

GOODNIGHT CPAP.

For years our bed was a battlefield, a boxing ring. Arthur tossed and turned. Even his pillow was restless. He was a gifted soccer player; no one could compete with his agile scissors kick. His arms flapped in all directions; a puppet in the hands of a spastic maniac. With a clenched fist he delivered a rabbit punch that jolted me to a bewildered awakened state. He flipped like a fish out of water. His breathing stopped, he gasped, choked. I found myself holding my breath afraid he would die. I shook him. His breathing suddenly revived, he always asked ; “ Why do you wake me up ?” The bed was a stage for his one man musical performance. A mild lullaby, sobs of violins lead to a rattle of castanets, blaring trumpets and culminated in Wagnerian crashes. Neither of us slept. If Arthur’s body was in unpredictable mobility I wasn’t any quieter. I laid on my back, closing my eyes, repeating : “I will sleep.” Soon distressed, frantic I turned from side to side hoping that everything that kept me awake would disappear. In desperation I went to Home Depot and bought earplugs for construction workers. That night full of expectations, I jumped into bed. The muffled rumbles of Arthur’s snoring found their way through the waxy plugs. Hopeless, I resumed my nightly transhumance: back to the guest room. In the morning, as I brushed my teeth, the unfriendly mirror reflected the image of a woman with drooping eyelids and puffy bags under her eyes. Did they contain all my sleepless hours? Days were another story. I sleepwalked through the day, suffering from perpetual jet lag. I envied Arthur for his ability to nap anytime, anywhere. He snoozed during concerts. It required very skillful tactics to bring him back to the real world around. Is it what happened at those concerts? Is it what happened at Elvira’s diner when his head repeatedly dropped to his chest ?

What is certain is that finally Arthur consulted a specialist.

“You may suffer from OSA- Obstructive Sleep Apnea” said the lung specialist. “This disorder takes its name from the Greek word, apnea , meaning without breath. There are three types of sleep apnea and of those OAS is the most common.” I felt a sense of relief. We weren’t alone. It was short lived. “ Untreated Sleep Apnea can cause high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, memory problems ; it may have an impact on your sexual life.” Both our lives felt under siege. Since I spent most of my nights awake, the doctor enlisted me to keep a record of Arthur’s sleeping patterns. I became a recorder, a sleep lab technician. On my night table I placed a fluorescent clock with a second hand arrow (accurate time and timing was required), a flashlight (Arthur’s sleep couldn’t be disturbed by my collecting data) , a pen. In a sleep diary I had to qualify and quantify Arthur’s snoring, wheezing, gasping, puffing, choking, the kicks and punches and the apnea episodes. All my gathered information pointed to Arthur having to spent a night in a real sleep lab. With only but his pajamas and his toothbrush he checked in. He spent a night plugged and wired to machines. All the results lead us to adopt our first CPAP machine. (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) Pretty serious name. The CPAP allows air to pass, through a mask, to the throat. It reduces snoring , it prevents apnea disturbances. Thanks to many manufacturers, CPAP ‘s have very imaginative even promising name : Elite, GoodKnight, Escape. Honestly it is not an easy task to live with someone who comes equipped with a CPAP machine. To deal with this I learned to see it as a Funky Machine. Funky because of all its parts and their names. There is a mask to wear and many to choose from, some have whimsical name: Mirage Activa , Acclaim. Arthur moved from the Lada of the CPAP to the Rolls Royce. The tone of a CPAP reacting to every breath he took pulled me from the “Twilight Zone of the deliciously falling asleep state” into a make belief world. It varied from of an Harley Davidson endlessly driving up and down the street to a train circling our house or a vacuum cleaner on an endless task. Compare to what I had lived with before it was almost heaven.

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Arthur mask's , Ultra Mirage, had a normal air leak. I enjoyed its refreshing breeze: a gift for a woman suffering from menopausal flushes. Arthur's first CPAP had no humidifier (Funky Machine ?) . He suffered from a dry mouth, a stuffy congested itchy and sometimes bleeding nose. To remedy all those ills, a Oasis Pass-Over Humidifier was chosen. With my wild imagination I saw us camping in the Negev. I learned that a pass-over humidifier refers to a cool humidifier. A heated humidifier warms the air to whatever temperature Arthur is comfortable with. He has to be careful not to reach a "rain-out". Droplets can form on the cool walls of the tube. They cause a rain-out and a gurgling in the air tubing. My scuba diving Arthur. With a little knowledge of physics and with time the perfect adjustment was easily found.

Now Escape, the Compact Travel CPAP, has joined our family. Escape travels with us, even when Arthur bikes the Blue Ridge Mountains. Escape comes with a Personal Assistant that reminds Arthur to change its filter, inform him of setting changes and of possible downloads to a computer.

I still remember vividly my first look at the CPAP machine, my many attempts to tame it, my difficulties to integrate it as an essential and inherent part of our life. Now, I collect the rewards. I sleep. In the morning I don't look like a raccoon. I am , most probably, the only woman who looks forward to her partner spending the night enjoying an Escape with a Personal Assistant.