

from *O Testamento do Sr. Napumoceno da Silva Araújo* (1989)

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At the time, Mr. Napumoceno was working as deputy manager at J. Baptista Ltd., and rumor had it that the partners were constantly pestering him to acquire some of the shares in the company and to take over the management of it with a salary four times higher than he was then getting. But it was also said that he always turned down the offer, saying that he wasn't cut out for such responsibility, etc. But what was said in whispers was that once he was a manager he wouldn't be able to pull the tricks that everyone knew about. However, the truth of the matter is such that a few years later he left the company to set up his own business, Araújo Ltd.—Import-Export. Notwithstanding the fact that he was the sole owner of the company he had the word "Limited" added to its name, and the gossip that went around town said that his "limit" was the share he had taken from Baptista, and that no one could tell whether this was great or small. But right from the beginning Mr. Napumoceno revealed himself to be an extremely astute businessman—or else a man as lucky as the devil. It happened that because his warehouse was located in the Salinas area he very often had to go there under the blazing sun of August, and by foot at that, since he didn't have a car and, in fact, didn't even know how to drive. That's why he decided to buy himself an umbrella. He searched in every shop and corner store but it was in vain. There wasn't a single umbrella on sale and he had to make do with a cork cap, which was singularly unpractical as an appendage; being the polite man that he was, he was forever lifting his cap to greet those people to whom he had to show a certain

respect, which meant that he had to run the risk of getting wind on his forehead, or catching a cold, or something worse. It was precisely this market deficiency that he complained about to a traveling salesman when they met on the street, after he had uncovered his head to greet the other, that is. But the man laughed broadly and said, "If you want I'll order you, not one, but dozens. Hundreds, if you want. That should be no reason for you to be upset." Now it so happened that Mr. Napumoceno was preparing to place an order with this gentleman and, almost as a joke, though quite aware this wasn't anything other than an unnecessary outlay of capital, he added a request for 1000 umbrellas. He knew that in the best case scenario he would sell about 10 a year but that at least the market would be served; it would put an end to the scandal of a person searching all of Mindelo for an umbrella and not finding a single one.

Yet, a few days later, when he received the traveling salesman's invoice it was a stroke of luck that he didn't have a heart attack. Ten thousand umbrellas, in a country where they are used as parasols because unhappily it never rains! He would not admit that he had written an extra zero on the order form and for that reason he felt insulted by the traveling salesman who had taken advantage of his friendship. He sat down at once to write out an enraged letter: "How can you, Sir, continue to regard the firm Araújo, Ltd. as one of your clients after an outrage of this nature that..." but tore up the letter and took himself to the post office because only an urgent telegram would relieve him of his rage; he wrote out SIR UNHAPPY MANNER CARRIED OUT OUR DEAL, but he tore that up, asked for another form, merely wrote out I AM LOST FOR WORDS TO EXPRESS MY DISAPPOINTMENT COMMA FULL LETTER TO FOLLOW PERIOD, left, noticed that Mr. Paiva Português was calling out to him, said "shit" between his teeth but smiled at him anyway and told him of his troubles. Mr. Paiva, who was a man for whom there were no problems that could not be solved, suggested that Mr. Napumoceno should try and sell his parasols or umbrellas, for either term would do, on the other islands. Or even in Africa! It would be interesting if Cape Verde were to begin exporting umbrellas to the other Portuguese provinces. But that solution did not please Mr. Napumoceno and that's why, when they said goodbye, in order to console him for his woes, Mr. Paiva prophesied that it would rain that year and that he would end up selling all his stock. "What a story! What a man!" said Mr. Napumoceno, exasperated. "This country is cursed; nothing will get the rain to come down." He walked away in the direction of the warehouse. He had left the shop assis-

tant to do some small jobs, things sufficient to protect the merchandise from the sun until they were put away. He had decided, right from the get-go, that he was a wholesaler. He wanted nothing to do with shops, grocery stores, counters and putting up with people, be they staff or be they clients. He was more than tired of having to deal with the nonsense of clients who didn't know what they wanted and with having to sort out problems to do with ill-trained staff. It was for that reason that he had decided that he and the shop assistant would be more than enough to guarantee the proper running of the company. He, Napumoceno, would make the contacts and the boy would run the errands, for moving about is something youths generally like. The merchandise would be stocked in the warehouse and sold directly to retailers, and the quantity depended on the relative strengths of these clients, but always in boxes, bags or bales. And while he gave instructions to the boy about where to place the goods, for he wanted to leave some space in front of the warehouse for a future office, he was mentally drafting another letter to the traveling salesman, a tough, almost offensive, letter that would make the man feel as humiliated as he, Napumoceno, felt. He thought: "Sir..." but he scratched that out: To hell with Sir! What he deserves is: You son of a bitch, you snake in the grass, you cheapskate crook forcing a small tradesman at the beginning of his career to be stuck with ten thousand umbrellas that won't get sold, not even at the rate of 5 a year. Unfairness and deceit are not strong enough words to express the dishonest manner in which you, Sir, have treated me. You, Sir, have deliberately ignored the good relations of loyalty that are implicit in the transactions between businessmen, or be it, the principles of mutual trust and confidence. In sending me an order for ten thousand umbrellas you, Sir, cannot but be aware that you have obliged me to make an extremely high outlay of capital that will be locked up until the goods have perished, for I do not foresee having sales of these goods at a rate higher than 5 units per annum. I repeat: if there is no reasonable explanation for this excessive number or if there is no action sufficient to repair the damages that you, Sir, have caused me, our future relations, be they professional or be they personal, cannot but be conducted on the basis of absolute mistrust, harmful for any type of understanding, the more so because I shall be forced to relate to my fellow businessmen that your lack of honesty disfavors carrying out even the most insignificant of transactions with you, Sir....

The invoice had arrived on the first day, the insolent and threatening letter dispatched on the second day, registered and with a delivery note, and on

the third day the ship with the umbrellas sailed into the bay. Fortunately in those days there were no air links or even regular steamships and the mailbag left when chance took it. Because the ship laid anchor in the morning and close to midday it began to rain. First it was a light and gentle drizzle, but persistent nevertheless, which made the radio announcer at the local radio station give out the news that in São Vicente it was raining torrentially. But this drizzly rain lasted the whole afternoon and the whole night—the sky was permanently overcast and threatening heavier showers—and so the next morning Mr. Napumoceno was quick to try and get his merchandise through customs, always with this drizzle falling, and because they were already in October, by tradition a month when it sometimes rained, and merely as a way of being at ease with his conscience, he had it announced through the radio that the firm Araújo, Ltd. had received a small batch of umbrellas and these were available for local tradesman at his warehouse located at Largo das Salinas. It was with no surprise that, the next day, he watched as 1000 umbrellas left the warehouse, which covered the cost of 5000. Still, it was only three days later, after he had placed 6000 umbrellas in the market, that it dawned on him that it wasn't worth it to offend his friend, the traveling salesman, for such a petty reason and took himself to the post office, he himself with an umbrella, and filled out a form (Model 3, Variant C7) requesting the return of his correspondence and returned to the warehouse; he smiled with happiness when he went past a certain "Rua de Lisboa" and saw the whole street jam-packed with umbrellas. When he arrived back at the warehouse he found there was an order for another 2000.

The rain continued to fall down, gentle and calm, and at peak hour the streets would be transformed into black clouds, rising and falling, and everyone would be laughing with joy, and the announcers on the radio would be playing with the idea of the rain and umbrellas: *Protect yourself from the rain with the Best umbrella; for only the rain is better than the Best.* And for eight days the rain continued to fall in the same beautiful and useful manner, drenching the ground, the houses, the streets. And when the last batch of 500 left the warehouse, Mr. Napumoceno had sparkling wine served to all those who were present at the Royal; he said he was celebrating the departure of the ten thousand.

In his will he admitted that the business had been a stroke of good luck; it was done by mistake and through an accident, because, some time afterwards, as he was going through his things, he discovered the order form and

he saw for himself that the extra zero in his request had been his mistake. Yet, when he had the glass in his hand at the Royal, he boasted about his commercial scent, that instinct that had made him foresee that it would rain that year and the great deal he had just made.

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