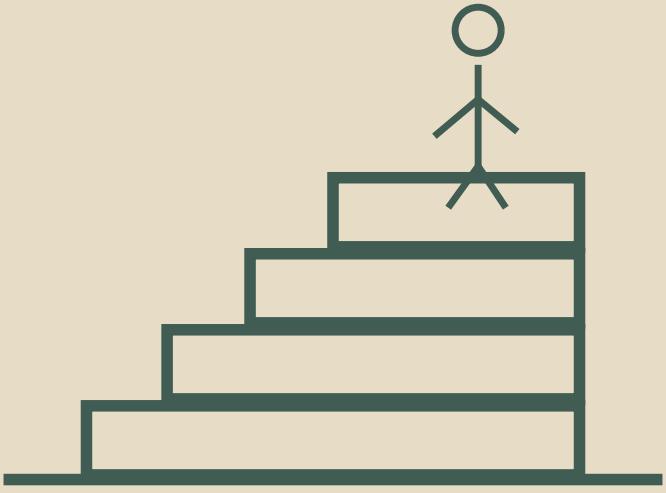
A HUMAN-SIZED BEGINNING



FERDINANDO FREGA

PART I

To be born and to grow up

I was born into a simple world, where time was measured by cultivated fields and the scent of damp earth. My childhood was spent among woods, invented stories, and small gestures of affection that I learned to recognize as treasures. My parents worked hard, and while there was never a lack of love, I soon felt the weight of responsibility: my mother fell ill, and from a child I quickly became an adult.

At ten, I knew how to cook, take care of children, and keep quiet. Growing up meant giving up something but also feeling a silent strength blossom within. When I left my hometown for the city, I had only courage in my pocket. I worked a thousand jobs, learning to navigate solitude and new opportunities. A bookstore was the first place that truly welcomed me: books had always saved me and continued to do so.

I wrote, I listened, I observed. I felt that, even in that urban hustle and bustle, there was room for a voice like mine.

Childhood and Play

I was six years old. The bicycle was too big for me, but my father said, “Learn to fall, then learn to ride.” I fell. Many times. But every scratch was a medal. I remember the sound of the pedal spinning, my grazed knee, the short-lived cry. Then, one day, I pedaled. And I never stopped. Now, when I see a child pedaling uncertainly, I smile. Not out of nostalgia. Because play is the first form of courage. And the red bicycle is still there, in the garage. It waits for the next fallen child who wants to get up again.

My Family Seasons

My family was not made of silence, but of uncontrolled noises, busy days, dreams piled up in drawers. There were so many of us, and nothing was ever enough: money, attention, time. Financial difficulties ate away at our serenity and smiles. At home, we argued over trivial things that concealed great pain.

When my mother fell ill, I took charge of everyday life. My siblings needed me, and I needed them. I did well in school, but not to prove myself: I did it to build a way out. The scholarship was my first ticket to a different life.

I have never denied my roots. In fact, it is thanks to those hardships that I know how to keep my feet on the ground today. Family is imperfect, but it is there that I learned what it means to be there for someone. Even when it hurts.

Autonomy as an Act of Faith

I never wanted to be told who I had to become. From an early age, the idea of living by my own rules—right or wrong— guided me like an internal compass. After my studies, the city put me to the test: managing money, work shifts, schedules, solitude. But every step I took alone was a freedom gained.

The turning point came when I had the opportunity to leave for another country. Another country, another language, another version of myself. I returned stronger, clearer, more whole. I began working in a competitive environment, but I carried with me the sense of proportion I had developed.

Autonomy, I have come to understand, is not just knowing how to do things. It is knowing how to choose: what to accept, what to reject, who to walk with. It is responsibility and identity. It is a home you build within yourself.

Work as a Tool for Rebirth

For me, work has always been much more than a source of income. From the very beginning, it was a place where I could evaluate myself, build myself, and rebuild what life, at times, seemed to be crumbling.

After years of study and sacrifice, I believed that a degree would be the key to a peaceful future. But reality was harsher than expected. I took low-paying jobs and skipped nights to maintain financial and mental balance. It was frustrating, sure, but I felt like I was gaining strength.

The turning point came with a project that shook me to the core: working on sustainable solutions, contributing to the world around us. I put everything I had into it, putting my heart, intuition, and energy into it. And that seed germinated: I became a permanent member of that company and over the years became part of something I felt was mine.

Work had transformed from a chore into a mission. And every small achievement reminded me of who I had been... and who I was becoming.

My Successes, Their Silences

I have never seen success as a trophy to show off. For me, it has always been a transition point. When the first accolades arrived—small at first, larger ones later—I did not seek the spotlight, but gratitude.

I still remember the first time my work was applauded in public. My heart was in my throat, my palms were sweaty, and an inner voice was telling me: "Don't forget where you came from." Every success was the result of sleepless nights, of unspeakable sacrifices, of a determination sewn with a fine needle amidst fears.

What the audience saw was a conference, a signing, a publication. But I saw my mother sewing late, my father silent out of exhaustion, my previous failures, and the boy who, in the silence of his room, dreamed of a clean rematch.

Money as an Ally, Not an End

Money has never defined me. I have lived through periods when even the essentials were lacking, and others when, finally, I had the space to dream without anxiety.

When I began my venture, I did so with just one word in mind: possibility. Not just for myself, but for those who would walk with me. The first few years were tough: closed doors, numbers in the red, sleep disturbed by the accounts. But I had an intuition, and a hunger: that of someone who not only wants to succeed, but to do so without selling their soul.

Today, that journey has led me to build something solid. I have never felt rich, but I feel that what I have earned, I have done without selling my name. And money, when it arrives like this, does not divide it into multiplying meaning.

The Choices That Speak About Me

Life always puts us at crossroads. Some obvious, others silent. The choices I made were not always comfortable, nor easy to explain to others. But they were mine.

I remember when I was offered a well-paid, secure position... and I turned it down to continue a research project that was uncertain but infinitely closer to what I believed in.

It was not a romantic decision; it was a bet on me.

Over time, consistent choices turned into open doors. They attracted people, collaborations, and opportunities that spoke my same inner language.

Marriage

I found love when I still did not know who I would become. I had dreams, plans, fears—but with her, I felt the world could be shared. We married with the belief that love could do anything. And for a while, it did. The first few years were filled with complicity, fragilities faced as a couple. Then came the children, the house to manage, the work that became increasingly demanding. We tried to keep everything in balance, fitting together days and hopes, talking when it was difficult, even remaining silent.

We supported each other through tough times: bereavement, an economic crisis, days when a glance was enough to know everything was harder than expected. But we stayed. Because love is not just an emotion, it is a choice. Every day.

Family, Children and Disability

When our son was born and we received the diagnosis, a whole new world opened to us. Our fears grew, and the question was always the same: "Will we be able to do this?"

The answer came overtime; through simple gestures and efforts you cannot describe unless you have experienced them. My wife quit her job; I redoubled my efforts. But it was not sacrificed, it was love taking on a new form.

We studied, listened to other parents, learned our child's language and the language of silence, which required patience. We discovered a strength we did not know we had, and he began to surprise us every day.

That challenge changed us. It made our family more united, more authentic. Disability did not become our identity, but a condition that taught us a broader form of love.

The Separation

There are loves that end with a bang, others that slip away like a whisper. Ours faded slowly, not from a lack of love, but from a difference in our gazes. It is hard to accept that commitment is not enough, that you can drift apart even while still loving each other.

We tried to stay, to rediscover each other, but something had cracked. When we decided to separate, we did so with our children at the center. It was not painless, but it was respectful.

We promised each other that our role as parents would never change, and so it has. We have found a new balance, without resentment, with a different tenderness.

Separating is not a failure. It is having the courage to recognize that love changes, and that letting go can also be an act of healing.

Sexuality and Desire

We loved each other in silence. Not out of shame, but out of intensity. Desire needs no words, only skin that knows how to listen. She had eyes that did not ask, hands that did not promise. Just presence. It was not eternal love. It was true love. And when we parted, there was no resentment. Only gratitude for having discovered that the body can be a home, even if just for one night. Sometimes I wonder where it is. But then I remember that certain presences are not sought. They are carried within.

Lost Friendships

His name was Luca. We were inseparable, then inseparably distant. There was not an argument. Just a series of silences that lengthened like shadows. Every now and then I see his name in my contacts. I do not delete it. It is my way of remembering that certain absences should not be resolved, they should be respected. Like graves: they are not open, they are visited. I tried to text him once. "How are you?" No response. And that is okay. Some friendships never end. They transform into memories.

The Disease

I was a dynamic man, full of energy, always immersed in a thousand activities. My career as an architect fulfilled me, and my family was the center of my world. Every day was an opportunity for me to create, to leave my mark. Then, one day, during a routine checkup, the diagnosis struck me like a bolt of lightning: a serious degenerative disease. From that moment, my life changed.

At first, fear and uncertainty overwhelmed me. My body began to buckle, and every exam was a fresh stab. My family, once a solid pillar of support, began to show cracks in anxiety and silence. Evenings at home, once lively and carefree, became burdensome. I still remember when I tried to tie my son's shoes and the pain prevented me from even doing that simple thing. I took refuge in the bathroom and cried. I felt useless, a prisoner of my own body. And looking into my wife Martina's eyes, filled with fear despite her smile, broke me.

It was then that we decided to react. With the support of friends and family, we began to explore alternative paths. Every small step forward was a light in the darkness. I found comfort in meditation, yoga, and in rediscovering myself through the lens of slowness. Those mornings in the garden, listening to the birdsong, became my refuge.

I discovered passions I had never explored: painting, for example. Each painting was an outlet, a silent confession. And through a blog, I began

sharing my experience, hoping to give strength to those who, like me, struggled every day.

I adapted. I continued to design, changing pace and perspectives. I worked on accessibility projects, turning my weakness into a tool to improve the world. My children learned what it means to resist, observing not just a father, but a man who refused to give up.

Every night I told them stories of brave heroes, in that tired but loving voice. I hoped that one day they would remember not my suffering, but my determination.

We even organized a mountain hike—my dream of showing them that, despite everything, the beauty of the world was still accessible. That day, between smiles and challenging work, I realized I had chosen the right path. Today I know I cannot stop the progression of the disease. But I have learned that true strength is measured in the heart. This is not just a story of illness, but of rebirth. How, even in the darkest moments, we can light a light within ourselves. And give it to others.

The Courage to Change Jobs

I had worked for ten years at a large company, enjoying stability, respect, and a steady paycheck. But something inside me had died. Creativity had shrunk within the confines of bureaucracy, and routine, over time, had sapped my passion.

So, one day, I made a choice. I left behind certainties and comforts to seek something that spoke to me today, not just to me yesterday. I found a startup that was young, unstable, crazy—but full of enthusiasm. The impact was harsh; I felt out of place and under pressure. But it was life, finally.

Those challenges rekindled me. I proposed ideas, built, learned. I rediscovered my voice. It was not just a career change, but a return to me. Change is scary, but sometimes staying still is the real risk.

Economic Difficulties

When I lost my job, it was not just my salary that was missing. I was missing my identity, my security, my direction. I was a father, a husband, a man—and suddenly I felt like I was not enough. Every morning, I woke up with the same question: "What will I do today?" I took every opportunity, even the humblest. I slipped into the world of precarious work, faced with a thousand noses and few answers. But I was not alone: my family remained by my side, and that love became fuel.

Little by little, the days became easier. I found a new job, more modest but dignified. We could breathe again. And in that experience, I learned that dignity is not determined by your bank account, but by how you endure.

My Teaching Failures

Opening my own business was a dream I had nurtured for years. When I finally did, I thought I had made it. But reality was a slap in the face: expenses, mistakes, few customers. I felt unprepared and overwhelmed.

Every night I closed the shutters with a lump in my throat. Then I began to face the truth. I analyzed my mistakes, asked for advice, and changed course. I stopped trying to prove something and started listening.

Failure, in the end, was my greatest teacher. My business resumed, stronger. But the real victory was my transformation: from a naive dreamer to a man capable of falling... and getting up again with awareness.

PART II

Really Living

For years, I lived according to other people's scripts. Studies, work, career, awards. I appeared fulfilled, but inside I was dull. I woke up joyless, surviving in a dress that was no longer mine.

At a certain point, I decided to reform. I left everything behind: titles, status, certainties. And I devoted myself to my true passion. I began painting. At first, shamefully, secretly. But with every brushstroke, a new part of me was born.

It was not easy. The criticism, the doubts, the loneliness. But every day I followed that call, I felt more alive. Today, I cannot say if I am "more successful," but I know I have found meaning. Living, for me, is choosing yourself every day, even when the world does not understand.

Suffering and Creative Rebirth

The loss of my parents was like an internal collapse: sudden, devastating, irreversible. From one day to the next, silence replaced their voices, and the house, full until the day before, became empty. For months, I walked through grief as if in a fog.

Then, without realizing it, I began to write. The words came out with difficulty, but they were the only ones that did not hurt. I also painted, without technique, but with urgency. Art was my medicine: it did not heal the wound, but it gave it form. Over time, what I had created began to speak to others as well. My works left my home, reached galleries, and unknown hearts. And I, during all this, began to feel alive again.

Every New Challenge Is a New Version of Me

I had a secure job, a desk, regular clients, and a predictable routine. But I felt like I was slowly fading, like a candle left burning too long. So, I decided that many would consider crazy: I left everything to open my own studio.

The first period was incredibly difficult. I was simultaneously a lawyer, secretary, accountant, and doorman. But day after day, I began to feel part of something of my own. Every signed contract, every satisfied client, every sleepless night became pieces of a new identity.

Over time, the studio grew. But more than anything, I grew. I discovered that the challenges are not the ones that change you... they are the ones that reveal you.

Writing as a Life Choice

Writing had always been my dream, but I had put it off for years. Too much to do, too many responsibilities. Then, as often happens, life made its choice for me: the company closed, and I found myself in a void. Or perhaps... in a hole.

I got up early and wrote. Every day. I authored my story, the stories of others, the ones I had never had the courage to tell. The first drafts were naive. The first rejections were stinging. But I did not stop.

When my first book was published, it was not the applause that struck me, but the voice inside me whispered, "You did it." From that day on, writing was no longer a dream: it became my home.

Finding Mental Balance

Professional success comes at a price. Mine was exhaustion. I rushed from one meeting to the next, from one airport to another time zone, but inside... I was falling.

One day I decided to stop. I said "enough" to run and "yes" to treatment. I started meditating, breathing seriously, talking to a psychologist,

looking myself in the eyes.

It was not magic, it was discipline. But little by little, the stress subsided. The nights became peaceful again, my thoughts clearer. I returned to work, yes—but with different rhythms, different boundaries. And life now has a more human feel.

Psychic Adjustment

Outside, I had everything: home, work, family. But inside, restlessness stirred so I could not understand. Until the panic attacks arrived: without warning, without mercy. It was then that I asked for help. Therapy opened spaces I had kept closed for a lifetime. I dug into my history, my fears, the scripts I had been playing without realizing it.

It was tiring, sometimes painful. But also liberating. Today I know how to listen to myself, I know how to recognize the signs. I am not perfect; I never will be—but I feel whole. And that is no small thing.

Expectation and Waiting

The desire to become a father accompanied me for years like a silent prayer. Every failed attempt, every uncertain answer, carved a void within us that was difficult to describe. The wait turned into absence, and hope oscillated between obstinacy and surrender.

In that limbo, I learned that not everything is achieved through willpower. I found comfort in talking with those who had experienced the same pain. And in the meantime, I discovered new opportunities: volunteering, art, the beauty of giving without expecting anything in return.

Then, one day, a call came. A voice on the other end said, "There's a baby for you." My hands were shaking. In that moment, everything we had endured became meaningless. The wait had transformed us. And it had been worth every second.

A New Success

After years of research, analysis, and presentations, I suddenly found myself facing failure. The project I had believed in had collapsed, and with-it part of my certainties. I wondered if I had taken the wrong path if it was all over.

But instead of stopping, I changed my perspective. I began to engage with other fields of knowledge, to open myself to engaging with diverse minds. From that intersection, something new was born: a project that united biology, technology, and intuition.

It was a long journey, full of risks. But when the first results arrived, I understood that what I had built was bigger than me. True success is not the prize: it is the courage to rise again with innovative ideas.

A New Life

For years I lived in the city, chaotic and chaotic, racking up successes like medals. But deep down, I felt like my existence no longer belonged to me. The day I decided to leave everything behind and move to a village far from the honking horns, I felt something born.

No ambitious plans, just a desire to be present. I planted seeds, hosted strangers in my bed & breakfast, breathed real air. The days passed more slowly, but more fulfilling. I learned to be self-sufficient, and to feel useful without having to shine. Today I know that my true career was becoming myself.

Sudden Rebirth

When my company closed, it felt like everything was falling apart. I had always lived within a confined space of routine: same city, same office, same certainties. Suddenly, emptiness.

But within that void, I found a way out. I rediscovered an interest in design, and I re-educated myself. I opened a small business and began working with materials, spaces, and people.

I never imagined that a layoff could become the beginning of my truest self. Sometimes, life pushes you out only to let you back in through another door, a more righteous one.

Waiting for the End

As you get older, you learn to make peace with the words left unsaid, with days gone by, with people who have come and gone. You never stop living, even when you know the time ahead of you is less than the time behind you.

Today, this is how I live: I tend to my garden, I read, I listen to my grandchildren. I share what I know, without pretension. I wrote my memoirs not to be remembered, but to leave a mark. Death is not an event, but an idea. And until the idea becomes present, I choose to be grateful every day. Because I have learned that fulfillment lies not in what remains… but in how we inhabit it.

Death

I experienced death up close the day my life partner left home… and never returned. A sudden accident, a phone call that shattered reality. For months, all I could hear was a deafening silence.

But then I slowly began to mend. I found a group where words were not judged but welcomed. Talking about my pain gave me a voice again. I decided not to let that void be just empty. I devoted myself to volunteering, to the animals he loved so much, to the ideals that had united us.

Thus, every gesture became a caress carried beyond life. I have not overcome death. But I have learned to walk alongside it.

The Transfer

I had always lived in the same place, among familiar streets and familiar faces. My routine was my security. But a job offer presented me with a choice: stay where I felt safe… or take a risk.

I chose to leave. The new city was chaos, surprises, and disorientation. But also, stimulation, energy, and life. I discovered assorted flavors, accents, and thoughts. I made new friends, changed habits, and explored myself.

Today that city has become home. Not because I was born there, but because it gave me a new lease on life. I have understood that sometimes you need to move away to find yourself within.

Professional Reinvention

After twenty years in the same profession, I had become efficient, stable... and dull. My mind wandered into territories, my desk no longer contemplated. So, one day, I decided to go back to studying: psychology.

In class, I felt out of place. But inside, something sparked. Every exam, every reading, every discussion opened a crack. With patience, I learned, I faced my limitations, and I became a therapist.

Today I listen to other people's stories, but in each one I also find pieces of my own. Reinventing yourself is not about rejecting what you have been. It is about choosing to evolve, even when everyone thinks it is too late.

The Personal Discovery

For years, I lived the life others had mapped out for me. Prestigious studies, secure jobs, goals that seemed like successes... but they were not mine. I was competent, but empty. And then came a solo journey, to a distant country, where no one knew me.

There I met people who lived with little but with meaning. There I discovered that I had desires of my own. When I returned home, I began to search for myself: yoga, art, music, silence. Everything brought me back to myself.

Eventually, I quit my old job and built a new one, more humble but more authentic. Today I feel whole. Not perfect. Only mine.

Life Change

I was a successful businessman: international flights, budgets, meetings, expensive watches. But inside I felt a subtle uneasiness, as if I were running toward something I did not really want. Everything changed during a business trip to Africa.

I visited a poor village, and there I saw eyes full of dignity and empty hands that gave everything. I returned home, but that vision followed me everywhere. So, I did what no one expected: I sold my company and chose to give it back.

I opened schools, small hospitals, and projects to help those who have nothing but still dreams. Today my life is simple. But every smile I see, every child who studies, or every mother who receives free care... reminds me that I am truly rich now.

Friendship

For many years, I was a loner. I took refuge in books, at work, in my quiet passions. I was good at building walls, but less so at building relationships. Then, by chance, I signed up for a photography course.

There I met a person who disarmed me: cheerful, spontaneous, enthusiastic about beauty. She never tried to change me. But with small gestures, she taught me to look beyond the camera viewfinder... and into myself.

That friendship reawakened a part of me I had forgotten. I realized that authentic connections do not steal your time: they help fill it with meaning.

The World as a Mirror

One day I decided to put everything on hold and leave. A backpack, a one-way ticket, and no clear plan. I wanted to lose myself in the world and find myself again.

I slept in hostels, spoke broken languages, cooked with strangers, and treated wounds in small clinics. Every place gave me something back: a story, a smile, a lesson.

I left my country full of duties. I returned full of prospects. Today I know we do not travel just to see. We travel to understand what we did not dare look at home.

Rediscovering Myself in a Kitchen

I have been an accountant for years. Everything was neat, precise, and secure. But something was bubbling inside me— and it was not just the accounts. It was the desire to cook.

One day, tired of the same old routine, I signed up for a class. Every dish I prepared was a story, a part of me taking shape through spices, flavors, and memories.

Over time, I opened a small restaurant. It was difficult, yes. But every night, seeing people thrilled by a dish, I did the right thing. I cooked my second life, and it tastes like freedom.

Getting Back on the Road for My Son

I worked as a cashier. Long shifts, low pay, but full dignity. One day, watching my son sleeping, I realized I could give him something more: an example.

So, I started studying again. In the evenings, after work, I sat down with my books, tired but determined. I passed exams with a full head and a burning heart.

I graduated. I found a better job. But I showed my son that there is no age to start over. Education gave me new wings. Now I know that the future is written even at night when everything is silent and you choose to believe in it anyway.

A New Body, A New Life

For too long, I ignored my body. I lived a life sitting down, eating in a rush, and working nonstop. Then one day, during a visit, the doctor looked at me seriously: "Either you change, or you'll get really sick." At that moment, I realized that life would not be endless if I did not take proper care of it.

I started walking, then sweating. I changed my grocery list; I stopped ignoring what hurt. The first month was tough, the second too... but by the third, something changed. My body began to thank me. I discovered healthy cooking as an act of love and exercise as a joyful habit.

Today I feel more alive, and not because I have lost weight— but because I have gained presence. This health is not just physical: it is an internal revolution.

The Fire That Never Goes Out

My life started out uphill. But those born learning to sweep the garden at five, with their grandfather's voice commanding, "Do it right or you don't do it," learn early that the world does not wait for you.

From my father, I inherited rigor. From my mother, irony. From poverty and dignity. From sport, moderation. From the Institution, discipline. From illness, silence. I learned that my word is my most precious coin. And those who do not keep their word, lose themselves. I have never had the truth in my pocket, but I have always tried to live it on my feet. Today, when dawn wakes me and a sparrow land on the windowsill, I look into his eyes and smile. We are two free thinkers—he and I—and no one will take that flight from us.

Everything We Carry with Us

Weight is not just a measurement. It is a state of mind. It is what we carry inside, amidst the unspoken words, the guilt, the secrets, the expectations. It is the phrase "I'm lifting a weight off my shoulders" that we have all said at least once. It is politics, health, pain, love. It is the people who look at you and say, "You've changed," without realizing how much that change has weighed on you.

In my life, I have felt many responsibilities. Some imposed, others chosen. But every time I mentioned them—aloud—I discovered they weighed less. Words, when spoken well, are the first step to lightening one's load.

The Faces That Return at Christmas

There are memories that are not nostalgia, they are rooms I return to every now and then. The set tables, the relatives arrive with their human comedy, each with their own role. Michele of the insurance policies. The uncle with the stamp. The lawyer who traded eggs for fees. Vincenzo who shared bread and smiles. Francesco who sought women and did not understand the job. I loved them all, in their imperfection. I observed them, recorded them, cherished them. Because each of them taught me something. And then there was me, among them, walking barefoot on the stones, stubborn and idealistic. I did not win everything, but I did not lose either: I chose to believe in something. And that, for me, is what being a man is all about.

A Love Story

I was fifteen. Every summer my father takes us to Montepulciano, staying at his cousin Marco's farmhouse among the vineyards. It was not free hospitality—it was an agreement between adults that seemed invisible to us kids. But that land... it tasted like freedom.

Marco was married to an Argentine woman, and they had a daughter named Elga. She was sixteen, tall, blonde, with light eyes and a way of

walking that seemed designed. I was already tall, strong, awkward in my feelings but ready to do anything for her. And she knew it, she saw it. She played with me sweetly.

At the village dance, I snatched my first—and last—kiss from her lips. It was long, intense, almost unreal. My heart was pounding so hard I thought I would explode. The next day, she introduced me to two friends and passed me off as nineteen. But from that moment on... she became distant.

When we left to return to Calabria, I knew I was in love. And that feeling has never left me. Ever. Even though our paths never crossed again from that day on. Until... Fifty years later, in another land—but still mine. I purchased hectares of vineyards in Sambatello, a project shared with my children and grandchildren. That day, as I was returning from my ride, I was told a lady was asking for me. Tall. Blonde. Blue eyes.

Elga.

We looked at each other. Words were not necessary. We caressed each other's cheeks, trembling. Fifty years had not erased anything. We started talking again as if time had stood still. We loved each other again, without questioning the past. As if the only thing that mattered was us.

And I, who had built an entire life, found myself wanting only one thing: never to lose her again. At sixty- five, I lost my mind like a boy. I abandoned rationality and listened to my heart.

And do you know why? Because I love her. And no one will ever be able to say otherwise.

The Passage That Makes Us Men

Transformation is everywhere. You do not need a factory: all you need is man and time. We change as children, as lovers, as old men. We change in our minds, our bodies, our affections, and no one—not even the most rational—is immune.

As I grew older, I understood that everything is molded: emotions, knowledge, character, relationships. Family shapes you, life sculpts you, illness corrects you. Pain teaches patience. Love—when it is genuine—tears you down and rebuilds you.

I too have gone through seasons: professional, emotional, moral. My grandchildren have changed me more than my children. Age has slowed my legs but brightened my gaze. I have known the beauty of those who redefine themselves every day. I have seen actors, animals, workers, saints... all shed their skin. But there is a truth I hold dear: you can change everything, but you cannot become beautiful if you are not authentic.

And I want to stay ugly, but authentic.

Telling Your Story to Stay

Writing is a simple act, but not trivial. Two years have passed since I began this new adventure: no money, lots of smiles, a few jibes. But I have learned one thing: the written word has the power that no shout can surpass.

A story is born from a true idea, an invented detail, a stolen glance. It is shaped, cut, and reinterpreted. But: it is offered. And it is offered even to those who do not deserve it. Sometimes we misdirect, but never our intentions.

There are stories I have had to erase. Others I have given different names. But they all come from the same place: the need to observe, understand, and give back. Literature—unlike life—is universal. And even if someone disappoints you, envies you, or looks askance at you, you keep writing. Because there is no true story than one born from honest urgency.

That Time That Comes to You

I have missed so many opportunities in life... and some of them have missed me. I have learned that not all of them are worth taking, but some are—and they change your path.

We often hear about bargains in the markets: houses, cars, one-of-a-kind offers. But the real ones are intimate: a look, a question, a woman who chooses you.

One day my wife met a childless woman who jokingly said she would pay me to spend five hours with her. I would have accepted: out of a sense of service, kindness... and to evaluate the union wages.

Nothing came of it, but sometimes I think about it: I stole a heart. Or just a story.

The best opportunity, however, I seized was when I began writing. Entering silently into other people's stories, leaving words where before there was only thought. And today, when someone says, "Let me see what is on Amazon written by FERDINANDO FREGA, which, let me be clear, is just the old part of me —I smile. Because that too was an opportunity: giving voice to who I was, to get where I am.

They Don't Always Understand, But Some Will Understand

I had only asked for an editing. Not an acquittal. Nor a summary execution. And instead, the third person I spoke to, amidst figures, judgments, and coldness, told me they did not understand what I had written. No novels. Just short stories.

Smiles. Because those "short stories" have been read by hundreds of people around the world, and many have written to me to say they found themselves in them, that they cried, laughed, reflected.

Her brain had not fully matured yet, that is what medicine says, not me. She was just off- kilter. Or stories should be read with the heart, not

with a ruler.

In the end, I thanked them. Because even a misguided criticism, if taken in the right spirit, helps us measure the value of our words. And how much they are worth... even when they are not understood.

Peace After the Wind

There are moments when life throws sad news at you, one after another. You feel deflated, dull, empty. Yet, from those depths, something moves.

After nine months of silence, frozen accounts, anguish, and restrained dignity, one day a payment arrived. It was not wealth; it was dignity coming back through the window. I stood up straighter. I still had little in my pocket, but everything in my heart.

I did not say anything to anyone. Out of superstition, but also because I know that true happiness is nourished by silence. I looked at my daughter and thought I did it. No matter how much they envy or doubt me: I know.

And at that moment, yes, I was happy. And believe me: being happy—after all—is a luxury few can afford.

Life in Reverse, Looking Forward

It is the dead of night. I am writing with Chopin blasting in my ears, holding my breath so as not to wake my wife. And I think about waiting. First, wait for birth: the mother who cannot wait to meet you. Then hunger, school, love that arrives late in the wrong time zone. We are always waiting for something: a job, a yes, a child, a project. And when it arrives, we do not even notice.

I have been waiting for my whole life. I have been waiting to say, "I did it." I am waiting for someone to notice the silent sacrifice. I am waiting for the moment when ten future generations will be able to say, "It all started with Grandpa, in 2024."

And they will laugh, not knowing that he, that grandfather, while he was waiting... only hoped not to be forgotten.

The Day Everything Changes (But Only for You)

It was my birthday. February 22, 1993. I wanted to make an impression, of course, but also to tell the truth: "I'm getting married to your daughter in two months." I said it to her mother. Casually. Like announcing a promotion, or an unpaid fine.

My father arrived later. A train driver for forty years, he knew how to spot derailments. But he did not deny me. He took me aside and, without knowing me, handed me three checks: all his savings for that day. Fifty million. I, a stranger. He, more than a father.

The truth? I caused him grief. And I still regret it today.

That day was the beginning. — Of responsibilities. — Of sacrifices. — Of a new loyalty: to myself, to her, to the life I wanted.

I was at the altar. When I saw her enter, I cried. Not out of fragility. Out of gratitude. I understood that that moment had come. And there was no turning back.

Envy

The term "envy" refers to a secondary emotion: an internal turmoil that arises when another possesses something we desire—a possession, a quality, a success. It is not just a fleeting feeling, but a complex, often uncontrolled reaction that arises from a comparison where we feel defeated, inferior, and powerless.

Envy is a feeling as poisonous as it is unmentionable. It manifests itself in cutting silences, forced smiles, and judgmental compliments. It is the wound of the ego, the cruel response of those who feel they have lost. And often, those who suffer it do not know or pretend not to. The

envious person tells themselves they are suffering, never attacking.

How do you fight it?

By returning to yourself. By stopping comparing yourself. By appreciating who you are. By broadening your mind. By living a life that does not aspire to be a copy of anyone else. Envy dissolves only in gratitude.

And how do you recognize it?

The shifty gaze. The lack of true joy in the successes of others. The need to point out mistakes. The excessive and soulless praise. The lack of genuine gratitude.

Keeping those governed by envy at bay is not meanness: it is protection. Because the soul, to grow, needs to surround itself with truth, not hatred disguised as affection.

Dialogue Is Staying When You Could Leave

Dialogue is much more than an exchange of words: it is an exercise in trust, empathy, attention, and appreciation. It is the foundation on which relationships with others are built, but even more so, with us.

I have learned that the quality of my internal dialogue determines the quality of my life. When the voice within me is destructive, judgmental, and rigid, everything shrinks. When it is welcoming, open, and human, it creates space for transformation.

Over time, I have come to understand that authentic conversation is an art form: it requires listening, simplicity, and an open mind. It requires not assuming but asking. Not accusing but understanding. Not dominating but co-creating. This is why dialogue remains the most powerful tool we have for healing and evolution.

The First Time I Felt Seen

Your first success is always something that changes you, but you do not utterly understand it until you experience it. It does not matter how big or small it is; what matters is how you approach it, with what spirit and determination you embrace it.

I was only twenty when my first real job opportunity came along as a freelance consultant. The idea of doing something on my own, of being independent, fascinated me, but at the same time I was afraid of failure. I had no experience, yet I felt that if I gave it my all, something positive would happen.

I will never forget the first contract I signed. It was not a monumental deal, but it was a sign I had made the right choice. I worked from home, in a room that was more of a dream than an office, with a desk in the corner and a computer that looked like an old traveling companion.

What drove me was determination. My ambition was not to impress, but to leave a mark. And that first assignment, modest but authentic, gave me the strength to believe I had something good to offer. Your first success is not measured in numbers, but in the fact that someone, that day, chose to place their trust in you. And you did not betray them.

Thinking and Reflecting

There were days when I wrote about everything. Scattered thoughts, interrupted stories, reflections that sometimes seemed empty. I collected thousands. Yet, few truly resembled me. I reread, deleted. It seemed as if my hand was running, but my heart remained still.

I did not want to say, "look at me," but to feel what I was writing. To ensure that every word left its mark, however tiny. I have published fifty-two books, translated into twenty- two languages. And yet, every time, I ask myself: did they read them? Did anyone smile, be moved, feel touched?

My dream was not to become famous. It was to make at least someone feel that my experience could reflect theirs. I never looked for shortcuts. I wanted to get there through the narrowest door, even if it was the longest.

I am writing for those who want to listen. And, I admit, deep down I have always sought out my "home" readers, those who speak my language, who walk the same paths. Because the truth is simple: a story is truly valuable only to those who lived it. But it becomes precious when it can be reflected in someone else.

The Difficult Choice

Some choices never come at the right time. In 2002, I found myself faced with one of those. A secure position at a large company, a good salary, clear prospects. But inside, something was boiling. A voice told me that this was not my path.

The fear was real. Rationality pushed me to stay. But my spirit demanded something else. When I turned down that contract, I remembered my hand shaking. But it was precisely that trembling that told me I was doing the right thing. Because, if a choice does not challenge you, it is not a true turning point.

I was thirty-eight, no longer a boy. I knew that making a mistake could cost me dearly. But standing still would have cost me even more: my growth, my authenticity. That choice changed my destiny not because it was easy, but because it was true. And sometimes that is where you find yourself: at the exact moment you choose your freedom, even if it is scary.

Encounter with the Future

In 2015, a meeting changed everything. He was an old friend, not a familiar face. His serenity was disarming. He told me about his trip to South America, about his choice to leave everything behind to help those in need. In his eyes, there was no pretension. Only truth.

He told me, “The future is not what we build for ourselves, but what we leave for others.” A simple, yet profoundly transformative, sentence.

I had spent years chasing goals, without ever asking myself if I was truly building something that mattered. That evening, a new horizon opened to me: the value of relationships, the sense of shared time, the invisible legacy we leave every time we help someone live better.

From that moment on, my future was no longer just a race, but a journey. A space where I could be useful, authentic, and present. Because true greatness lies not in what you achieve, but in what you can give.

A Job (Like a Dress to Wear)

I have seen work transform into a perfect, smooth, and merciless mechanism. Resumes crafted like shop windows. Interviews that feel like movie auditions. But behind those measured smiles and those questions about resilience, I have always wondered: do they really see us? When I was looking for a job, I was more focused on what not to say than on what to express. The questions that mattered—"How much will I be paid?" "How much time will I have for myself?"—were always the most uncomfortable, the ones no one wanted to hear. Yet, they are precisely the ones that reveal our value.

I learned that a job is not just a contract. It is a dress. It must be comfortable, represent you, let you breathe. I turned down "safe" offers because they did not suit me. I accepted more fragile but more challenges. I gave it my all, even when the reward was only a sincere handshake.

Today, I know that an excellent job is not just what provides a living. It is what makes your life meaningful. And every time I sit down at my desk, I ask only one thing: not to forget who I am, even amidst a thousand emails.

The Human Being

We live in a society that forces us to focus on what we want to achieve and how to achieve it, too often forgetting who we are. And so, as we chase goals, we end up losing ourselves. Stress overwhelms us. We justify ourselves with tired phrases: "Sorry, I was stressed," "I could not find a minute," "I forgot," "I have other priorities." Kind lies, told to defend ourselves. But they remain lies, nonetheless.

There are those who shield themselves behind phone calls they never received, those who vanish into the fog of an imaginary meeting. And then there is indifference: elegant, impenetrable. The indifference of those who feel superior and no longer see anyone. If the world were governed solely by these dynamics, we would fear people more than wars.

Yet, being human is much more. It is principle, it is value, it is justice. The best people are not the perfect ones, but those who are there when we need them. Those who do not turn away. Those who offer their heart, without asking for anything in return.

We have the right to think, to heal, to exist. And we also have a duty to remember where we come from. Our history, our civilization, our humanity. We are observed, yes, sometimes even envied. But what makes us genuinely great is the feeling that flows through us: that warmth that makes us human before being citizens.

And then there are them, the kind-hearted and the good- hearted. The difference lies not in the gesture, but in the intention. In that silence that does not seek recognition. Because true charity is a dialogue between spirit and earth. In my life, I have always chosen positive thinking. Because only by building better souls can we hope for a more humane world. And the work, our work... should begin right there.

The Right Times

Men and women should not be compared; they should be understood in their own rhythm. Women experience time with an almost sacred discipline. Precise, organized, tolerant. They tend to their family as one tends to be a garden: with care, discretion, and a silent sense of sacrifice. They do not spend money to show off, but to build. They do not seek useless novelties, but stability. They know how to manage nine months of life within themselves, with a strength that no surgical intervention can ever match.

Humans, on the other hand, often experience time like children with Nutella sandwiches. Their beards grow freely, showering is an option, punctuality is optional. But it is not just superficiality: it is another way of inhabiting the present. More chaotic, certainly. More disorderly. But still human.

Yet, when a man and a woman decide to walk together, time can become an ally. Remaining faithful to someone is not a chain: it is a gift. It is recognizing in the other a witness to your own journey. It is growing together, with the same hours, the same joys, the same failures.

Time, when shared, changes everything. It becomes energy, healing, direction. Because only by living together does the weight of things truly lighten. And the courage to be there, even in delays, even in differences, is the only time worth waiting for.

I wish I were.

Sometimes, between a chat and a coffee, that question comes up: "Who would you like to be?" And then the mind races: to someone who made history, to someone who earned millions, to someone who left their mark on time. No one ever thinks about the baker down the street. To someone who gets up at four in the morning to get you ready for the day. Yet behind every "modest" profession lies a tale of dignity. We live in a time when admiring those who possess has replaced admiring those who build. But true value is not measured in prestige. It is measured in consistency.

I too, I admit, have fantasized: being a curious bee, a silent eagle, an earthly angel. But in the end, I remain who I am. No mask. No disguise. No life to steal or imitate. Only my own, with those who want to share it. Because freedom, after all, is remaining yourself within a prison called life.

Detachment

There are departures that are not meant to distance oneself, but to teach. Mine was one of those. I wanted you to face your responsibilities, to learn what it means to choose and what it means to follow through.

It would have been easy to solve everything for you—the way parents do in families where money has no value, where peace is bought at the price of growth. But that was not what you needed.

Facing problems is like sculpting your inner stature. Every obstacle overcome is a lesson learned, a stone added to your structure. It is not the loopholes that matter. It is the steps you take alone that count.

One day you will understand who really matters in your life. And maybe it will be too late, or maybe not. For now, I leave you with these words. They are not punishment. They are a boundary. Because the truth is, not everything is owed to us. Sometimes you only get what you are willing to earn.

Who Really Remains

At first, I thought friendship was right. If you give, you receive. If you listen, you are listened to. But life, as always, took it upon itself to correct me. It taught me that true friendship does not make noise, does not knock, does not announce its arrival. Or its departure.

One day, for fun, I installed software on my computer. It analyzed my social media contacts and flagged the "useless" ones. It closed two of my accounts. Dozens of names silently disappeared. And yet, I have never felt so lighthearted. It was like dusting off a room I thought was still inhabited.

Those who stayed did not ask for anything. They did not text to ask "why?" They just stayed. True friendship is like this: it looks at you when you are down, it hugs you without asking questions, it reaches out to you even when you are not needed.

I do not distinguish between male and female friendships. I only distinguish between those who are there... and those who are no longer there. The former remains inside. The latter... were just noise.

Today I have few friends. But true ones. And there is no need to talk too much with them. Just be there. And stay.

The Stories That Keep You Alive

Everything in my life began with a story. As a child, I sought them out to fall asleep; as an adult, I sought them out to wake me up. Stories have always saved me: from fear, from apathy, from the illusion that everything had already been said. And today, more than ever, they are a kind duty to those who read... and to me.

I listened to stories in bars, in the silences of the elderly, in poorly written but heartfelt books. I read newspapers that elegantly distorted reality. I spoke to people who simply needed to be told to feel real. And then I began to write. Not to create, but to reveal. To give form to what exists but does not yet have a voice.

Even the Bible—unbelievably—is a story. The longest-lived. Because man, any man, needs to tell stories to understand who he is. And if a story is told, no one is forgotten.

Writing, for me, is not a pastime. It is a way to avoid evaporation. To remain attached to reality with a thin but strong thread. Because every time I return to a page, the truth will not let me go. And so, will I.

Handover

Thursday, August 10, 2023, marked a concluding chapter. After months of uncertainty and relaunches, Universo al Femminile has changed hands. At the NH Collection Milano Presidente, amidst elegance and tension, the Board of Directors unanimously resolved to sell the entire project.

A Chinese consortium has outbid fierce Spanish competition three times in three days. The price? Interesting. The future? An unknown. We signed, entrusted the lawyers with the documents and bank transfers, and then said goodbye. The founders are leaving, but the employees remain. The leadership has changed, but not the memory.

To those who believed in working, I hoped: thank you. Two intense years. Over. But not erased. History moves elsewhere. We are already elsewhere.

The Departure

A departure is not just a moving train. It is an intimate farewell to what made us feel safe. It is a suitcase filled with objects, but also with expectations, fears, and desires.

There's always that suspension: before takeoff before separation. An emptiness where the heart expands and the mind begins to travel before the body. We leave behind habits, love, and reassurances. But we find new challenges.

Every journey strips us and dresses us anew. People, glances, smells, unfamiliar words become windows onto the world and onto us. We change shape, without realizing it. And when we return, we do not really return we are someone different in a place that has remained the same. Leaving, then, is just another way to find yourself. A slower and more beautiful form of birth. One that never ends.

Affectionateness

Affection is a language without words. It is a gentle gesture, a comforting smile, a presence that does not invade but accompanies. It is what transforms a relationship into a bond, a meeting in refuge.

Being affectionate is not just touching but touching deeply. It is understanding, even without words. Giving without asking. It is a way of life. And a way of caring. For others, and for oneself. Because true affection begins from within: from the ability to treat ourselves with kindness, when everything would have us be rigid, strong, invulnerable.

In a frenetic world, affection is our slow pace. It is a resistance to superficiality. It is an invisible seed that sprouts in those who receive it. And it is what saves us: being touched without being invaded, being seen without being judged.

The Right Price of Respect

I still remember my first consulting assignment as if it were yesterday. I had prepared meticulously, listening, observing, studying. I handed in the work with the pride of someone who had put everything into it and received a sentence that left me reeling: "I expect a discount; after all, you're not famous yet." I remained silent, but inside I was seething. It was not about fame, but about value. Mine. The work was not a favor, nor an attempt. It was a commitment, a promise kept. And I was afraid to say that word, "compensation," as if it would detract from the dignity of the gesture. Then I understood: money is not a prize, it is recognition. It is not a bonus on trust, but a measure of care.

Over the years, I have seen many colleagues sell themselves short to enter the market, lowering their heads, waiting for someone to understand their value. But not me. I have learned to ask for what is right, no more, no less. And if someone cannot afford it, I respect that. But I do not lower myself to be chosen. I prefer to stay out of a negotiation that requires me to give up my identity.

The price is not the number on the invoice. It is the respect you give yourself. It is the voice with which, one day, you will be able to say: I did not trade myself for applause or a bank transfer. And there is no more honest account than this.

The Essential Discount

I still remember when the market began to change. Those spartan stores arrived, without elegant shelves, without uniformed clerks, without background music. Just products and prices. They called them "hard discounts." At first, it seemed like an anomaly, then it became a model. And I, curious by nature, began to observe carefully.

Behind those low prices was a precise philosophy: remove everything except the essentials. No advertising, no redundant packaging, no glossy illusions. Sometimes it was the same product, but with a more sober label. Other times, an identical copy with altered names: GILTEX instead of Gillette, PUTELLA that made you smile, but cost less. Was it deception? Perhaps. Or just a new way of operating in the market, cruder, but also more honest in its brutality.

I have seen companies bend over backwards to avoid being left out. I have seen consumers learn to read beyond the brand. I have learned, too. That value does not always shine through, that the true content often hides behind imperfect packaging.

And over time I realized that this was not just true for products. It was true for us too. For people. The most authentic, often, are those who do not shout. They do not promote themselves. They do not have slogans. They remain. Like iron shelves, but full of substance.

And that is why, today, I choose life the same way I look at a shelf: I do not look at the full price. I look at the story inside.

A Simple Rule for Living with Honor

There was a time when I searched for the beginning of everything. A rule, a moral foundation that held the world and my mind together. I studied philosophy, read essays on symbolism, and even delved into theology. But every formula I found left me with a gaping hole. Every explanation crumbled in the face of real pain. Then, one day, sitting on a random bench, an elderly man told me something I have never forgotten: "Mind your own business and you'll live to be a hundred." Simple. Rough. But perfect. It was not selfishness, it was moderation. The art of staying in your place without losing sight of others.

That phrase became my eleventh commandment. I added my own: to be a free man, but with good morals. It means not taking everything but choosing. Not flaunting truths but living them. Not invading but being there with grace.

I do not know if life has a unified meaning. But I know that when I sleep peacefully, it is because I have respected those principles small, but mine. And in the chaos of the world, sometimes a rustic compass works better than a satellite one.

An intuition

The power of practical thinking returns here, like a river finding its mouth. You needed visibility. You needed dignity. And you did not want to pay the price of a system corrupted by favors and shortcuts.

The solution? Not in noise, but in relevance: LinkedIn. Not just another social network, but a meeting place for reputations. After many wrong paths, you have chosen your path. You have stopped bothering those who would not listen. You have stopped sowing seeds in barren soil. You have invested in a space where those who read do so because they want to.

Feelings

Over time, we learn to read hearts—our own and those of others—with more mature eyes. It is the only exercise that truly forces us to confront the invisible: feelings. Not our skin, not our age, but what beats within us.

In this, women have a natural superiority. Life and medicine tell us so, but those who have loved them already know they have a sharp and mysterious management of emotions, capable of holding together family, pain, decisions, and courage.

Men, on the other hand, often disguise themselves as silent witnesses to their own emotional failure. As Groucho Marx said, "a woman without success." A joke, sure. But also, a warning.

I pay homage to women. Because without asking, they know how to give. And because during my Christmases, in my true days, there was always a woman's gaze that held the world together.

When Saying No Is the Truest Choice

There are times when saying "no" means going against everyone. And I know this well because it happened to me. I remember that meeting well: a full table, tense smiles, colleagues lined up. They were waiting for me with a signature. That was all it took. A signature for an agreement that was advantageous, but poisonous in every other respect. I listened. I looked at their faces. And I understood that accepting would mean selling the respect I had built up over years of work. I heard that voice inside me—mine, not anyone else's—whisper: If you sign, you are lost.

I stood up, took my time. And then I said, "No, thank you." A glacial silence greeted me. Some thought I was crazy. Some knew I was just being myself.

Unpopular decisions are not theatrical gestures. They are intimate, silent, and often painful choices. But they liberate. They bring you back to your voice. They cost you approval, but they restore peace.

I do not know if I will do it all the same again. But I do know that since then, every morning, the mirror has never avoided my gaze. And that, to me, is worth more than a thousand well-paid signatures.

Thinking to Find Myself

There are days when everything seems to rush. And others when I stop. Not because I want to, but because something inside me is holding me back. In those moments, I do not just think I reflect. Which is different. Reflecting is looking at yourself without filters, like in front of a mirror that does not lie.

I have been writing for years. Notes, sentences, scattered thoughts. Some I have lost, others I keep like internal photographs. I do not know if it is art or disorder, but every line has lightened my spirits. It has allowed me to see myself from the outside—or from the inside when I was too far from myself.

People are often afraid of silence. I am not. In silence, I have found some of the best answers. Those that do not shine but illuminate. Those that do not make noise, but light you up inside.

Writing, for me, is the most honest way I know to think aloud, even when no one is listening. And one day, between these lines, someone will stop and say, "I feel this way, too." And then I will know that every thought I let go has found a home.

The Eyes That Stay Inside

I traveled to Ghana with light baggage and a weighty question: I wanted to understand. Not to take pictures, not to compile statistics, not to add sentences to a PowerPoint presentation. I wanted to truly know what hunger is. And there, between Accra and Kumasi, I understood it. Not with my head. With my skin.

It was not just a hunger for bread. It was a hunger for opportunity. For the future. For respect. In the eyes of a child, sitting in the dust with his shirt torn, I saw something that left me speechless: a silent question

demanding dignity.

They had tried to prepare me with graphs, briefings, and numbers. But I asked for a detour, to go where buses do not take you, where life is delicate that snaps often and silently. I walked among dry wells and empty hospitals. I saw mothers giving birth in the middle of nowhere, children smiling with empty bellies and hands still ready to reach out for a game.

They asked me for trust and money. But I do not give away hope. I check, I touch with my own hands, I look into their eyes. I found those who worked in silence and I did my part: direct, simple help, without bibs or ritual photographs. Just a gesture that could help.

I do not know if it was enough. But I know that since that day I can no longer ignore it. I can no longer say "I didn't know." And that is what makes us human: not the ability to talk about pain. But the responsibility is to never forget it.

Immigration (Inside Me)

I was twenty-four when I decided to leave. My hometown was too small for me: I loved the land, the mountains, the sunsets that warmed my skin, but I felt a pull inside me that I could not ignore. I looked at the horizon and felt a call: it was something that spoke of possibility, of the future, of discovery.

I never said "goodbye," too definitive. I said, "see you later," even though I did not know if I would return. I left home with a suitcase full of hopes, and inside me, a thousand fears I tried to keep at bay. The border was not just geographical: it was emotional. Every step was a fracture and a rebirth.

The world I found on the other side was not made of bright lights, but of cooking smells, long shifts, tired faces. I worked where I was needed, I accepted the silence of others, I learned to make space for myself without making noise. English was a language that left me on the margins, but I learned to use it to express myself.

Over time, that land became mine too. I no longer had a single place to call home, but a memory that spread across multiple languages, multiple geographies. My strength today lies in not having forgotten who I was and in not having given up on who I can be. Every border I crossed taught me to carry everything with me: roots, scars, and that hunger for the world that, even now, never leaves me.

He Who Knows How to Listen Without Speaking

For me, reading has never been a duty. It was a refuge, a lens, a mirror. When I open a book, I look for a space where I can better listen to myself. I do not care who reads to demonstrate culture: I read to feel less alone.

I learned early on that not everyone is a reader. Some start and stop at the first page, overwhelmed by internal turmoil. Others do it to imitate, or to add a title to the shelf. But reading is something else: it is letting in the words of others shed light on oneself.

There were days when I read only in the bathroom because it was the only place I found peace. Other days I read to seem elsewhere, to avoid myself, to disappear. But the pages always called me back to the truth. Because a book knows where to strike, even when you do not want it to. When I read, the world slows down. The sentences take root in my memory. And every time I close a book, I am a little richer, more fragile, more lucid.

Reading is like walking in the shoes of those who have already traveled parts of the road. Sometimes you find comfort. Other times discomfort. But in any case, if you truly read, something inside your changes.

The First Day of Work

In 1985, it all started with a shortcut: I did not interview, nor did I wait. I got in through a family connection, with the implicit responsibility of having to prove myself better than the others. Two weeks of intense training, company codes, strict rules printed on paper, if you did not follow them, you got no commission.

It was a Friday when I received my first urgent assignment. I set out with enthusiasm and a healthy dose of naiveté. I arrived with documents in hand and hope of doing well. But as soon as I entered the shop and met the owner, the scene changed: no handshake, just accusations. He told me that representing a large group did not give me the right to be disrespectful. And that one day, if I fell from grace, I would starve to death.

I was twenty. First day, first client, first slap. But I remained silent still. Not out of fear, but out of clarity. I could react, but I knew that losing control would mean losing something much bigger. At the end of his outburst, he asked me what I had to say. With icy calm, I replied, “Merry Christmas.” That sentence opened a crack in hostility. He left but then returned. He contacted me three hours later, while I was having coffee. He asked if I could transmit the order. I did. And that was the start of everything.

In the next six months, I doubled my annual revenue. I was promoted. At that moment, I understood that decisive moments are not announced, but experienced. And that strength is not just knowing how to speak: it is knowing how to stand tall without losing who you are.

Being Special

There is no official document to prove it. There is no stamp. It does not come by inheritance, nor on a resume. You feel "special" when others give it back to you. When they look at you, they stop, and say, "You have something."

At first, I did not believe it. I wondered if I had gotten everything wrong: my tone, my approach, my thoughts. But then, in distant places, with people who owed me nothing, I heard unexpected words: "Encantado," "thank you," "keep talking."

I wondered why no one in my family had ever used that word. It was because they took me for granted. Or they just did not have the eyes for it. But a few friends, sincerely, told me: you are strange, you are different... there is something about you that cannot be explained, but you can feel it.

All I did was bring with me were principles: listening, kindness, truth. I shook hands and looked into eyes in dozens of countries. I learned that happiness boils down to two things: a shared meal and a caress that asks for nothing in return.

Today I understand that you do not have to shine to be seen. You must be there when others falter. You have to say the right word, make silent gestures. Not offer miracles, but real solutions. Not tell stories, but live.

So, thank you. To those who said it to me from the heart. For my part, I will not change I will continue to be simple. In my own way. Without applause. But with presence.

Write to Not Disappear

I wrote for years, often without knowing why. To bring order to my thoughts. To avoid disappearing. Words saved my voice, my thoughts, even my memory. When everything around me changed—city, friendships, projects—only writing remained to keep me true to myself.

Writing has never been an aesthetic gesture. It has been an act of survival. An intimate struggle to clarify myself, a stubborn attempt to leave a trace, like someone walking on sand and hoping the waves will be slow in arriving.

Every line I have written has the flavor of a life lived. No invention. No borrowing. Just me, naked, uncertain, determined. Sometimes fragile,

sometimes ferocious. But always present. Writing is like breathing in reverse: you take what is inside you and let it go, hoping someone will read it and say: I felt that way too. It is there, in that silent encounter between writer and reader, that my existence finds meaning.

I do not write for pleasure, even though I love it. I do not write to teach, even though there is something to be learned. I write because without words, my truth would have no home. And home, for me, is every reader who welcomes these pages and recognizes them as their own.

PART III

The Unemployed

It is not a topic I would have chosen first, but it was asked of me. And when something is asked with respect, it deserves a response. The world of the unemployed is an uneven map, full of different paths: there are those who want to work but cannot; those who could work but refuse; those who seek a "tailor-made" job, impossible.

The ideal of a permanent job still exists, passed down like a family heirloom. And on the other side, there are those who, armed with qualifications and courage, throw themselves into the open sea of freelance work—opening a VAT number as if it were an act of love, often alone, facing countless obstacles and few instruction manuals.

And then there are them: the unemployed by choice. Those who say, "It's not for me," "It is not enough," and wait. They wait for the system to reward them anyway. They have received promises disguised as solutions: checks, subsidies, illusions. But no motivation. And the lack of motivation is like rust on the soul: it corrodes meaning, dulls ambition, and takes away dignity.

Work, real work, is for the hungry. And only those who are hungry change the world.

Loving When You No Longer Expect It

After relationships that always ended the same way, I had stopped believing in it. I had decided that it was not meant to be, that I was not cut out for love. Then she arrived: between poems and unexpected encounters, between glances that asked nothing and words that did not judge.

With her, every wound stopped bleeding and began to tell its story. We walked slowly, respecting our own pace, honoring our fragilities.

Today I know that love does not heal everything. But when it comes at the right time, it teaches you to heal yourself more gently.

Dialogue Is Staying When You Could Leave

For years, I thought dialogue meant knowing how to speak well. Presenting solid arguments, having an immediate response, convincing with the right tone. Then I discovered that true dialogue begins when you stop trying to win. I have spoken to people who did not understand me. I have explained, I have shouted, I have remained silent. But the most difficult conversation has always been the one with me. When my inner voice accused me, no response was enough. Only listening—the honest, non-judgmental kind—has made a breakthrough.

Over time, I have learned that true dialogue is one that leaves space. It is the dance of pauses, the quiet exchange, the gaze that does not wander. People often talk to fill the void. But only those who accept silence can truly communicate.

If I could go back, I would talk less and listen more. I would say more often: "You're right, I hadn't thought of that." Because the right words are not there to prevail. They are there to stay. And today I know that dialogue is this: having the courage to be there when it is easier to walk away.

Relationship With Technology — Offline

I deleted Facebook in 2018. Not out of protest, but out of exhaustion. I realized I knew more about digital anniversaries than actual birthdays. My life had become a feed: scroll, react, forget. I would wake up and check notifications before I would even remember who I was. Then one day, during a meeting, I realized I was not listening to anyone. I was just waiting for the right moment to post something. I deactivated everything. Now I use my phone for calls. And when I write, I do it on paper. I am not against technology. I am against the illusion that it is enough for us.

PART IV

A Simple Rule for Living with Honor

As I grew up, I searched for answers in higher places: philosophy, religion, and books that claimed to offer absolute truths. I hoped to find one universal principle capable of holding everything together: love, work, pain, and justice. Yet whenever I seemed close, something slipped away. Every idea, however noble, broke apart when evaluated against real life.

Then one day, in the South, sitting with an old man under the shade of a fig tree, I heard a phrase I have never forgotten: "Mind your own business and you'll live to be a hundred." And suddenly everything became clear. It was the sincerest proverb I had ever heard. It was not about selfishness. It was about moderation. About respect. About not invading other people's space, about not trying to shape lives that do not belong to us. A harsh principle, but true. Much more concrete than many doctrines.

Since then, I have found my universal principle. It is simple: be a free man, but with good morals. Free, yes. But not arrogant. Good, but not naive. Stable within, even if everything around you change.

It may not be a commandment set in stone. But every time I follow it, my conscience breathes easier. And in this frenetic world that changes label every three days, I hold on to the only value that remains: respect for oneself and others. Always.

Politics and Society — The World Outside

When I worked in Portugal, I realized that Italy was not the center of the world. That injustices do not just speak Italian. That bureaucracy, precariousness, and loneliness are universal languages. I stopped thinking in terms of "us" and "them." Now I think in terms of "who listens" and "who shouts." And I, finally, chose to listen. Politics goes beyond parties and votes: it is about how we treat those who are different or vulnerable. To ignore it is to be part of the problem.

Spirituality or Faith — The Silence That Listens

I have never believed in God, but in the silence found in empty churches. One evening in Porto, I entered the Ignea de São Nicolau: I was alone, sitting on a pew, neither praying nor asking for anything. Something, however, was listening to me. Since then, I occasionally enter church, not out of faith but out of a need for a space where all is silent.

I Wasn't Looking for A Happy Ending

I was not looking for a successful conclusion. I was looking for a truth that would not make me ashamed of who I had become.

I did not write to teach. I wrote to remember. Sleeping forget the times, I held it all inside, the words that stuck in my throat, the nights when sleep was just a break from the pain. Writing was my way of staying upright. To not lose myself. To not lie to myself.

I am not a role model. I do not want to be. But I am still here. And in a world where everyone races to be noticed, staying is already resistance.

If you have come this far, you were not have been looking for a formula. You were looking for someone who was not afraid to say, "I made a mistake. I started again. And now I'm walking on my own two feet, even if they're shaking."

I am that someone.

And if you find even just one sentence that sounds like you, then this story is no longer just mine.

I am Still There

I have not become better. I have become more real.

I have lost time, affection, and illusions. I have broken inside more than once, but I have never broken forever.

They judged me, misunderstood me, erased me. And yet, I stayed. Not out of pride. But because my voice is worth as much as my life. I learned to keep quiet when necessary. To say "no" even if it was costly. To face fear without pretending.

This book is my way of leaving a mark. Not to be remembered, but to say—clearly—that you can fall and get back up. That you do not need heroes. All you need is a bastard will not to give in to resignation.

If someone asks me who I am today, I will not name a profession. I will not list a title.

I will just say this: I am still here. And I have no intention of stopping.

Where No One Applauds

I do not seek applause or easy approval. I seek true traces, footprints that remain when the noise subsides. Here, the truth is told, without veils, without masks.

This is where the essence is built, not the spectacle.