

**THE CONFESSIONS OF RALPH:
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FANTASY**
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Prologue

Like all those who suffer from chronic restlessness, a kind of pest inside the soul, preventing one from being happy or from simply enjoying tranquil mediocrity, I one day thought about exorcising myself. To transcend my self through "art". The chance not only to enjoy ephemeral glory immortally, but to drive away the bats inhabiting my brain, perhaps even to free myself from them forever. So I became a writer. To write a novel whose development would begin immediately. But leafing through a book by Jack Kerouac, a kind of angel and devil of the fifties, I found a statement which, true or false, bothered me:

"*Fabricated* stories and novels about what would happen *IF* are for children and cretins afraid of seeing themselves in a book, just in the same way they dread seeing themselves in the mirror when sick or hurt or hung over or crazy."

So I dropped my initial idea for a novel, whose perfect, though somewhat boring, first chapter had already been written – a chapter which, by the way, I partially used in these *Confessions* of mine, under the title of "Resurrection". Because, after all, that writing had been from the period of time when I had first decided to expose myself publically.

And so now I take leave, body and soul, to write my story. Moreover: I proceed to intentionally live a story that will deserve to be written, though it be incongruous, imaginary and even fantastic.

I'll explain: dissatisfied with my own personal history up till then and dissatisfied as well with my probable, middle-of-the-road future, I decided to transform myself into another man – to become a fictional character. Somebody who, without disregarding the chances and hazards of fate, would choose and embody an imaginary destiny so that it could then be recorded.

Ralph is this man. He was born with my first death, the death of somebody whose identity is of no interest because he rejected himself, and withered away, giving his place up to a fictional character.

After all, all autobiographies, not just this one, are imaginary as well as real, presuming it is possible to delineate precise boundaries in these matters. For if reality is in a certain way an imaginary creation, imagination and fantasy are in turn black-and-blue realities that completely reveal the concrete being and the world upon which they were based.

I warn you, this autobiography, like all others, is also composed of fragments selected from real life. The very selection of these fragments is already a way of corrupting the truth. On the other hand, it would also be impractical as well as boring to record all of Ralph's moments which, like any other man's, are filled with hours, days and even months of little significance. But to counteract this, my autobiography will try to experience moments as intense as a whole existence.

Summing up, let's say that this book deals with the real life of an imaginary man or with the imaginary life of a real man. Most of all, I want to amuse myself – or even move myself – living and writing this book and, in so doing, taking some liberties, such as objectifying myself, sometimes in the third person singular or through the words of others.

And seeing myself much too decadent or vile or small and mediocre in one chapter, I'll appear witty and effervescent in the next one, undoing the previous impression. In the same way, when I yield to the temptation of silly sentimentality – seduced of

course by some engaging deception – I'll try in every way to growl and bare my teeth, like the beast who hides inside us all.

Book I

The Departure

The first step is to make a clean break with the city and to sever all ties with my former life. More than that: to erase all traces of this past. To convince myself that I am Ralph, conceived from nothing, and made into a physical and mental being in his early twenties.

I go out into the street on this my first day of active existence as Ralph. New clothes, fresh haircut, carrying a small suitcase with my few belongings and a vague notion of where I'm going. And some money in my pocket. I grabbed what was left in the house. No regrets at all as I ransacked those old suit pockets. Anyway, I didn't have anything more to do with those people, my ex-family. Ralph, the man without a father and a country; knight errant of good and very bad intentions. Fortunately, in this day and age, one no longer needs horses or suits of armor and, much less, squires.

New clothes, fresh haircut, starting all over from the beginning. No fixed idea in my head except the assurance that something has to happen. Because I am Ralph, the character in search of his story.

If this were a port city, I would direct myself immediately to the docks. Strolling down the wharf, I would be accosted with proposals for work and adventure. A crew member on board a ship of smugglers. Or perhaps a scribe on a ship of explorers, discovers. But there's nothing left to discover on Earth. All sea routes having already been crossed by millions of navigators.

But this is not a port city. Not even one noticeably industrial or prosperous or hellish or very beautiful or anything else. A city, that's all. The capital of some Brazilian State. All of a sudden I wonder what I've been doing here all this time. Streets so mysteriously familiar that I need not pay the least attention as I walk them because these legs, belonging to Ralph's predecessor, still direct me and know the way.

People walk the streets as in any other city. Faces vaguely familiar, but Ralph knows nobody. Ralph, the solitary knight, losing all his memories and his pasts.

Shops done in poor taste. Bars and banks. Buildings. Here in this sport, dear tourists, the most important historical event was a public servant's leap from the twentieth floor on account of debts, drink and disappointing love-affairs. A man of no importance. Nobody paid attention to him, even though they gathered around his body. The people only wanted to see his guts, the spectacle and not the man who got only a few lines in the local scandal sheet. Nevertheless, he was a very important man, a personality. To himself. In that fall, a whole universe fell apart and will never be rebuilt.

To our right we have the main office of the most prosperous bank in the country. The bankers get richer every day while their employees get more fed up with life. But he who remains an employee in a certain way deserves such a fate. Because there's always the possibility of hurling yourself from the twentieth floor like our friend, or else, for the more courageous, holding up a bank or pissing on top of the boss's desk, or better yet, the most obvious: never going back there again.

Spontaneous and unimportant ramblings of Ralph while not yet in full control.

Ahead of you, ladies and gentlemen, if you fix your eyes way up that avenue, we have the State House which serves as the domicile and office of he who so wisely governs this State. As for the pointed iron bars, the armed soldiers and the dogs, don't get excited, distinguished visitors, for it's only a minor precaution. Because there will always be those who'll reciprocate the love of their superiors with hate. A vile minority, but dangerous nonetheless, and one it behooves us not to underestimate.

But, actually, ladies and gentlemen, the inhabitants of this land are peaceloving. Peaceloving and bovine, as the city's monumental park to your left attests. A locale for suspicious trysts and perpetual listlessness where the placid inhabitants of this city usually take their Sunday strolls, despite the fact that some crimes against society's morals and customs have been committed here – even a gruesome murder once took place here, just as all things eventually take place.

But here, people mainly take boat rides on the lake, eat popcorn and ice cream, and have fun on the Ferris wheel. Others just lie on the grass, gazing at the sultry summer and working out the details of impracticable projects to the sound of a flute that some bearded beggar is playing, making all things sound lyrical and possible.

Here, in the monumental park of the city, the beggars beg, the lovers love, the kids kid around, the police police, the sellers sell and the curious are curious. The curious are those detached souls who never participate in anything. The curious are merely curious and are everywhere, thoughtless but unconsciously conscious of their modest, but nonetheless, very important role which is to join with other curious souls, forming conglomerations and multitudes of the curious who merely sit everything out impassively, although, on some rare occasions, these curious ones do turn into an enraged mob. These are considered to be our so-called historical moments, like the Fall of the Bastille, etc. Clashes between armed armies and multitudes of the ex-curious, of course, with the armies in most cases getting the upper hand.

But right up ahead, my dear visitors, you who are honoring us with your presence – is the artsy part of town with its lights, bars, restaurants and night spots. After a day of intense and constructive work (you see, progress is our motto), our anonymous heroes go there to have a good time. And so do our heroes of the middle and upper classes, as well as our wholesome young people with their schizophrenic and exciting rhythms. At this hour the bars are still empty but, gentlemen and ladies, if you deign to wait, you will see that, little by little, the lights begin to go on and men and women, like insects, will begin to surface as if from nowhere. The amplifiers will be turned up to their highest volume and people will suddenly become happy and will exchange looks and smiles, kisses and late-nite plans for bed, while fingers touch with tenderness and legs furtively hunt under tables during conversations that build to a kind of climax just when that quality of genius, hiding inside everybody, blossoms and devises dazzling projects – films, melodies, novels, individual and mass revolutions – that pass like a flash through each one's mind. The only problem being that each of these minds will be so deadened and numbed by alcohol that it will file this idea – which could be

its last – as a second priority to be taken up the next day or on Monday – the day of beginnings, when undoubtedly it will already be too late. But don't be alarmed, ladies and gentlemen, there still exist a few people who just live and have fun and that's it, with life being for them nothing but a slight numbness, laughs, bodies, orgasms. And so a man or a woman end modestly, but nonetheless happily, one more night which will pile on top of another and others and so on until all of them join together in the great beyond along with that public servant who threw himself, a bit prematurely, from the twentieth floor.

But don't think, dear tourists, that this is the end of our city's night life. Because a little up ahead, you will find a block even more Bohemian than the artsy part of the city. On that block, the lonely citizens of the masculine sex – the old, the very ugly or the timid – enjoy themselves til the wee hours of the morning. Whores, late night snacks, binges. It's the time when sentimental, beautiful and popular songs are sung from the bottom of a gutter without any accompaniment, not even a ukelele or a tambourine. It's also the time when one vomits or cries for no special reason, but for all the possible reasons. Over there's the city's combat zone: where needy citizens feverishly and uselessly stalk the streets to satisfy their lustful needs, laying their little heads upon the enormous breasts of old whores and letting themselves be cradled like little boys, while agile fingers feel pants pockets in search of a thin wallet. Over there's the fun part of the city.

This was my city, ladies and gentlemen. While you may like to see the other picturesque and cultural points of interest – churches, museums, libraries (where one day I hope to place my book), City Hall, the monuments to the great men of our national and regional history, not to mention the more serene and elegant neighborhoods – I'll ask you to excuse me as I follow my own course, which is definitely another. Good-bye, ladies and gentlemen, it was a pleasure to know you during this excursion. My name is Ralph. Always at your service.

New clothes, fresh haircut, money in my pocket and a small suitcase with my few belongings. I graciously wave to those who are staying behind and take the avenue to my left. I cross in between the cars, against the light. I feel almost immortal during this the beginning of my story. Nothing can happen to me.

Because I'm just starting and the good guy never dies at the beginning of the film, unless they reconstruct him through flashbacks. And as for me, there's nothing to reconstruct. Ralph, the man without a past.

With quick steps, anxious, breathless, sweating, I am now rambling down the avenue that ends at the railroad station. Suddenly, I'm stricken with the fear of not getting a seat on one of the trains leaving the city. The sensation that everybody wants to flee and that there will be no room for all of them. I'm now running madly like a hunted man.

I swiftly cross the station's platform at the exact moment when the last call for departure rings out for some train. I throw my suitcase into the nearest car and leap inside. I'm leaping into a new life. I don't worry about my ticket. I pay my ticket as well as the fine for not having a ticket. I pay with the greatest pleasure. A fine for having arrived so late. But yet not too late.

SANT'ANNA, Sérgio. *As confissões de Ralfo; uma autobiografia imaginária*. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 1975.