RACE ACROSS A MIND

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AN EXCERPT

Chapter 18 · Eleventh day · Martinsville to Salem

Eleventh day of twelve. Rain, pain piling up —
and stopping would have been perfectly legitimate.

What I know is that the sky opened and dumped heavy rain for a good while, wide open road, cars flying past and nowhere to hide. The water, mixed with highway grit and dirt, ran down my back and into my shorts and made the sores hurt like hell. I can say I have a fairly wide tolerance for pain, but “excruciating” is the appropriate word.

In the middle of it I only remember Tó saying something like “now that’s a proper welcome,” and I could barely answer. What he actually said was far more beautiful, I found out later. But I was riding with my jaws clenched, just trying to hold myself together. It wasn’t the water coming down from above that was wrecking me. It was the dirty water coming up off the road.

It was in one of those hours that a sentence arrived in my head and never left me again, and it is, in the end, the only honest answer I have for people who ask how you stand something like this.

I could stop. All it took was raising my hand. There was a car behind me, and behind it seven people who would have had me out of there in thirty seconds, without a single word of reproach, and it would have been perfectly legitimate. That pain was a choice of mine. I could hand it back whenever I wanted.

And that was exactly what made it bearable — because in Lisbon there were people in a hospital bed at IPO for whom pain is not a choice. Nobody asks them if they want to continue. Nobody offers them a car. There is no hand to raise.



The legitimacy of stopping. And plenty of reasons not to.

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Race Across A Mind is out September 24, 2026.

The story of the first Portuguese person to solo-finish the Race Across America — and of the other crossing, the one made from within.

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