feel like, even though the taste has gone. Check again the SIM in Mom telephone. There is something not working.

04:44 – Laura: It's my fault. I forgot to send her the usual report by mail, yesterday evening. Do I have to call her this morning?

First dream: VideoBlog

My room-mate G.F. works for a radio station. After days of forced inaction, we felt the necessity of taking a useful initiative, in this emergency juncture, in which many of our certainties have been shattered, even in those who are supposed to give us technical answers.

We devised to set up a chronicle from the front-line, since, being here we are well aware of it, this is a real war, one that will cause deaths, wounds and immeasurable material losses.

Despite experts in virology, often ridiculed by press and colleagues as doomsayers, had been warning about the statistically possible devastating pandemic for several years, we now discover that Covid-19 has taken by surprise even the richest countries: outdated pandemic plans, emergency resources reduced year after year, Civil Protection and Third Sector organizations downgraded and left to fend for themselves.

Therefore, G.F. calls his contacts at the radio

and we organize a daily interview program, aired at the same time of his original broadcast.

Obviously we call it “Chronicles from the front-line”. Using the cell-phone on speaker mode, we both are able to interact, recording long vocal feeds, which then we send to his colleagues, to be broadcasted.

Since the beginning, the success is extraordinary. Many seek information, many more want to be reassured or simply to remain in touch, to feel less alone. The following day, early in the morning, we get back the requests. We try our best to give answers to the most common in the afternoon.

The topics are varied, but we describe mainly our long days in isolation, what we do ourselves, in order to reduce the risk of contagion for the staff.

The room we occupy has no automatic monitoring devices: we provide to take several times a day all the parameters that the doctor will use for deciding our therapies: oxygen saturation, temperature, blood pressure, then we communicate the numbers through the

glass: the nurses know they can trust the timing and correctness of our data.

The staff enters our room only a couple of times a day, for cleaning (for personal hygiene we are still autonomous).

After this first attempt, we soon realize that our program lacks the incentive of the real-time interaction with the listeners.

G.F. and myself know that we'll not be allowed to make movies in our room, nor to divulge images that could infringe the privacy rights: even though both of us may agree, the medical and support staff are to be safeguarded.

That's why we organize video calls from our cellphones to his technician at the radio station, who then feeds them on the broadcasted video channel. It's quite complicated, but it seems to work. The quality is poor, the phones die off in mid-sentence, but it's really stimulating to spend this hour chatting about everything with many strangers.

We try to keep the duration within the hour, without going too far.

Our favorite doctor has already warned us about this matter. Until we are relatively well, we may continue, but he has been adamant on time and duration: late afternoon for a maximum of 1 hour.

From the hints of our guardian angels we know that they also connect at times. We hope not to say too much nonsense...

Quite naturally a blog connected to the program "Chronicle from the front-line" springs to life, which soon becomes too demanding for the two of us. We engage our boys (children, nephews, friends) who are much more versed in pruning and selecting topics of wider interest. But it's not enough: I realize that this thing is going too far. I feel more and more stressed emotionally and physically. I eat less and less, nothing has flavor. And the temperature seems to creep-up some line every day.

At last it's the end of day. The room is in dim light. I turn towards G.F.'s bed and see him sleeping soundly.

I am profusely sweating: I test my temperature:39.3°C. Better to take another pill, in

order to avoid having further nightmares... I'm going to ask G.F. about "Chronicle from the front-line" tomorrow, but I feel that it has been a dream (or a nightmare, based on the overwhelming sensations I felt and the resulting lethargy I am feeling in now...).

03/03/20

08:26 – Angela: Just had a good breakfast, prepared by Laura, who doesn't feel tastes and smells, but prepares and eats proper food. I have a sort of aversion, but when I eat and the food is light, I feel it does me good. The lethargy I am in doesn't allow me to perform the chores of the house, I just stay put all day, and at night I sleep fitfully, but sooner or later the morning comes with this silence, in the house and outside. What I like the less are the calls, which I would prefer to avoid. Of course, if one has good news to report, it's a pleasure to answer, but now, with the situation still so uncertain, particularly for you, I don't wish to talk to anybody. Nevertheless, if I receive calls, I thank the callers for their concern.

10:17 – Armido: The head Physician has been here and we had a clarification. I hope there will be no further problems, but the lack of trust is irreconcilable. Yesterday evening they forgot the supper again, they just remembered we existed around 9 pm and brought us the leftovers. The therapy with Kaletra was supposed to be 2 pills twice a day, while I was given only 1. Now the doctor has corrected my clinical folder.

14:44 – A.Z. [*a rescue colleague who is practising in nursing*]: How is your mood?

14:56 – Armido: It's bad. Your future colleagues are quite inadequate, as for interaction with patients. Above all, they don't trust us and are overstressed. Consider that since last Friday, I have been moved to 3 different rooms, where we had the means to test saturation,

pressure and temperature. We have always been autonomous, minimizing their risk. For 2 consecutive evenings they forgot our supper. This morning they have beaten the record: they claimed they had given me a pill of paracetamol and 2 pills of Kaletra, while I received only 1 pill of the latter. Later the head Physician finally agreed with me. Now it's an armed truce: I don't trust them and they look at me with suspicion.

16:52 – A.Z.: I am so sorry to hear that, Armido. For sure, the relationship with patients in isolation is more complex. The managing of this emergency is a little limping and all the staff is under high stress, as you say. Hold steady, I beg you. If you are able to build a cooperative relationship patient-nurse, the hospitalization will become bearable. Stay positive!

04/03/20

08:03 – Armido: K. [*ex colleague of the Red Cross Cremona now working for ATS Brescia*]: my feeling is that Covid-19 follows a predictable pattern, over a 2-3 days cycle. At the time scale of the medical folders (2 temperature measures a day) nothing stands out. If you plot on a graphic date+time in X-axis and temperature in Y-axis, we may be able to see something of interest. Use my records and those of Angela and Laura, plus those of G.F., which may be significant only for the last days. When you are ready, send it by e-mail. Thanks.

08:05 – Angela: At the onset I had few symptoms, but now I have always a sickness feeling, headache, nose dryness, disgusting mouth. The only hope is that it's going to be over sooner or later, but, in spite of the therapy you are taking, there are no visible effects yet, what then?

08:06 – Laura: Fortitude and patience, that's all we can do!

08:10 – Armido: Yes, for you 2 it's too early to see an improvement. Be confident, You are better off staying at home.

08:11 – Laura: Well... the fact that you've been infected so heavily does not necessarily imply that we are going to do the same. We might be better equipped than you to fight it.

08:15 – Armido: Of course, I hope it's like you say. I meant that you are better off staying at home, for the time being, unless the symptoms become more severe. In that case call Dr P. for advice.

08:27 - Armido: Cool down, K., Dr B. just visited us. He ordered a new chest X-ray, for this morning. He liked the idea [of the graphic] a lot, also because they have no better idea.

11:31 – K.: I like him already!

11:55 – Armido: Anyway, prepare an Excel spread sheet, insert date/times in the first row, related temperature measures on the second. Than select all the cells with values, press the right button, and choose “make graph”. A simple graph will do, with a line following the temperature values.

14:09 – K.: Great, Armido. Let's do it together.

16:09 – Angela: Good afternoon. We called the health assistant who is following our parameters, just to have some advice, in order not to risk underestimating the symptoms. Because I am not well at all, which may be normal after 10 days of fever. Laura does her best to cook, despite the total loss of taste and smell, maybe due to the body trying to erase unpleasant sensations? I know that you wait for news, but while there are none good, it takes some effort to communicate.

16:24 – Gio [*my son-in-law*]: Good news are bound to come soon.

16:35 – Armido: Don't give up. If a simple solution were to be found, the Chinese would have adopted it already. It's a question of time, if no other medical problem pops up. In this case, we'll see what to do. How is your fever? Is it still controllable with paracetamol?

16:49 – Laura: The temperature for both of us has abated with paracetamol.

16:52 – Armido: Well done. I was given a Venturi berthing device, fed by 6 l/min of oxygen, They also took a blood sample for Emogas, a dosage that indicates the efficiency of the lungs gas exchange. I still haven't seen the result of the last X-ray.

17:04 – Angela: You, who are a forerunner, keep us at the rear informed: sooner or later we should all emerge from down under.

17:06 – Armido: Right, the purpose is just that. Nevertheless, each case seems to be apart.

19:14 – Franci: Do you have time and wish for a chat?

19:32 – Armido: No, Franci. I can't speak with the Venturi mask, now at 10 l/min, besides the therapy with Kaletra, Chlorochine and a new antibiotic. They took a new chest X-ray and blood sample for Emogas. Appetite has gone and I am worried for Mom and Laura.

19:37 – Franci: Let the worry for them be. Why all these drugs for you? Have they detected pneumonia or are they just worried about the fever?

19:43 – Armido: It's a sort of battle for preventing it.

05/03/20

06:19 – Armido: Good morning. Short-winded but no fever.

06:35 – Laura: Good morning, we have fever here, but no respiratory problems... I feel good and tend to ignore the thermometer. Mom took paracetamol at 4 and now she is still sleeping.

06:55 – Armido: Don't do that. The temperature is going to be a key to understand the behaviour of this virus. We are working on it, but we need hourly measures.

06:35 – Laura: Of course I take the measures, but I ignore in the sense that I don't bother too much about it.

This helps me to remove the problem for some time, otherwise to remain focused on oneself is worse, at least in my case, since I don't feel too poorly. Anyway, I notice with pleasure that you have become honorary member of the medical staff.

07:09 – Armido: Yes, I play both patient and doctor, but getting no pay for it.

*My wife is brought to the Emergency
Unit in Manerbio (BS)*

17:05 – Maria L.: Laura, you did the right thing. If you don't feel safe better ask for help... I am so sorry, big hug. If you need a hand in keeping in touch with doctors and hospitals, let us know.

17:10 – Laura: I would like some good news, for once.

17:12 – Armido: Anyway, the duration is decidedly much longer, not less than 15-20 days from the onset. Now let them do blood and antigenic tests, which I suppose will be analysed here, then we'll catch up.

17:51 – Angela: They already took urine samples, later an X-ray: the doctor said they are likely to send me back home if the lungs are free, since it's safer; obviously I agree.

17:51 – Laura: Are they going to test you for the virus at least or not?

18:28 – Angela: The X-ray doesn't show problems. Now waiting for the blood sample results, then I'll be probably sent home with antibiotic therapy.

19:39 – Angela: The results are good, I'll have to take Augustin for 6 days. In case I have further problems, I should come back here or go directly to Spedali Civili, where are the dedicated wards. A fine smile and a caress...

20:05 – Maria L.: But the test?

20:16 – Angela: No, they discharged me like this, without precautions. We'll behave.

20:12 – Armido: [*to B.C.*] My wife was discharged from the Emergency Room of Manerbio. Could you please go for her?

20:14 – B.C.: Arranging now for the transport, don't worry. In a few minutes we'll be leaving. How are you?

20:16 – Armido: Thanks. They don't have the faintest idea: all options between IC and discharge are on the table.

20:17 – B.C.: Well, it seems they are a bit confused. Let's hope for the better.

23:24 – Armido: I am being sent to IC. I'll let you know as a in place. Good night.

23:24 – Franci: What happened?

23:25 – Armido: The breathing function is too compromised. It requires an advanced support.

23:59 – Angela: What we feared is happening, then. If there was a chance for a simpler solution, it has been ignored. Keep calm, as they say.

I was given 3 doses of antibiotic, so I could initiate the therapy earlier. Tomorrow I'll ask somebody to go to the pharmacy. Two different strategies have been applied here, we'll see which is the most effective. There is a third one, Laura's: strict refusal to assume antibiotics, let's hope hers has a good outcome as well.

05/03/20

05:41 – G.F.[*my room-mate in the first days*]: How is it?

06:42 – Armido: Better, I should say, looked after by beautiful nurses (like De Gregori's "*General*").

07:32 – Angela: Good morning, endless evening but night in our bed. I did not have the intention of assuming the antibiotic suggested by Dr P., but at the Emergency R. in Manerbio, to discharge me with some preventive therapy, they gave me the ancient Augmentin, in order to save more specific drugs for a later phase. Anyway, I feel better than previously, I believed to have no fever now, but it's 38°C instead.

12:21 – Armido: Yesterday late in the evening they decided to move me to Intensive-Care, in order to monitor my parameters continuously, for the time being with high flow oxygen reservoir-mask, pulsoximeter and heart monitor working. In the morning, they took several blood samples, for Emogas test and the rest. Tomorrow a new chest X-ray is scheduled, in order to rule out the possibility of pneumonia. After that I should leave

Intensive-Care, have 2 consecutive virus test with negative results, before being declared healed. Have a good day.

13:39 – G.F.: F..k, today I had to use an oxygen bottle, because in the night they took away our double wall dispenser.

13:44 – Armido: Damnit, I can't leave you alone, without you letting be abused. In a short while they are going to move me again, in order to try loosing away the Covid-19...

16:37 – Franci: Very well. Update from Germany: Alto Adige has been declared risk zone yesterday in the evening. Sofia will stay at home today and all of next week. Irene at home today, but maybe on Monday back to school. No after-school at Hort next week.

16:44 – Angela: Do not be surprised by the contradictions, we have seen a lot of them in our advanced Lombardy, I don't think us to be the worse.

18:28 – Angela: A Dr P., Head doctor of Dad's ward, just called to inform that he'll be moved to Medicina 2, 5th floor, stairway 14, since he is hopeful Dad is recovering; the new reference is Dr S.. The reason is to make room for other patients in need of advanced support.

18:52 – Gio: Granma I. has been praying a lot for you.

18:55 – Armido: Well, that's why there was such an unexpected recovery... They are moving me to a new ward, in Surgery, which has been allotted to the "healed", at the 5th floor, bed 25.

19:22 – G.F.: No fever, you? Still with oxygen?

19:32 – Armido: Yes, always full throttle. Let's see tomorrow.

19:32 – G.F.: The same here, at 10 l/min.

07/03/20

01:10 – Armido: Ciao. I seem to breath much better. Let's see if it's going to last. In any case, before discharge, it's still necessary a double negative test. We'll see.

06:55 – G.F.: Well, here no fever... saturation 96-97 with 70 bpm, more or less.

07:07 – G.F.: But, damnit, if I get up from the bed it goes down to 83.

07:19 – Armido: That's normal. We now have a reduced lung efficiency. It will require some time before you can climb stairs without puffing.

07:35 – G.F.: Ok, ok, I hope so, because, besides this problem, the rest is good.

07:44 – Armido: Don't lose hope, I think that by Wednesday at the latest they are going to discharge us.

07:41 – Franci: Do you prefer we video call, and then talking to the girls, or do you wish to wait, if you are weary?

07:43 – Armido: I would rather them not to see me like this.

09:19 – Franci: The policeman protecting Salvini, tested positive for Covid-19, declared: "I wasn't aware I was carrying around such a dangerous and difficult to

take out organism. As for the virus, I am fairly sure to overcome it". No pun intended, but a smile in the morning is necessary.

09:21 – Armido: For sure. I knew pretty well the circumstances of my infection. Yesterday morning I feared I would be intubated, but for now all is ok.

16:27 – Armido: We might have an engagement on Garda lake (Arco) in June, with a swim and a pizza afterward. Friends from Tuscany and Genoa.

16:28 – G.F.: Perfect. I am in.

19:07 – G.F.: Ciao, Armido. How is it?

19:12 – Armido: I just had a respiratory crisis, now stabilized at 93.

19:12 – G.F.: Holy cow, what a crap. With oxygen?

19:14 – Armido: Indeed. In fact yesterday I was moved to a new place at the bottom floor, where, if needed, they could intubate me. For the time being, I have avoided that.

20:46 – Franci: Do you breath well without the mask?

20:46 – Armido: Yes, but the saturation goes down. I must be careful not to remain breathless.

20:48 – Angela: Dr P. came around at 6 pm, stopping out of the gate, to check on us: I confirmed that I am feeling better than last Thursday, when I called him. His advice is that Laura too should take the antibiotic, but for the time being she isn't going to do it, as we know.

20:552 – Laura: The main thing for you is to having the oxygen always ready, your look now is not important.

21:09 – Armido: For sure. For the antibiotic, I agree with Laura. If and when the breathing quality deteriorates, it will be necessary to intervene quickly. In that case, call on L., who knows how to fetch a 15 l bottle with the relative breathing apparel.

21:43 – Armido: [to K., *to whom I have been sending daily reports of our clinical data*]

Saturday 07 March

-Hour 01:00 T 37.7°C, Sat 97, CF 87, P 107/62, diuresis 1400 cc, drip-feed Meren 2 gr, drip-feed NaCl 0.9%, blood test

-Hour 07:30 T 37.7°C, Sat 94, P 119/70, drip-feed Meren and Linezolid, chest examination

-Hour 11:00 T 37.8°C paracetamol and drip-feed Linezolid

-Hour 13:15 T 37.7°C

-Hour 15:30 diuresis 1200 cc

-Hour 16:30 T 37°C, P 115/75, CF 88

-Hour 18:00 Respiratory crisis, Sat 83, CF 97, T 38.3°C, paracetamol in drip-feed, later stabilization Sat 93, CF95, evening therapy+ paracetamol, Sat 93, CF 95, T37.0°C, diuresis 1500 cc, NaCl 0.9% drip-feed

08/03/20

06:46 – Armido: To all females of our big family a special tribute. You are our strength.

06:49 – Armido: No sleep tonight, like you, I imagine

06:53 – Dr E.C.: Yes, but are you feeling better now?

07:05 – Armido: Yes, better, but breathing still poor
(Sat 92)

08:05 – Dr E.C.: Ok, you'll improve a little at a time.

08:21 – Armido: Yes. The saturation today seems fairly better.

08:30 – Dr E.C.: Fine. We are bracing for a month of extreme hardship. Let's hope everybody will understand and follow the rules.

08:41 – Armido: Very unlikely.

12:58 – G.F.: Starting tomorrow, they are probably going to reduce the oxygen flow.

13:03 – Armido: That's excellent. I hope the same happens to me too. It depends on the efficacy of the therapy for erasing the virus from the lungs. You should be fairly close to the end of the therapy cycle (7 days).

13:07 – G.F.: I hope so, because I am really confused at present.

21:29 – Armido: At last this long day of battle against Covid-19 is drawing to an end, a last drip-feed with Linezolid and then I hope I'll be able to sleep, softly cradled by Mina's love songs.

09/03/20

07:25 – Laura: I am sorry... the therapy seems ineffective... anyway, keep trying to eat...and to rest when the pain is reduced.

07:27 – Angela: How comes that the antiviral drugs aren't working? Do you still feel feverish? It's not possible.

07:30 – Armido: I'm afraid not. Doctor says the analysis data aren't so bad, while the lung situation is fairly compromised. He ordered an enema, with the aim of completely emptying the abdomen, to give additional space to lung expansion.

10:42 – Armido: Have you since been to Verolanuova? There are agnolotti and tortelli in abundance.

10:55 – Fede: No, Mom prefers not, she says it's too much suffering seeing us beyond the gate.

10:59 – Armido: That's right.

13:11 – Angela: I wonder how a critical situation like this might have developed. When you were taken there, it was not too bad, despite all of them around you trying to check the virus progress, it goes unchecked on “your” path... Maybe it's not the right time to argue, but you'd better report the malaise and the adverse effects after so many days of illness.

15:27 – Armido: Certainly. Nothing tragic, really. The bottom portion of the lungs is resting on the diaphragm and the abdominal sack, which, if not empty, may limit the expansion.

15:46 – Gio: Yes, but we wish that the upper part too is restored! Big hug.

15:50 – Armido: Of course! We'll see the results of the X-rays tomorrow. The last one showed evident marks of viral damage. The comparison with tomorrow's results may highlight the efficacy of the pharmacological therapy.

10/03/20

08:27 – G.F.: Hello, Armido...how has the day got going?

08:30 – Armido: Well, the night, as usual, without much sleep, but no fever, only laborious breathing. In my opinion, tomorrow they are going to test us, just to check the whereabouts of the virus.

08:29 – Armido: Angela, I already checked flight and hotel in Hawaii, from April the 14th to the 28th. We need a place like that to recover.

08:56 – Angela: I am well at 36.9°C, we can wait for the Hawaii in the next life, as usual, there are so many good things close by and in everyday living.

09:27 – G.F.: Just shaved.

10:00 – Armido: At first I did not recognize you...

11/03/20

12:12 – G.F.: Ciao, Armido. Well, tomorrow I will be tested, and, if negative, I'll be discharged on Saturday. If positive, I still go home but must return back in few days for another test.

15:12 – Angela: While we are here covered by our blankets, spring uncovers its colours.

17:53 – Fede: How is it?

18:19 – Armido: Very well, no fever all day. My morning opinion, still confirmed, is for a test tomorrow, replicated next Friday. If both negative, we go home, cured.

12/03/20

06:22 – Armido: All fine, here. I still have oxygen and urethral catheter. I am waiting for them to come in few minutes and remove both. Then virus test, to be repeated the following day. If negative, we'll be discharged as cured and we'll make a jig dance.

06:47 – Fede: Did you read that it is not permitted to enter or leave the Country, even our village, without a certified health or work reason? Nobody knows how long this will continue. Nor is it specified that the cured may go around as they wish. Maybe later we'll be given the app, like in China, or, more likely the small bell of the plague corpse carriers (*Monatti da "I promessi sposi" di Alessandro Manzoni*)...

07:00 – Armido: I would like to come to your house and collect my things, so that, when we come together we may have dinner at the restaurant.

07:05 – Laura: Dad, all activities are closed down, at least until the beginning of April...

07:05 – Fede: (Wallet with credit cards still with me!)

07:33 – Angela: Good morning, surfacing now from my *buen retiro*: until 2:30 I have been tormented by an itch, even the sleeping pill had no effect, than later I may have fallen asleep, now just awoken, fortunately. I gladly read your messages, as we were in a big family hug.

07:44 – Armido: All is well. My only doubt is whether our flight from Malpensa will be confirmed.

07:46 – Laura: Dad, it's useless, you'll not be allowed to move, if you have made reservations, you must cancel immediately.

07:53 – Armido: Look, Laura, I am truly cured.

07:57 – Laura: Good for you. I am not.

07:58 – Franci: Yesterday evening medical report wasn't good. Did they tell you otherwise?

08:02 – Armido: But today I am really much better, due to a new oxygen mask, the one in the picture, which creates a sort of hyperbaric chamber around one's face. The augmented oxygen-relative pressure in the airways is a miracle (Dr B.).

10:53 – Armido: They are warning me that the respiratory function will worsen again, therefore I am being sent home for only 2 days, than I must return here to IC. When I'll come around, they'll check if I am finally cured.

10:55 – Franci: The doctor just called me: they are moving you back to Intensive-Care now. He said nothing about your going home.

Second dream: Holiday

After an accurate planning, I was able to fulfill the dream of reuniting my whole family in a beautiful tropical location, for a holiday, that I hope will be unforgettable.

At last, I am cured, I have gone back home, fragile, but resolute to return in good shape.

The idea of this vacation has been well present, even in the darkest moments of my long stay in hospital. I carried out with care all the preparation, choosing destination, organizing transport by chartering a small plane, capable of taking us all and flying to the place without stop-overs, a luxury that for once I think we deserve.

The travel day has come. The plane will take off from Nurnberg with the “German” family, by 9, landing in Orio [Milan] at 11, where we “Italian” will join the flight. I kept warning everybody to reduce to the strict minimum the baggage, since we'll be almost naked most of the time, nor will there be any social occasion; however the things to bring aboard are a lot. The aircraft is a small executive bi-reactor, capable of taking 12 passengers, manned by 2

pilots and 1 hostess: the 10 of us almost fill it up to its capacity.

Nobody, except me and the crew, know the destination. It'll be a surprise. We take off at noon, as scheduled. Our destination is a small Indian Ocean island, not yet assaulted by mass tourism, but fitted with a tiny airport. We fly southeasterly, ETA 17:30, but 20:30 local time. We may be able to enjoy our first sunset.

The hours seem minutes, in mirth and fun for us all. The “German” grand-daughters have monopolized the “Italian” child cousin and run around, exploring every nook and cranny, asking questions to the hostess, in German, of course. Sergio is a bit confused by this unusual way of talking, but, with the typical child ingenuity, seems to understand the meaning and to communicate his thoughts. We adults have time to update on mutual news, after months of forced isolation and worries about my health. All seems left behind, even though I still carry the marks.

To this holiday, unconsciously, I ascribe the meaning of a renaissance, the beginning of a long trip of recovering my physical and mental faculties. I am aware that these 2 weeks will hardly be enough, but I hope it will be a good

start.

We land in a fairy world, a terse sky, encrusted with stars, an incredible violet nuance on the horizon, where the sun has since vanished. A small bus is waiting, on which we amass all our baggage and squeeze in ourselves, for the short trip to the bungalow, that will be house for the next days. It's almost dark and we can't see much of the landscape, but the first impression is that the place fulfills all my expectations. The bungalow is the only construction in the middle of a tiny bay of calm water, delimited on one side by a cliff and on the other by a breakwater pier, which hides the small village we just crossed. The owner of the "distributed hotel", his definition for the half dozen similar places he owns on this and other nearby islands, is waiting for our arrival, a distinguished grey-haired gentleman, who inspires liking and wishes us a nice stay, entrusting us to the care of a middle-aged couple, who will cater to all our needs.

They have a typical supper on the ready, with beans, rice, grilled fish, fruits.

We are a pack of ravenous wolves, but there is enough to satisfy everybody's tastes. We drink

beer and fruit juice.

It's late but not too much. We are tired and eager to start early tomorrow. Everyone to bed!

The silence is almost unnatural, only the slow lapping of the sea on the beach, just a few steps from our door.

The excitement wakes me up early. All the others are still in bed. I try not to disturb my wife, but she has a sixth sense and asks me quietly what time it is. She forces me to return to bed, too early. Yes, master... the wisdom voice, which calls me back to reality: I cannot go swimming alone, in a place I don't know and in my precarious physical conditions. She is right, of course, but by now I am unable to lay down quietly, the light outside is almost bright, I want to see "our" bay in all its morning glory.

I wear a swimsuit, a t-shirt and walk to the beach. A fantastic view, with sea hues changing intensity along the depth gradient, the tropical forest just behind the beach, a pleasant chromatic contrast, birds everywhere, over the sea and on the land, that seem to move at leisure, some sailing lazily, others taking flight between a tree and a palm, on holiday too.

I stare, fascinated, until I hear the first stirrings from the house. They are all awake and happy. It's impossible to keep them inside, the porch is perfect for starting the day with a good breakfast. I, as usual, am the most eager, but the children too cannot hold back the desire of walking the few steps to the water edge. The view is breathtaking and it confirms my good choice of location, despite my unstable mental conditions.

The expert swimmers go in, exploring the bay, the others remain to splash around in shallow water, clear and already pleasant at midmorning.

The cliff is promising for starters, shielded as it is from the open sea, steep and rich in ravines and crannies, the ideal habitat for flora and fauna, above and below water.

For this first foray, Franci and I are followed by Maria L. and by the little mermaid Irene, who seems vaulting in the water, much faster than my laborious progress. I realize how much out of shape I am, when, breathless, I reach the cliff at a brief distance from the beach. We begin exploring, moving slowly towards the

open sea, pointing to each other the marvels we discover.

A submerged world with vivid colors, enhanced by the sun surface shimmering reflections, due to a light breeze.

The bottom is gradually deepening, but the visibility remains good. My companions go down, to show some feature of interest: a sea paradise of shapes and colors. I try some tentative dives, just to verify whether I am able to keep apnea enough to go below about ten meters. It seems all is well, I feel reassured and enjoy the experience. We go back to shore, to join the others and we spend the rest of the morning playing like children in the shallow water by the beach. We have the little bay all for ourselves, from time to time a boat sails on the open water, without disturbing the quiet of our small world.

Mom reminds everyone to renew the sun cream, to avoid nasty burns. Luckily the beach is fitted with large umbrellas, under which to rest. The bungalow veranda is a few paces away, however.

After a light lunch, I am eager to begin with a real snorkeling and possible fishing sea excursion. Francesco and I, fitted with flippers,

masks and my faithful old arbalete, reach the seaward side of the reef and slowly begin to move along.

Here the sea is felt some more, but is quite bearable, not disturbing underwater visibility, which remains good even at several meters. After some trial dives, to verify that all is ok, I arm the gun and begin coasting on the surface. Fishing in free dive is a sport that entails calm and slow movements, one must not fret and especially make noise.

I see shoals of small fish of every colour and the rock walls are rich in crevices, covered by mollusks of any shape. The bottom is visible, it seems to be at no more than 15 meters, a depth I have always been able to reach and maintain for some dozens of seconds. I dive straight to the bottom, but soon realize that I am unable to stay there, I'm breathless.

I turn slowly for the surface. Francesco asks if everything is fine. Ok, with the hand, but I know that it's not completely true. I take several deep breaths and try again, with a better result: I have time to look around and I notice some grey shapes in a horizontal crevice, a short distance ahead, big game fish.

I go back to the surface and signal

Francesco to remain close to our buoy, keeping an eye on me, after which I dive again and close the distance. The fishes see me, but do not seem to be the least afraid, they slowly swim in and out of the grotto, I count about a dozen of them. I shoot the nearest: hit. The fish drags me for some meters towards the open sea. The hunt excitement is helping me feel well, until I perceive a sudden air hunger. I drop the gun and swim back up quickly: the surface seems so far that I doubt I can reach it. When I surface I just have enough air to empty the snorkel, before breathing frantically. Franci is close by, worried. He has been observing me from the surface and understands that I have been carried away by the hunt passion. When my breathing subsides, I am able to tell him to recover the lanyard which connects the buoy to the gun. It seems the fish is still securely harpooned, he says that he can feel the struggle, but at a point the lanyard is going taut and he has to dive and see what happened. The grouper, that's the fish, is seeking refuge inside the crevice, the gun is visible in the water, with the lanyard disappearing within the rocks. A bad business, with those razor-sharp black tuff edges, it is

very likely it will snap. He dives and I see him laboring at the bottom, until he is able to grasp the harpoon and drag out the fish, still weakly struggling. He gets back to the surface and I can see with pleasure that the prey is substantial, a fish of about 1 meter. Supper is guaranteed. I feel spent and prefer to swim back to shore, with my guardian angel following.

I still breathe laboriously, I feel an hand on my shoulder, hear a voice telling me to calm down, an air flow entering my lungs. I breathe better, at last. I open my eyes and see a mask, but not Francesco's, it's a plastic screen, through which clear eyes smile at me. A guardian angel named Franci, I can read her name written by marker on the blue overalls she is wearing.

My dream prey was... just a dream. I feel comforted, after all, I have many days left to dream again!

12/03/20

22:14 – Angela: This day is closing at last. The news, instead of improving, have gotten alarming. Let's hope it won't take much for a return to "normality". We do our best to face this difficult moment, we are not alone in this situation and above all we are a close family, in spite of the geographical separation. Thanks to all. I love you.

13/03/20

12:54 – Franci: I just called. They said he is still at risk. When he was admitted yesterday in the evening the situation was desperate, this morning it's slightly better, but he is still one of the most serious cases they are treating. He is in Intensive Care 1, stairway 3, first floor. He has a breathing tube. They said not to call, they'll keep us informed, likely late in the afternoon or in the evening, if there are news. They recommended to be patient, they have a full ward and cannot work the phone. I think they will call you in Verolanuova, since they didn't ask for my number.

13:27 – Angela: Thanks, Francesco, either a diagnosis mistake has been made, or they have been influenced by dad's confidence. His physical and psychological endurance testifies for him, let's hope that time is on his side as well.

14:24 – Laura: ... Mom too is a rock.

14/03/20

06:38 – Laura: Good morning. I dreamed of Dad tonight, metaphysical discussions... We are stable, me with some fever and cough, Mom a bit of fever, lower than mine, as we use to be... Mom is cooking a lot and I eat a lot.

15/03/20

07:28 – Angela: Good morning, even to that virus that doesn't want to leave our bodies, more or less entrenched, it continues to be felt: heavy head, night sweats, a flavour that is not ours in the mouth, but so it is. It will take time, but we'll learn it's weak points and then it'll no more run freely within our bodies.

07:33 – Federica: Dad, please, wake up to this spring.

18/03/20

20:40 – Angela: Somebody left this little flower bunch, with a note: KEEP FAITH.

19/03/20

07:28 – Angela: Good morning. You emerge to reality and, after having detected the same flu-like sensations, you tell yourself: no, it's just an aftermath... Then: Laura, what's your temperature? Then Armido... Yesterday, E.'s message, so brusque and professional, almost bounced off me. Now it has become real instead, but if the

tracheotomy is the rule in these cases, it would be the least. They just informed us, didn't ask for authorization, for now, but we would give it, obviously, Dad is in their hands and we hope anything goes for the better.

08:10 – Laura: Today is Dad's day, nothing different from the wishes and the thoughts we make every other day. Come on, Dad.

Third dream: Cloning

I have the sensation of being immersed in a large tank, a sort of aquarium where many unknown bodies fluctuate in mid-water, connected to the surface by tubes and cannulas. I am one of those naked bodies. The sensation is not unpleasant, the water is at physiological temperature, the sounds are muted. A limbic recollection comes to mind: I am again in nature's womb, I don't feel pain, secure, cradled around by delicate flowing.

Suddenly I perceive a ferment of action, sounds, excited voices. I am lifted up and poured in a smaller vessel, hardly capable to hold my body, the water here isn't as clear, but greenish. I miss the company of the others, I feel like having been singled out for some risky task which I have no clue about. My vessel is covered by a semitransparent tarp and jolted for a long time, lastly set down in an unknown location, full of metallic noises and screeches. After a time that seems endless, I feel a succession of shakes and realize I am

being carried by a train, traveling increasingly faster in the night. From time to time a brief splash of artificial light, some change of direction, some acoustic variation, the impression of a sudden increase in eardrum pressure, like when you enter a tunnel at high speed. After hours of travel, the rhythm of the motion decreases, suddenly the cold light of an enormous and noisy space is searing. I immediately feel a cold sensation, like as if the water has frozen. My small vessel is moved again to a nearby place. I perceive the vibration of an engine, then motion: I think it's a lorry. Another long trip, full of rude direction changes, with the temperature more and more frigid. At last, the vehicle stops, the vessel is taken and carried inside, I wouldn't guess where, but the instant variation of temperature and brightness confirms that it must be a large and quiet space, well lit by a warm glow.

My vessel and its content, is delicately poured inside a larger one, a sort of thermal pool, where, though, no other body is floating.

Now I am free to move around with leisure. It seems this place is quiet, at last. I can see through the water people on the pool kerb,

maybe doctors and nurses, the faces hardly discernible behind the masks I have come to know so well, but I see others, they seem military, they wear menacing gas-masks, which worry me a little.

I wonder what they are doing here. Where is here? I move to the side and surface: they speak a throaty language that I immediately identify as German. Why have I been carried to Austria? Then I notice that the military wear a white cross on red background on their epaulettes, Helvetic Confederation: I guess we are in the eastern part of it. I don't understand though why I have been brought here, to this place that is more like a luxury hotel than a hospital. Nobody seems to pay attention to me, medical and military staff debate vigorously what to do. I get some words which I know, one in particular is often repeated by a military man, while the doctors seem to disagree: "clonation". They must be joking. What place is this? Are they insane? Luckily the doctors seem to prevail and the military leave hastily the place.

I am relieved, but some minutes later other people come in, whose role I am unable to

guess, they seem to be civilians, people of mature age with an imposing and prosperous young lady.

She sheds her robes and joins me into the pool, clearly uncomfortable. She comes reluctantly nearer and talks to me in a mixture of Italian and German, asking me timidly to make love to her. I am appalled. I ask her what is happening, but my German is almost symbolic and she doesn't get much of my Italian, still less can she talk my language. I try repeating my question in English, she understands perfectly and explains the reason I am here. My genetic profile matches exactly the one the scientist of her country deem necessary to prevent obesity and other connected diseases, in addition to acquiring a better resistance against SARS-CoV-2 virus, the pandemic spreading swiftly in Europe, but almost sparing Switzerland.

I convey being positive to the virus. She knows, but the doctors are certain that my immune response is extremely effective and my genetic composition, partly derived from the

Neanderthals, may guarantee the expression of the desired characters in the future generations of the Swiss people.

I realize suddenly that we both are guinea-pigs, she because is embodying in ideal measure the genetic characters to modify, me because I am effectively fighting the virus and, although I eat a lot, never tend to fatten.

Even with a higher than normal cholesterol level, my circulatory system is in perfect conditions, as are all other organs. She appears to be more frightened than me, apart from the embarrassment. I ask her whether it would be possible to have some privacy. She approves and at her request, all the others leave the place. There certainly are cameras, but I don't care.

I feel tenderness for this girl, taller and for sure stronger than me, while she timidly comes nearer. She hugs me and my body reacts on its own, in spite of the weirdness of the circumstances. She clings to me, but I am used to do it slowly, to take care of her needs, before mines. I am aware to be out of shape, due to the long illness, but it's a new sensation in the water, not the least unpleasant, the absence of

gravity helps me. She seems to appraise my attentions and to enjoy them, no more shyly. At last I reach the climax, the semen collected by the condom. We remain embraced for a long time, cradled by the warm water, then somehow reluctantly we part.

I greet her with a smile, while she turns a last time, before exiting the pool. The white cots come back in, confirming they were always watching.

I hope at least having been able to lessen the humiliation of this experience and that she'll remember me with affection. I don't care anymore whether she'll bear a child or my semen will be used for other purposes. This unusual trip a little at a time is fading into a dream. I let myself be rocked by the water, I hear new sounds, but keep my eyes shut.

A gloved hand gently shakes me, a voice whispers that it's necessary to change my position, the “pronation” has lasted too long, I must be turned to a supine position. They help me.

I open my eyes in the familiar setting of my Intensive Care room, with a bunch of sacks

above my head, feeding me drugs, physiologic solution, food. Cables connected to my thorax and finger, detect my parameters, which I can hear punctuated from the monitor behind my bed. I feel a flux of air in my throat, also connected by a tube to an oxygen dispenser on the wall. Two bright and kind eyes bring me definitively back to reality.

It's simply been a nightmare, maybe a dream, not so dreadful in the end. I don't know how long I have been dreaming, but I am exhausted.

After all, I no more am a teenager...

28/03/20

My wife receives a videocall from Intensive Care: the Covid Wards have been gifted with tablets, to enable the connection of the “awake” patients and their families.

My recovery begins

16:10 – Angela: I sent the videos of this morning. He asked why Laura still wears mask and gloves...

16:11 – Maria L.: Fine that you can see and reassure him. It's good for him and you alike. Hug.

16:41 – Fede: Did he look like in pain?

16:47 – Angela: Yes, it's wonderful seeing him, but he is connected to several tubes and wires, his chest is full, besides the throat, the nose and, today, the forehead too had a plaster. Shocking to look at.

29/03/20

15:22 – Armido: I am available online... Good afternoon.

15:25 – Fede: How about your breath, is it a struggle?

15:38 – Armido: Yes, but each day a bit better.

15:43 – Fede: Thanks, Dad, for keeping up, we can only guess the stress and the pain it takes, but it's all we hope for.

30/03/20

12:36 – Armido: Every day a tiny progress. Ciao.

31/03/20

07:14 – Angela: Good morning. I'm still in our bed: a kiss and a hug. When you wake, if you can and wish, call me: I have to tell you about a dream.

14:53 – Armido: Here I am.

14:58 – Angela: I was napping on the couch, it's like I felt your presence... I'm joking. Tonight I had a nightmare: since you were unable to speak, I decided not ever to speak either, for solidarity... I immediately woke up. I don't want to make a video call, because it's too tiring for you, but write how you feel and think...

16:33 – Armido: It's hard even writing a few words. Articulating concepts is out of question, but I can see progress.

16:36 – Angela: Don't worry, now you are battling that Corona and it won't be useless, everybody is doing his best for his own and other's sake.

01/04/20

09:35 – Maria L.: We were able to make a vocal almost in Italian.

12:37 – Armido: How lovely, ciao to you all.

13:40 – Angela: Ciao to the girls, to the boy and to Granpa, who can see you in your respective houses, like us.

15:11 – Armido: ciao. To sleep, to dream...

03/04/20

10:53 – Armido: TRY CALLING THE DOCTORS FOR THE DATE OF DISCHARGE.

11:32 – Angela: Armido, they are still gradually lowering the external ventilation, to avoid hypoxia. When you are able to breathe autonomously, they will disconnect you from the machine, and then it will be time to consider discharging. Stay positive, nobody wants to keep you there forcibly, they keep you with care, believe me. Every evening they call me to relate the progress of the day and I thank them, grateful for this regular conversation. They do their best for “adjusting” you, be patient.

04/04/20

10:39 – Armido:

Holiday Hawaii April 14-29

Hotel 3390, included breakfast

Direct flight 1393 USD 4683 Lufthansa

from Linate at 6:30, to be at the airport by 5:00

Arrival approx by 19:00

Grand total 1.393,339 USD= 1.583,34 €

HOTEL 212.14 € VOLO LUFTHANSA 92.365 €

CANCEL!!

11:31 – Franci: To cancel I must enter your mail box, do you agree?

12:44 – Franci: Holiday postponed. No charge on the account nor on the credit card. All fine.

13:11 – Armido: Ok.

16:42 – Angela: I have just been informed by Dr P. that you are slowly getting better, that you hate staying seated in the armchair, but they need you to, for reaccustoming your lungs. He calls you by name, there won't be many namesakes, and he is the one who knows you better, I believe.

16:44 – Fede: While seated, can you read or do you have to exercise? Don't you sleep well at night? You aren't sedated any more then?

16:55 – Armido: Yes, but it's really very difficult to sleep with a tube in one's nose and a tongue like a stone.

17:01 – Angela: You are right, we have no idea of the pains you are subjected to, but, believe, they do this because they care for you and surely you have grown fond of them as well.

17:07 – Armido: Sure, even though at times they seem sadistic.

17:26 – Laura: I know this is not in your character, but in this circumstance you have got to rely on them. To us they seem competent and full of humanity, be patient, Dad, concentrate on the improvements, hug.

17:29 – Fede: Laura, have you got the test result yet? You only did one, right?

17:37 – Armido: Let us know.

18:07 – Angela: We haven't had any answer yet, Laura is here in the living room now and we are chatting.

18:45 – Armido: You look healthy, not like a sick in hospital. When I'll be able to return home, I hope to regain some weight and colour too.

18:59 – G.F.: That's good, I am super happy!! When we meet, I'll relate all the events of these days. I have been interviewed by TG1!

05/04/20

07:54 – Angela: Good morning.

09:52 – Armido: I didn't sleep at all and the morning has started with a collective enema. To balance that, I have swallows labouring at their nests out of my window.

09:54 – Franci: Sorry to hear that. Alas, for wildlife this is a favourable period: dolphins in harbours, swans on the canals, rabbits and hares in city parks... They like the overall calmness.

09:57 – Maria L.: Ciao to all. Here the garden family has enlarged. To the usual residents (doves couple): a couple of magpies, a wonderful robin, that comes to our windowsill, and several sparrows. Today we are going to build a birdhouse for crumbs.

17:19 – Dr E.C.: Ciao! How are you?

17:22 – Armido: Well, I don't know what to say. Having no first-hand precedent, it's hard for me to recognize any progress.

17:29 – Dr E.C.: Tomorrow I'll call and ask them, but the simple fact that you are here writing seems to me a substantial progress in comparison to what I usually see.

17:32 – Armido: It takes some effort. Thank you.

17:33 – Dr E.C.: Step by step. Till tomorrow.

17:36 – Armido: It's Dr P.

17:36 – Dr E.C.: Ok! Is he back? I guess he has been sick as well.

06/04/20

12:30 – Fede: Dad, how is it today? Did you sleep?

14:21 – Dr E.C.: Ciao! I spoke to Dr P. He said the situation is stable and they are slowly weaning you from the external ventilator.

18:07 – Armido: Ciao to all.

18:17 – Laura: hello, Dad.

18:22 – Angela: At last we hear from you, metaphorically...

18:29 – Armido: Today lots of examinations and blood sampling. They wish to get rid of me.

18:30 – Franci: Very good, try cooperating!

18:31 – Laura: We all hope it will be soon, but don't be impatient. The more we wait, the bigger the celebration and holiday will follow.

07/04/20

08:07 – Franci: Sofia just woke and asked: "Granpa Armido all well?" and then "Can Granma stay together with him?". You are always in her thoughts.

08:13 – Angela: Oh dear, we know she is so affectionate and attracted to people, especially the babies. "*Lo siento*". A hug to Irene too, who needs to be "felt".

10:14 – Fede: How is it?

10:15 – Armido: So-so.

10:58 – Angela: Be strong, Armido, but I shouldn't tell you this, since you have it in abundance, maybe patient would be more appropriate, we love you and want you back cured. This is a new thing, they don't know how to treat it, nor do they know the individual reactions, we are like guinea-pigs for the future: after all, we like to experiment, maybe less to be the subjects of experiment. Did you sleep tonight? Because spending the night awake is stressful, I know.

11:55 – Armido: Yes, tonight almost well. They told me not to move, to avoid irritating the wound: I obey.

11:55 – Armido: Now they are trying to make me breathe without the external ventilator, just some oxygen. It means, when I can do it continuously, to be allowed to leave IC for a normal ward. Physiotherapy. My legs are sleeping.

08/04/20

13:58 – Armido: Small backward step, but before evening I hope to resume autonomous breathing.

14:00 – Laura: Well done, Dad, you are improving.

14:06 – Franci: I am Irene: Ciao, *Nonno* (9th).

14:07 – Armido: *Nonno, Opa*.

14:09 – Armido: *Nonno = neunte*.

14:10 – Franci: Excuse me, *Nonno* or *Opa*.

14:10 – Angela: You keep us on pins and needles...

14:42 – Fede: Come on, Dad!

15:17 – Armido: Since I can't speak, I write. You'll see (Irene) that when they put me back together, I'll be able to talk again and it'll be easier to tell everything to each other.

09/04/20

08:01 – Armido: I join the virtual chorus: Greetings for an “unusual” birthday. How is the rest of the world doing? M.?

08:27 – Franci: No news from H., we have to wait. In case of lacking data from Brescia: “happy birthday, Federica”.

10:35 – Fede: Modified recipe, to make do with available ingredients: cane sugar, instead of white, 2 instead of 3 eggs, 80 gr instead of 100 gr of butter, apple instead of pear, milk chocolate instead of dark, milk instead of yogurt... for all else I followed the family recipe (adding a bit of orange-lemon skin and cinnamon).

10:38 – Armido: Thirty years of school come of service. Mom is a good teacher.

10:46 – Fede: Mom is certainly the first instructor, although “more chemist” in the procedures (generally)... Maybe here you may notice Granma A. paw, of the school “by eye”... Dad, you certainly miss home flavours, but Mom is waiting for your requests. And we too can't wait the moment of reunion.

11:14 – Armido: I hope it'll be soon.

11:22 – Angela: How sweet.

16:51 – Does anybody know where my fede (faith=wedding ring in Italian) has gone?

16:53 – Fede: Did you have it on? Maybe in the trolley? I emptied the beauty and it wasn't there. The trolley is now in D.M. street and I can't check. Maybe the nurses put it in a safe place, together with your other objects... or did you mean something more spiritual?

17:04 – Angela: Nice irony dart, Fede. That would be the second, I keep score, likewise for the lives we have: some of us have already spent more than one, let's be careful.

17:19 – Armido: I don't recall when they might have removed it.

17:21 – Fede: Probably before your entering IC, they may have stored it with the rest.

17:22 – Armido: Let's hope...

11/04/20

08:35 – Armido: Good morning.

08:37 – Fede: Night full of stirrings with Sergio, maybe the Spring?

08:48 – Franci: All quiet here. The girls were good tonight.

08:48 – Laura: I'm fine too, even though I woke up very early.

08:55 – Armido: Ciao to all my girls, grown and young alike. Breathing autonomously. Doctor says the blood test results are all good, the virus test is scheduled in the next days. For all else, the improvement goes on.

10:24 – Laura: A small improvement for me too: yesterday evening and this morning temperature 36.9°.

16:34 – Armido: Goodness, what an effort to breathe, a function we always take for granted, so difficult in my conditions.

16:35- Fede: Are you still autonomous since morning?

16:37 – Franci: You have just to restore the muscles that have become slack, you'll see, it's going to improve. Keep in mind that five days ago you could not do it.

16:38 – Angela: Now they should connect you back, to relieve you a bit. Doctor told me so.

16:41 – Armido: For the night, not before. These girls are inflexible.

16:42 – Fede: ... My goodness. But if you can't take any more, let them know. I don't think they should spare oxygen on you!!

16:52 – Armido: They do it for me, if I want to be autonomous earlier.

17:00 – Dr E.C.: Ciao! How is it?

17:05 – Armido: Many hours in autonomous breathing. I am spent. But they say I am on the right track. Ciao.

17:05 – Dr E.C.: Good! Happy Easter! See you soon.

13/04/20

08:26 – Armido: Good morning. Washed and in free breathing, let's see how long I can endure.

08:39 – Laura: Don't forget to be patient.

08:47 – Angela: When you are tired, do you flag them or have to you wait for the assigned time?

08:48 – Armido: I am re-connected to the ventilator. Much mucus.

08:49 – Angela: When we called yesterday, you were

resting. Which time do you wish us to call, to see you?.
If you prefer of course you can call us any time, hoping
the cell rings.

08:52 – Franci: Irene: “I understand. It happens to me
too when I have much mucus, I hardly breathe”; Sofia: “I
wish the virus goes away, to see Granpa”. A hug from all
of us.

09:16 – Fede: Here we are too. Lately we wake every
2, 3 hours each night, with the result of getting up at 9
(at times).

09:25 – Angela: Who knows why he wakes up so
often, he must be disturbed by something, it used to be
hunger before, but now the stomach has grown and he
can overcome the night. Have you any idea why, Fede?
The girls do their best to be close to Granpa ... as we do.

09:29 – Fede: No... maybe another temporary phase,
that for him always takes the form of waking. When the
mucus is removed, do you find relief, Dad?

09:30 – Armido: Not always. At times nothing works.

15:09 – Armido: I was against it, and find myself in
free breathing. What a trick...

15:14 – Angela: I don't get you, what were you?

15:16 – Armido: No... don't recall them having
disconnected me.

15:17 – Fede: Napping.

15:24 – Armido: Now I am *connected* *agaito* *the-*
ventilator *A*.

15:26 – Angela: Stay calm, they can see your
saturation and decide consequently.

15:38 – Armido: *Exactu*.

14/04/20

09:38 – Fede: How is it, Dad?

09:45 – Armido: Who knows, to me it seems a series of ups and downs, no logic in it, I hope they are right.

09:46 – Laura: Be thought, I beg you, this virus is said to be sneaky by many, don't give up. Don't you agree with their strategy?

09:49 – Armido: I don't have a say. They know what must be done.

09:51 – Laura: Yes, so the above sentence is because you are not seeing an improvement.

09:51 – Armido: Exactly.

12:02 – Angela: Ciao. I went shopping to Conad at 8:30 this morning, full trolley, to spare trips. You are confined, but we too are segregated within our houses. The situation is incredible. You have got to keep all your thoughts inside, besides the virus that has found a nice accommodation. A little at a time you'll be able to get rid of it. Don't worry if you don't feel like writing much. It's so good that we can communicate via Web.

16:44 – Laura: Well done, Dad, you are traveling a very hard path. It must be considered as a new birth, maybe for this reason Dr P. used the word “weaned”.

21:17 – Laura: Good night, let's hope it'll be so for any of us, in spite of rough winds and internal agitation. I am excited because tomorrow I officially resume teaching... who knows...

15/04/20

08:33 – Armido: Yesterday in the afternoon I was definitively disconnected from the ventilator and my vocal cords could function again. I sound like a crow, but I can speak a few words. The problem is I am still unable to swallow, not even my saliva. We'll see today.

08:37 – Angela: I was told about it on Monday, then yesterday Dr P. said they had not done it yet. It's a discomfort now, but all will be well later. From what I got, they removed the small ball closing the larynx, but the ventilation tube should still be in place.

08:43 – Armido: I don't know exactly what has been removed, but the swallowing seems to be the only problem.

14:44 – Armido: The problem seems to be caused by the type of tracheotomy cannula (uncapped) they are using. The Physiotherapist thinks that, once the breathing efficiency is certain, I may resume swallowing.

16/04/20

11:21 – Armido: My voice has been cut again. Later today, they are going to install a capped cannula, that will allow me to speak again.

11:27 – Angela: Do you still have to use the ventilator?

11:53 – Armido: No, in fact from now on I can speak, but they cannot connect me back to the ventilator.

16:59 – Laura: How is your “newborn-breather's” day

going?

17:34 – Armido: Oh! Today has been strange, with music (Mina and Battisti) and long waits. It seems to last forever.

17:37 – Laura: If you feel bored it means you must be better.

18:20 – Armido: Good point...

17/04/20

09:42 – Armido: They may move me to a GP ward. It might mean I am no longer infective.

10:33 – Laura: In reality I know of others being even discharged, still positive, but not at risk, there are many newly equipped wards in hospitals, not only ICs, like the one you are in... We'll see what they tell you.

11:31 – Armido: Let's wait to be at destination. Waiting to see how it works. I am in a room with 2 patients. Bed 9. Very quiet, but small change.

20:03 – Armido: We are in a comedy. Alarm bells ringing, for no reason, nobody answering them, I wonder...

20:05 – Franci: Welcome back to hospital normality... Look at it positively, they don't expect anybody to die, if the call is not answered instantly.

20:40 – Laura: First negative test for me too, next Monday the second! Come on, Dad.

18/04/20

12:30 – Laura: Are you well, though?

13:23 – Armido: Worse than yesterday. Maybe it's just the need to adapt to the new environment. To be bedridden is uncomfortable, but inevitable.

13:26 – Laura: Ask for some exercise, to reactivate your body. Be strong, Dad.

15:18 – Angela: I read that the Heparin is more effective than the ventilation, both as an anti-coagulant and anti-inflammatory agent, a few doctors use it mainly for home therapy. Do you know whether they use it for you also?

15:43 – Armido: Yes, every day.

17:06 – Angela: Ciao. I just called your ward, I miss the daily communication with the Doctor on duty: Dr B. was there and told me that your situation is stable, you are not receiving food yet, because it takes some time to get used to swallow. Tomorrow another doctor will be on duty and on Monday Dr S., whom you have met before going to IC. Maybe you feel worse than yesterday, because you are less sedated, this is his guess. You tell me, but above all refer to the doctors, I don't want them to underestimate, as happened before.

Forth dream: The Procession

I wake slowly in a dim light, resembling the humid fog of the Po valley's winter downs. Muted sounds, shadows moving slowly, looking like ghosts levitating around.

I don't remember where I am, why I am here, laying half down on a soft warm surface, shaken by recurrent cold shivers. The fog doesn't clear, it seems to seep gradually into my bones. I can't move, I feel pains scattered everywhere, but I know I can bear much more than this. The pain doesn't scare me, unlike the uncertainty of the situation and the vague recollection of a looming danger, a deadly threat, that maybe concerns me or some of mine.

I wait there, ready to pick whatever slight change, for an undefined time. Nothing happens, nor does anything change.

Then a strange noise, seemingly coming from my left, becomes more and more audible, a sort of wheels' rustle, one of which emits a brief

squeak at every turn.

A bent back materializes in the fog of my visual field, then slowly a full body takes form, enormous in my imagination. It advances ponderously on my side, coming from my feet's direction.

When I am able to see it in profile, it appears monstrous, entirely wrapped in a dark overalls, his head has a strange shape, the face fitted with an enormous round trunk and a giant eye, reflecting weak gleams. It reminds me of the bacteriological warfare drills I used to take during the military service. Not a monster then, but maybe a “soldier”, protected against possible contamination.

I too feel the contours of a mask covering my face, connected to a tube spilling a flux of fresh air.

In the meantime the “soldier” has become two, with a trolley between them, over which a vaguely human shape lies, entirely covered by a greenish tarp. I don't understand why they have covered the face too. The couple, with their mysterious load, exit my visual field, but others follow in rapid sequence, all similar to the first.

Suddenly I have a flash of lucidity: these are morgue gurneys, bearing the deceased during the night. Sudden dread and pity overcome me.

No more life under these sheets, those were people, with dear ones, life projects, now reduced to a mass of decomposing organs, due to a life form so different and so similar to our own, coming from a past of hundreds of millions years, capable of using a specific key on our cellular door and recruiting our cells for its own replication.

I realize how fragile and self-centered we are: basically nothing more than a bunch of cells, cooperating to form a society, so complex as to become capable of self-consciousness. But at a basic level, sugar filaments, welded together by couples of four substances, combining in a precise order, similar to the one belonging to the virus, now assaulting this wonderful and complex project.

Maybe Lynn Margulis was right when stating that viruses and bacteria are our ancestors, that we are one with every life form on this planet, maybe in the entire universe.

A consideration that paradoxically reassures me. The flow of life does not stop with the death of a single. We all should bear this in mind. I am no longer scared.

19/04/20

08:30 – Armido: Good morning. Just finished the morning toilette. Another hard night. Today is a new day, though.

09:04 – Fede: What's wrong with these nights? Can't you sleep? Is it the breathing? The mucus? The swallowing? Or maybe the ambient disturbance?

09:24 – Angela: Indeed, what is that insomnia, so unusual for you, at least before your meeting COVID?

12:00 – Armido: Well, noises and the monitors ticking.

17:22 – Armido: I apologize for the poor interaction, but it takes much effort to just typing few words.

20/04/20

09:27 – Fede: Since the doctors don't call us at home any longer for a daily report of your conditions, and they tell less to you too, maybe you can give them Mom's number, so as to have some more communication, what do you think?

23/04/20

08:32 – Armido: I did not sleep well.

08:44 – Angela: Tonight neither? Have you informed the doctors? Due to the anaesthesia of the IC treatments, your circadian cycle may have been altered.

11:45 – Armido: The problem is the mouth, always dry, not allowing for a good breathing.

11:55 – Angela: For sure it's a consequence of all the “cures” you have been subjected to, when you resume swallowing and eating, it will change, I guess.
Calculating the days you are not eating ...

25/04/20

10:55 – Angela: Don't worry if it's difficult to speak, when we meet I'll talk for both... Joking, let's hope next Monday they will close the tracheotomy and then with the speech therapy you'll resume eating some real food. Today I boiled some meat, prepared mayonnaise and Russian salad, I don't know how long it'll take us to eat all, but I have plenty of food provisions in deep freezing.

26/04/20

07:46 – Armido: No sleep tonight.

07:47 – Angela: Good morning. Haven't they brushed, washed, shaved you yet? What time are scheduled the first nursing operations?

07:48 – Armido: Early, but they are blood sampling. The hygiene begins at this hour.

07:49 – Angela: But why don't they give you a sleeping pill?

07:50 – Armido: I had no respite from coughing and mucus. Good morning.

07:52 – Laura: ... What a course... So the mucus still there... I can imagine it's not easy to excrete it altogether.

28/04/20

14:30 – Armido: Ciao. How is it?

14:37 – Fede: We are well. The rain is still missing.
What about you? Coughing the same or better?

15:22 – Armido: Now the bother are the peristaltic
infusion pumps.

15:36 – Angela: A pity you cannot handle them, you
would find a solution for sure.

15:42 – Fede: Sergio is putting aside things that break
down for when you'll be back, and we keep explaining
him that even Grandpa is unable to put back together a
shattered glass or other ephemeral things that are
destroyed just by his touch... that you will have enough
to do adjusting the wheels of all his vehicles.

17:42 – Armido: Yes, he must be made aware of the
limits of fixing.

21:30 – Fede: The rain!

21:40 – Laura: Well... dancing in the rain has always
been wonderful... I hope I'll dream a downpour tonight,
of the type that cleanses, just like the one in Manzoni's
novel... A hug to everyone.

29/04/20

14:11 – Armido: Ciao. I am worried for the lack of
improvement. Everyday seems the same or worse than
the previous. I don't know what to do. Better you talk to
the doctors, to know whether they have any ideas for
changing this situation.

30/04/20

18:01 – Angela: Ciao, good night. You are not alone, with all the monitors guarding... you and the others. But tonight I'll be alone, even though not for the first time.

18:03 – Armido: I am alone too, in a room with 3 beds. Good night.

01/05/20

07:37 – Angela: If you are alone we can make a video call, when and if you want.

08:32 – Armido: I am unable to speak, dry mouth. If you wish, send a vocal message.

08:49 – Angela: All right, but let me remove the sweater, otherwise my picture is the same as yesterday.

09:44 – Armido: They suggest a temporary PEG, to overcome the problem of swallowing. I don't know what to do.

09:53 – Angela: Darn! If they propose this, it means it's going to be for some time. Since the drip-feeding is not really a complete nutrition, in order to recover strength and become autonomous once more. I'm sorry we are not there together to take this decision, but we support you anyway. I am with you, as I used to say before your hospitalization, in bad and good times. I'm going to call the ward, to ask for an explanation.

02/05/20

16:55 – Armido: I was discharged from IC, now in

GP2 Covid. My problem is I am unable to swallow and they have to drip-feed me. Ciao and thanks.

17:34 – G.F.: It will take time, but you'll see, all is going to work for the better. Don't lose faith.

03/05/20

07:06 – Armido: Good morning. A night interspersed with noisy alarms. Now, hygiene completed, a new day of inactivity begins.

07:29 – Laura: I don't consider inactivity taking the time to recover, Dad... And anyway, although your body is still far from full recovery, it's nice to read your comments, with the "usual" Dad's style.

08:59 – Armido: It's a comfort having preserved the style, after all the recent losses, dignity, voice, eating. Thanks and have a nice Sunday.

09:24 – Franci: I'm sorry not to be close, but with messages and video calls. I comprehend your situation, it would be hard on me too being seriously ill. Having to rely on others for almost everything. But stay strong, even so slowly the progress is there. Some days ago, you succeeded in sending a first vocal, are you completely unable to speak now, or is it the same?

09:44 – Armido: My speech is hindered by a type of cannula, changed recently.

09:51 – Franci: Sorry. How are your room-mates faring? An advantage or a bother?

12:36 – Armido: No room-mate. Alone for the last 3 days.

12:48 – Franci: Boredom without rest!

13:30 – Armido: Well, you know that I like being alone, even though this applies when I am well. In these conditions I don't really know if it's worse or better. For sure it means that the patients number is diminishing.

09:46 – Armido: Yesterday's test is negative, Tomorrow it will be repeated and we'll see if it's a confirmation.

09:46 – Fede: Some doctors who have been infected said that it's been a revelation being on the other side and that this experience (certainly not to be bidden to anybody... well maybe to Trump) has changed their perception of the patient forever. You too, as an health operator, had an hard ordeal, but also a great opportunity. Certainly nobody is going to be as before.

09:58 – Angela: I was fearing something like this, as the virus has been within you for long and they made their best to get rid of it... Now the left-overs of what it did remain, it will take time, but we'll help you clean-up.

13:27 – Armido: The Neurologist has been here, she ordered a legs electromyography and an head TAC. I don't know if this is a new pathology or a consequence of the therapy.

14:46 – Angela; I don't think it to be a new pathology, for sure the virus has affected the neural centres, like the lack of smell, flavour, pains everywhere in the body. They probably want to ascertain possible impairments with the exams they can make.

17:31 – Armido: Tomorrow the head nurse will be calling you, to explain the PEG problem, Dr S. will be here in the morning. I have just talked to her. The duration of the PEG is related to the time it takes for me

to recover the swallowing function. Ciao.

04/05/20

11:20 – Dr E.C.: Ciao! How is it going?

11:43 – Armido: Every day a new bad surprise. There is an impairment at the feet, that will require rehabilitation. Besides the swallowing problem. I don't know what to make of it.

18:26 – Armido: I guess the neurologic problems are due to the weight loss and to the forced inactivity. The more time spent in bed, the worse the problem becomes.

18:29 – Fede: But we have been reading pieces about a recent study on Covid-19 neural damages.

18:35 – Laura: ... Some of them are reversible, even though the recovery time is very long. I remember how long it took me to recover full functionality when my hand nerve was pinched by a fractured bone and I had to be treated by electro stimulation for 2 months. Of course you cannot get on drip-feed all this time... especially to rebuild some muscle, essential to any movement... Dad, we are always concerned for you, even if unfortunately you feel alone, but you are present and precious to us, any way you are... You can't imagine how good it is to see again your messages after this long silence...

18:39 – Fede: As a matter of fact, everything points to a reversibility of the effects.

18:56 – Armido: Yes, with physiotherapy and rehabilitation everything should resume normality but it

will take much time. Thanks anyway for your positive words, I greatly need them. Good evening and night.

05/05/20

07:05 – Armido: Good morning. I am sorry I am unable to interact more, mainly with the girls. A big hug to everybody.

06/05/20

07:17 – Laura: Good morning, We can't imagine how hard it must be for you, but you are with me in many moments during the day, I feel your presence and I focus on that, step by step all the rest will come back... I guess it's the same for the girls and Sergio.

07:26 – Franci: I agree with Laura. Sofia wants to tell you that if you can call, she is happy, if you don't feel like it, she sends greetings and she'll wait. Use this as a motivation, in a good sense. We love you and feel close to you, while you struggle to heal. Hug.

12:27 – Angela: After having put Dad's pc out of order, yesterday I have been to the bank, to be enabled to pay for the firm and... today I did it. As always, doing mistakes leads to learning.

07/05/20

16:15 – Armido: Some fever in the afternoon, 37.4°C, they took blood and urine samples, chest XR. We'll see tomorrow how significant this may be. I am a bit

disheartened.

16:23 – Laura: Dad, do not lose faith now, let's hope the fever goes down soon and that it's just caused by your fragility... anyway you see they examine every option. You are a clinical case! I am going to **school for 2 hours meetings with my students' parents.**

16:34: - Gio: Be strong, Armido, most has been done, now just the details have to be fixed!

16:59 – Armido: I hope so.

18:00 – Angela: I was outside in the sun, then Lina brought some begonias, which I put in vases. I see this news just now: really you must be a bacterial culture... we already knew you are cultured.

08/05/20

06:43 – Armido: Yesterday in the evening: fever 38.5°C, a pill of paracetamol, this morning still 38°C. Waiting for the doctors. I hope it's nothing serious.

12:26 – Armido: Now no fever. The doctors have been here and suppose an hospital infection. New antibiotic. Dr S. should call you.

12:35 – Angela: Unbelievable. I was told you were finishing the treatment on Wednesday, now something else. After all they must act on the clinical evidences.

13:40 – Angela: Dr S. told me that the morning fever is due to a fungus infecting your blood, it happens in hospital at times, when the immune system is down. They identified and are treating it. The virus has gone, but there's a new resident now. You must be "patient" a bit longer.

13:44 – Fede: Your fascination for the mushrooms recurs from within... Has the virus been erased, then?

09/05/20

18:40 – Angela: I have been able, after some trials, to video call Dad, it's been fine and useful, since he has to exercise the voice. He has still some fever, but no doctors nor physiotherapists are there today, the weekend is like this. Ciao.

10/05/20

15:12 – Fede: Hello, Dad, I apologize for my questions like -how is it?- in the last messages on the family group. I know you are facing one more hard ordeal, but keep faith, think it must be the last effort, since the virus has finally been won and now you can concentrate on confronting the rest, I beg you: endure, you must come back here, to the world you created, with all of us and your projects.

18:34 – Armido: I had a surge of fever, they have given me Paracetamol drip-feed, now 37.2°C. Good evening and night.

11/05/20

08:08 – Armido: Today no fever. All is ok. How are you?

08:17 – Angela: I am with you, if you say you are ok, I am ok too.

12/05/20

06:40 – Armido: All right. I slept. No fever. Good morning.

13/05/20

12:35 – Armido: High fever.

12:48 – Laura: We contacted the doctors, they were in a hurry, so they'll call back in the afternoon. However they already knew the infection wasn't erased, because it takes time, and therefore the fever might come back again. Dad, I am sorry you are still suffering, you are always in our thoughts.

15:09 – Armido: Now the fever has gone.

20:50 – Armido: Fever increasing 38.2°C... Drip-feed in place. Good night.

14/05/20

09:47 – Angela: Yesterday evening G.F., your first room-mate in GP Infection, called me, to know about you and to thank for the psychological support you gave him during those days. He searched and found our home number on the web, but he had already sent greetings through K., when Laura was still in contact.

11:35 – Armido: They have tried placing back the nose feed tube, but failed.

11:30 – Angela: How so, was it painful?

11:51 – Armido: This is meant to give me a more apt feeding, but they were unable to direct the tube through the oesophagus.

15/05/20

06:59 – Angela: Good morning, early aches dissolving slowly as the day matures. How is our special envoy?

07:07 – Armido: Good morning. Poor sleeping, almost no fever.

20:40 – Armido: Fever 37.7°C. Good night.

16/05/20

06:52 – Armido: Well. the fever has gone and I slept soundly. Good morning.

17/05/20

07:52 – Armido: Still high fever 38.5°C. in the night till morning. Paracetamol drip-feed, epic sweat. Now I don't know, but it should be lower.

16:35 – Armido: Temperature over 38°C, now they are setting up paracetamol drip-feed.

18/05/20

06:12 – Armido: Good morning. Unfortunately still with fever at over 38°C. I slept poorly.

06:58 – Angela: Armido, besides the paracetamol, did they give you something else? Did any doctor see you?

09:42 – Armido: The doctors have been here: the program is still placing a PEG or as alternative a new nose feed tube. For the fever attacks, some more emocultures to be made.

09:44 – Angela: What about the many taken last week, no results?

10:03 – Armido: It appears not. I don't understand any more.

16:47 – Armido: Tomorrow a new attempt at placing the nose feed tube, in order to restart stomach and intestine functioning. These recurring fever bouts leave me spent. Repost on family group. Good night.

19:29 – Laura: Hello, Dad, maybe you are already sleeping, you'll read tomorrow, I just wanted to wish you a good night and to say you are great. I knew, but all this ordeal you are going through now is difficult and you are strong, very strong: in my opinion it's right to tell you this. And I thank you because you keep showing me what inner strength is.

19/05/20

08:10 – Armido: I am moved by what you wrote, since I don't feel strong at all. You, with your words, are my support.

Fifth dream: At the Theater

I wake up suddenly, at a strange sound, maybe a siren or an alarm. I don't get where I am at once. There isn't much light, I can only see a bundle of small pipes, descending upon me from several sacks and bottles, precariously hanging from a trestle over my head. I lie face up, my wide open arms covered by bandages and strips. I can't see the ceiling nor the walls, only a large glass window on my left, through which a weak bluish light filters.

Few quick shadows cross my visual field.

The sound that woke me becomes persistent, repeated with a fastidious frequency, it seems to come from behind my head, but I don't have the strength to turn around. When I try going on the side, a new sound immediately combines with the first.

I feel clearly aches localized at the arms, the feet, the throat and a diffuse general discomfort that prevents me from thinking lucidly. I have the impression of being a Guinea-Pig on the anatomy dissection table of a crazy

pathologist, who is measuring my resistance to pain and testing my reactions to visual-acoustic stimulus.

I can't remember how I ended up here, don't even know where this is, maybe a cinema where a noir movie is being played, maybe an avant-garde theater stage, where I am the unintentional main character and the victim.

MWe (dis)conclusion I reach, after a contorted train of thoughts, is that it must be a fiction, a show for the benefit of a troupe of sadists, an audience I can't see nor hear.

Strange beings completely wrapped in white overalls, with a shiny screen as heads, move around me, but I am unable to focus on any of them. When I try speaking, only few weak sounds issue from my mouth, which don't raise any reaction. Could they be automatons? Would it be I am in the hands of aliens?...But no, it's all a setup ... or else?

When I can't bear the sounds and the doubt's tension anylonger, I start shaking and shouting, but I emit only a rasping breath, my voice refusing to help me.

The automatons keep following their script,

undisturbed.

Fed up by now, I start tearing away at the tubes and bandages fixing them in position, uttering disdain words, that, I realize, are not interpreted as such. Suddenly, strong lights are switched on, forcing me to close my eyes, I hear voices, at last. Gloved hands immobilize me on both sides. I am unable to get free, I open my eyes, and focus on the concerned face of a person, looking at me through a transparent screen, I grasp his words: calm down, calm down...

The disturbing sounds are silenced one by one, the talking face recedes and at last I realize he is a nurse, the one who is always ready to amuse us, attempting, with little success, to cheer us up.

They reconnect the tubes and the wires I tore away, change the empty sacks and the stained bed sheets.

I finally realize being in my hospital bed, still at risk, for a long sequel of complications, that regularly hit me, aggravating my prognosis, after an endless IC permanence.

My exhausted body is failing me, a piece at a time. The brain works part-time and shows decreasing capacity of connecting to reality.

Nevertheless, I don't want to surrender, not yet.

Yesterday Doc has hinted that the nose feeding is not enough and, failing to resume in a few more days the swallowing function, they must resort to applying the PEG (Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy) procedure, in simple words, an hole into the abdomen, through which a small tube allows feeding nutrition directly to the stomach.

The idea is terrifying, I have seen many subjects with PEG, permanently bound to bed or, at best, on a wheelchair, with a sack hanging above their heads.

I recall that I'm having a first visit by the Speech Specialist this morning, who is going to ascertain whether my incapacity of speaking and swallowing is permanent or not. I grab on to this last chance.

The phonation exercises she suggests to articulate become my main task during the waking hours, a mantra replicated several times

a day, with much annoyance for my room-mate, who has a jolt every time I begin uttering them.

Soon my persistence raises nurses and doctors grins. After some days, I ask for a test, having realized I can swallow my saliva, which I used to dispose of in countless paper tissues before.

A fruit puree, just out of the fridge, is the first semisolid food I am able to swallow after more than 3 months. From that moment the recovery truly begins. I can say, loudly enough, that the worst is behind.

19/05/20

13:29 – Armido: I'm still waiting for the application of the nose feed tube. Meanwhile fever has gone up, paracetamol taken, now better. Ciao.

17:38 – Armido: Nose feed tube applied: what an unpleasant operation.

17:39 – Franci: Yes, but it helps to reactivate stomach and intestines. Did they have a look also (gastroscopy)?

20/05/20

07:21 – Armido: Good morning, fever tonight, then later I slept.

13:17 – Armido: Yes they have resumed giving me water yesterday, and a porridge this morning. Now I must abstain, because I'll have an abdomen echography later.

13:35 – Angela: Have you been told why the echography? It's not an annoying examination, nor is it invasive though.

14:44 – Armido: I suppose they want to make sure everything is in order, I don't know. In the meantime I keep on exercising speech and leg motion.

14:55 – Angela: I know you are perseverant. May I call you? Of course it'll be more difficult talking with the nose feed.

15:46 – Armido: Just finished the echography. All is well. Now eating.

19:49 – Armido: A bit of fever, not much. The tracheal tube connection becomes loose quite often and it's not easy to fix it back. Now waiting for the nurse who is able

to do it. Good evening and night.

21/05/20

16:01 – Angela: How are you? How is the new nose feed working?

17:45 – Armido: Yes, stomach and intestines have resumed their functions too, I evacuated already. The speech exercises are extenuating. I just finished the second sequence. I doubt I'll be able to do another one. They have refitted the tracheal tube. Hoping it will stay in position. Today the Speech Specialist gave me a written sequence of exercises, that will occupy most of my day. They all pertain to the neck zone and take a long time to be done. Therefore I'll not be in touch much.

22/05/20

15:41 – Angela: after several years, the pomegranate bloomed.

16:36 – Armido: Well, this year is full of bad and good events. Faith in the future.

23/05/20

13:39 – Armido: I can drink short water sips.

13:56 – Gio: Great!

14:30 – Dr E.C.: Ciao! How are you?

18:16 – Armido: I started a rehabilitation of the esophagus, with some tangible results. I am able to swallow some water. All else is ok. Thanks. Ciao.

18:20 – Dr E.C.: Good. See you soon.

24/05/20

06:34 – Laura: ... The morning started observing a snail slowly advancing in the garden, drenched by the night rain: gradually and tenaciously... good day to everybody.

26/05/20

08:01 – Angela: Well, good day! I was telling Laura that I intended to finish reading Mario Tobino's book yesterday in the evening, *Le libere donne di magliano*, and I did it at 1 am. This morning I am a bit sleepy, but have nothing urgent to do, excluding... managing the house, the cooking, together with Laura, in the few moments she has between on line lessons and after school. Today and tomorrow she has Class Councils, always from her bedroom, of course, but the daily routine is nice, when you are well, when your relatives, near or far, are well... A triviality, you think? No, nothing obvious, everything is unique, I am convinced, and these times confirm it. A virtual hug to you all.

11:51 – Armido: Just finished eating a pudding and mashed fruit with the Speech Specialist, starting tomorrow semisolid diet, with half mush through the nose feed.

11:58 – Angela: That's fine, Cremaschi!

27/05/20

18:41 – Armido: I had supper: vegetable soup, fresh cheese, potato puree, yogurt. All fine. Good evening and night.

19:11 – Angela: Hurray, Armido, those aren't your food preferences... but you will have plenty soon. Stomach and intestines all right?

29/05/20

07:23 – Armido: Good morning, I had breakfast and hygiene. A new day, that I hope will bring some progress.

09:09 – Armido: Hello to everybody. I just performed a first morning session of exercises and reading aloud. Now eating a pudding.

31/05/20

08:45 – Angela: I spent half an hour, chatting with Dad, he in his bed, me in mine, nobody around, until now, someone entered his room.

01/06/20

07:16 – Laura: Good morning, are they coming for a physiotherapeutic session today or do they skip for the festivity of the 2nd of June?

08:41 – Armido: I think they'll come. Anyway I have moved forward already with a complete set of leg exercises.

02/06/20

08:01 – Angela: Good holiday, for us, while a normal day for all else, which is much compared to the anxiety

of the past 3 months. A virtual hug to everybody.

09:31 – Armido: Dealing with speech and physiotherapy exercises. Good holiday to all, even to those working.

06/06/20

16:44 – Armido: I just took shower plus shampoo, feeling reborn.

18:28 – Armido: Good evening&night. 360° hug. I am doing my best to elongate arms by gym, so that I can embrace all of you.

09/06/20

14:21 – Laura: Dad, what about the exam?

16:41 – Armido: Yes, the exam is ok. Tomorrow one more virus test, then Thursday I'll be discharged to move to rehabilitation program.

17:04 – Angela: Good news, that the exam is showing no pathology, the Doctor told me that 3 consecutive emocultures had to be negative, before they could discharge you, and the rehabilitation centre may be Hospice Domus, the nearest. Today A. told me she will soon begin her internship exactly there, and I was hoping you might be sent there as well... Anyway we'll be glad if you are discharged towards any other place.

10/06/20

09:24 – Armido: Dr S. has been here to tell me he'll call directly a colleague, to verify a possible uptake from

Domus within the week, otherwise, Rovato.

13:25 – Angela: I just received the call of Dr S.:

TOMORROW in the morning Dad is to be discharged towards Domus, if nothing bad happens, she added.

13:20 – Angela: I asked about your clothes, the lost ring, the possibility of seeing you, but the visits are not allowed yet, either in Hospital or in the Rehabilitation centres.

14:39 – Fede: I guess we could organize an ambush (in agreement with the Domus personnel), in order to meet the ambulance either in the premises of the hospital or at the entrance of Domus, so that we can greet each other, without entering the wards. In my opinion this is feasible.

14:47 – Laura: Yeah, nice idea!

15:07 – Angela: Dad should communicate the departure time, so that we can be at Domus. I may be able to recover the dirty clothes.

15:49 – Armido: I can inform you when the ambulance is here, but it takes only few minutes to reach Domus, maybe it's not the case. It's better to let me arrive and settle, and organize in a better way.

18:22 – Armido: They found my ring. It was here in the ward safe.

18:24 – Fede: Oh, great!

19:44 – Angela: That's why I always spend an extra word. Apologizing, I asked Dr S., telling her you don't remember when they took it. She guessed it was removed in IC and from there to the safe. In this case we may celebrate the 45th year marriage anniversary.

11/06/20

08:11 – Armido: I showered and trimmed. Looking myself in a big mirror: a limping skeleton.

08:16 – Fede: Well, for some time you'll be justified when overeating at the table, or for not restraining... When you return, the beef-up diet begins. If not enough, you could join Mom in her late evening nibbles.

08:29 – Angela: Smarty, not always can I forgo the evening ice-cream. With Oscar Wilde: "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it".

08:47 – Armido: Take it easy. It's been so hard shedding all that weight, that I must nurse the recovery.

09:03 – Franci: Come on! You just fell asleep and when you woke up you were slim.

09:13 – Armido: I assure you it wasn't sleep but dreadful nightmares. When waking I could not guess whether what I saw was real or not. Therefore the slimming has been costly. Now I must enjoy the recovery in no hurry.

09:14 – Fede: Logistic info: In agreement with Domus, we could be waiting for the ambulance at the driveway, for a brief encounter. Mom is going to buy a new tracksuit now, then she comes here: if your carrier isn't very early, we could make it. You send a signal when they arrive (... eventually take your time!).

09:33 – Armido: Around 10:30. By this weather, I suggest not to try. It has no practical purpose, dirty and clean clothes are packed in black bags. Don't fret.

10:43 – Angela: We are at Laura's place. We are leaving Sergio with her and then coming to Domus. If we

meet you at the entrance, fine, otherwise we just do the clothes exchange.

11:26 – Armido: Arriving now.

11:36 – Angela: We are inside, in the ward's hall.

We greeted him at the lift exit. Of course the luck of finding a kind person who has agreed to accompany us from the driveway to the hall in front of the ward, on the 2nd floor, ward D, allowing us to enter and be present at the reception's procedures.

13:03 – Franci: How is it in the new room/hospital?

14:25 – Armido: Ciao. In place and bureaucratic procedures done, visited by a Doctor, had a further Covid test, without which I would not access the Gym, had lunch, visited by the Coordinator of Physiotherapy and by a Physiatrist, in order to ascertain the deficit.

14:55 – Laura: Holy cow!... Reading now all of this, during a half hour break... Well, you've got to let it go, then. There at Domus and then Mom, they will think up the better nourishing menus, for sure.

15:11 – Armido: We'll see. The lunch hasn't been elating, but it was late and maybe they gave me what was left. The sandals are ok and I can walk with more confidence. Until the result of the test, I am segregated alone in a room. Hello to everybody.

15:15 – Angela: Ciao, we have eaten, walked around, put Sergio to bed and now I am ready to go back home. The Doctor who took your test told us that you are going to stay at least a month: all the time it takes to walk again safely, then the recovery will continue at home.

15:50 – Fede: We learned that you may exit in the park, with an auxiliary to help you... You must crave for

some open air.

16:45 – Armido: Well, yes. But more than that, I crave to start rehabilitation. They are speculating it will take a full month, I want to make it in 3 weeks.

12/06/20

07:15 – Laura: Good morning, from the bed. How has the first night been? Slept, dreamed. The change of bed is supposed to stimulate remembering dreams.

09:23: - Armido: No dreams and early wake. All is well. Negative Covid test, therefore the rehabilitation may begin seriously in the afternoon.

15:14: - Armido: Ah, you are there. I just had a first walk with the Physiotherapist, first session in the Gym tomorrow at 14. I tested the feet braces and I can walk much better.

15:50 – Fede: A walk outside? Ask whether you will use the swimming pool, since you'll need a swimsuit.

16:23 – Armido: No, inside. There is an ample hallway leading into rooms, service spaces and parlours. They made a medical walker available, fitted with a seat. Therefore starting tomorrow I'll be peripatetic in there and use the stationary byke, that I just tested. I don't know about the swimming pool, yet, but I guess it's not in my program.

17:01 – Angela: Fine, you are gaining confidence in your environment. I see you already had the test result, I wonder why we had to wait a week to know.

19:36 – Armido: I had a long tour with my walker after supper. At the hallway's end, I found a large terrace

fitted with chairs and tables, overlooking the garden: I stayed there for an hour, wonderful weather, view on the Maddalena hill. A nice place, indeed. I can't wait to going down in the green. Good evening/night.

14/06/20

08:55 – Angela: Good day. Dad and I have been in video call for an hour. We didn't mention our anniversary, but while we are together it's a marriage celebration nonetheless, even when arguing... in good and bad fate.

10:00 – Laura: It's trueeee: greetings... for now from afar... in a short while we'll celebrate together.

10:15 – Armido: Is it not tomorrow?

10:29 – Franci: My diary says today, what does your ring report?

10:31 – Fede: Maybe they did not engrave it?

10:48 – Angela: No, this is the second ring and it's not engraved, but we risked buying a third... only two pyjamas are missing, bought yesterday, to avoid worrying.

11:49 – Armido: I am hopeless with dates, you must be right. I seem to recall Mom mentioning Monday the 15th, now she hasn't clarified, therefore send your greetings...

15/06/20

15:07 – Armido: Finished first physiotherapy session. Tiring, it should yield good results in a short time. Ciao.

20:01 – Armido: New weight test in the evening: 60 kg (+2 in comparison with Thursday).

17/06/20

10:37 – Armido: Overload of physiotherapy, in the morning: 08:30 electro stimulation, 09:15 up and down the stairs, then in the Gym using the machines to strengthen the legs muscles. Quite tired, now. A further Gym session is scheduled at 14:30.

18/06/20

18:41 – Armido: All well today? I just had supper. Exhausted by all the exertions of the morning. In the afternoon I only went walking over to the terrace and cycling for a virtual distance of 5 km. A kiss as a good evening/night.

20/06/20

09:34 – Armido: I just had a long chat with Dr B., whom I asked a guess of duration of my stay here: he believes I might be discharged within the first week of July. I'll still need to use the feet braces, which they are going to provide.

24/06/20

08:58 – Fede: In the morning we are going to D.M. Street, to water the flowers at the 3rd and 4th floor. We could show up, later: you are free after 11, right?

09:45 – Armido: Yes, I'm free. Make a buzz when arriving, to give me time to reach the terrace.

25/06/20

11:07 – Armido: I talked to Dr B., a short while ago. They intend to discharge me by the middle of next week. We are going to test and select the suitable feet braces to buy.

11:13 – Gio: Great, just in time to supervise the works in M. Street.

11:52 – Armido: Great, just in... Well, yes, it seems quite right. What about the ugly pine?

11:58 – Gio: Still there, Fede feels regrets in cutting it down.

28/06/20

11:49 – G.F.: Ciao, Armido, how is rehab going?

11:54 – Armido: It's ok, They are discharging me next Thursday, even though I'll have to continue rehabilitation in Verolanuova. Ciao.

11:54 – G.F.: Very well, with time all will return to normal at home.

30/06/20

18:21 – Angela: C. called me to congratulate about you: her husband, who is working there, seeing you walking and making stairs, told her you are a miracle. After the Covid infection, not even as severe and long-lasting as yours, people are still unable to walk. The sanitary were good, you have been “lucky”, but are also working hard yourself.

18:33 – Armido: I have a fine Physiotherapist, who is always encouraging.

02/07/20

08:46 – Laura: Send the release's picture.

08:50 – Angela: I am at the ward's door.

09:14 – Angela: Waiting for the hard-earned papers.

09:15 – Fede: And we waiting outside!!

14:01 – Laura: Me too just arrived at home, welcome back, Dad.

14:18 – Armido: Ciao to all. The euphoria of going home has caused my leaving the cell phone in the car. I read you only now. Going to call all of you before evening.

Epilogue

More than 6 months after discharge, prosecuting with rehabilitation therapies, muscle strengthening at the Gym and eating like a wolf, I am back to my ideal body weight. A neurologic deficit at the feet still persists, which only partially hinders my activities. Of course, chronic damages are present at the lungs and probably at the heart, with reduced resistance during extended aerobic exertions. Fortunately the last spirometric exam showed an evident improvement of the lungs exchanges.

I am gradually resuming some volunteering services and I consider myself privileged, since I can be almost certain of being immune to a new infection, serene about my wife, whom I infected, even though it was much less severe for her. My daughter Laura, who was our guest that fateful February 2020 weekend, remained positive for almost 2 months, even though with light symptoms.

She has been able to continue teaching from our house, being a support to my wife during the most dramatic moments of my long hospitalization.

Unfortunately this pandemic is not over, even though many think so. It's quite difficult for me to justify more and more frequent behaviours dictated by ignorance and carelessness. It was so before this experience, but now it's still harder.

I would like to tell all those underestimating this threat, that their behaviour is not affecting them alone, but the whole community they live in. And, as always, the weakest are paying the most.

I know this message will not be accepted by many, who believe that bad things always happen to the others. While, in some measure, certain tragedies happen more frequently to those risking recklessly, this pandemic hits randomly, also those who are most accurate at minimizing the risks, but by necessity must come into contact with potentially infected people.

My thought goes to the many tens of thousands of doctors and nurses, who devote their efforts well above their professional duty, forgoing the rest, but not the encouraging smile that meant so much for me. Of them, I could see only the eyes, but words were not necessary to feel empathy and comfort.

To my colleagues of Verolanuova (GVVS) and Cremona (CRI) I address a big BRAVI, because they have endured and kept doing their precious and free work. I'll soon be back among you, even though for no other reason than that of reciprocating your love and closeness.

Each of us should feel compelled to abide by the sanitary measures issued to minimize the multiplication of a virus that will stay with us for a long time, changing more rapidly the more it finds new hosts.

It is a "life" form, from which probably issued the evolutionary branches that we use to classify all forms of living beings. A primary coalescence of amino-acids that had at its disposal hundreds of millions (maybe billions) of years to evolve,

incomparably more ancient than the presumptuous and careless humans, who are carelessly fostering its proliferation, through ignorance, negligence or consumerism and predatory greed, towards such an extraordinary planet, that may possibly be considered, against all statistical probabilities, unique.

Verolanuova, 24/01/2021

Armido Cremaschi

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18th December 2020, Mount Dasdana, 2086 m

Notes about the Author

After an education in Chemistry, Armido Cremaschi had a varied and intense professional life, that led him to make significant job experiences in numerous fields and Countries. Since 2009, after relinquishing most of his professional obligations, he has been concerned almost exclusively with a research project, pertaining the feasibility of residential units, self-sufficient in energy and personal mobility. Unfortunately, as is often the case in his Country, the project has remained on paper only. In the meantime, he has devoted himself to volunteering, becoming a member first of Pubblica Assistenza Gruppo Verolese Volontari del Soccorso Onlus in Verolanuova and later of the Italian Red Cross in Cremona. Since January 2021, he has resumed volunteering services in both associations. This is his first published work.

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