

José Rizal

5 **Nobody is happy of his own fate**¹

(dialogue)

(version from French to English by Kenneth Mauro²)

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- Here I am! I heard your laments, worker; you say that you work so much, that you gain little and you don't enjoy yourself. Do you want to change your state? Granted! What do you want to be?

15 - Oh Fortune, you're asking me what I want to be? But you know it very well: I'd like to become the inspector that tyrannizes us. Oh, how I'd be good with everyone. An inspector! Here's a happy man, who doesn't have to work so much! He does nothing but shout, reproach and command; he's well-paid, he's free!

20 - I agree! You'll be an inspector. Luckily, I know someone who envies the condition of the workers. You'll take his place, his thoughts, his pleasures, his concerns; go begin your new purpose... Well! Are you happy?

25 - But you had not told me that my master was so capricious and hard to please, that he had a moody humour. He wants everything to become wonderful, that nothing is missing, he doesn't pay much just because he wants to keep his rank and to be respected by his workers. Oh, if I had known that was so, instead of wishing for an assistant's job, I would have liked to be a master!

- Really?

- Since you have been so good...

30 - Now you want to be a master? It shall be! Luckily, there are many who would like to leave business. Be a master and enjoy your condition... Are you happy now?

- I'm not saying no...

- Thank God!...

- Only that...

35 - What?

- Excuse me, but I didn't think... As time passes, it is not always sunshine and daisies in the life of a master. Strikes, threats, the socialism! You're always on the point of being murdered, plundered, decayed, stoned. You know that capital doesn't yield so much, risks are enormous; unemployment damages us

¹ Escritos de José Rizal, Tomo III, Obras literarias, Libro Segundo, *Prosa*, Edición del centenario, Manila, Instituto Histórico Nacional, 1995, pp. 200-204. Probably it has been written about the 1888, when Rizal had the intention to write his next novel in French and was researching to write in this language.

² Acknowledgements to Cristina Raffaella D'Amato for the English revision.

very much; competition reduces our prices; tax, contributions, wars take the rest. Think that you've worked day and night hoping for a day of rest with your own family but instead you wake up one morning with socialism and your own dream has vanished!... How I envy the light heartedness of that author who was pulling my leg yesterday at the mayor's lunch! That's a happy man; he lives peacefully, he has his pleasures; the future doesn't worry him; he has all that he wanted and wished for, he is celebrated, he is invited everywhere, he is admired like a brilliant man...

- Do you want to be that poet?

10 - Of course I want to!

- Then it's easy; he wants to be a grocer. Be a poet, be an author; have the spirit. Go! And be happy!

- What a beautiful thing to be a brilliant person! Come honoured guests to be everyone's entertainment and the joy of the insipid society. To be an author means to find yourself at the mercy of editors and booksellers; it means that you torture your own mind and imagination night and day to give birth to an idea that the imbeciles don't even understand and that people of spirit listen to with indifference, jealous of your fame! The writer is a slave at the mercy of all; he's the prey of ignorant critics, he's an unhappy man who lives influenced by hope and illusions and dies of hunger and misery. Here are the thorns hidden under the laurels. It's nice to be an author, but only after death. Chateaubriand³, after having written *Atala*, did well to become minister. He wasn't stupid. A minister, that's the true power, the true glory! To lead, to keep the fortune of his own compatriots in his own wallet, to pass in front of the quiet and bowed crowd; to read the respect, the fear, the envy on the faces of others! To be able to refuse invitations, to accept them without having to be graceful, without having the spirit or the sentiments, to remain mysterious, quiet, dumb; to drop a word from time to time in the middle of general attention, to cast a protector's glance... Ah! That's the real happiness, that's life!

30 - Do you want to be a minister? What wallet?

- Oh! It doesn't matter what; I'll have time to learn the profession.

- So be a minister! ...Are your wishes granted?

- Damn! Parliament, opposition, the envious who find everything that you consider good bad! Come on! And the newspapers, the horrible reptiles that turn their curious gazes onto your alcove, who attack mercilessly, without regard, without delicacy. The minister? He's at the mercy of all. He's a slave covered of gold, respected until he has the power, despised when he has collapsed; a gladiator whose life depends on the whims of the public and a nod of his master, the King! Never a night without horrific nightmares! Two or three votes against or in favour of and that is the unpopularity, and your sovereignty reduces you to nothing. Oh! To be a king, to not be responsible, to have noth-

³ François-René de Chateaubriand, 1768-1848, famous French man of letters and politician, of conservative and Christian trend. In his work *Atala*, he included two novels which tell the love vicissitudes of two Louisiana's Indians.

ing to do but sign, sleep, and enjoy himself while the ministers overlook!... Ah if I were king!

- King? Do you want the crown? Constitutional or absolute king?

- Constitutional king, please. I'm aware of my principles.

5 - Constitutional, well! Here it is, do your job of being king!

- But, it's ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous! I'm a mechanical marionette, at the mercy of my ministers! I haven't got will, no initiative! If I have to read a speech, it must be written by the minister: I'm his spokesman, that's all! I can't make friends, alliances; I can't travel without their permission! I'm the least

10 free of my kingdom. You never saw? But it's insupportable! I want to be absolute, to be the leader of myself and of my kingdom, I have to do a revolt!

- Don't trouble the world, my dear! Do you want to be a tsar?

- Absolute, but absolute!

- Here you are, absolutely tsar! There! ...But you sigh, your forehead is

15 troubled... what's the matter?

- Unhappy is what I am! Is this living? Be afraid, don't trust, and always serve? I've got two peaceful days, only two, since the sceptre of my empire is in my hands? The danger threatens me every time, mysterious and unexpected! I can't trust anybody; I must suspect all and try to drown my fears and my

20 frights in blood. Ah! Happy you, Marco Aurelio, happy the king who can lead his people without hate and worry! Happy the philosopher that, with a smile on his lips, can quietly assist the social struggles without taking part in them; that observes tranquilly and calmly the exploding revolutions, the falling thrones and the disappearing dynasties. Ah! Alexander, you weren't envious of Dio-

25 genes⁴ only because you're Alexander, but me, I envy him!

- Do you want to be a philosopher? Which branch?

- It doesn't matter what, provided that you rid me of this heavy burden...

- Well; be the best philosopher! You're happy, I suppose...

- Alas, alas! Happy? I've passed through with the gaze of all the classes of

30 Society and I have seen nothing but tears. As a child who, having lost the mother's embrace, is lost in the streets of a large city, and cries and always walks and does not rest until he sees her again, so the man, the son of nothing, will look vainly for the happiness, and will groan in vain on his condition; he won't ever be happy until he comes back in death's grip.

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⁴ Diogenes of Sinope, also known as the Cynic, Greek philosopher, 404-323 BC. It is said that while he was relaxing in the sunlight, Alexander, thrilled to meet the famous philosopher, asked if there was any favor he might do for him. Diogenes replied: *yes, stand out of my sun light*. Alexander still declared: *If I were not Alexander, then I should wish to be Diogenes*.