

THE LABRADOR FROM CINCINNATI

Everybody Laughed.
The Dog Didn't.



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There has always been a social rule that says the same thing: people laugh at funerals and cry at weddings. For most, it left a smile inside a thought; but those who reflected, those who believed they were the many, insisted it wasn't true.

It was like telling the whole world, five months ago, that with only \$70 a month I would climb the entire web, all the way to the top of the multinationals' own queries — no money, no advertising, no SEO — and most people would have taken the news as a joke, with a smile, catching only the ironic side. No one thought it could be evidence, or that the irony lived only in the action of the one who had pulled it off.

But today was a special day: my father's birthday. Early in the morning, without warning him, I went to visit him in his eternal residence: the cemetery.

The meeting was a mix of tears and smiles, but in the end I had celebrated him my way, inside this story, to surprise him — the thing I did best, and the thing he adored.

When I got home I found my wife crying. I thought she had joined me in the emotion of the day. She hadn't. She was heartbroken over our dog, a ten-year-old American Labrador, an old boy by now, who had refused to eat for three days, and she couldn't find a solution.

Even the visit from the dog doctor — I had never promoted him to veterinarian — turned into the usual nightmare of human medicine: a paid visit, prescriptions, lab tests, and him with his shiny new car while I stood there admiring how smart he was.

So I investigated the problem and found the cause. My wife had changed the brand of kibble he had grown up with: a jumbo 10-kilo bag, rich in vitamins and advertised everywhere, made by a company I knew very well, for the modest sum of \$25.

Elisabetta, my wife, had tried a new brand that cost less, with a female American Labrador on the bag, and she thought it would win him over. It didn't. He wanted that brand, and only that brand.

My wife thought I was pulling her leg, but when I took a handful of the new kibble and put it into the old bag, he started eating — then stopped right after the first mouthful and looked at me, as if to say I would never manage to fool him.

I was laughing like a madman at the whole situation, my wife was crying because she thought the dog was dying, and my daughter, caught in the middle, was telling us we were both idiots.

I took the dog by the leash and we went out for a walk, all the way to the window of a pet-food store. There, right on display, was his brand. He made no secret of it: tail wagging, barking, he told me that was what he wanted.

I stopped to explain that we were going through tight times, that the brand he loved so much had been the object of one of

my climbs, and that maybe one day I would have him named director of that division — but for the moment he would have to accept the situation.

He was a dog, yes, and we can all agree on that. But he had one advantage: he was American, and that gave him an edge over every other dog in the world.

We went back home and he started eating, and my wife, dying of curiosity, wanted to know what had happened.

I told her that I had promised him he would run the PET&FOOD division of a multinational in Cincinnati, and he had believed me — because when someone named Frega says something, you had better prick up your ears and always assume it might come true.

Ferdinando