

Blood of my blood

Laura Grimaldi

On applying the drain for my first pneumothorax (a cut with a scalpel higher above my breast and the introduction of a rigid tube down into a crevice of my lung or pleura), the doctor in the ER had caused little pain, I believe thanks to some anesthetic. Instead, here in the thoracic department the pain was atrocious, aggravated by the fact that I was under the CT scanner and forced to remain immobile. I am not quite certain, but I believe the scan was needed to guide the tube down my insides.

As I am convinced that no-one believes you unless you shout loud enough, I screamed like a damned soul in the hope that, if nothing else, the doctor would have taken more care rather than put up with my cries. It didn't work. He pushed even harder, apparently irritated by this old lady who, in spite of her condition, still had the strength to make so much noise.

Over the following days my lung continued to misbehave, refusing to expand and continuing to make the liquid bubble in the container, fortunately hidden by the edge of the bed. The situation would have been considered normal only when the liquid remained still.

The Head of the Thoracic Department, a good-humored and sensible man, appeared in the morning. With him came his retinue, usually his assistant and two young doctors (newly specialized, perhaps, or about to become so), followed by two rather aloof female doctors with well-to-do Milanese accents, designer ballerinas and cashmere sweaters under their white coats. Evidently the two ladies saw themselves as the reincarnation of *Mama Cocha*.

They all scrutinized the revolting liquid closely after which the Chief offered a few words of encouragement.

Three or four days later I was informed I needed a second drain. This time I had a bullet in my gun, and I was well prepared to defend myself. Straight away I attacked the doctor who was presumably about to commit the offence (the very one who had introduced the first drain with no regard for my suffering). Threatening a fainting fit at the first sign of pain, blackmailing him with the heart attack and even resorting to the most humble supplication, I did obtain that the tube slid down almost without my noticing. Which makes me think that this novel *Monsieur de Sade* could have spared me the pain the first time, too.

However, in spite of the second drain, the liquid continued to bubble in the container, relentlessly.

In the meantime, I was curled up in my bed between a young Rumanian girl and a not so young lady from Brescia, with whom I chatted incessantly all day.

They needed to talk and I to hear new voices.

Other days, another morning.

His first round of visits over, the Head of the Thoracic Department returned to my room. After commenting on the obstinate defiance of my lung, he asked my consent to perform an injection of my own blood into the chest wall, implying it was the only possible alternative. I cannot remember if he said the method was only or mostly used in the United States, or if it had already been practiced sometimes in Italy. Of course, I accepted. First of all, because having explained at length what the procedure consisted in, the doctor, man of solid credibility, had convinced me it was painless. Secondly, because this same Head of the Thoracic Department had transplanted both lungs on a twenty-year-old who now



"Looking for strength in this crunch time" by Marco Ceruti.

exercised by going up and down the hospital stairs. What could a simple little procedure like mine be for such a great surgeon?

Obviously, he did not do it himself, but the doctor who had inserted the two drainage tubes. Assisted by the two *Mama Cochas*.

Out went my blood from my arm, with a seemingly enormous syringe, in went my blood through one of the drainage tubes to my pleura.

Put that way, it sounds simple. Not at all. But it was painless, at least physically. To see my blood reaching my body not through my veins but pouring in like a glass of magic potion from the drainage witch's cauldron, provoked contrasting emotions in me. Repulsion, alarm, exaltation.

Blood is not a good sight, especially one's own, and it always rouses fear in me. As for the exaltation, I confess I was proud of myself for having had the nerve to face this bizarre

test alone. Who knows, if it worked I could have taken part in saving my own life.

Admittedly, I hardly slept that night. I was worried, but in a sense resigned at the same time. I thought I detected a little concern in the doctors, too.

It seemed they had explored all the possibilities and now it was a question of waiting.

The next morning the miracle had happened. My lung had decided not to slight its own blood and had started to function once more.

'Better than the blood of St. Gennaro', I told the doctors! I think I managed a smile. And then, 'Thank you'.

Translation by Ada D'Aniello

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by Laura Grimaldi - Collezione Libellule

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Laura Grimaldi (born in 1928 - died in 2012) an Italian writer and translator from Tuscany.

At a very early age she moved to Milan where she started her linguistic consultant activity for the publisher "Mondadori Editore" by translating works from English language.

She was called the *Italian Queen of Crime Novels* because since 1962 she started managing some series of books, which are milestones in the Italian Mystery and Crime Novels history, such as "Segretissimo" and "Il Giallo Mondadori".

To Laura Grimaldi is due the popularity of Dashiell Hammett in the Italian audience. She was the author of novels, of an enquiry book on terrorism (*Processo all'istruttoria: cronaca di un'inquisizione politica*, 1981), and of two political-satire books on mystery and crime (*Elementare, signor presidente*, Milano, A. Mondadori, 1977, and *Elementare, signor presidente: dieci anni dopo*, Milano, A. Mondadori, 1987). Thanks to the translator activity of Laura Grimaldi the works of more than 200 Authors such as Eric Ambler, Ray Bradbury, John Dickson Carr, Raymond Chandler, Agatha Christie, Philip K. Dick, Thomas Harris, Ernest Hemingway, Ellery Queen, Rex Stout, Scott Turow, Donald

E. Westlake have been published in Italy.

Her novels – among which we remind the trilogy "*Il sospetto*", "*La colpa*", "*La paura*" – have been published in many countries: Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Russia, Poland.

During an interview about crime and mystery novels and about noir novels she told:

I like noir novels since "noir" represents the chaos, and detective and enquiry novels since they represent the order, and it seems to me that for people already complying with rules – as we are – there are too many rules to be complied with...

Laura Grimaldi lived her last years affected by COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), a disease which lead her to a chronic respiratory failure, and she wrote about that period and experience with braveness and humour in her last autobiographical novel "*Faccia un bel respiro*".

In that book Laura Grimaldi remembers some moments which left an imprint on her experience as a patient, and which transform the hospital department into a stage on which physicians and patients, nurses and patients' relatives play – as being unaware actors – the comedy of life. The Author of "*Faccia un bel respiro*" told:

I had all those "things" inside and I felt that they needed to be told. I overcame the reluctance to talk about me because I wanted to give voice to the other half of the sky.

Just figuring out for a while that the sky would be a hospital, here there is a hundred of pages from the point of view of the patients:

... who are not only a lung, a disease to be treated, but also persons who keep their preferences, their habits, their characters.

The book was published just a few months before her death due to respiratory failure causes.