FREGA MEETS SUNDAR



FERDINANDO FREGA

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When I first heard that name, I seriously wondered who the fuck he was. Everybody was talking about him. He had almost taken the place of the Nazarene—except he wasn't 2,000 years old. He was only 54, and he came from that magnificent land called INDIA.

The only place in the world where you breathe English air but live with Asian culture and elegance, inside a mix of 22 languages, where almost 1.5 billion people live permanently.

But back to our story: this name was connected to a company called ALPHABET. I didn't know who they were either. I thought it was some kind of consortium created for the illiterate people of the world, those who had never had the good fortune to learn how to read and write. Then I realized I wasn't entirely wrong, because that was exactly what it dealt with—only the texts, reading, and literature lived inside the web, which used two codes: human decimal and algorithmic binary.

I was curious to understand the man, so, like Kipling, I took a train and traveled from Reggio Calabria to Bombay, which today they call Mumbai.

My destination was clear. They were waiting for me in CHENNAI, in the southern Indian state of TAMIL NADU, where lodge brothers would host me. Everyone knew—from the Grand Lodge of England downward—that Brother Frega lived on 70 US dollars a month and wasn't used to asking anyone for anything.

There I was, finally arrived. They were waiting for me and took me to their home, but I refused and tried to rent a room instead. A three-day

stay was within my financial means and fit my budget.

I had only a few hours to get used to the territory when REGUNATHA arrived to pick me up. Where were we going?

THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY MADRAS.

As soon as we arrived, barely inside the first university entrance, I saw a sign that struck me like lightning. Their motto, in Sanskrit, translated as:

SUCCESS COMES FROM ACTION.

We were received by two professors, Freemason brothers, and I immediately began asking them about SUNDAR. I was convinced he had studied in Madras back when they were still assistants.

The professors admitted they knew who he was, although in reality he had studied at KHARAGPUR. But here, they said, we all consider him one of our own.

Before anything else, they explained where we were. This was not just some university campus in Boston. We were inside something incredible: IIT Madras also had supercomputing capacity through the IBM Virgo Super Cluster, offering 97 TERAFLOPS of computational power.

What the hell that meant, I had no idea. I don't understand a damn thing about computers, but I nodded because, judging from their tone, I understood that the statement was important. And that was already enough for me to be there.

After the formalities, we left the place, and REGUNATHA told me he had a surprise for me. I said, "Let's hope it isn't women. I'm 61 years old and no longer a young man. These days women are my favorite form of conversation, because I draw from their inventiveness and intelligence and feed on both."

He said we were going to see a woman. “But relax, Nando, there’s no sex involved. She seems to know the person you’re researching very well, and you’ll see that she won’t disappoint you.”

“And besides, you know that before we are Freemasons, we are free men of good character!”

“Yes, but let’s stay dressed, please.” Hahahahahah.

We entered the gate of her house. A young woman welcomed us. She must have been about 25, but I didn’t think she was SUNDAR’s daughter—and in fact, she was the niece of the woman waiting for us.

She welcomed us and had us sit on her sofa. She offered us the unavoidable tea, but as a good Calabrian I asked when we were going to eat. I had been living on water for two days, and my stomach was already on strike. It still hadn’t understood that we weren’t in Italy.

The woman introduced herself as RADHA and immediately asked me direct questions, already knowing who I was.

I leaned toward REGUNATHA and whispered, “Radha, like the one from Zoho?”

And he, without changing expression, said, “No, she’s younger. This one is wiser.”

She said she had had a great deal of fun reading THE WILKINSON SAGA on gillettenarrative.com. She had perhaps read it 20 times and had recognized herself in certain passages—in the figure of her aunt. Then, with overwhelming feminine charm, despite being 90 years old, she asked me whether everything in it was true.

I answered with a simple joke: truth and lies are two algorithms of life, and between them lies narrative, which remains the visual expression of the one person who writes it.

She smiled, but she wasn't surprised. She told me that it was the only answer I could have given. It revealed who I was without saying so. That was why she would give me information about SUNDAR.

When he was little, he was always drawing one hundred zeros, and nobody understood why. One day he put a 1 in front of them. We thought it represented his future bank account. Thirty years later, he was working for a company called exactly that: Google, from googol, a 1 followed by 100 zeros.

Everyone had always been ready to blame this defect on his mother's work as a stenographer. But we were only at the beginning, and today we understand that the defect he was born with turned out to be nothing but perfection.

We heard from a reliable source that one day, as curious as ever, his mother asked her son how the bank managed to send him a bank balance with 12 zeros. He replied, "They write the numbers in cursive by hand. There isn't enough room."

I noticed that throughout the stories, the woman and my accompanying brother—also an older man—often exchanged knowing looks. But I was focused only on what I was doing and didn't stop to decipher their behavioral code.

Radha told me that Sundar had always been well-liked and that women often accompanied him because of his elegance, intelligence, and charm. Almost a portrait of me, if it weren't for the difference in our pockets.

When the moment came, I told a few stories from my 40 years of travel across 65 countries: stories of a life, jokes, and adventures. The woman seemed so absorbed that she invited us to dinner. But I politely decided it wasn't the right thing to accept. I wasn't ready yet.

As we were leaving, she gave me a small paper note and said, "Nando, write to me whenever you want. I receive your correspondence with

great pleasure. And you may call me Auntie—I would be proud."

REGUNATHA was laughing like a madman, and I couldn't understand why. He said it had been at least 30 years since he had found himself in a situation like that. I asked him to take me back to the hotel, but first I was curious enough to ask him:

"Excuse me, but what did your wife do for a living?"

Without thinking, he answered, "She was a stenographer."

I was about to explode, but I held myself back. At that point I asked him to leave me near the hotel. I would find somewhere to eat on my own, and the next day I would leave.

He asked whether I needed anything else, and I invited him to come to my home in Calabria whenever he had the chance. I would be delighted to host him—to show him what we Calabrians know how to do well anywhere in the world.

But who were the characters in this story, really?

Real people. I never asked them where they came from. I simply accepted their presence, because that is what I have been doing for 61 years—and I am certain the world will not forget me.

And inside the Indian lady's little note, I found a message that said: "Come back to me whenever you want. You are always welcome." At the bottom was her address.

The next day I returned to the station. The train seemed unwilling to leave, but I didn't know why. Perhaps it was waiting for me. Or perhaps it had understood that after MY AFRICA, a Calabrian could also have MY INDIA.

Ferdinando

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