GILLETTE WAS MY FATHER

FERDINANDO FREGA



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My father was born inside a wound.

He was ten years old when his mother received two blood-stained garments. They belonged to her brother—an officer in the Italian Army, missing in the Russian campaign. No certainty. No grave. No signature. Only the debt of a war that returned scraps and silence.

That day, while his mother wept, my father learned the first rule:

Life gives no discounts.

His other two uncles joined the Carabinieri and became senior non-commissioned officers. Discipline was not a family value. It was the air they breathed.

He graduated from the Salesian school in **LAGONEGRO** and chose the path of a reserve officer cadet. His mother, terrified of losing another son to military life, had him discharged after two years. He was twenty-two years old. Already a Captain. Already inside a career with promise.

But he described it in his own way:

“Silent successes. There is no need for publicity.”

He returned to **LUNGRO.**

He became manager of a beach club in **COPANELLO**. Then he worked in Naples as an inspector for an insurance company. He understood immediately that it was not his world: too many words, too little ethics.

After six months, he resigned and went back to Castrovillari, where he stayed with his sister.

One day, in a bar, he picked up a greasy scrap of paper. It carried a classified ad from *Corriere della Sera*. They were looking for sales staff. The company name was not mentioned.

He applied.

There were 120 candidates for one position.

He came third.

The first two candidates tried to negotiate a higher salary. They were eliminated.

My father accepted 80,000 lire a month.

It was January 1962. A postal clerk earned around 15,000 lire.

Two months later, Gillette raised his salary to 120,000 lire. The following month, to 150,000.

It was not charity.

It was recognition.

Gillette understood that it had not hired a salesman.

It had invested in a man.

The Frega Course

In Milan, they decided that every new hire had to spend one week in my father's territory.

Most did not survive it.

They collapsed. They asked to be taken to the airport so they could sign their resignations. Only those who made it through the first three days—without mental fog, without breaking down, without losing their nerves could say:

"I came out alive from the Frega course."

Among them was Piero Chiummo.

He arrived as head of advertising and promotion. Then he was hit by the shockwave of the Frega method.

A sharp reprimand. A clear rule:

"If you came here to play, go back to Milan. Customers come before everything else. They are the ones who pay our salaries."

CHIUMMO would later become Managing Director of Gillette Italy for twenty-five years.

He was not an easy man.

But in front of my father, he learned the grammar of the profession.

Calabria Was the Test

My father's numbers echoed through headquarters: distribution, product presence, Nielsen market share—99.5 percent across his territory.

The company ritual was simple:

"If Frega can do it in Calabria, in a devastated territory, then you can do it anywhere."

His routes were planned four weeks in advance.

Hotels. Restaurants. Bars. Tobacconists. Every stop mapped. Every appointment accounted for. No improvisation. No distractions.

First, problems were solved in the field.

Then Milan was informed.

A perfect geometry.

Gillette was already a global company with an expanding international footprint, and the early 1960s were a period of major commercial pressure and innovation in the razor market. But in Calabria, the company's real competitive advantage had a name: Frega.

"Day Outstanding"

Then came the Gillette credit-control people, armed with an English phrase that sounded important, almost threatening:

"Day Outstanding."

English was not commonly spoken around there. For some people, the phrase alone was enough to create anxiety.

It referred to the average number of days customers took to pay their invoices.

The credit team took the quarterly account statements assigned to every salesperson and analyzed them together. They could have done it in Milan. But they wanted to see Calabria for themselves. They were curious. They had questions.

How was it possible?

How could Calabria, a region historically considered poor, with few factories, little industry, and a lower economic rating—have payment reliability comparable to Milan?

My father looked at the Sales Director, Dr. Di Tullio.

Di Tullio seized the moment.

"Don't you know? Frega goes around armed. The first customer who fails to pay gets a bullet."

The three men went pale.

They gathered their reports, their figures, their documents—and left.

The legend of the Gillette salesman with a gun spread among the customers.

After that, no one ever asked what he kept under his jacket.

But he carried no weapon.

He carried only his heart—for the company and for his family.

And to him, they were the same thing.

The Friday Night Test

Gillette International began wondering whether the story was true.

One morning, without warning, **MR. DE WAKEFIELD**, the CEO of Gillette Europe, arrived in Milan. He asked **DR. DI TULLIO** to leave immediately for Calabria.

He wanted to meet the man who was making the numbers go mad.

The bet was simple.

On a Friday evening, at 8:00 p.m., Frega could not possibly be working one hundred kilometers from home.

Di Tullio guaranteed that he would be.

They found him leaving the last tobacconist on his route.

He did not look surprised.

He greeted them and asked whether they wanted to inspect the work he had done.

They did not dare.

The Englishman asked whether this was an exceptional circumstance.

My father answered like a blade:

“This is my normal way of working. If you are not satisfied, I will sign my resignation immediately.”

They had a coffee.

They were about to leave.

Then my father stopped them.

“You must pay for your coffee. You are not my guests. It is not included in the signed route.”

They thought he was joking.

They paid.

Then they understood.

It was all there:

A code of honor.
A code of ethics.
A legal code.

One single theorem.

These were the men who built Gillette.

This was the system.

This was my father.

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