

An episode of love in the Cecilia Socialist Colony

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If the truth frightens you, do not read it, because this little book is, for you, full of horrors.

It was on a November afternoon in 1892 that Eleda and Hannibal arrived at the colony, and it was an unhappy arrival. The new companions were tired from the trip and ill-prepared for the colony, which two dissidents —let's call them that— established in Curitiba, had described to them as one of the poorest and least socialist than it really was. I also contributed to their unhappy arrival by receiving them somewhat coldly, because I believed they had hesitated to come, which was not true. So, that afternoon Eleda gave me no other impression than that of a tired and somewhat sad little person.

And yet, those new companions deserving of my sympathies were completely sympathetic.

I had met Eleda a year earlier in ... during a public conference in which I had expounded ideas about free love. I remember that, when I questioned her privately, she answered me very candidly that she admitted them. A few days later I saw her in a hospital in that city, a courageous nurse, full of self-denial, tireless, near the deathbed of that brave young socialist who, for five years, was her most loving companion. Friends told me that Eleda's life was always one of continuous and modest self-denial; a painful struggle, but strong and intelligent, for her friend and for our common ideas.

From her, from her simplicity, from her sadness, from her strength of spirit, I had taken away a certain feeling of sympathy and admiration; but not the slight desire for the woman. She was for me a noble and delicate figure, who imposed herself by her character, who embarrassed me by her goodness, whom I liked as we like a gallant companion. The moments when I knew Eleda ... were rare, brief and painful, but these impressions were clearly recorded, precise, and so I communicated them to my good friend Giannotta.

Hannibal is a good companion, one of those who in the socialist agitation have become accustomed to losing much and gaining nothing. He is not vulgar in mind, but his heart is bigger than his mind. Under a rough appearance, he hides a fine and delicate feeling. He was one of the first and few who decisively supported the initiative of this socialist colony, and he helped it greatly, later becoming a part of it. Hannibal is a man whom I esteem and treat with particular care. In the first days of his arrival I had ample opportunity to get to know Eleda better.

She is a little woman of thirty-three years old; but when she is calm and feels healthy, she shows that she is barely twenty-five. She has in her eyes and in her fine-lined face something that makes her look like a child. The expression on her face is always serious, with a sad seriousness. She began to interest me, and I often took pleasure in asking her if she was accustomed to this solitude of the prairie and the woods, to this monotony and scarcity of life. She answered me that she was making every effort to do so and that she would succeed. Then I saw in her the intelligent, courageous, good socialist that I had found in ... And from this a sympathy, a delicate and attentive affection arose in me, which was none other than the dawn of love.

One evening she gave me to read a letter that Giannotta had written to her, wishing her a good trip to the colony. "If you go alone," he said, "accompany me once there with my friend Cardias; you will make a good couple; in any case, give her a kiss and a hug on my behalf."

"So, Eleda, when do you plan to complete Giannotta's order? When will you pay that debt?" I asked her jokingly the next day.

—Sooner or later— he replied in the same tone. A few days passed.

—Listen, Eleda —I said to her one night at her house—. You are a serious little woman, and you should be spoken to without artifice.

She looked at me and understood immediately.

—Why couldn't you love me a little too?

—Because I'm afraid of hurting Hannibal too much.

—Talk to him about it.

We parted without a kiss.

Eleda spoke to Hannibal, as an affectionate but free and sincere companion should speak to the companion she loves and esteems. Hannibal responded like a man who, above his passions, places scrupulous respect for the freedom of a woman.

—He suffers— Eleda told me.

—It was to be expected— I answered. But do you think that the good or the bad side of the heart suffers in him? Is this pain human, is it socialist, is it indestructible? Is it the pain of the dagger that kills, or is it that of the scalpel that heals?

—This is what we should know— Eleda answered me. And we parted without exchanging even a kiss.

Hannibal himself told us:

—It is prejudice, it is habit, it is a bit of selfishness, it is whatever you want; but freedom must precede everything and before everything. I love Eleda, and there is no reason for me to stop loving her. I will suffer, but it will do me good. You live sadly, without love. Eleda will do perfectly to comfort your life.

— Do you hold a grudge against Eleda or me?

— Not at all.

That day Eleda and I exchanged our first kiss. That night Eleda came to my house, and Hannibal cried in the sadness of isolation.

Unfortunately, life is still like this. The happiness of one is diminished by the pain of the other.

A few days later, our companions learned of our initiative of free love; with what delicacy, with what loyalty, with what self-denial we had triumphed over one of the most heartfelt and ferocious social prejudices!

In the Cecilia colony, from its beginnings, the theoretical propagation of free love had been carried out, understood not as an illegal union —or a divorceable marriage without a priest or

without a judge— but as a possibility of diverse and contemporary affections, such as the true, evident, practical and possible freedom of love, both for men and women; the reasons and opportunities of this reform in customs had been discussed, such as, more or less, I will summarize at the end of this writing. In theory, this reform was generally accepted, but in practice it was postponed until the Greek Kalends, because of the grief experienced by the husbands, because of the prejudices of the women, because of the long-established domestic relations which seemed hard to break, because of the fear that, if the colony were dissolved, women and children would be left to fend for themselves, and perhaps, a little, because of the poor enterprise of the celibate element; above all, it seems to me, because of that obstinate, brutal, thoughtless force of habit which hinders and will always hinder human progress.

The spirits of the colony being thus predisposed, the news of the event was received with a feeling of pleasant surprise, disturbed only by the fear that Hannibal, in spite of his intelligence and his goodness, would suffer from it. Women, in general, did not change their behavior toward Eleda, and I can even assure you that they did not harbor any feelings of low esteem, internal or hidden, toward her.

When later the respectful manner with which I treated Eleda was seen, her bearing, which never ceased to be affectionate with Hannibal and reserved with me; the fraternal affection that unites Hannibal and me in the common objective of making Eleda's life pleasant; when, in short, it was seen that free love is not a vulgar animalism, but the highest and most beautiful expression of affective life, even the last hesitations disappeared, and our case — without having been imitated until now — was considered a normal fact of life.

Moreover, it seems to me that the old edifice of love, unique and exclusive of the pretended or real paternity, has been left here battered in its main walls from the dome to the foundations, ready to collapse if another push comes to shake it again. Of the family entity, it seems to me that here the spirit has died and only the body remains, using the phrases that old metaphors use.

The fact that I have narrated succinctly is too complex, too intimate, too finely woven of diverse feelings, to be easily understood not only by strangers, but even by the actors themselves. For a better understanding, a kind of psychological analysis seemed necessary to me, to which Hannibal and Eleda have lent themselves with absolute sincerity, answering the two questionnaires that I reproduce below:

“Cardias asks his dear comrade Hannibal to answer sincerely the following questions, in order to clarify some psychological data regarding the subject of free love. A warm kiss from your Cardias.”

“I answer your questions voluntarily, but making you observe that if free love were widespread, many painful yeses would become noes. I cordially return the kiss you sent me. Yours most affectionately, Hannibal.”

“—Did you admit in women the possibility of loving nobly more than one man?—
—Yes, but not in all women. —Did you recognize this right? —Yes. ——Did you consider free love useful to the progress of socialist morality and social peace? —
Yes, I believed it and I still believe it, because, without this, where is freedom and equality? —Did you think that the practice of free love could cause pain to any of the two participants? —Yes. —Which one, especially? —Maybe to both. —Did you

think that the woman's partner would have suffered pain from his partner's new affection for another? —Yes, if he truly loves her. —That he would have accepted it with indifference? —Yes, if he did not love her, or was a scoundrel. —With pleasure? —Almost never; but he could feel satisfaction if he knows that he is carrying out a consoling work worthy of our principles. —That he would have desired it, suggested it, favored it? —Idem.

—When Eleda told you my request, did you feel pain? —No. —Surprise? —No, because I had already expressed it in Italy and I was prepared for it.

—Contempt? —No, never. —Humiliation? —No. —Resentment toward me? —Not resentment, but compassion. —Was it offended vanity? —No. —Insistence of property hurt? —I never thought of being the owner of Eleda; this would have been an affront to her. —Selfishness or desire for exclusive good? —Not selfishness, but rather fear that her affection for me would diminish. —Fear of ridicule? —A little. —Idea of conjugal treason? —Was I ever chaste? —Was your consent spontaneous? —Absolutely yes. —Was it out of coherence with the principles of freedom? —A little out of compassion for seeing you suffer, and a little out of coherence. —Was it out of pity for me, who had lived so long without love? —This is what I answered. —If it had been another companion, do you suppose you would have experienced identical sensations? —I couldn't be precise; but if that had happened, I would have suffered more. —If it had been a proletarian, not a companion of ours? —Idem. —A bourgeois? —I would have felt sorry for Eleda and suffered a lot, without being able to affirm that I would have left her.

—Have you suffered more before seeing me with Eleda? —No. —The first time? —Yes. —Or which of the following? —Always, more or less less, —Have you cried? —Yes. —In your pain was there resentment against Eleda? —No. —Against me? —No. —Fear of ridicule? —I answered now. —Sadness of isolation? —A little. —Fear that the affections of the companion would suffer a deviation? —I know Eleda well enough to say no. —Fear that I would treat her vulgarly? —No. —That I treated her with sweetness? —Yes.

—Do I wish that she enjoyed another physiological and intellectual affection? —I don't know. —Disgust of this? —If it were, I would not feel disgust. —Fear that she would become less pure? —I know Eleda well enough to answer to. —Less affectionate? —Yes, — An unreasonable and involuntary instinct of selfishness? —As much as we are all, nowadays, selfish, I do not believe that my displeasure was produced by selfishness. —In fighting your pain, have you experienced the satisfaction of one who does good? — Certainly. —Did the idea of running away cross your mind? —Yes, but not based on this sole motive. —Does the appreciation of others influence your feelings? —I have always despised the appreciation of others; nevertheless, I would have been sorry to see the mockery of fools. —Is your esteem for your companion the same as before? —Yes. —Is your affection for her the same, greater or less? —It is the same, but perhaps more heartfelt. —Does the repetition of your companion's absences alter your pain? —Yes. —Does it make you irascible? —No. —Are short absences more painful for you? —No. —Long ones? —Yes. —Would absences of a few

days be more painful? —This is where selfishness comes in, since these long absences would make me an outcast from love, like you were before. —Do you suffer more seeing your companion stay with me? —At first, yes. —Or seeing her leave your house for mine? —Now it makes no difference to me. —Would it seem more acceptable to you if your companion lived alone and invited us voluntarily? —Yes, for the peace and freedom of all.

—Do you dislike my loving her?—No. —Do you think that free love will become general because of the rebellion of women?—Yes. —By the consent of men?—Even if men do not want it, when women seriously rebel, it will happen, and everyone will be happy about it afterwards.—By the disinterested initiative of the latter?—No, save for a few exceptions, which may set a good example.”

“Eleda: For the exact study of the emotional episode in which you have so nobly participated, I need some data about your intimate feelings. I ask you for them with the certainty that you will sincerely confide them to me, because you know the importance that this psychological study can have, and because frankness is in your character. Forgive me if some questions are indiscreet; Forgive me and try to answer, because they have a scientific aim, Friend Cardias.”

“—Were you educated according to orthodox morality?—Yes, until you were twenty. —In your first youthful love, did you feel absorbed exclusively in a single affection? —Yes. —In your second love, which was the longest lasting and the most intense, did you love Another contemporary with your adored and Purple companion? —No. —Did you feel any nascent sympathy? —Yes. —Did you cultivate it? —No. —Cultivating it, would you have thought it guilty? —No. —Did you lack the opportunity? —Yes. —Did you seek it? —No. —Your affection for L..., which was the shortest and the least deeply felt, was it exclusive? —I felt at that time another sympathy; but, as they say, an impotent one. —And your affection for Hannibal was exclusive? —Yes, until I met you. —Have you long admitted the possibility of loving more than one person at the same time? —Yes. —Were you ever jealous? —Once; but my jealousy was of very short duration. —Did you ever give yourself without love? —Never without sympathy. —And out of sensuality? —Never. —Did you tolerate moral violence? —No.

Were you surprised by my request for love? —A little. —Did you dislike the brief and direct way I used? —On the contrary, I liked it very much. —Did you promise out of pity? —A little. —Out of sympathy? —Yes. —Was the fear of causing pain to your partner truly the only obstacle? —The only one. —Did you tempt the idea of loving me, without your partner knowing? —No. —When you told him my request, did you express the desire to satisfy it? —No. —Did you suffer by guessing your partner’s displeasure? —Yes. —Did you suffer for him? —Yes. —For you? —Also for me. —For me? —For you especially. —Did you consider his pain as a proof of love for you? —On this I cannot give my opinion. —When you gave yourself to me, was your partner’s consent complete? —Yes. —Did you hasten events a little? —No. —Did you consider your partner’s pain reasonable? —I considered it as the result of the prejudices that,

whether we like it or not, weigh on us. —Destined to disappear? —Yes. —Did our conduct vis-a-vis your partner seem correct to you? —Yes.

—Did you come to me with a clear conscience? —Yes. —Do I increase the happiness of your life a little? —Yes. —Do you love me sexually, intellectually, from the heart? A little of all three ways? —Yes, a little of all three ways. —From the first day, do you love me a little more? —Much more. —Do you love Hannibal more? —Yes. —Have these two contemporary affections made you better? —Yes. —More sensual? —No. —Do they harm your health? —No. —Does the contemporary multiplicity of affections, this thing we call free love, seem natural to you? Yes. —Socially useful? —Preferably socially useful. —Would it displease you not to know the paternity of a child you now generate? —No.”

It must not be thought that Eleda is a woman of easy love, and much less one of those pathological phenomena, for whom it is useless to seek the physiological laws of life. She represents rather the average type of intelligent workers of the big cities, perfected by the socialist ideal, clearly and intimately understood. And that she is a normal type of woman is proven by the fact that she is neither vulgar nor romantic, she is delicate, she is gentle, but she is positive.

Her emotional youth was sad, almost dramatic, and has left a mark on her of true sadness, which rarely abandons her. Inexperienced young woman, she loved her brother-in-law, who won her by surprise. It was an unhappy love, like all clandestine loves, stirred by an immense affection, irresistible for the friend, and by an indescribable tenderness for the sister. Terrible catastrophe: the death of the sister, followed by the death of the friend.

Four years later, when Eleda's heart could open again to the smiles of love, her companion was an intelligent and hard-working young man, the most active, the most effective socialist who ever stirred the working masses of ... But the setbacks of the family, the persecutions of the police, who imprisoned the beloved companion several times, the hardships of poverty saddened a love that lasted five years, and had an epilogue under the vault of a hospital where the life of the brave young man was extinguished.

A year later, Eleda found a lonely man suffering from life, and, a little out of pity, a little out of the annoyance of widowhood, a little out of sympathy, she gave herself to him. It was the least beautiful period of her emotional life, and events cut it short after three months.

Finally, she entered into a free union with Hannibal, contracted in order to go together to the Cecilia colony.

Let honest women study this biography of Eleda, in which not a single secret is hidden, and then tell themselves if this woman is blameworthy, if following her example would be shameful.

And now I will attempt my own psychological analysis, noting that I am not an exception in intelligence and goodness either; I am only a man, raised, like so many thousands of my brothers, in that educational school of pain, which, in short, is life; a little skeptical, a little pessimistic, but also a little optimistic when I think of the future—an optimist of the positive school—a man of contradictions, as it seems to me that we all are in this period of social palingenesis.

I love Eleda, or rather, I love her well, as she prefers to call her, with sharp reasoning, our companion. For us, love, depending on whether it is true or simulated, is the pathological or quixotic form of affection; It is that congestive form that lifts the adolescent towards the luminous clouds of Platonic adoration, where Dante sees Beatrice pass by.

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or it is the terrible martyrdom of Leopardi, it is suicide, it is the crime of the ignored thousands; when it is not the simulation of high feelings, the profanation of a noble madness in a vulgar comedy, which tends to conquer a body, a dowry, a social position.

To love well is the physiological, normal, common form of affection. To love well oscillates between 20% and 8% of the centigrade of love; lower, there is the caprice, the sympathy of a day, of an hour, which —gentle and light— arrives, kisses and passes; higher is the sublime madness or the ridiculous stupidity. To love well is an appetizing mixture of voluptuousness, of feeling and of intelligence, in proportions that vary, according to the individuals who love each other well. In conclusion, “loving well” seems to me to be what should suffice for the emotional happiness of the poor human species.

That is, I love Eleda well; I love her well subjectively and objectively, that is, I love her well for her and for me.

If I loved her well only for myself, for the pleasures she gives me, for the warmth she has brought to my thoughts, I should say, more exactly, that I love myself. It would be an affection, as noble as you like, but its own, like the affection we have for our lungs, 2 our stomach, our skin for the services they render us, for the need we have for them; like the affection we feel for flowers freshly cut and placed in water on our table; like the affection we say we feel for canaries when they sing well in their cage. They are subjective loves; we do not love well, but we “love well” ourselves.

I love Eleda as well as myself, and that is why I wish her to find in this world — since we have given up the other — all those fleeting moments of happiness and all those peaceful days that she may be able to find. And since I am not so presumptuous, or rather so imbecile, as to believe that I am not all or even a large part of Eleda’s happiness, I take pleasure in her past affections, in those present and in those to come. Far from tormenting myself with retrospective jealousy, I speak with her willingly of the loves that have occupied so much of her life; I try to preserve them in her memory, to revive her emotions. I love those two extinct beings who loved my friend so much, and were so loved by her. The one I still have a bit of antipathy towards is that third person who quickly passed away in Eleda’s emotional life. And I still have it because he was not worthy of her, because he did not love her enough, because he was not loved enough. Because, in short, he brought few moments of happiness to the life of his friend.

I love Hannibal, because I know that Eleda loves him deeply and is proud of her love. That is why—before we began our relationship—when I feared that Hannibal’s grief might be incurable, I told him firmly and sincerely:

—Listen, if my affection were to tear yours to pieces, I would prefer to leave things as they are today.

That is why, at night, I often accompany Hannibal and his companion home from our meeting place, and I affectionately wish them good night.

That is why I am glad that, when Eleda says to Hannibal: “I am going with Cardias,” she gives and receives from him a kiss.

That is why I was tortured by the explosions of despair that, in the beginning, overcame Hannibal, when he embraced and kissed our Eleda, whispering to her through tears:

—How much I suffer, how crazy I am! I know that you continue to love me, that you love me more than before. But I am afraid; afraid that you love Cardias more than me, because he is more intelligent than me. I love you too much, and I am unjust towards my companion. I do wrong; I

see it, I feel it; I become stupid, I will go crazy, I would like to die. Love me very much, because I love you so much...

That is why I am happy now, that, between Hannibal, Eleda and me, there is a perfect equation of affections, and the cares of one, for one, do not disturb the serenity of the other.

Will anyone think that this suppression of jealousy is a characteristic or a sign of a weak, lymphatic or fatty psyche? That this quietness of the soul is the sleep of the dormouse? That this episode of love takes place between three friends of quiet life? If anyone thinks so, he is mistaken; because the blood of modern humanity is stirring in us today, the thought of our times is tingling in our brains, the balanced and strong sensations of virility are running through our nerves.

If we are displaced by a single centimeter, we are certainly not displaced to the lower level of humanity, but above: that nearer level that human society must soon reach, because its eternal law is not to descend but to ascend.

Just as I take from the thoughts of others the elements which, together with my own observations, constitute my ideas, so I take a good part of what constitutes my feelings from the conscience of others. But for my feelings as for my ideas, I neither fear the ridicule nor desire the praise of others. When I can prove to myself that my feelings and ideas correspond perfectly, my conscience lives in modest security, even if it were in conflict with the conscience of all mankind. With this security, call it naive security if you like, I confide my confessions to the hypocritical and sanctimonious public.

Having recounted the episode, I would like to point out the theory in socialist thought and morality.

The dogma that one cannot love several people at the same time is widespread and accepted and undisputed.

If it were not a dogma, and were not also a generally accepted opinion, how much work would be needed to demonstrate the truth? Then, the truth—natural, spontaneously accepted—would be that, exceptionally, one can love only one person.

But when everyone, or the majority, believes a bestiality, they do not need to demonstrate it; all they do is support it with some vulgar proverb, since popular ignorance has not suffered from a shortage of proverbs. It is up to the heretics to refute the dogma, to demonstrate that the opposite is the truth.

Loving more than one person at a time is a necessity of human nature.

This is the thesis that a legion of scholars could develop in a collection of volumes. I am not a scholar, not only in developing it; I am barely capable of understanding it intuitively. But the people are also more apt to understand intuitively than to analyze, and perhaps these few pages that I can devote to this thesis will suffice.

Physiologically, love is the pursuit of voluptuousness, the involuntary consequence of which is the perpetuation of the species. Physiologically, the male enjoys, within the limits of his strength, as many females as he finds ready for coupling; and each female, at the time of ovulation, enjoys as many males as she finds. Among the phanerogamous plants—where the sexes are better characterized—promiscuity is the law, monogamy is the exception. The chaste lily encloses in its snowy corolla five stamens around a single pistil, and the queen of flowers herself houses around the single genularium a regiment of males, often representing a multiple of five. But if you wish to consider the stamens of a flower as the many sexual organs of a single male, think of the many species of plants which bear male flowers on some individuals and female flowers on others. They are clouds of pollen from thousands of males, which the wind carries far away

in its whirlwinds to kiss the waiting female flowers. The pollen granules of a single anther, who can know how many pistils they rest on? Who can say how many anthers fertilize a genarium? If many varieties of plants belonging to the same species are planted very close together, innumerable bastardizations occur.

Flowers denied the fable of monogamy and marital fidelity. Monogamy is an exception among animals, almost entirely confined to the order of birds, where the work of incubation and the care of the young make it necessary.

In the early history of mankind we find matriarchy; much later, and under the influence of economic and political reasons, came polygamous patriarchy, and then monogamous marriage.

But philosophical schools, religious sects, and personal rebellions have always affirmed, down to us, free love as a protest of nature and reason.

But what must be kept in mind most of all is that woman has always loved someone besides her husband; and that man has always loved someone besides his wife. Rarely, exceptionally, has the new affection killed the old; if it were otherwise, no husband would be loved by his wife and no woman by her husband. Most of the time, the two affections live in peace in the same heart, contributing to the fact that one makes the other more tender and more expansive. It is free love minus loyalty, or plus lies, the pleasant lie; it is the sophistication of free love; it is adultery.

And how could free love fail to prevail?

A person is loved for certain qualities of his or hers; beauty, spirit, goodness, intelligence, strength, bravery. And how many gradations, how many blurrings, how many ways of being there are for each of these qualities! You will love the person who possesses, among these qualities, the one that pleases you the most. But then you will find another person, several, who will possess the same qualities, the same attraction to a greater or lesser degree, and you will not be able to help but love him or her. Hypocritical morality will sometimes succeed in condemning you to a ridiculous martyrdom, but more often than not it will destroy the substance of monogamy and preserve only its form.

Love is unique and exclusive to lower organisms, because it is all summarized in a coupling that kills the lovers and gives life to the offspring. But the human species, rising, in certain aspects, above animality, refined, proceeding from the simple to the compound, its primordial sensations, its primordial needs. Now, and throughout the entire historical cycle, it is no longer just any female in that periodic moment of love that moves the psyche of man; it is no longer the first-born male that the woman wishes to have in her arms. The primordial sensation has become polychromatic, since so many sparks of beauty — of plastic beauty, of moral beauty, of intellectual beauty — have emerged from the bosom of the rich human polyhedron. Since the human species said sweet and mysterious words to each other in their embrace, since tenderness and kindness shone in the eyes of women, and intelligence and poetry in the eyes of men, love ceased to be the simple and primordial need for any coupling; between a single male and a single female, all the elements of love could no longer be exchanged.

Thus, love could still be unique and exclusive in these two cases: when in the loved person nothing is desired but sex (and one must live at the lowest level of the human scale for this to happen), or when in the loved person all the beauty, all the goodness, all the intelligence are contained, in a word, when all the attractions of the opposite sex are contained (and one must be quite stupid to suppose that this happens). But since only a small part of these attractions can exist, the feeling involuntarily runs to seek the rest.

In fact, in the richer social classes, where—under certain aspects—human nature has been elevated, the feeling of love assumes a more complex form, richer in lines, colors, nuances, and shadows, which can always be more difficult to realize in a single person the type dreamed of; and the affective relationships, in those social classes, are more delicate, higher, more numerous—despite the hostility of the social environment—and indisputably freer, than they are in the artisan and peasant classes.

I am sorry that I have not given the irrefutable demonstration of the thesis presented:

“To love more than one person at a time is a necessity of human nature.”

In a public controversy where the most absurd causes are usually supported and made to triumph by the most stupid musings and the most brilliant paradoxes, the public — fierce with modesty and conventional honesty — would probably whistle at me and applaud my opponent. But you who are reading me will complete my demonstration and make it more irrefutable, if you have the courage to question your conscience, alone, of course — because you probably also fear whistles — and ask it:

“My conscience, no one hears us, no one sees us. My conscience, can you swear, without lying, my fidelity? Have you not realized that that one affection was not enough to fill my heart? Have you not noticed that other love, which did not kill the first? Have you not felt my imagination, flying around lightly, eager for beauty, for spirit, for tenderness, for knowledge? Have you not heard the fierce, useless and inglorious battles that love and duty, desire and fear, tenderness and shame have fought in your bosom? Have you not seen the new germs that swelled in the trunk of my heart in the spring? They were full of leaves and flowers, those new germs; Who knows what splendours of greenery, what delicate aromas, what sweetness of fruit, they could give to my sad life? And I have destroyed them, because to destroy them was a duty, because to respect them was a sin. Tell me, tell me, my conscience—we are alone and no one hears us—if duty and sin did not exist in the world, would I not feel the need to love some other person, without causing harm to the one I love? My conscience, answer me for once the truth.”

And if your conscience answers you truthfully, for you, who are reading me, this book is over.

The right to the full freedom to love seems to me to be indisputable. In fact, all codes and all religions deny it to married people; the morality of this century denies it to young people.

The freedom to love belongs to the category of corporeal freedoms, which are the most essential, the most necessary, the most difficult to suppress. Until the legal principle of slavery is restored—and that is to say, never—it will be impossible to deny the right and the faculty to freely dispose of one’s own person, both one’s own body and one’s own feelings. And do not come to me with the restriction that one freedom, one right, ends where it injures another freedom, another right. If when my right passes, someone suffers and cries, I may deplore it, and I may even renounce my right; but if you intend to deny it to me, then it is just as well to declare freedom a lie.

Can the right to love freely be cancelled by the promise of marital fidelity? If this were the case, it would be necessary to reestablish the indissolubility of monastic vows, which are pronounced with such improvidence, as is ordinarily used when pronouncing marriage vows, or simply the promise of exclusive and free affection. In both cases, it is in the knowledge of the conditions, of the feelings of a day, that the whole life is mortgaged; life, which will be full of circumstances very different from those foreseen. A promise of fidelity is very deplorable, because it is very fatuous and insincere. But a foolish thing cannot destroy a natural, imprescriptible and inalienable right.

These things are well known to people, and they put them into practice every day. Only, the right is exercised in mystery, like theft; and what should be free trade, assumes the pleasant and provocative character — but not very dignified — of smuggling.

On the other hand, when we anarchists say to adult and sane people, “Do what you want,” it is the simple, but real and understandable, form under which we understand the right.

But how few are the energetic characters of rebels! And so many, who know how to defy everything — from ridicule to death — hesitate and weakly bend before the fear of hurting the person they love.

To introduce this reform into our customs, it is not enough to generalize the conviction that absolute freedom to love is a natural necessity and a personal right. It is not enough for one of the two lovers to say: “Follow the new affection, freedom for freedom, I abandon you.” Or, with more intelligence and greater kindness: “Your new affection is gentle like ours; you are not different from what you were and that is why I still love you; I neither stop loving you, nor abandon you, but I suffer.” It is not enough to throw oneself into the arms of middle terms, into the half-way solutions of prejudice and poorly understood selfishness; it is necessary to throw oneself resolutely on one side or the other. If we declare ourselves for freedom, it will be necessary to help others to become free, as we need to be helped. If we think we have holy freedom in our home, just because we have said to our partner: “Do what you want,” we will either have understood nothing about life, or we will have understood enough to be hypocrites like everyone else. The passionate partner in reality never does what she wants, but what she must — that is, what she believes she must do — in order to avoid her partner suffering, which she tacitly understands is threatened.

The reader will say that I am falling into exaggeration and absurdity, while in fact I follow logic and seek the truth, sending to hell prejudices and serious buffoonery such as morality and dignity are today.

We must love our woman deeply for us, for our happiness, but above all for her and her happiness. We must sincerely wish her other affections that will lead her closer to happiness; and we must deeply convince her of this desire. We must help our companion to study those small germs of sympathy that, if not cared for or fought, would never have taken full development; From these germs of sympathy we must, together with her, select and educate the most gentle, until sympathy becomes love, which is as much as saying new elements of joy, of goodness, of personal education and of social progress.

On these geological formations of adultery, which are our times, it seems to me that we can already be new men. May I be hanged if I do not tell the truth. When there were no reasons foreign to my will, I would say to Eleda:

—Listen; I wish that a new shudder of youth would gladden the twilight of your life. What small sympathy beats in your heart? Tell me. Is it small? It will grow. Does it not yet have a concrete form? Soon it will assume more precise contours and bright colors. Is that the young man you like best? Love him calmly, because he is good.

And I would like to announce to the timid young man the good fortune; and invite him to exchange the first kiss of engagement; and adorn my bed with flowers for their first meeting; and receive the young man at the threshold of my house, kissing him on the cheeks as a brother; and return later and find them embraced and kiss them on the forehead as happy children. I would like to do all these dark things; and I feel that I would do them in spite of a trace of jealousy, but under a shell of goodness, affection and reason.

If I try to tear free love — which for me almost always means multiple and contemporary love — from the regions of adultery, shame, and ridicule where it has been confined, in order to lead it, radiant with justice and piety, with a high and pure forehead, a serene and smiling gaze, a strong and secure heart, healthy, young, and beautiful, in the midst of people who have rejected it, I do not only aim at the triumph of the holy law of nature, at the energetic affirmation of right; I also aim at another goal, which is perhaps higher and greater: I aim at the destruction of the family.

The impostors of morality, the impostors of religion, the liars of art, the fools of school, and all the numerous rabble that has brutalized human character, have opposed to the nauseating reality of families, the poetic, gentle, and holy abstraction of the family. They have raised us up by the helmets, dreaming of an unrealized and unrealizable ideal, while the reality of our families drowned us in pain and infamy. They have betrayed us, showing us tinsel as if it were gold, promising us wine, when they knew perfectly well that the vat only contained, and could not contain anything but vinegar. They deserved that we should destroy their lying ideal, even if it had the artistic value of a Madonna by Perugino; But unfortunately we are still too imbued with moral aesthetics, and fiction, abstraction, the fable of the holy and pure family, let us leave them among the creations of human fantasy.

But for the real family, for the family that exists in the painful reality of life, there is not one consideration, not one respect; every kick that can be given to it is a good deed.

I also believe that the human species has villainous reminiscences; but the domestic environment seems to me to be the one that most lovingly educates it and best cooperates in resurrecting the human beast.

If the family could live in the street, under the scrutinizing gaze of society, or, as I don't know who said, in a glass house, it could perhaps attenuate a little its ferocity, its vileness, its corruption. But the human couple locked inside the family tends to isolate itself in the cave, in the cabin, in the hovel, in the palace, wherever it can. And the domestic sanctuary, the inviolable sanctuary of the family, the secret gynaeceum becomes the underground of the holy Inquisition, the secret cell of the Bastille. The worst human brutalities are there inside, because they remain veiled and unpunished.

It is in the sanctuary of the family that the husband forces the wife to the filth of a courtesan; it is in this holy intangible ark that incest, the most repugnant form of love, is consummated; that sodomy, the most abject of human infamies, is practiced; that the vice of virtue is stupefied in masturbation. It is in the absolute monarchy of the family that the hand of the vile man strikes the cheeks of the woman; that the young grow in the sad habits of obedience, of dissimulation, in the desire to be able one day, in their turn, to command. It was in the tragic quarrels between parents that the children—taking sides for the father or the mother—learned to hate. It was in partiality, in the preference for one of them, that the brothers learned envy and jealousy. It was in their early maternal teachings that they learned selfishness, superstition and lies. In the family, the offspring repeat and perpetuate the stupid cliché of their parents.

Do not come to me and argue that abject families are the exception; number them, if you can, and you will find that they are the rule. Nor can it be otherwise, because in the family the impunity of each offender is almost certain; for which reason it could be rigorously maintained that — given the current wickedness of the human species, which no one doubts — all families, more or less, are corrupt, and those that seem honest and clean, owe this civil appearance to dissimulation and hypocrisy.

And do not oppose to the family the free union of the socialists, their free family; it is a family like all the others; of freedom it can only have, and indeed has, only a theoretical larva, because family and freedom are contradictory terms.

Far be it from my mind to bring the family life to trial and to write its indictment. The family is prosecuting itself more and more every day; every moment it is breaking down and decaying.

The chronicles of the gazettes are its health bulletins, which certify the worsening of the evil: the novels and the comedies are the episodes of the immense catastrophe; Balzac and Zola are the engineers who point out the cracks in the old building; the sharp journalist who satirizes husbands and wives, parents and children, mothers-in-law and sons-in-law, is the skeptical sacristan who sounds the death knell.

For myself, I am so convinced that the family is the greatest dunghill of immorality, wickedness, and ignorance that, if it were possible for me to destroy it by choosing one of the great human scourges: religion or locusts, individual property or cholera, war or mosquitoes, government or hail, parliament or ulcers, the fatherland or malarial fever, I would without hesitation choose the destruction of the family.

But the family is not one of those institutions that can be destroyed from outside, and much less by violence. The resistance, the reaction would be immediate, general, irresistible. It is one of those institutions that must first be destroyed in the popular conscience, and then materially collapse by internal self-destruction.

I know very well that everything that has hitherto been put in place of the family is not worth a penny more than the family; that asylums for bastards are butcher shops, that boarding schools are filthy houses, that one-hour loves are fatuous and venal.

But I know also that when the intellectual and moral aristocracy of men, the interested mass of women, with the evident practice of free love, have wiped the lie of paternity from the face of the world, the family will be half destroyed and the social relations that are called to replace it will necessarily arise spontaneously.

The instinct of motherhood is also transitory and destined to disappear. It has developed parallel to the natural need to raise offspring; so it does not exist in that order of animals that can abandon their children as soon as they are born; and it is attenuated in the social classes that raise their children outside the home. If society can one day offer mothers something that is really worth more than their nursing and their early education, the need to raise children having disappeared, the maternal instinct will also gradually disappear, and the fortunate people of those times will breathe a sigh of relief, pronouncing the *finisfamilias*.

As the family is currently the main reason for existence and the main support of the capitalist regime, for the same reasons it is incompatible with socialist life.

If it were a collectivist and authoritarian form, the exclusive love of women and offspring will spur everyone on towards the conquest of power and wealth, and the social world will once again become a battlefield. If it were a communist and anarchic form, each person will try to concentrate the greatest amount of well-being around his family, even if it is at the expense of others. Solidarity will be a theory as long as man sees woman and children on one side and humanity on the other. And the most intelligent, hard-working, and energetic parents will believe in community by sacrificing their children, and will join reactionary alliances. However great the social production, parents will strive to squander it, fearing that their children will not get enough. However shortened and brilliant the work, parents will always fear producing too much, when they see that they do not produce exclusively for their children.

Geronimo Boccardo wrote, quite rightly indeed, in his *Universal Dictionary of Political Economy*, when discussing the word Communism: "You will never be able to eradicate from the father's heart a powerful instinct, the love for his offspring; He will work for them, he will accumulate the products of his labor for them, and lo and behold, the instinct of property will be reborn... Logic forces you to be communists to the extreme, to strike down the family with the same blow with which you strike down property or else to admit and respect both."

Well said, by Jove! Let us free ourselves from both.

And if we do not free ourselves from the family, the family will destroy communism.

This is probably what has happened in many American communist colonies, founded on the family principle, which fell, or became anemic, or had to rely on religious sentiment, while almost all those that established celibacy prospered. Chaste celibacy is a physiological and moral aberration; nevertheless, communistically, it is worth more than the family. In the Cecilia colony, too, almost all the internal difficulties come from family selfishness, and should disappear with free love. The intelligent communist population of Oneida flourished for thirty years with free love, which they called complex marriage, and fell despite this civil custom, for reasons of another nature.

Change the rites and names as much as you like, suppress them if you like; But as long as you have a man, a wife, children, a house, you will have a family which is equivalent to saying a small authoritarian society, jealous of its prerogatives, economically rival to the great society. You will have small territories tyrannized by the strong, you will have circumscribed environments, in which love is explained in all its most erroneous and painful manifestations, from jealousy to crime. And since collective life results in part from the sum of all individual lives; and since private habits greatly influence public habits, the existence of a society that attempts to govern itself simultaneously under two contradictory principles will be undermined and insecure: the selfishness of domestic life and the solidarity of collective life. In the formidable duel that would necessarily be engaged, it is not easy to foresee which of the two combating principles would succumb.

The harmony of economic relations between the individual and society can be natural and spontaneous only when all women are considered as possible friends and all children as possible sons. Then the affection of the most beautiful and seductive women will be the prize desired by every man; it will be the stimulus that will replace wealth and glory in the human contest of talent, of industry, of courage: sexual competition, which takes such a part in the struggle for existence and the improvement of the species, will break up the artificial chapels, spilling over into the natural breadth of life. The best individuals will be found, for the benefit of the species, because virtues have their artistic side, their attractive beauty, and, even today, despite all the fatuity of sex and education, spontaneously, without the fictitious idea of social duty, women are often more interested in the intelligent and good man than in the perfumed and uptight Nuremberg puppet.

And while love is thus a stimulus and reward for civil virtues, it is also in itself an element of education. Everyone becomes better by loving; he feels the moral influence which two minds in love reciprocally exercise upon each other. Let us, then, love as many people as possible; let us receive from each one that special educational element which he possesses and which he can give us; let us assimilate all these elements to our own character, and in this way we shall be able to say that free love completes us, intrigues us, improves us, makes us fit for higher forms of social life.

It is asserted that the coming social revolution will economically emancipate women; that, as workers, they will have a right to possess the wealth produced, without it being any longer, really or apparently, held by men; that, as a necessary consequence of their economic emancipation, their emotional emancipation will also be, and that, in this way, the problem of love will have its spontaneous, logical and necessary solution.

These predictions seem to me to be rather uncertain, rather doubtful in the point at which they move. Given the universally accepted opinions, the dominant customs, the sentiments in which popular consciousness prevails, it is not the case to ask: Will the social revolution economically emancipate women? And if not: will women be economically emancipated? Could she be emancipated, for this reason alone, from moral prejudices, from the despotic affective supremacy of man?

With the winds that blow even among the most carefree men, among many anarchists who believe themselves to be the most fervent advocates of freedom, but who in the case of love are still Muslims or something worse, so much so that they keep their women apart from the social movement, doubt arises. It is true that the economic emancipation of women is written in all socialist programs, but it is written more as an ornamental part, which is thoughtlessly written and happily abandoned, than as an essential and necessary part, concisely, energetically desired, a sign of battle for which one wins or dies. And it is natural that it should be so, because sex corresponds greatly to social class.

Just as every class has always fought for its own interests, and never to emancipate other classes subject to it, so men, who today take pleasure in the exclusive possession of their women, will neither defend nor consent to an economic emancipation that would endanger that possession, which would destroy it completely. The pretexts for denying tomorrow the emancipation promised today will not be lacking, and they will even have something of reason, because man and sophist are the same animal.

While the current feelings about love and family persist, the apathy will be brought to bear on a much more delicate and fragile field than that of today, on which the bourgeoisie fights for its economic privileges; The most convinced anarchist of that time, if he fights for his wife, will be as reactionary, as fierce, as implacable as Alfonso Rothschildt is today fighting for his millions. Either men's ideas about love take a more reasonable path, and succeed in bringing women into it, or the social revolution will be nothing more than the triumph of the male proletariat; new customs will emerge in the popular consciousness on the detritus of old customs, or women will constitute the fifth estate of the society to come, or men will find it convenient to renounce at the same time my property and MY wife in order to share in the larger, richer, more varied possession of OUR property and OUR women; More precisely, this is to say: either men will find it more convenient to give up women as a thing to be appropriated in order to obtain a free friend in the changing eventualities of free life, or women — who can no longer descend to being graceful and benign animals — will have to prepare themselves to give the last battle, to integrate all humanity into a single and free association.

In either case, just as economic relations were the issue of the 19th century, so emotional relations will perhaps be the burning issue of the 20th century.

Let us conclude: Not the unattainable promise of economically emancipating women and offering them a free union, which is not what it is, but the spontaneous destruction of the family, is what should already be courageously included in any socialist program; and in socialist morality

it seems to me that free love should already be included as a multiple and contemporary bond of affections, desired by all, feared by no one.

The expression "free love" that I have used in this little book is not very convenient, because the same words often designate something else, and because free can be said to be the necessary adjective and always included in the concept of love. It is useful to find an expression adapted to that mode of affective relations which I have indicated, as that which must arise at the death of the family in whatever form; it is useful for brevity of language and for clarity of ideas. Excluding the term "free union," which means another form of family; excluding the term polygamous polyandry, which can be simply a marriage of four and a larger family, there remain the terms "complex marriage," already used in *Oneida*, and "communal marriage," used by L. H. Morgan and by Peter Kropotkin*. I would prefer, however, the expression "anarchist embrace," or better, "amorphous kiss," which seems to me to mean more clearly the negation of all domestic forms in sexual relations.

I am pleased to add that the initiative of the Amorphist case related in this pamphlet has recently been imitated by another courageous woman. This second case is even more significant than the first, because the heroine has only left the uneducated agricultural classes of Italy two years ago; she was bound by eighteen years of married life and by a crown of five children. However, she has also felt a new affection arise alongside the old affection; and she has nobly expressed it to the father of her children, and has been so affectionately eloquent in expressing the need to seek the triumph of our ideas, for the threatened family principle, that her companion heroically drained the bitter cup, and, in a meeting yesterday afternoon, he himself gave us the news of the loyalty he has shown.

It is another sure step that the Cecilia colony has taken, over and above prejudices, towards its smiling future.

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Giovanni Rossi
An episode of love in the Cecilia Socialist Colony
1896

Socialist utopianism (1830–1893) by Carlos Manuel Rama.

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