MY AUNT NORA



FERDINANDO FREGA

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The Art of Attraction · 06

In recent days this name kept coming back to my mind. She had been my mother's neighbor, the woman who in 1963 took her in like a daughter and gave her, perhaps for the first time, what no one had ever taught her: affection.

I am not the kind of son who hands out easy judgments about his own mother or about others who have passed away. Mine remains simply a free exercise in the analysis of human behavior, with no excuses, with nothing at all, as if I were a naked king.

And this Neapolitan lady, with typically Swedish features — blue eyes, fair skin, medium height — was used to smiling, and always, with her sweet, bewitching voice and her natural quick wit, the way people born at this latitude of the world know how to do, she left you with something to think about: why did she say that to me?

It was 1985. I was working in Cosenza and went to visit her. To me she was Aunt Nora, and she affectionately called me Ferdinà. She had been godmother to my sister Teresa, a gift from my mother for which she had always been grateful, and she always asked about us.

The last time she had seen me I was just over seven years old, and now, at twenty, she was looking at a young man, but she knew very well what material the cognitive fabric I carried was made of.

Her affection toward me showed itself in a different way, and I could feel it, but she held back, almost as if she deliberately wanted to stop herself from saying everything she thought.

That afternoon I also met her daughter Lella, a dentist, a beautiful woman with her mother's charm and her father's elegance. She greeted me warmly and said: "Is it really you, Ferdinando? The same one who lived for two years across from our house?"

At first I answered her with a smile, and then I said: "Yes, it's me, the best version of the place where we are today." Everyone laughing, everyone watching, then the goodbyes and the leaving, and that was the last time we met.

Just the time to get into my car, and I heard my name called from a balcony two floors up. It was Aunt Nora: "Ferdinà, come back, I want to see you again."

"I smiled at her. I knew it would not happen. My task had already been done."

A true naked king, before an intelligent woman, stays just like that: as his mother brought him into the world.

And I was my mother's son.

Ferdinando