

Vision Quest Campaign

If Tom Revel were opening up, and he does at times, mostly in conversations, prayer, or private journals visible to some individuals in intelligence agencies when his Wi-Fi is on, which he often leaves on for purpose of letting some see (with awareness that more than one IC entity can, plus perhaps foreign businesses and governments) some analysis which is of more interest to some than creative content, albeit some enjoy that too, and on for purpose of Tom's convenience—checking email, scrolling social media, and occasionally Googling curiosities, mysteries, facts and fundamentals, sources of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, and on the darker end droplets of updates pertaining to the hatred in the world God hates (the hatred not the world, which is God's lovely creation), and at sinful moments content spurring moral dilemma or worse, heart and soulfelt crisis, requiring the Lord's mercy to purify Tom's being upon sincere confession that he is but human, one of more than eight billion people and growing, and as a human, even with streaks of spirituality, a creation subject to flaw because flaw is part of what makes us human so the best we can do, you might say, is try to scrape away the flaws and behold what might become through such scraping at the higher end a breathing, breathtaking masterwork with upmost minimal flaw, what might earn the appreciated compliments, if modestly delivered, such phrases regarding character like "he's a good, decent man" or "she is gracious and lovely" and in the performances variations (perhaps less modest, venturing into the fields of praise) such as "he powerhouses through opposition, whatever it be, it's basically you set it up and he smashes it like bricks cannoned into glass creating space for teammates to walk beyond the border of strategies into a comfort zone of success where they turn around and wave goodbye to the strategies they thought they needed until power master saw and engaged the situation."

Ask him what animal he likes, Tom might say "giraffe" and the team builder thinks it's significant like Tom has revealed significance to which Tom later says, "Listen. There's not much to it, really, I said giraffe because my desk has a wooden sculpture on it given by someone in my family," to which Teambuilder says, "So it shows you care about family," And Tom thinks, "I can't believe it. This man may be on to something; somehow this guy's question has me reflecting on my relations with family and other loved ones. I thought my response was random."

Brussel sprouts and soda with an entrée of room gazing satisfy Tom most days. He plays spy by himself, at times imagining he's about to jackhammer the intelligence world, if only the brunette lady with dark lipstick in the tan dress, torn stockings and brown heelless shoes braiding her hair and adjusting her sunglasses, drinking milk at the next table across from her girlfriend, were working for Hamas. Ask Tom: "You never know." Common sense says, "No. You know. She's a so-so attractive woman dining with a friend."

Tom thinks, "Maybe it's not only brunch in that plastic carry out bag; there's a passcode and Ms. Heelless Milk is heading from this Mediterranean bistro, point A, to the drop spot in a Boston park, point B, and she's meeting a heavysset Lebanese man who bankrolls shady foreign activities and knows people with maps of tunnels in hot zones. Perhaps I should follow and see? Wait. Don't do that. Laws are in place. In fact, I support such legislation. Without preventive measures in the books, who knows what people would do?"

"Wait a minute. Heelless left her fashion bag and her friend doesn't notice. Shall I play the hero? If I perform a hero task, am I acting as a hero or am I just hero? It's like the debate about Amendment XXV Section 3, ratified in 1967. When the President writes on a piece of paper, "I'm unable to discharge the powers and duties of the office" and gives it to the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and Speaker of the House, two persons, the Vice President is Acting President. What does 'Acting' mean? And what about that for the 'Actual' President? Is that a good situation? It depends on who you ask. 'Well, I'm still President,' he says, 'I just don't have to act like it, constitutionally that is. At least not until I give a letter to the Pro Temp and the Speaker saying "The contrary is so."'

"I say it depends on who you ask. Ask an actor what 'Acting' means. Something like: 'It's the essence of humanity presented as behavior facing obstacles and dealing with conflict and relations and in so doing, revealing truth and what it means to breathe.' You ask the actor, 'Does the Vice President need to know all that? We're putting together a worksheet about what happens if she needs to act more Presidential.'

"The friend took the purse. So much for the hero moment. Another will present itself. There could be a bomb in it anyway. My distracted thought may have saved my life. In that regard, I exhibit savior characteristics. Kind of hero."

What scenario is it anyway? Tom wonders. If that's what's done at the higher level of executive matters, continuing with the Amendment XXV thought, maybe my studio should adopt the practice? Imagine.

"Team, especially Mr. Chief of Staff, I've decided I don't want to act as President for the time being. I want to keep the position, I just don't want to act like it. My understanding, we need to notify the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and Speaker of the House, and I guess the Vice-President."

"Wait a minute," Chief of Staff says. "It's not a lighthearted matter. That's in place for serious issues, not for going to lunch or vacation. Like I'm going to binge watch movies or play guitar? Amendment XXV? That's not how it works. It's supposed to be, 'Hey. I was walking to the motorcade and Secret Service overlooked Oswald or Booth wannabes but I survived, and while recovering and sympathy popularity escalates I need space and time to heal.'"

"So it takes place when Secret Service fails to do their job?"

"There are other scenarios."

"Like what?"

"Personal ailments," the Chief of Staff says. "Like say you need surgery. And it's not known if you'll wake up. That might be a good use of Amendment XXV."

"Why would I not wake up from surgery?"

"Maybe that's not a good example. Your brain might get foggy."

"I've seen ads for Prevagen. Is that made from jellyfish? It improves your memory?"

"No. I'm talking blackouts and failing mental fitness exams and the like."

An assistant says, "I don't like this. On the record we're talking about high level executive matters taken lightly, executives getting harmed to the point of near lifelessness, Secret Service not succeeding, brain fog, jellyfish."

"I say let's see what happens. So for this to happen, the President Pro Tempore and Speaker?"

The assistant says, "I cannot believe the handoff of power in the free world depends on two people receiving a letter."

"Does it need to be cursive?" They look at each other.

Tom returns to his apartment near Coolidge Corner, Brookline. Ms. Heelless Milk is gone. She's off doing her thing, sharing a passcode and discussing Mid-East tunnels with a spy, or maybe hopping on the T or at the theatre. One thing known, she's on Tom's radar. It's not so much attraction at this point; it never really was. It's larger. National security, or perhaps international, is at stake. Tom will find his way into the Langley museum; he'll earn his mark.

Tom glances toward the park near his apartment office. The absence of activity means he's clear. Followed? Negative. How long does the spy game last? What began as a solitary game at lunch has passed its prime. Tom doesn't mind, until now. He looks at his watch, battery recently replaced. All the talk about acting, time to get his act together. Lunch is over. The time lands his flight of imagination, which is somewhat surprising. You'd think the vacation of mind would interfere with daily tasks. It doesn't. He's one who takes pride in balancing fantasy with reality. Sometimes the balance tilts, and Tom feels the need to adjust the beam, a mental tune up, but he knows his surroundings. Wait for the white figure on the crosswalk sign? Yes. Set an example for the eager lady with the stroller. Good citizenship. Volunteer to help hold the door for the balloon man leaving the flower shop down the street. Good deed. Also there's the benefit of others able to say they saw him. You never know when that comes in handy.

The police ask. "Has anyone seen him?" "Yes. That gentleman in the green sweater and slacks held the door for me." "Oh yes, I remember him. I stood next to him at the crosswalk. He didn't jaywalk and gave a slight smile." Or Tom's assistant Agnes: "Yes, I saw Tom. It was working hours. I had just finished eating my sushi. He asked if I had seen Mr. Asher next door." The police inquire. Agnes says, "We received a letter from neighbor Mr. Asher. A misdelivery."

Back to now. Agnes says Mr. Asher seemed in good spirits. Shoe Shiner Leon was approaching as she was leaving. Agnes said she asked if Mr. Asher, having retired intellectual property law, earns money these days from opening mail for Secret Service.

"Why would you ask that?" Tom says.

"Mr. Asher brought it up. Then he said that's not what he does."

"I could have told you. He invested money heavily or knows someone who did in media."

"He lives modestly if that's the case."

"Asher thinks his one-bedroom is a castle. He did Ancestry.com and learned an extremely distant relative was a Lord. He wants to be knighted but it's America."

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Tom is dipping paint brushes in turpenoid but not painting while either mindlessly or mindfully watching a public station documentary about Japanese Puffer fish. It's on a different screen than the one Agnes wheeled in where they watched Vision Quest Campaign unfold. Tom's already forgotten the moment earlier at the deli when the white-haired manager approached a striped-dressed pregnant woman and said, regarding her weight, "You make it look easy," to a choir of smiles.

This is no light moment, the Puffer fish. It's somewhat spy related. The scientists sent in a fake fish with a camera eye to study the intelligence of Puffer, and Puffer accepts the fake fish. That's how legitimate the robot appears. The mission: figure out what drives this creature to make sand sculptures in the ocean. Puffer's motivation, according to the documentary, is to attract a mate. The lady Puffer is impressed by the art and swims around watching Mr. Puffer draw lines in the sand until it's good enough for her, which he learns when she enters the sculpture zone. Art exhibit plus nature plus relationship advice plus sight and sound, it's predictable Tom's watching. That said, it's not work. Tom might say it counts as incubation or inspiration for an untitled work in progress, and for all we know maybe it is, but it's a tough sell.

Assistant Agnes enters. "The photographer is here."

Tom looks at the brush. Clean enough. "What is this?"

"Do you mean who?"

"I mean all of it."

"You mentioned in the board meeting that we might want some Public Relations for our work. The independent radio spots got some traction about CIA, black sites, drones, and the like, and some feel like Mission Accomplished, but there's confusion about what the celebration is about. Some feel, and I must say I can see their view, it's like a victory though it's not clear there was a great obstacle to overcome."

"We removed a significant dose of evil from America and did it without wasting tax payer dollars. Peace elevated. Few were that concerned. Mr. Asher liked the speech. He's trained in sound."

"That's the type of thing people might want to know. The radio broadcasts only go so far. Dramatic, somewhat eloquent deliveries, but at times confusion."

"So is the photographer waiting?"

“Yes. I’ll get him. He stepped out to make a call. It’s a lifestyle session. He wants you to be yourself. He trained under Pete Souza. Show him how you’re inspired by Japanese fish.”

Moments later the young photographer enters with a cell phone and a camera bag. He sets the bag down. Tom approaches to shake his hand, but before Tom reaches him the photographer has already taken a cell phone photograph. He’s only a few years younger than Tom, dressed very similar, business casual. Only the brands differ. They shake hands.

“Nice to meet you,” Tom says. “My assistant arranged the appointment. What is your name?”

“Haba.”

“I like the sound of that. Does that start with an H or an A?”

“H.”

“Curious, is it short for something?”

“Habakkuk.” Haba exchanges the phone with a very nice camera.

“I don’t hear many Habakkuks. The Old Testament prophet?”

“Yes. Also indirectly Protestant,” Haba says.

“The righteousness connection?”

“Not bad. Yes, my parents were moved by Martin Luther’s understanding of Paul’s reference to ‘righteousness from God’ and they learned he got that from Habakkuk 2:4.”

“That is powerful. History passes, in the sense of memory, all the more reason to record. As you know, and I’m recalling, righteousness by faith was like an anthem in the Protestant Reformation.”

“It drove me to Catholicism.” They laugh. “Not really,” Haba says. “So how it works, during the session I’m a wallflower. I know you make photographs and may find what I’m doing interesting, but act like I’m not here. After a while you’ll likely forget I am.”

“This is where wires cross, slightly. The ladder is over there because I was photographing the light fixture, but if I take the same photograph from the same angle, which I would possibly do if you weren’t here, you would be in the image. So in being myself your wallflower is no disguise. My photograph would reveal someone else in the room. I would inadvertently catch you working.”

“It wouldn’t be inadvertent at this point because you’re aware I would be visible.”

“That’s a good point. It’s like a mind game. You’re present but not. Kind of spooky.”

“I’m not sure I follow.” Haba is photographing the light fixture.

“It was a spiritual joke. Like the Holy Ghost, present but unseen.”

“I assure you, I am not the Holy Ghost. I’m a man with a camera working an hourly wage.”

“An hourly waged camera man with the name Habakkuk.” Haba clicks the camera.

Tom continues: “Do you mind if I take a look at what you’ve got?”

“I just started.”

“That angle of the light fixture. I can tell you’re on to something.”

“All right, but I do work best quietly. I can focus. Clearer thoughts. Clearer mind.”

“There’s much to be said of clarity. No doubt. It’s only those late night realizations where all is suddenly very clear, and you almost wish things weren’t so, unless of course you’re having a God moment, and I’ve come to believe they do happen, but when I’m saying you wish otherwise, it’s when it’s maybe not a God moment and clarity includes the good and the ugly, When it’s merely imagery of the tree of life—before the fall of mankind, all seems okay. Nice garden. I like the water, the fruit, God walking and talking, the woman over there. Angels zooming in and out or echoing. Not sure I like all the animals, but I’m able to name them. Maybe I’ll walk over here, grab a stick, put it in fire created by a lightning bolt, and then move the stick around on a rock and craft a charcoal drawing, maybe of that woman or the food to eat. Maybe remind myself of what to store for the off season. But once that shadow is cast, Haba, from that tree, the hamartia, the desire to exceed human limitation, the pride to a sinful degree, gives you a wake-up call, or could anyway. And you’re left wondering, perhaps by yourself at night, or say you have a girlfriend, wife, friends who live with you, whoever, they’re not there at this moment. ‘You know what I am?’”

“A man whose assistant paid me and likes to photograph a light fixture?”

“Human.” Tom smiles and nods, as if he’s shared wisdom instead of concluding flight, and he’s aware Habakkuk would have accepted most any closure to imagery charcoaled on the mental landscape. It’s like shared enjoyment the speech landed, even though it be basic.

Tom says, “The only issue with the somewhat abstract photograph of the light is my presence.”

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