

including the banquet: about ten thousand francs, almost my entire inheritance from the simple, good Baron of Jacuecanga.

"I wasted neither my time nor my money. I became the pride of the nation and, as I landed on Pharoux dock, I received an ovation from every level of society. A few days later, the president of the republic invited me to have lunch with him.

"In six months, I was sent to the consulate in Havana, where I was stationed for six years and where I will return to perfect my studies of Malayan, Melanesian and Polynesian languages.

"That is fantastic", observed Castro, as he picked up the glass of beer.

"Listen, if I weren't so happy, do you know what would I be?"

"What?"

"An eminent bacteriologist. Shall we go now?"

"Let's."

*Gazeta da Tarde, Rio. 28-4-1911.*

## The other

*Rubem Fonseca*

Every day I would go to my office at 8:30 a.m. The car would stop in front of the building, I would hop out, take ten or fifteen steps and walk into the building.

Like all businessmen, I spent the mornings making phone calls, reading memos, dictating letters to my secretary and increasingly getting exasperated with problems. By lunchtime, I had already worked very hard. But, I always had the feeling I hadn't done anything useful.

I would take an hour for lunch, sometimes an hour and a half, at one of the restaurants in nearby; then I went back to the office. On some days, I would speak on the phone more than fifty times. There were so many letters that my secretary or one of my assistants would sign them for me. And, at the end of the day, I always had the impression that I hadn't done everything I was supposed to do. I raced against time. I was annoyed when there was a mid-week holiday, since it meant I would have even less time. I took work home daily, where I could produce more; the phone didn't ring so often.

One day I started to feel a strong palpitation. Coincidentally, on the same day, as I was arriving at work in the morning, a fellow appeared right at my side on the street. He walked along with me up to the door saying, "Mister, mister, I wonder if you could help me?" I gave him some change and went into the building. A bit later, when I was on a call to São Paulo, my heart took off. For some minutes, it pounded hard, leaving me exhausted. I had to lie down on the sofa until it slowed down. I was dizzy, sweating heavily, I almost fainted.

On that same afternoon, I went to a cardiologist. He ran detailed tests, including an electrocardiogram, and, finally said that I needed to lose some weight and

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change my habits. That was funny. Then he recommended that I stop working for a while, but I told him that was out of the question. In the end, he prescribed a diet and told me to walk at least twice a day.

On the next day, at lunchtime, when I went for the doctor's recommended walk, the same fellow from the day before stopped me and asked for money. He was a strong white man, with long brown hair. I gave him some money and went on my way.

The doctor had said frankly that if I weren't careful of myself, I could have a heart attack at any moment. On that day, I took two tranquilizers, but it wasn't enough to rid me of my tension. At night, I didn't take any work home. But, time didn't pass. I tried to read a book, but my mind was somewhere else, at the office. I turned the TV on, but I couldn't take it for more than ten minutes. After dinner, I came back from my walk and felt restless, sitting in the armchair, reading the newspaper, annoyed.

At lunch time, the same fellow was at my side asking me for money. "Is it going to be every day now?", I asked. "Mister," he answered, "my mother is dying, she needs medication. I don't know any people in the world who care, only you, mister." I gave him one hundred cruzeiros.

For some days he vanished. One day, at lunch time, I was taking a walk when he suddenly showed up by my side. "Mister, my mother died." Without stopping, I started to walk faster, saying "I'm sorry." He walked faster to keep up with me and repeated "died." I tried to get rid of him and sped up, almost breaking into a run. But he ran after me, saying all the while "died, died, died", stretching out his tightened arms as if straining to make an effort, as if his mother's coffin would be placed on the palms of his hands. Finally, I stopped, breathless, and asked "How much do you need?" He needed 5,000 cruzeiros to bury his mother. I don't know why, but I took the checkbook out of my pocket and made out a check in that amount, standing there on the street. My hands were shaking. "That's it!" I said.

On the following day, I didn't go out for my walk. I had lunch at the office. It was a terrible day when everything went wrong: papers couldn't be found in the files, an important account was lost by a slight margin, a mistake in financial planning meant new and complex budget calculations had to be done urgently. At night, even with the tranquilizers, I could hardly sleep.

Next morning, I went to the office and, in a way, things were a bit better. At midday I went out for my walk.

I saw the man who asked me for money standing, half-hidden on the corner, lurking, waiting for me to pass. I turned around and went the other way. I soon heard the sound of heels on the sidewalk, as if someone were running after me. I hurried, feeling my heart tighten, as if I were being chased by someone, a childish sensation of fear, which I tried to fight against, took over. At this moment, he caught up to me saying, "Mister, hey, mister." Without stopping, I asked: "Now

what?" Staying right by me he said, "Mister, you've got to help me, no one else cares about me." I answered with all the authority I could muster, "Get a job." He said, "I don't know how to do anything. You need to help me." We were running through the streets. I had the feeling people were staring at us in an odd way. "I don't have to help you at all," I answered. "Yes, you do, or you have no idea what could happen," and he grabbed my arm and looked at me, and for the first time, I really saw his face, cynical and vengeful. My heart pumped, nervous and tired. "This is the last time," I said, stopping to give him some money, I don't know how much.

But it was not the last time. Everyday he appeared, suddenly, begging and threatening, walking beside me, destroying my health, saying, "this is the last time, mister," but it never was. My blood pressure rose even higher. My heart exploded at the mere thought of him. I didn't want to see the fellow anymore. Was it my fault he was poor?

I decided to stop working for a while. I talked to the board of directors and they agreed to give me a two-month leave.

The first week was hard. It's no easy task to stop working all of a sudden. I felt lost and didn't know what to do. But I gradually got used to it. I recovered my appetite. I started sleeping better and smoking less. I watched TV, read a book, took a nap after lunch and walked as much as I used to, and it felt great. I was becoming a calm man, and was thinking seriously about changing my lifestyle; not working so much.

One day, I stepped out for my daily walk, when he, the beggar, suddenly appeared. How in hell had he found out my address? "Mister, don't abandon me." His voice was bitter and full of resentment. "You're the only person in the world I can count on, don't ever do that again, I need some money, this is the last time, I swear!" – and he leaned his body against mine as we walked, and I could feel his breath, rotten and sour with hunger. He was taller than me, strong and threatening.

I walked towards the house, he came along with me, his steady face set on mine, watching me curiously, suspicious, implacable, until we got to my door. I said, "Wait here."

I shut the door, went to my bedroom. I came back, opened the door and when he saw me, he said, "Don't, mister, no one else cares about me." He didn't finish speaking or, if he did, I didn't hear him because of the blast. He fell to the ground; then I saw that he was a skinny boy with zits on his face, and of such pallor that not even the blood that started to cover his face could hide it.