





**FEEL**

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To my Argo,  
At midnight you sighed and left, serene.  
I take you to the sea and keep my promise.  
This book is the way I feel you.  
FEEL.





# Prologue

## The Air That Was Missing

Porto, September 2, 2025

Argo woke up whole, ate the biscuits with the same liturgical greed as always, drank water like someone blessing the day, and curled up on the sofa with his head on the pillow where I'd left the warmth of my nape; by mid-morning, his breathing started to funnel, first faint, then a sudden tightness pinching his chest, a short, almost embarrassed wheeze, as if asking for air were bad manners. I picked him up, a segugio italiano with twelve years and a day etched into his short, black, silky fur. Argo had the exact weight of a life that saved me from several small deaths; I left without closing the door, went down the stairs with my heart still folded, got in the car, fuck it, and went.

The clinic received us with the clean efficiency of places used to endings and that, even so, believe in modest miracles. Oxygen, medication, and that technical ritual that suspends God for a few hours; they said three days, he'll stabilize, stay with us, he'll hold on, come back later, the essential thing is oxygen. Argo looked at me through the glass like someone seeing an aquarium in reverse; he didn't whimper, didn't ask for anything, just trusted me, and a dog's trust is a mirror that humiliates us. I touched my knuckles to the useless transparency; promised him bread, sea, bed at my feet, the sacred routine of a world he understood better than I did; I went back home with empty hands and an orphaned leash biting my pocket.

Porto kept on with its chaotic, useless life, dumb pigeons in the squares, seagulls over the Douro, people rushing everywhere and nowhere; while my house lost its lung. The sofa kept the crease of his body like someone keeping a secret; the bed, at my feet, had the exact hollow of his rest; I washed the water bowl like someone washing a chalice after a sad mass; ran my hand over the blanket and picked up two hairs, one light, one darker, a kind of cheap relic I put

in my pocket to remind me that matter has memory. I sat on the floor, leaned my back against the sofa, and listened to the house breathe for the first time without the noise of paws; absence has a mineral sound, ancient, prehistoric; it doesn't hurt, but it digs.

The vet called at eleven at night and her voice came trained to hold the world without breaking it. Argo was going, his oxygen saturation dropping despite the oxygen, therapy exhausted, the body choosing rest, "come now," she said, "come before it's too late." I went back with the haste of a condemned man running for a last pardon. They gave me a low chair, lined me up with his muzzle, put his paw in my hand, and that's how, simple and brutal, dignity became a gesture. I spoke in his ear, the words of every day, good dog, my companion, your house is waiting for you, the sofa misses you... and I do too, shit, I do too; his mouth softened, his eyes fixed on a point where my voice was still a sound, the machine straightened the line; at midnight minus a breath, my dog, Argo, chose peace. He didn't suffer. I suffered for both of us.

I left with a light paper that weighed more than I did. The hallway light had the cold cruelty of hospitals and airports; I signed papers like someone forging signatures they don't want to recognize, authorized the cremation, asked for a white jar, no ornaments, no gold, no theater; because the sea doesn't need frames. The house waited for me without ceremony; I went up in silence, opened the door, let the dark in; lay down at the foot of my own bed to take his place, just to smell the life that left there an unconditional love. Pain didn't want metaphors; it wanted silence, cold water on my face, and a curse muttered low so as not to wake the neighbors. Fuck. I said it three times, it didn't help, but it tuned the air.

The first night without Argo had a rotten clock; every minute was a dog coming through the door and not coming in; I dreamed of olive trees, lemon trees, saw the Italian road tracing itself like an atavistic map in my animal's bones; woke up with a dry tongue and a primitive certainty: he was born in Italy, twelve years and a day before, and it's Italy he must return to, even if only as dust, because origin is a port and a tomb and I keep promises even when they don't fit the law.

Calabria. The name dropped into my chest like a welcome stone; Tropea in the distance with its chalk cliff, the Tyrrhenian licking the rocks with rage and tenderness, the Aspromonte as backbone and the Calabrian mafia weighing in the air like a sin that pays debts. I'm not going as a tourist; I'm going as a debtor; I carry a white jar that is an old heart and a conversation that won't fit in a clean room.

In the morning, the clinic gave me the ashes; the container was small, but it held the universe of my house. I set it on the table where he'd beg for bread with his head cocked, that honest beggar's grimace that melted my discipline; I told him the plan in a low voice, because death, when it's loved, deserves confidences; we're going down south, my friend, we're going to give you to the sea that taught you to sleep in the sun, we'll dirty our hands with salt and close this circle with the rigor life denied us. Made strong coffee, put on the green linen shirt he hated because it smelled of the street, packed a short bag and long paperwork, called the number I keep in a mental locker since Sicily, an ex who doesn't like names and owes me a survival; she answered with silence and the cough of surprise; I told her I'm bringing ashes and a question, she replied that some things are settled on the sand at dusk, as long as no one brings a recorder and that Calabria, when it calls, doesn't accept delays. We hung up; the negotiation started before the meeting.

I ran my hand over the sofa like someone combing a ghost; put the water bowl away in a drawer, so I wouldn't trip over liquid memories; wrote the date on a sheet, September 2, 2025, Porto, the day I ran out of air inside a dog's body; folded the sheet and put it in my pocket next to the hair I kept; some objects, when pressed together, make a secret pact that keeps us on the edge of the abyss.

The white jar of ashes stayed pressed to my chest as I let myself fall into bed. Turned off the lights. Breathed slow. The world kept going; so did I, but with less air. And, still, with enough to take him where he belongs.

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# Chapter 1

## The Jar and the Void

Bari, September 22, 2025

I left early for the airport with the white jar pressed between my sternum and my shirt, as if the slightest touch could break the law of the world and let Argo's dust escape. The passenger seat was empty and I, a trained idiot, kept reaching out to stroke nothing, an automatic gesture exposing the old habit of having a warm body there to look after me. The leash in my pocket made a rigid bulge against my thigh, a short rope pulling my awareness down. I reached parking lot P1 and breathed twice against my body's will, mouth dry and hands uncertain as I locked the car. The airport is a factory of departures where pain wears the suit of goodbye.

The short line, the passport, and the paperwork that legitimizes ashes as if death needed stamps. A security guard asked for my carry-on; I explained, in two sentences, the essentials, without looking him in the eye. He nodded, opened the zipper with the care of someone who knows the difference between a souvenir and the remains of a life. He ran the scanner over the white jar and fixed his gaze on a neutral spot on the ceiling so as not to cover me in pity. He closed it, handed me back the weight and the world. I thanked him with a gesture and moved on.

At security, the tray took my usual phone, switched off, and a second, small one, sealed in plastic, still virgin, which I placed on top of a cheap pocket book. The screen blinked as it went through the machine, an innocuous promise of current. I took them out, put them in my jacket, and spoke to no one. The air had that chill machines release to homogenize people.

I sat by the window, outside the black runway wanting to boil in the first heat of the morning. My phone vibrated with a short audio. Maria Victória. The question: “Where is Argo?” I listened once and her voice hung in the cavity between my ear and my memory. I didn’t answer. Not answering is a kind of crime tallied by the soul. I archived it with no flag, a debt of truth to burn later.

In the feed, a video from Vila Nova de Gaia of a child almost three years old running beside the giant letters, the fat, luminous river reflecting the slow boats and the sun licking the granite with a craftsman’s patience. The energy of that run climbed into my wrists like a good, useless fever; the contrast scraped my tongue. I put the phone away. The time had come. And I, with feeling cracked open in my skull like an operations map, moved down the boarding corridor.

On the plane, the jar stayed wrapped inside my jacket, close to my chest. No one noticed I was traveling with a dog reduced to a fine cartography, each grain a coordinate of twelve years and a day. The flight attendant asked if I wanted a drink; I asked for water. I swallowed half a bottle and realized my body still didn’t know how to drink without hemorrhaging meaning. I closed my eyes. I flew above the bandage of clouds to the south.

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Stepping out, the heat hit my collarbones. The airport atrium carried a low murmur of late summer vacation, trolleys pushed at angles and flip-flops slapping skin with the sound of dumb birds. An old concert poster stuck at mid-height, faded colors and the face of a singer that pushed an echo into me. An old promise to a southern Italian woman, no name and no date, as if promises were bones that resurface on the beach after a storm. I touched the inside pocket of my jacket by reflex, where I keep the numbers, one from Naples, mentally tagged as a cold line, unused and stored like gunpowder that shouldn’t see a spark. The feeling, knife and contract, reminding me this is all plot and reckoning and that every choice has a percentage of guilt.

At the rental counter, the glass reflected me in functional mode, unshaven, eyes low-res, linen shirt begging for the sea. The woman looked up, hair tied back, a discreet piercing in her nostril.

— Documenti, patente e carta di credito, per favore.  
 — Ecco.  
 — Fiat 500.  
 — Fiat.  
 — Pieno a pieno. Firma qui. C'è la telecamera LPR all'uscita, non fare il furbo.

I smiled like someone who accepts the rule and denies it inside. I signed the receipt, took the key, felt the hot plastic in my palm. Paper tempers the trail; a signature is a confession with date and time, ready for the crossing of databases and police goodwill. I slipped the receipt into my pocket book, between two pages where the tangle of letters hid secrets better than my memory.

The Fiat waited outside, a white car with black cloth interior smelling of cheap disinfectant and rubber in the sun and a steering wheel still marked by hands with no story. The sun stored on the roof transferred to my fingers as I opened the door. The silence was factory-fresh. I sat down, checked the mirror, pressed the jar to my thigh inside the jacket. Before turning the key, I opened the glove box with the solemnity of someone lifting a sheet from a corpse to confirm identity. Empty, as it should be, ready to receive the urn that isn't an urn, but a totem-object. I placed the white jar inside, adjusted it with the care of a sacristan who knows the weight of things. I breathed. Touched the lid and made the promise as if a camera were recording me without my consent, in a low voice, with the certainty of someone who condemns and absolves himself in the same gesture:

— I swear I'll take you to the sea you recognize. When the water touches you, I'll open my chest so the first current passes through my bones and takes what's left of you.

I turned the key. The engine woke up cold, without protest. The radio spat out an end-of-season song, "Bella Storia," thin voices and a short, circular refrain repeated to the point of nausea, I switched it off with a dry tap. Operational silence. I left the lot, passed the barrier, looked at the camera measuring me by the micrometer. The automatic license plate recognition system, LPR, reading my plate like it's dispatching my future. I thought of the envelope. I needed the bar.

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The fishermen's bar was in Falerna, pressed up against the sea, four kilometers west, along a street with single-story houses and antenna shadows marking the spot. I arrived from the back to check the entrances and exits, an old habit of a body that's had to leave places without leaving a trace. I parked in the darkest parallelogram, put the leash in my pocket, touched the jar under the dash and felt my hands tremble a little again, nothing folkloric, just electric current running through the phalanges. I went in.

The smell of fried fish came from the kitchen, with fresh oil and lemon squeezed on a counter where a knife bore cuts of history and maybe more than just fish. Four men at the counter, shirts with salt in the fabric and that weathered skin of those who don't ask permission. The owner, a medium-height guy with measuring eyes, heard the first clink. I stacked three coins in the middle of the counter, one on top of the other, discreet. He put away the glasses, waited two seconds, tapped the top of the little stack with his finger, which wobbled and righted itself.

— E allora.

— Tre caffè ristretti.

— Tre caffè. E altro.

— Una busta con carta.

— Che scherzi. Non siamo l'ufficio.

The coins stayed and the talk stayed without a smile. He disappeared through the door to the storeroom and came back with a thin brown envelope, no stamp and no address. He set it down next to the coffees. I paid for another round I didn't order, balanced normality with the zigzag of improvisation. I took the envelope and put it in my inside pocket. Didn't open it. Drank the shortest coffee like swallowing medicine without water. My heart lined up with the clatter of plates. I left without questions. Outside, the light was raw.

Behind the bar, there was an alley with dumpsters, old bicycles leaning against a wall, and two windows with broken shutters. I opened the envelope. Three license plates, two front, one rear, and variations of code in metal with black paint. A strip of double-sided tape and two extra screws. A note with the new plate number written in tight handwriting and a rough sketch of a Z-shaped route.



Whoever prepared it knew more than they respected. I kept it. Felt guilt playing in my teeth, still thinking about the airport parking lot being filmed by that LPR with its skinny arm and cold lenses. Swapping plates makes sense when the cameras don't record a before-and-after story, but the ideal never matches what's possible.

I opened the trunk, had minimal tools in a canvas bag. Removed the front plate, saw the rear screw glued to the thread with cheap adhesive, a company move to keep parts from escaping, took it out, put the new one on, tightened it. Four minutes. A dog barked in a courtyard, three barks, pause, two, pause, like a domestic Morse code. Swapped the rear, wiped it down, closed the trunk. A cat passed by, looked at me without judgment. Got back in the car and checked the alignment in the reflection of a closed shop window. Decent. Felt the envelope like a benign tumor in my jacket. Breathed. Started the Fiat.

Counter-surveillance in Z. First leg to the beach roundabout, turn right, enter a narrow street with laundry hanging, go to the end, turn left into a square with a church, make a slow U-turn, check the rearview, ignore the man in a cap smoking without looking. Quick stop by a stationery shop. Bought two pocket books, the cheapest, fragile spines, small letters, rough paper. One by Pirandello, "Uno, nessuno e centomila." Another by Moravia, "Gli indifferenti." The Italian at the counter had no change, I gave him the smallest bill and left. Got back to the car. Parked two streets up, leaned back against the seat, opened the plastic on the disposable phone, took out the SIM, cracked the casing with a fingernail, turned it on and activated it with a code from a promo package, no name, no address, no contract promise. Kept it offline. Airplane mode, only Bluetooth on, for a ritual that needs no radio.

There I created the cold Bitcoin wallet with the rigor you give a safe that only opens when all three, two out of three, consent. In the black-covered notebook, I drew three columns, wrote down the 24 seed words (BIP-39) in a lineup that would make a priest blush for the devotion of the stroke; no photos, no scans, no clouds or modern postures, just black ink and firm pressure, then swapped two words for exact combinations in Italian to confuse prying eyes. The first key stayed outside the phone, the second in a dead old Nokia that

works as a mute little safe, and the third isn't mine, it belongs to the cold line, the Naples number I haven't used and that can, if life tightens, serve as lock and witness. I'll do the signatures later, today just the seed. Split the seed into two halves faked from the pattern, wrote half in the margins of Pirandello, half in Moravia, tiny letters interspersed among words on page 27 and 43, subtly cut a bit of the spine to hide a thin paper with the right order. Glued it back with lipstick glue I bought at the stationery, pressed with my fist and let it dry five minutes with the engine heat helping. The car was an incubator for small crimes and big survivals. Put the books back in the trunk, inside a bag with some random supermarket logo. Feeling, as operation, demanded redundancy. I gave it.

I missed the fourth leg of the Z when a street I expected to be two-way turned out to be one-way, reversed, and the car in front braked, an ice truck blocked the maneuver, two seconds of hesitation were enough for me to end up aligned with a municipal camera with a droopy lens on a pole at the corner, pointed at the intersection. The provincial LPR isn't omniscient, but it records when it's hungry for numbers. I breathed, turned, and corrected. The mistake was already catalogued in my inventory of necessary failures.

I'd go back to the fishermen's bar for the other part of the exchange. A man waited at a table outside, sleeveless shirt, biceps marked by sun and work, an old anchor tattoo acting as membrane. Didn't say a word, just lifted his chin two millimeters. I sat two tables away. The owner brought me a glass bottle of water and a short glass with ice with teeth. I put down three coins again, not stacked, side by side. The man got up, went to the bathroom, left a paper bag abandoned on the stair rail leading to a floor made of scraps, and came back empty-handed. I got up, washed my hands, grabbed the bag without looking inside. We were exact. Outside, the wind brought salt to my nose with a traceable origin at the breakwater, nothing literary, just the surface drying on my fingers.

I crossed the road, half unhurried, half urgent. In the Fiat, I opened the bag. A small map of the area, red line with two discreet arrows marking routes without cameras and a pencil note: E90 to the east, avoid Tropea until the final exchange. I was heading west, but the destination was on the other side, the Ionic route, the SS106/E90,

the backbone on the map that took me to the shoulder where the sea leans. I put away the map and stashed the bag in the trunk with the books. Checked the urn in the glove box again. My hand trembled less. Low voice:

— We're in motion, companion.

Leaving the village, the last municipal camera wrote me into its notebook with the new plate; I smiled with the irony of someone who knows a perfect story doesn't exist when logistics are handled by people who breathe. I got on the short highway, grabbed the A2 by the arm, went down half a dozen kilometers, took the 280 exit, the 106 appeared on my left like a continuous line of asphalt with scars. E90. The sea beside me grew more open, more godless. Turned off the AC, opened the window two fingers, felt the blast of hot air mixed with the smell of floating diesel, fish in aluminum boxes, and the rest of the seaweed drying on the hulls of stranded boats.

The disposable phone turned on without a plan, just to measure presence. Didn't connect to the network. Wrote the number in a notebook, scribbled a cold line over it, so my head wouldn't swap the paper with superstition. The other phone, mine, brought another audio from Maria Victória, which I didn't even open. This one keeps asking for a place in speech and I, temporary bastard, keep pushing it to the edge while I drive with ashes in the glove box and a map gnawing at my time. I turned off the main one completely. The trip claimed the monopoly.

I passed on the shoulder a van with data collection equipment, mast camera, two short antennas, scooping up numbers and rolling slow. Looked at it twice. The municipal LPR is a spoiled beast. Avoided looking in my mirror until the next ramp. Improvising a license plate biography in half a day doesn't clean all the glass.

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I stopped at a fleeting service area, two pumps and a minimarket with fresh fruit and dusty candles for saints. Bought a bottle of cold water and a knife with a ruined bone handle. The new blade needed purpose. Got back to the car, sat sideways and opened the glove box again. The white urn brought the clinic room back to mind, the transparency of machines turning breath into lines that rise and fall, my Argo's dignity accepting the end with a modesty that humbled me.

Touched the urn with the blade closed, like consecrating objects with a shadow of ritual. Closed it. Started up. Left.

The road sharpened my senses. Farmers sold red onions in piles and tomatoes on a folding table, bags swaying and women in headscarves watching the cars as if they were judging. The sea there, the timid flatness cutting off the speech of those who spoke loudly. I said nothing. Drove. To the left, signs for Catanzaro Lido, further on, Crotone like a hard word. I still haven't decided where. I only feed the movement and carry what's mine to carry.

A stradale patrol parked in the shade of a dwarf pine and two hats resting on the capot. I didn't look; a shifty glance builds the story. The fake plates gleamed in the sun with too much varnish. Thought again about the first registration at the airport with the original plate and realized I no longer control the versions, only the way the next image will catch my profile. Time will have to do the math and I'll always give one number less.

The road noise was a continuous, deep band, already annoying, with the rim repeating itself like a cheap mantra. The Fiat, loyal in its technical indifference, stabilized. I felt hungry and didn't stop. A body in shock runs on a diet of noise and water. I was obeying.

The question opened and closed on my tongue: am I transporting remains or carrying promises. I put my right palm on the dashboard, in front of the glove box, and felt the vibration of the plastic, 1.2 millimeters of amplitude at 2,000 rpm, the resonance of something simple that reminded me of another, older thing. Argo sleeping in the back seat on trips to the Douro, serene, muzzle pointed at the window and tongue gathering warm air as if it were news from a newspaper. I stopped thinking. Feeling brought me back to the basic rule: face what happens, not what you wish would happen.

Tropea showed up on a sign with an oblique arrow. I did what the pencil note said: avoid until the final exchange. Drove on. The sun dropped a notch on the sky's invisible ruler. I wove the idea of a less observed spot to do the last technical act of the day. Found a ruined gas station, concrete pump and rust, two pillars standing like exposed rib bones and a sign saying "Chiuso per ristrutturazione," an old dog sleeping on the cement without a collar. Parked in the improvised shade of a fallen awning. Worked out. The knife came

to hand and the bag with the plates too. Checked the screws after thirty kilometers of constant vibration, tightened a quarter turn in the back and checked the front. Checked the mental map of cameras with my eyes sweeping 180 degrees. No obvious lenses. Put the old plates in a black trash bag, tied it up and hid it in the empty compartment for the spare wheel.

Slid the books into the side compartment of the trunk, lying down, like folding up some blankets. Went to the passenger seat, ran my hand over the fabric and stroked the emptiness again, the gesture wanting science and vomiting habit. A truck passed on the 106 and left a short trail of heat pulling the air back. Closed the doors. Rested my skull on the headrest. Spoke with a full glass, so no one would hear. Argo, you're here. And I'm here, taking you to the point where the beginning charges me for the goodbye.

I started up and left behind the ruin and the nameless dog sleeping. The E90 opened up a bit, the monotony of the kilometers became a landing strip for operational thought. Contact list clean, Naples number saved and unused. A meeting to arrange somewhere on the sand, at dusk, like writing a headline and hoping the press doesn't notice. The contract of feeling goes with me, tied to the urn, the leash, and the Fiat receipt. The blackmail is intimate; there's no court that will acquit me.

When night started gathering in the jagged crowns of the eucalyptus, I shut the world off. No music. The silence in the car isn't absolute, it's the sum of minimal vibrations, glass, tire, engine at medium revs and the body accepting the VHF of nothing. I reached a roadside motel with missing letters for a name. Didn't stop. The pine floor of another night waits for me in another city. Tonight, I drive until I feel salt in my breath. Tonight, I don't talk to Maria Victória. Tonight, Argo travels whole in my gesture. Tonight, the Ionic route took the word. Tomorrow, someone will demand answers. I'll be halfway through a reply. God help whoever interrupts me when I say now, I feel.

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# Chapter 2

## The Columns and the Breath

Capo Colonna, September 25, 2025

The low beach yielded to the rock. The Doric columns marked four lines in the white sky. The ground was covered in fine dust that crept into the tourists' sandals and dried out my mouth. I sat on a toppled block of limestone, three steps from the beaten path, to watch without offering my profile to the cameras guarding the entrance. In the distance, a man called “uagliò” to two boys pushing an ice cream cart. The wind brought the smell of sunburnt seaweed and sea salt coming from the cape. The sun shifted a finger's width. I breathed through the left, where my lung didn't throb so much with the dust. Argo's first wheeze had started on a day like this, dry air, stubborn bronchioles and that embarrassed sound before everything else happened. Death takes its time, but it isn't life.

The Fiat was parked sideways, rear facing the tallest bushes and the driver's door turned outward. I aimed the rearview at the window itself, to get a small cut of light so the interior would be less visible. The white urn slept in the glove box, nestled against a foam wedge I improvised with the map bag. Touched the plastic with two fingers, closed it. The columns looked each in their own way; stone survives worse than it seems when you press your face to it.

He arrived five minutes after the arranged time. Wore a cheap white shirt, a plain baseball cap, and kept his hands still. Walked straight toward me and didn't look at me. Leaned his back on the block next to mine. We sat looking ahead, at the tourists taking pictures with the sea slicing the background, where two seagulls begged for crumbs on the wooden walkway.

— Water?