

THE BIC EPILOGUE

It was seven in the evening when my phone rang, and I was ready to answer.

“Hello, Mr. Frega. This is Valeria from the Sheraton Hotel in Reggio Calabria. Please forgive the disturbance. I'm calling on behalf of the General Manager to ask whether you could come by tomorrow morning around 10:30 a.m. regarding a matter that concerns you.”

“Certainly. But you know, I'm the anxious type. If you were kind enough to give me a hint about the subject, I could arrive prepared and ready.”

“Truthfully, I shouldn't tell you. But in practical terms, it concerns a debt left by your French colleague a few weeks ago. She instructed us to contact you in order to settle the matter.”

“Please tell the General Manager I'll be there tomorrow morning. Thank you.”

A French colleague?

Who the hell was that?

Of all the possibilities, the only name that came to mind was Chanel.

And why would she call herself my colleague and leave me with a problem that wasn't even mine?

The next day I arrived at the hotel.

The General Manager greeted me warmly and immediately handed me a letter that had been delivered there in my name.

Although they were not a post office, they had kindly agreed to receive it because both my father and I had been their customers on behalf of our parent company, Gillette, for more than fifty years.

Then the General Manager asked whether I was willing to settle my colleague's debt, and I asked him how much it was.

“I'm almost embarrassed to ask you for it,” he said, “but the lady was absolutely insistent that you pay the debt before opening the envelope.”

“How much do I owe?”

“Mr. Frega: one U.S. dollar.”

What a daughter of a bitch, that French woman.

I smiled.

We said goodbye.

Then I walked outside to open the letter and read it.

My love, now you understand what it feels like to pay one dollar.

Kisses,

Your Chanel

But it doesn't end here.

I didn't own a car, and I never took buses.

Life in the great foreign capitals had taught me to walk, so I headed home on foot after covering almost three kilometers.

I rang the doorbell.

My daughter opened the door and shouted:

“Surprise!!!!”

Ferdinando