GILLETTE:
BILLED AFTER DEATH

FERDINANDO FREGA



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The Art of Attraction · 07

Dying had never become a problem. For a man like me, the only concern was the choice of place, and if I had been given that opportunity, I would certainly have chosen the best one: the bed of a woman I didn't know.

To my mind, that was by far the finest point of transition between what we are and what we will become, always planning to bring along, as a dowry, the app of pleasure.

Ahahahahahah

Six episodes of clinical coma had tried and failed, with a life expectancy announced in rough terms as somewhere between forty-eight hours and thirty days at most. But the people making these forecasts were often doctors — the ones whose prescriptions are paid for by the public health service, and not only them: also the one who goes on vacation with his mistress on fees hidden inside targeted prescriptions for pharmaceutical companies — and never, ever, a real forecast from an expert in meteorology.

And every time, beside the bed, there lay — punctual, and as far as I could remember always the same one, same format and color, same details, no air holes, as if it had been made to measure — a coffin with a name tag: FERDINANDO FREGA.

Nobody smiled, but it always stayed there, waiting, while the board of hell decided whether it was more convenient to leave me on earth, being a pain in everyone's ass with

gillettenarrative.com, or to let me transit to that place, with no phone and no money, where I might create a new ALFHABETDEVIL that would surely have destabilized their current format too.

And when it became clear that I was to stay on earth, one day the funeral home's invoice even arrived, with this description in the details and the cost items:

6 stops for the hearse;

Reservation of the coffin;

Double-shell model, size XXL;

Eight pallbearers engaged for thirty hours;

Maintenance and waiting time with standby;

Taxes and VAT.

Interest and revaluation.

Total: 3,500 euros, payable by bank transfer within 30 days of the invoice date.

Caught up in the spell, I went to check the recipient's details, convinced it was a mistake, and instead I found my own, perfectly correct. There was no doubt: the dead man had to pay for the living one, and the demand was beyond dispute.

But nobody knew that I am someone you don't expect. Out of the hospital, in my free time and during the long wait at home, I took care to phone the funeral company, passing myself off as the son of the deceased. After investing some time, one joke after another, and winning the secretary's sympathy, I invited her to dinner, and she had no trouble accepting. After all, I was

only the dead man's son.

I would see the matter firsthand and understand what happens afterward, when a man is considered dead by definition — but I would be able to tell it alive. That was what fascinated me.

I went to pick her up at her place. She wore a strong, sweet perfume, the kind that says take me, I'm yours. She was about forty, not exactly in the first bloom of youth.

I was a good deal older, but in my family age had always been an opinion, not a fact on a birth certificate, and besides, you don't get into bed with your ID card: that one is for church, when you get married.

After dinner I disputed the death invoice — not the services themselves, those were sacred and beyond dispute, but their quality and type, which had been neither agreed upon nor proposed: the order had gone out automatically. The poor thing felt the difficulty of the moment and had no choice but to offer me a discount. But how much?

I didn't want to seem aggressive — after all, I was the presumed dead man — so I put off the financial part for another day, and she agreed.

When it was time to pay for dinner, as if by magic, I realized I didn't have my wallet, but she was kind and gracious enough to tell me she would take care of it, no problem. I still remember the amount: 169 euros.

When we left, I took her back home and apologized. I explained that I had lost my wallet with all my documents and that, for that evening, romance too would stay among the lost items.

She smiled but made no comment. She nodded, the way only women know how.

About an hour later I texted her that I had found it, and then the lines that shocked her:

You know, I'm the one from the invoice.

I told you I was dead.

The problem is, I'm still alive, and I keep costing your company money.

The 169 euros are the proof.

Never trust a man who won't die.

Ferdinando