

Report From Agent Gamble by Nick Cody

“Antipathies lead to animosities. Nip it in the bud.” It took a while for my swimmy vision to bring her note into focus. By her, I mean my wife Lisa, who had scribbled the message onto a yellow note, peeled it off the pad, and then attached it to the one place I was sure to see it: my alarm clock. She gets up early but I always sleep in late. The “it” in her note referred to my resentment over a “little mission” I was given recently. I’d stayed up last night and railed against my rotten luck. Lisa listened and commiserated, nodding at what I felt were the ace points in my argument, points emphasized by pounding my fist into my palm, and then she nodded off completely. I must have continued shadow boxing for another full hour before I noticed that I’d been talking to myself. She was out cold.

I joined the Movement about six months ago and the assignments I’d been given did not exactly match my initial expectations. Read Rudolf Rocker. Check. Meet another Movement noob at the Jumping Bean café to discuss the latest work of Noam Chomsky. Check. Write a check to support the DemocracyNow fundraiser. Check.

The reading I didn’t mind. It was something I had taken for granted, a necessary blade in the armory: get the facts! And given my net worth, funding this or that group was always going to be part of the game. As far as Ethan goes, that’s the guy I met at the Park Slope café, he’s plenty smarter than me. He just needed some help getting his head around Chomsky’s critique of U.S.-Israeli policy, and that stuff has nothing to do with the intellect. Reading, meeting, discussing, all well and good, but none of it seemed like *action*. I’d hoped for something bad ass, like Code Pink or WikiLeaks. Instead, it was turning out to be more like book clubs and cocktail parties.

So three days ago I received my latest directive via secured email: *Accept your invitation to the Koch brothers’ Halloween party in the Upper East Side, bring a costume, 1 guest.* My first thought was, whoa! these Coordinators are good. How did they even know I was sent an invitation? Then I realized the answer. I’d told them about it a month ago as an offhand comment about the Koch brothers being prime candidates for the Cream Pie Campaign. Just like the inverse of a baseball team honoring one of its young heroes with a soft plate of whipped cream to his face, the Movement started creaming bad guys whose actions were dishonoring the nation and the species. The agents would then get arrested, be charged with a misdemeanor, and appear on nightly TV shows to explain their hijinks. My mention of it to my Coordinator was a not-very-subtle way of saying I WANT TO THROW THE PIE.

Instead, I wound up with a suggestion to play nice with the mucky mucks. I wasn’t even offered any ideas for a Halloween costume! My wife, who probably preferred to stay home and keep her feet warm, played along like a good trooper, “I wonder if Catwoman will be there. C’mon! It will be a hoot!” What could be funnier than seeing senior citizens in spandex, was her argument. But I wasn’t expected to simply attend and think derisive things. I had to talk to *them*, face-to-face! The first lines of my directive said it all: “Hello Guy. I am the Coordinator who believes in magic. Something lies dormant in corrupt human hearts. The seed can only be reached through soul power. It comes up from the heart, through your face and into the face of the other, then to his heart. Find the seeds and wake them up.”

I thought hard about quitting. But if you knew what my life was like before joining the Movement, you’d know what that means. Before I got married, I spent *five whole years* playing World of Warcraft. And before that it was shrooms, blotter acid, and Phish concerts. In college I

wrote bad poetry and consoled myself with the thought that ‘at least I wasn’t a wealth-obsessed overlord fixing to destroy the planet’. Exactly *how* Procter & Gamble was destroying the world eluded my youthful understanding, but I figured no Fortune 500 corporation could be innocent, right?

So I wrote atrocious poems and thumbed my nose at the family back home, who calculated that I would grow up sooner rather than later, enter a top-notch MBA program, and return east to inherit my share of the Gamble fortune. They were right about a few things. I gave up poetry for physical fitness, and I gave up WOW for Lisa Swann. No thanks to me, P&G brought in over \$80 billion last year. I excuse myself from shareholder meetings and no one has ever complained.

Several years ago *GQ* did an expose on me titled, “Gamble Much? The Billionaire Guy With Fabulous Abs.” They did a bit of research beforehand and surprised me during the interview by quoting part of the only poem I have published. I pointed out that it was the greatest celebration of cunnilingus ever to appear in that journal. It got past the editors because they thought it was about food and farms. *Iowa Quarterly*, 1994:

*Lapping at love’s molasses,
I have the mindless euphoria
of a heifer with her cud.*

That was around the time when I really started reading. Zinn, Chomsky, Finkelstein. But they didn’t care to hear about any of my new-found political views. They wanted playboy stuff, bachelor kiss-and-tell. The writer at *GQ* garbled a few of my quotes, bleeding heart stuff mostly, and thereafter the more I read, the less interested any of “those” publications became in what I had to say. Still got the 6-pack though.

Moving on to the party. I went as Leonidas, King of Sparta, from the Zack Snyder film *300*, and Lisa settled for a hastily put together Anna Kournikova, racquet and all, only a hundred times more gorgeous. To sum it up: we lost in straight sets. And, according to the doorman who relayed the news with apologies, the Koch brothers weren’t even in attendance. The suite was under one of the charitable organizations they manage. A tax write-off. Lisa bored a hedge fund manager to tears by describing in detail the research she was doing at MIT on the language acquisition of children who lose their sight and hearing around their second year. She explained that according to most studies it seems to be true that children are born with ready-made capacities for language. They just need those two years of exposure to language to be able to communicate later by other means. Fascinating stuff! Deaf/blind children learn to communicate by placing their hands on the speaker’s face in order to decipher the words being used. Science is not my bag, obviously, but Lisa had explained it to me a few times (and that the research had been pioneered by Carol Chomsky) and all I remember is something about the “Tadoma” method and conclusions drawn from the poverty of stimulus.

“Speaking of which,” I said, “I spy a couple in the corner who look like they could use a little stimulation.” I turned and winked at Lisa who never lost a beat lecturing at Mr. Derivatives. It was at this point when I noticed that nobody wore anything like the goofy Halloween costumes we had been expecting. Catwoman and Homer Simpson were definitely not part of the crowd. It was all cloaks and masks. And quite similar to the scenes in Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut*, without the orgies.

Meta-report moment: Do I really have to go into this? I know what happened. I mentioned my wife to the masked couple, pointing to her in the corner, mentioned Carol Chomsky, and then Noam Chomsky, and then brought up in an off-hand way that he spoke at the U.N. a couple of weeks ago, didn't he? On the topic of Israel. Some pretty strong words. The pale-faced overlord scoffed. Chomsky, he spat out the name again. He launched into a diatribe. Chomsky, old dove and left-wing nut, speaking out against this and that, the defense budget and capitalism, while there he is, working at MIT all those years when MIT was receiving huge funding from the weapons-research industry. "Capitalism has worked pretty well for him, hasn't it?" My yeah-buts and attempts at devil's advocate only drew more vitriol. Shadows coalesced around us. More cloaks and masks were listening in while appearing to be looking in another direction. I could feel the heat rising to my face.

Then finally I said something like, "You know a lot of people say Chomsky's points, in talks and on the printed page, are impervious to rebuttal because they are so well-researched and ethically principled. But I've come up with a fairly devastating critique of his political beliefs."

You could *feel* the shadows leaning in. The place grew quiet. Then I chuckled and lowered my voice to draw them in further. I started with a soft, "The argument that other critics of his fail to employ is," and then I erupted into a titanic outburst of profanity and curses of such scathing bitterness that a masked woman yelped and sprinkled the floor with her Mimosa. I brandished my *xiphos* and tainted otherwise good points with unnatural language. Lisa threw up her hands, flush with shame, and said she was leaving. I knew I had lost. So on the way out I stabbed the decker cake top down and shouted to the crowd, "You're on the wrong side of history! Morality! Repent, you motherfuckers!"

So, I screwed up in a major way. Lisa's still not talking to me, but I think she'll forgive me if I ask for it another dozen times. I'm going with reflective practice here and trying to find out how the whole thing deteriorated – in case I'm given another assignment. I guess we learn from failure, not victory. But really, is anyone going to read this?

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