

GILLETTE AND THE NUMBER THREE

The number three followed me every day.

Every moment.

And whenever I least expected it, it appeared.

A few days ago, as I woke up, I noticed a small swelling under the right side of my jaw.

About the size of a ball.

My wife asked me what it was.

I gave her the only answer that made sense.

Since I haven't been travelling for a while — perhaps because of the waiting, perhaps because of necessity, perhaps because of an excessive production of testosterone — a third ball had decided to grow.

And I was not the one who chose where to place it.

My wife smiled.

She told me to stop being an idiot and go see a doctor.

But what kind of doctor?

A general practitioner?

A hospital doctor?

A specialist?

The family doctor knew little and seemed to live on experiments.

The hospital doctor lived on quick interventions with no obligation to prove anything.

The specialist charged money and therefore was not for me.

The emergency medical service seemed the best among the worst options.

A woman doctor opened the door and asked what I wanted.

I was still standing outside the gate.

"I know the fruit and vegetable shop is next door," I said, "but is this really the medical clinic?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Two kilos of bananas. If you let me in, I'll tell you which variety."

She smiled and opened the gate.

Then she saw my face and my third ball.

Gloves appeared.

The area was examined.

Mumps were immediately ruled out.

I had already survived those when I was four years old.

The verdict arrived.

An inflamed lymph node.

It needed to be checked immediately.

Operation "Guaranteed Income for Doctors" had officially begun.

Three prescriptions:

An antibiotic.

A steroid.

An ultrasound scan.

And the commitment to return in three days for further evaluation.

Then she took a sheet of paper and began writing instructions explaining how the ultrasound should be performed.

I smiled.

"Are you really sure your colleague needs written instructions to know how an ultrasound works?"

"You're right," she replied.

Then came the inevitable question.

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a patient.

But I spend most of my time in fruit and vegetable shops."

I stood up.

"I'm going home.

I'll treat myself with garlic.

And then I'll let you know.

You are among the lucky few who will actually reach retirement.

Once people discover the effects, many of your colleagues may need a new profession."

When I arrived home, my wife was waiting.

Concerned.

She wanted to know what the diagnosis was.

I told her not to worry.

Soon I would be travelling again.

And the swelling would probably disappear.

Maybe even before the plane landed.

Ferdinando