# Chapter 15: Eu Tô Famoso

A friend once asked me, "Wait, how many times have you been robbed?" I answered, "Too many to count." It's one of the sad realities of living in South America. Luckily, nothing has been at gunpoint so far, but I can't rule it out. I've had my nice Levi e-bike stolen in the middle of the day because I locked it up by the basket, which they simply unscrewed before riding off into the Rio sunset. I've also had a very nice thousand-dollar gold chain pickpocketed, ironically on Thanksgiving Day, a year after I was drugged and robbed in Medellín. Apparently being robbed on Thanksgiving is an annual tradition for me. I'm starting to dread that holiday.

While expensive, these are an unfortunate part of everyday life here. You must always keep your head on a swivel. I've decided nice things aren't worth having if they can easily be taken. I'd like to say I'm way more careful now, but I still live in the moment. I can't walk around paranoid all the time that something will be taken, which is the exact opposite of me in a manic state.

I'd like to tell the story of my phone being stolen at Pedra do Sal, a famous samba party in Rio. Monday nights are especially busy because, traditionally, that's when people had the day off. It was Christmas, and the gringo group of digital nomads had planned to have some drinks there that night. At the time, I had become friends with a very beautiful Russian woman with red hair. Let's call her [Y].

A little about me: I'm very opposed to dating anyone in a friend group. The gringos in Rio have formed a large digital nomad community. It's even been written about in the Rio news. While I was attracted to [Y], I knew it wasn't a good idea to pursue anything. We had become good friends, and I didn't want to ruin that. Plus, news of any relationship in the group spreads like wildfire. I wasn't particularly popular, but I imagine this dynamic is common everywhere.

That night I spent most of the time chatting with [Y] about random stuff. I'd told the group I'd invited a date to join me. I could tell [Y] wasn't thrilled about this, but we were friends, so I didn't think much of it. My date arrived with another friend. She didn't speak English, so I tried to talk with her through Google Translate. Pedra do Sal is extremely packed most Mondays, with everyone shoulder to shoulder, stacked on top of each other.

It's not the best environment for long, deep chats on Google Translate, so I kept my messages brief. I wasn't interested in her, though I'm sure she was a lovely person. As the night went on, I could tell [Y] was getting a little jealous. I found that surprising, because we'd never had anything romantic. I was getting ready to leave and saying my goodbyes. Not sure how it happened, but saying goodbye to [Y] turned into us kissing. It caught me totally off guard. I'm certain people saw us. My rule about not mixing business with pleasure had been broken.

We talked for a second after the kiss. She confessed that she'd always liked me and that I was the only man in the group who respected her. I was flattered, but my inner dialogue was telling me to get out of there quickly so I could gather my thoughts.

I said goodbye and headed toward the Uber pickup spot, which meant walking 10 or 15 minutes shoulder to shoulder. If you didn't know, Pedra do Sal is famous for pickpockets. I'm pretty sure one in three gringos who've gone has a phone-thief story. Normally I'm more careful with my phone, but that night I was a bit shaken from the kiss. I texted a friend who was coming to Rio and tried to explain what had happened with [Y].

Between texts, the person in front of me stopped walking and started moving backward. I quickly put my free hand on his back to keep him from coming into me. He kept walking backward. I stuffed my phone in my pocket and used both hands to stop him. This went on for several seconds. I was like, WTF, why is this guy walking backward like this?

Eventually we started walking again at a normal pace, still crammed shoulder to shoulder. A minute or two went by, and I went to grab my phone from my pocket. Surprise, surprise, it was gone. I briefly tried to look for someone who could have taken it, but it was pointless. At the time, I didn't realize it had happened during the weird walking-backward situation. Looking back, it was a classic decoy.

One of the phrases I've been practicing in Portuguese is "Eu tô famoso," which means "I'm famous." Among all the digital nomads, I've become famous for being the guy who has things stolen. I'm just glad word hasn't spread to the Cariocas (people from Rio) yet.