



MR. FREGA ON LOAN TO L'ORÉAL

On Sunday mornings Giorgio and I would often meet — a friend and colleague, a commercial manager at one of the largest companies in the world in women's cosmetics: L'ORÉAL.

It was our way of staying close, of telling each other about the week, about work, then talking about the clients out there in the market, trading the odd joke about whatever had come up, over a warm cup of coffee at the bar.

He had a sociable nature, always smiling, always ironic, but with an untamable spirit — an elegance and refinement that had no equal.

He always had a joke ready, and never a careless one, a proverbial smile that put everyone at ease — he liked to say he'd spent a fortune on his new teeth, and had to insure them for 25,000 euros, against the risk that someone might not take one of his sharp little jokes so well and decide to knock them out.

Whenever we went out selling together around our region, Calabria, we'd announce loudly to every client that we were the luckiest men alive, working for the two finest companies in the world, who paid us a fortune just to have fun, not to work — which never failed to irritate whoever was listening. They often didn't believe us, but we had the respect of almost everyone anyway.

One April morning he told me: next week I'll come pick you up, we're going to work in Sicily, three days — don't worry, everything's covered, you won't pay for a thing.

He knew perfectly well it wasn't my territory, so I asked him: what the hell are we going to do out of territory?

Well, he said, that'll be your surprise — and maybe a bit of mine too.

You'll always be Frega of Gillette, but for three days you'll be a company guest out in the field, on L'ORÉAL's tab.

I'll show you the other side of the coin — a market you don't know, one you've never seen, because you've never been in it, where women are the leading players in every purchase, with all their particular ways.

For me it's also a way of saying thank you, for the two years we've spent together — I know that without you, without your help and your willingness, your warmth and your manners, everything that makes you the man and the friend you are, I probably wouldn't have made it back to work, and maybe not even back to living, after Crohn’s disease.

He let himself go, just for a moment, a single tear — it was the first time I'd ever seen him like that, unable to hold the emotion back.

He told me we'd spend three days in Catania and one in Palermo, then head home — they were treating it as an official test, approved in advance by his sales management, who had signed off on it, and everyone was curious to see what would happen and what the two of us would get up to.

I said yes without hesitation. Companies always handed you information, but they never shared real experience — and this was a genuine chance to grow.

I told my father about it, and he smiled and said: you keep doing things nobody sees coming — that's not just a trait, that's Ferdinando Frega.

That was his way of giving his blessing. He'd known Giorgio for twenty years and knew I'd learn something — he just didn't know what.

I got home and my wife saw something odd on my face and asked what was wrong. They've loaned me out to L'Oréal for three days, I told her, and she shot back: same old joker — when are you ever going to be serious?

The day I get back I'll tell you exactly how it went, I said, and gave her the whole story. She said: now you're in trouble — you're walking into the world of women through a different door than the one you're used to. I'm curious to see what happens.

Ferdinando