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**FERDINANDO FREGA**

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*The P&G Saga · 19*

The house phone kept ringing and nobody answered. I was home alone, in the shower.

It fell within my weekly allowance — the one shower my wife had agreed to. She said too much washing ruins a man’s skin, that I had to stay just clean enough.

But the truth is she wanted to save on the gas bill.

And she also thought that if I didn’t wash, I wouldn’t go with other women. Too bad she didn’t know that the showers in other houses were free. And at no charge.

Ahahaaahah

I got to the phone, but they had already hung up.

A little later it rang again. This time I answered, and it was my doctor — my psychiatrist, a university professor I hadn’t seen in over five years — asking to meet me.

I let him choose the day and the time, with immediate availability on my side: I accepted, that afternoon at 5:30, at his practice.

I arrived twenty minutes early, an old rule inherited from my father and adopted by the managers of the Land of the Rising Sun as well.

Arriving early to an appointment means you have already accounted for the unexpected, and that makes you reliable and sure of yourself.

I saw him come out of his room. The waiting room was full of people he had to see; each one had an appointment and carried 150 euros in his pocket, just to hear what the hell he had to say.

He came toward me and greeted me: “Dear colleague, good afternoon, welcome, I was waiting for you.” Then, turning to his secretary: “Carmen, push all the patients back at least an hour. I’m in a meeting with my colleague.”

\*Minchia\*, colleague. Me, with a 4 in Italian at school and a diploma awarded for sporting merit, and people think I’m a doctor. What the hell is he doing — has he lost his mind?

We went into his office and he sat me down in the little lounge corner, one armchair next to the other. It was the first time for me; I had always seen him as a patient. There had to be something big going on, but I couldn’t figure out what.

“Dear Ferdinando, let me talk first, as long as I want, and then I’ll give you your five minutes.” Ahahahahaha

“I’ve known you since 2009, when you first came to me, brought by a doctor friend of ours who has since passed away, and I have never charged you.”

“I confirm, Professor.”

“Shut up, damn it, it’s hard enough for me to talk to you, because here we have all understood one thing about you, without Jung or the philosophers of the world: you are just someone nobody expects to exist — and instead, there you are,

in my city, making the world's head spin."

"I'll be brief: explain to me what the hell you did with Cincinnati and Wall Street. Is it possible that I can't leave you alone for one minute?"

Ahahahahah

"And then there's me — seventy-eight years old, a university professor, national president of the Association of Italian Psychiatrists, two hundred publications — and I can't understand how you managed to break through the web.

"Everyone I know in America called me. They wanted to know whether your diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder is real, and I confirmed it — but we both know that if I hadn't, they would have taken away your pension of 351 euros a month.

"Now tell me what you've been up to. But first I have to ask: are you taking any medication, and what are you taking?"

"No medication for five years. Just one value off in my blood tests, but nothing to worry about."

"I'm the one who decides whether it's worrying. Which value?"

"Testosterone at 1,400..."

He looked at me and replied: "\*Minchia\*", and how did that happen?"

"It's all my neighbor's fault. She has a fairy-tale backside. I see her and everything stands up."

"Stop messing around. Let's be serious.

"Tell me what the hell you did."

“I did what you taught me, but without a degree, without a specialization, without studying, without a secretary.”

“What does that mean? I don’t understand.”

“I studied human behavior, I dressed up as an author and I wrote it down — so nobody can say I practiced medicine without a license, without being registered, without writing prescriptions or issuing diagnoses.

“And I found my clients on the web. But since I can’t issue invoices, I preferred not to sell anything right away. I will do it later, with the whole core business, to a single player — if he agrees to fall into the semantic trap.

“That’s all.”

“I have just one question for you.

“Why leave Italian out of the languages?”

“Italy is a place where you can spend a fifteen-day vacation and eat well, but then you have to leave. Otherwise, as soon as people start taking an interest in you, they launch unfair attacks, they grow curious and even mean, denigrating you and reporting you.

“And world history teaches us that this country has never recognized its geniuses — starting with you, without looking any further. If you had been born in America, today you would have had a different life. Only when you come back with recognition from abroad do they validate you — and even then, with suspicion.

“And after eighteen criminal trials I learned it on my own, and I don’t have to ask anyone’s permission.”

I got up from that armchair, looked at my watch and said: “I still have one minute left to tell you something.

**“Professor, thank you — and I love you.”**

Your Ferdinando