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“Finally, I can feel the warmth of my fingers on my face”

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“I’ve never had any doubts, **I’ve always believed**. Over the last few days, the words of the Gianni Morandi song kept going through my mind, ‘**Finché non suona la campana vai**’ (‘Keep going until the bell rings’). That’s what life’s been like over these years, and particularly over these last few weeks.” **Carla Mari** returned home, to Gorla Minore, on Saturday, with two, newly transplanted hands, after an operation that has never been done anywhere before, at the San Gerardo Hospital, in Monza. Last October, she was called and told that a donor had been found, a woman from Cremona. Since then, **after three years with neither hands nor feet**, which she lost following a serious infection, her life has changed **once more**.

As she speaks, Carla rubs her fingers, as though it were a tic. **A happy tic, however**. “I can feel my hand touching my cheek, it feels warm, not cold like the prosthesis,” she says, still excited. “Before, I even dried myself **with a towel**.” She says this, with a laugh in her voice, and with a sparkle in her eyes; around her, in the living room of their home, are her **husband, Giovanni**, and her children, **Benedetta** and **Matteo**, and Matteo’s girlfriend. “I get tired easily; we’re choosing who to speak to; it was thanks to **VareseNews** that I kept in contact with my home town, also in hospital, every morning, if I could.”

What was life like in hospital?

“It was like a prison, but now I’m finally home again. It was distressing in that sterile room (*she looks at her husband and children*), but I had a goal to fulfil, a hope.”

And what about after the operation?

“For the first seven or eight days, I saw that the doctors were calm. The reassured me. There was a lot of caution in their eyes, but also a lot of enthusiasm. It seemed that everything had gone better than expected. And it had. It was the first time, also for them, to treat a case like mine, they didn’t have a record of cases they could go on.”

What was the first thing you thought about after the operation?

“That I had woken after the anaesthetic. Then I could clearly feel pain, and I was a bit dazed. But I was over the first hurdle. I was still there. Then I saw my hands.”

But you didn’t feel that you could move them ...

“Not immediately. But I did the following day. They told me not to exaggerate, but that was a good thing. Now, I mustn’t inflame the tendons, I’ve got some exercises I have to do every day.”

What did you appreciate most when you came home?

“The food (*she laughs*), like so many other people who come home from hospital. Joking

apart, there was nothing I appreciated, except being home surrounded by the warmth of my family and friends.”

How are your hands?

(she looks down at them and moves the fingers slowly) “They move, see? Just a little, but they move, I can feel the warmth in the fingers, I feel they’re mine. They feel heavy, but I was told that that’s quite normal.”

What goal did you set yourself in order to overcome that time?

“After three years with prostheses, I couldn’t wait to go home and hug my children, and my husband. But that’s not all; I wanted to shake people by the hand, to be able to clap at shows, to do the little women’s jobs that I like so much.”

Her husband, Giovanni says, “And maybe hold a grandchild.”

Her children laugh. Carla reassures them, “I know, maybe in the future. I wasn’t able to enjoy my children because I worked a lot, now I’d like to make up for it with a grandchild, with these hands.”

And what about the future?

“Over the last few days, a number of newspapers have reported that I’d like to go back to work. I want to say it’s absolutely untrue. I’m not interested. I worked for 33 years, I’ve got my pension and I don’t need to work. Now, I just want to get better and enjoy my family.”

Over the last few days, you’ve been at the centre of attention a lot; yours is a unique case ...

“I don’t like having so many people interested in me. I didn’t like it, even before all this happened. At the press conference, the other day, I would have run through the emergency door, if I’d been able to. But I know this is a gift, and I have to accept the situation. Also for the doctors that have given me this chance. I own them a lot.”

Have you got any dreams you’d like to fulfil?

“I’d like to travel, go on even small journeys, without the hassle of a bag for the prostheses. And without having to worry about the spare prostheses. Now, I can think about going on a journey, freely. Then, maybe, I’ll manage to get out of bed without asking anyone for anything, put on my prosthetic legs with my own hands, and go to the bathroom. It’s all possible.”

Did you ever think you wouldn’t make it, that you wouldn’t be able to put up with it all?

“No, never. And I told my husband and my children. If you’re against it, tell me, but I’m going to do what I want. I’d decided by then that I would do it.”

What are the dangers now?

“Rejection; I’m fully aware of it. I think the danger is minimal. I have to have continual checks, it’s normal, I know. But I’ve got faith, I believe in it.”

Carla touches her face with the back of her fingers.

She strokes her skin and smiles. “And so, this morning, I put cream on, all by myself.”

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