

The day the itching attacked me in the rear

Marcelo Garbine

I still had two and half hours before Ethan would get back to me about what time that afternoon's meeting would be. Anything could happen. My clumsy steps down Seventh Avenue only didn't attract attention from passersby because people have other things to do; watching a bald bearded man walking aimlessly among the sea of people is not a very pleasant pastime. My book project was equally likely to work out or not work out.

Instead of wallowing in my anxiety and reinforcing my paranoia by checking my watch every two minutes, I decided to enjoy one of my favorite activities: the movies! Not everyone has the luxury of going to see a movie on a Tuesday afternoon. What a delight. And not everyone is bald, anxious, and distracted, but also being assailed by a fleet of angry pinworms and still thinks that they will be able to concentrate enough to watch a movie.

I was solving more than one problem a a time, and felt an enthusiastic feeling of relief. I could watch a good movie and scratch my nether regions in the dark without embarrassing myself in public. One fewer shame equals one fewer trauma to add to my collection, and fewer unwanted memories in the future. Not that I am worried about what people think of me, but I don't need to lose my cool. Protecting yourself from time to time can be fun.

Most of those strangers were never going to see me again, and those who did would probably not remember me. Even with this in mind, I'm a guy who tries to be normal. I try to avoid sticking my hands in my pants and making adjustments, to the joy of some people and the disgust of others.

Coincidentally (or maybe there was some universal cosmological synchronicity), there I was, just at the corner of 45th Street. Not even the itching could remove my sense of contentment at being close to my second home.

The AMC theater is one of those rare places in the craziest part of New York where you can feel free from the manic obsession with schedules and urgent commitments. It's an oasis right in the middle of this asylum we call a city.

I went in and bought a ticket for Woody Allen's "Blue Jasmine", which in my opinion, was the best movie of 2013. There were thirty-eight minutes to wait before I could go into theater number four, where it was showing. Just nineteen more furtive glances at the clock, a few twitches to the left and a few more to the right to shut up the insufferable pinworms, and soon enough I would be in the pitch dark, where I could scratch wherever I pleased.

But look at that beautiful blonde! And she's alone! If it weren't for these anal invaders, I would go over there and talk to this beauty. But today, alas, is not my day. I would be satisfied just to be able to pay attention to the movie and, of course, if Ethan called me later with good news about the book. Oh no! That blonde was not coming this way. Say it isn't so..... Oh yes, she was.

"Hi, is this the line for 'Blue Jasmine'?"

"Yes, miss, it is."

"I've read good reviews, I have high expectations for this movie," she said with an inviting smile.

I wanted to say I also had high expectations, not only for the film, but also for the fact that she was there with me, but what could I say if I was solely and completely focused on not embarrassing myself in front of a beautiful woman? I used the time-tested technique of interlacing my fingers behind my head to control my hands. It worked, but it was tough going.

My rear end was burning, it was on fire. I couldn't utter a single word. I thought she was starting to assume I was an idiot who didn't know what I was doing

there, but this was disproved by the sparkle in her eyes. She really seemed to be interested in me.

"I think I know you from somewhere. Aren't you a writer?"

Oh, no. The last place I wanted in a situation like this was to be recognized. I was about to deny it, but I was too weak to pull off any kind of character.

"Yeah, I write."

"I knew it! It is you!"

The usher walked towards the velvet rope blocking the door to the theater. He would let us in any time now. And what could be worse... my phone started to squawk. What the hell. Who on earth would be calling me now?

"Hello?" "Who the hell is it? I mean, hello, Ethan?"

"Could I please speak to Marcelo?"

"What?"

"My name is Olivia, I'm calling from Bank Northeast...."

"Olivia, I'm sorry, but I can't talk right now."

"Marcelo, you've been selected for a special line of credit...."

"Olivia, you have to be kidding, special lines of credit are absolute ripoffs."

"Not at all, Marcelo! We have special rates and you can even get special rewards depending on how much you spend!"

"Listen Olivia, I am not interested. I know your special rates are heading toward the stratosphere the first time I even blink. Then you nail me with special fees."

"But, Marcelo, you have nothing to lose. This is a special opportunity, and you can always dispute any fees."

I have a real hard time cutting people off. I hate to be rude.

"Olivia, I know this is all just some scam to rake in 200% interest per day the first time you forget to send me the bill on time. The only thing I can think of that is more annoying than worrying about some shady credit card scam is having pinworms."

Olivia laughs. "Marcelo, you have a great sense of humor."

"I'm not sure it's always a good thing, Olivia."

"Oh but surely it is, Marcelo. And you don't have to worry about it being shady, you can use your Bank Northeast card with pride!"

"Olivia, I don't usually tell the general public about my athlete's foot, do you really think I will let people know that I have some shady high-interest rate card?"

Olivia laughs again. "Oh Marcelo, you're just too funny."

Oh, no. I had hoped that would have been the last straw. I wasn't out to get Olivia. Well, actually, maybe I was. But I was much more interested in getting

into this delightful blonde who was smiling at me, and Olivia was being a bit of an impediment.

In my mind, I was a bit more concerned with getting it on. But everything else was getting in the way. There was a whole list: Ethan still hadn't called, my damn worms were itching like hell, I was about to miss this movie I really wanted to see, I was afraid the blonde was going to lose interest, and now this!

Olivia was squirming into the middle of all this to get me to sign up for her ridiculous credit card. And what did I expect? Who the hell was I to consider getting into someone's pants when my own pants had been invaded by this horrible itching parasite at my own back door? And there was the problem: I was hit with the perfect storm of simultaneous problems. All of these factors had gathered, arranged, planned, and constructed an entire conspiracy against me. And Olivia just kept it coming...

"Marcelo, another thing you may be interested in is a credit protection program, that way if you are not able to pay your bills you are protected."

"Olivia, I am not married and I have no kids."

"Sorry, I don't follow you, Marcelo."

"Why would I want a credit protection program?"

"It's for your own security. If you had an accident or weren't able to work, your balance would be paid, and you wouldn't have to worry."

"Olivia, if I had an accident or wasn't able to work, I would shoot myself in the head."

(Silence) "That's a terrible thing to say, you have your whole life ahead of you..."

"Olivia, I'm not that young, and even if I were, what's the point of being young and disabled?"

Finally, I managed to get Olivia to thank me on behalf of Bank Northeast and wish me a great afternoon. And I didn't even need to be stupid. Well... I may have been a bit controversial, but I was still classy. Of course. Now, finally, I could talk with the ... Wait a minute, where did the blonde woman go? Well, who knows, maybe I would find her inside the theater.

I held out my ticket to the usher in his black uniform; erect and overly serious, he was planted at the entrance to theater four, oblivious to the comedy that was happening right in front of him, a comedy that only I could perceive. In the darkness, I couldn't see any blond hair in the light cast by the screen.

Good for me. That way I didn't have to feel like a loser for thinking it wasn't a great time to get it on. And I could sit way in the back, in the corner against the wall of this small and empty theater, which was how it should be on a Tuesday afternoon.

Contradicting what I had said to Olivia, I had two kids now: the film, and my pinworms. And like any good father, I needed to divide my attention equally between the two. I paid a little attention to the film, and then turned to my pinworms. But it was to the pinworms that I sang:

"One way or another, I'm gonna getcha getcha getcha getcha, one way or another, I'm gonna find you..."

I just left out all the parts about winning them over.

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