

Espionage Auntie

&

The Case of the Sandy Beach

by

Antonio Perez

© Brett Paufler ©
September 17, 2016

a work of fiction
all rights reserved
www.paufler.net

#

#

The television blaring, she could hardly think. It was all she could do to scuttle out of the room and escape from what was important!

And what was important?

Greg (Brady, you know Greg, from the *Brady Bunch*) had asked two girls to the dance at the same time. Oh, no!

Gilligan (come on, still stuck on that island fifty years later, that guy, same good nature, same bumbling way) had somehow managed to promise everyone else on the island conflicting things. Let me say it again. Oh, no!

And poor Mister Banker (no one remembers his name), in order to keep those ignorant Hillbillies' (who now live in Beverly Hills) money in his bank, he had promised to resolve the conflicting needs of Granny, Ellie Mae, and Jethro, while old Jed, who was now a millionaire, don't you know, was thinking seriously about moving back to Tennessee where folks were normal and they weren't surrounded by blaring announcers day in and day out, making such a racket, one could hardly remember to say, 'Oh, no!' at the end of a silly aside such as this. Oh, no! Indeed!

She closed the door, muffling the sound behind her.

She drew a breath.

Can't you just see her, sighing in relief as she slumps against the bedroom door, looking about the room, surveying the ceramic horses and gymnastic ribbons of her niece's bedroom?

Remember to breath...

Remember to look around and take stock of what 'IS'...

But most importantly, remember who you are.

She was *Espionage Auntie*.

She sighed.

No, there is no sighing. Secret Agents do not sigh.
Secret Agents do not cry! Secret Agents do not...

There was a knock at the door... no, it was more like a scratching in its tentative, unsure inquisitiveness. It wasn't the insistent tapping of her sister. It was not the hard banging of Sam, her brother-in-law, sister's husband, good man, that Sam, not saying anything bad against good ole Sam, boring to a fault breadwinner of the family, away at work even as we speak, definitely a devoted family man that Sam, but not much of a television junkie, so maybe if he were here, he would, in fact, be in here with her.

'Save me,' he would be saying, playing the part of someone in the televised version of the resistance. 'I can't take anymore. It seemed like a little thing at first. I mean, we all have our foibles, but *Dog-It, Man,*' this being about as close to either a swear word or a colorful conversation the man, that Sam, could muster, 'She doesn't even watch the good stuff,' you know, what passes for News in this day and age.

But Sam would never do that. He was a good man that Sam.

Was... such a curious choice of words... was...

Espionage Auntie, prone as she was to narrative asides, flashbacked to earlier that morning when Sam, Samuel, Dr. Samuel B. (in all) Seriousness, donned his hat,

straightened his tie, kissed his wife, grabbed his briefcase, and headed out the door, in that order, with the same timing, like he did every morning, day after day, just like clockwork, ever since the day she (*Espionage Auntie*, that is) had arrived.

It was enough to make you sick... OK, maybe a little with jealousy, if you weren't already in a dizzying vertigo-like fall from the surround sound cacophony of the television, day in and day night, unsure as to whether, you were stuck in some *Twilight Zone* episode (not that they ever watched that show, too cerebral, she supposed) or just loosing your grip on reality.

Stop, already!

Just stop!

Espionage Auntie stopped. She took stock. She was breathing hard. Good! I mean, panic attack, not good. Not being able to think, also not good. But on the whole, breathing, well, as they say, better than the alternative.

So, breathing? Check.

In a safe harbor? Check.

Persistent scratching at the door, slowing, almost giving up, ready to turn away...

Espionage Auntie quickly opened the door! Looking around, no one was there! Strange. She had thought someone was there. Well, maybe they left a note. Looking down...

How does one indicate surprise? Shock? Delight? Little Samantha was there, almost turning to go, hesitantly, starting to talk...

‘Not here!’ *Espionage Auntie* whisked the little girl into her room. Auntie’s room? Samantha’s room? For the duration, it was the same. Throwing a pillow at the crack in the door (sounds travel, people listen, but also missing by quite a wide margin, yes, rather, and causing no small mysterious delight in her diminutive companion, Auntie was a strange one that was for sure, funny, odd, in a word, strange), *Espionage Auntie* ushered her contact (niece: Samantha, six and a half, remember the half, that half is important) to the far side of the room.

‘What news?’

The girl looked at her, blankly.

Good, no news. Or as they say, no news, is good news.

‘Tea?’ That usually loosed them up. Some folks had their T-V. *Espionage Auntie* had her T, straight up, no milk, sans sugar, and more times as not as of late in imaginary cups, in imaginary saucers, with nary a drop of

anything resembling some much needed delight to go around.

That had to change!

It was the jamming signals, video mind control, three hundred and forty eight channels, Sally, her sister, would have you know. Though, they only seemed to watch the same two. 'Eh, three hundred and forty eight channels and we only seem to watch the two,' so there you are, from the horse's, er, that is to say, the sister's mouth.

But they were having tea, high tea, the good kind, the kind where you spread a blanket out on the floor, sit down in the middle of it with your niece and pour imaginary tea, Sumatra Black, if you please, into imaginary cups, fine, nearly translucent bone china, and talk about boys, 'Yuck!', school, 'I like Miss Richards!', and whatever else comes to mind...

'Oh, sugar,' Auntie, *Espionage Auntie*, asked, sort of rhetorically, as she held out the chocolate covered square: Sponge Candy, the delight of the Tri-State area. After all, if she didn't get her niece spun out on sugar, who else was going to? No one, that was who.

Besides, that was all part of the *Espionage Auntie* shtick. Was it a shtick? Well, clearly it was a shtick. But even for a shtick, can a shtick be a shtick if you never tell anyone else about it, the shtick? I mean, doesn't that defeat the whole point of a shtick?

So, with that in mind, should she tell her niece about the shtick?

And how does one tell another about a shtick?

Of course, far more importantly, ‘Oh, you’re done with your tea. Another cup? Sugar? But of course, one lump or two?’

Two it is, as if she expected anything else, so refined...

Sam traveled. Never quite making tenure, ‘Who wants to get locked down in the same old same old?’ clearly, not her sister, clearly, not her husband. And so, he had opted for, secured, been lucky enough to consistently land, resident teaching positions, a semester here, a semester there... usually there, almost always there, no, no, a little farther, off the beaten path, worlds away...

It was as the Frankfurt airport...

She had wanted to be there for the birth of her niece. She was going to be an Auntie. It seemed important... to her, maybe to no one else, but it seemed important to her.

And there she was at the Frankfurt airport getting the third degree from some bored custom’s agent. He must have been bored, but one could still make out the flicker of life in his eyes, the delight as he teased her, going through her luggage, it seemed such an invasion.

Was she really a threat?

To national security?

‘And Madame, what are these?’

‘Chocolates, sponge candy,’ from the Tri-State area, don’t you know, a local specialty. ‘We used to enjoy them so much as children, and...’

‘You should not be feeding newborns chocolate.’ His English was impeccable. His eyes piercing. She liked to remember them as blue. ‘We have chocolate in Germany, you know. You may wish to sample some of the local delicacies while you are here?’

The ‘you’ in question being a very soon to be Auntie, who (once again, that ‘you’) never knew what to make of such comments. Was he hitting on her?

Yes! Yes! Actually he was...

No! No! Actually, he wasn’t...

So, confusing, so very confusing. But apparently, as far as going through her personal belongings, he had lost all interest.

‘Müssen Dór,’ he had said, rather cryptically while she was gathering her things, ‘It is the best chocolate, the very

best chocolate the world over. So, no need to bring your own the next time you visit Germany. In some ways, it would be insulting to bring your own the next time you visited Germany.'

Welcome to the country.

She wondered if he was part French... or related to her sister.

It did not matter. During her trip, she had gone to the Müssen Dór and the custom agent with the piercing blue eyes (were they blue) was right; the chocolate was simply divine... but it was not Sponge Candy as one might find, readily, by the side of almost every check out register in the Tri-State area... and one seldom had to take a train with two connections, very confusing, only to arrive minutes before closing, so nice of the couple, and they were a nice couple, to stay open, a while longer, pulling down the shades, closing up shop, but all the same, happy to hear about the candy, sponge, from the Tri-State area, while preparing her a special box of their own to take with her, 'There is no place like home, what one is used to, and what is there, but you are not there, and this is what's here' so maybe, they, too, were part French, 'and we would like to think that you will enjoy what we have to offer,' so, the good part of France.

She did... enjoy.

She does... enjoy.

And she has continued to order from Müssen's throughout the years, that final Dór, being a bit pretentious at times, but never for birthday's, she never ordered the Müssen Dór for birthdays, holidays, or other special occasions and especially not when visiting nieces wherein it might be important to stock one's pockets with goodies, so hands would be eager to hold, company eager to join, and laps delighted to sit in and be next to.

'Do you have to go, Auntie?'

Yes! Oh, gads, yes, child! Can you not hear that racket! I must get out of this place before I go completely insane.

They were weird. Her sister was weird. Her husband was weird. You know, you try to save people from themselves, her sister mainly, if she'd had a brother, she'd probably be doing the same thing for him, trying to save him for himself... drifting off into space, into her own mind, can't you just see, well, she certainly could see, the man-boy wiping the snot from his nose onto his tuxedo sleeve at his very own wedding, poor girl, his bride to be, you had to feel sorry for the girl. But she would try. She would try. She would do the best she could. And she, *Espionage Auntie*, that is, would have brought chocolates for his children. Of course, it's easier to see his imaginary children as boys, so probably she'd be bringing them ant farms, rubber band guns...

I mean, there was that whole other branch of the espionage service, the one that deal in death...

But hers was a subtler art...

She had not been able to save her sister from her sister, but maybe she could save her sister's daughter from her sister.

Was that clear?

Did it need to be clear?

Your mission if you choose to accept it...

For supper, they used tv-trays, had the latest and greatest microwave specialties, the local delicacy was always flash frozen, never fresh, and this was not due to a lack of financial resources, mercy, but their apartment was... astounding: the view, over the ocean, setting sun, ships sailing by, one could almost feel the breeze, almost, dust, allergies, nature, that sort of thing, 'We never open the doors,' going out the balcony, bad form, two weeks, no longer, one doesn't want to out stay their welcome, after all, but in all that time, nary a venture forth, out into in the wild unknowns.

'The beach? Why? If you want to go swimming, there's a pool.'

But wading in the surf? Building sand castles...

‘And sweeping all that sand up for the next three weeks after you’re gone, no thank you.’

Going to the beach was not allowed.

‘So, I will be checking into a hotel later this evening,’ *Espionage Auntie* explained, tried to explain, have I explained?

‘Do you have to?’

Of course she had to, after all, she was *Espionage Auntie*, she had learned diplomacy from the very best of them, which is to say, she had learned bribery from the very best of them. And yes, that often worked best... when dealing with immature children: a bit of chocolate here, a luxury suite on the ocean there. They wouldn’t have to worry about sweeping up the sand... or driving her to the airport Sunday morning... or even microwaving the latest and greatest anything, as advertised on TV, for the next few days if they wanted be her guest for a little five star decadence. I’m sure they could whip up macaroni and cheese for dinner in the restaurant and fruit loops for breakfast, you know, for guests with a more discerning palate, after all, she’d already asked. ‘Madame, we aim to please. We shall have an assortment of breakfast cereals for your company’s enjoyment, including,’ of course, ‘the Loops of the Fruit.’

‘But do you really have to go?’

Yes, it felt good to be wanted. ‘I’ll be back soon enough. But, you know,’ added almost as an afterthought, but actually at the core of her nefarious plan, ‘you could always come with, spend the weekend with me,’ at the hotel, ‘go to the beach, build a sand castle...’

‘But the sharks?’

Poor thing, by the look in her eye, Samantha was serious.

But then, so was *Espionage Auntie*, as she procured a squirt gun from the purse at her side with practiced ease, holding it at the ready, defiantly daring the world, ‘I won’t let anything happen to you, darling.’

And that was all it took: smiles all around, squealing delight, and a sugar crazed youngster armed to the teeth (or should that be filled to the gills) with an Auntie’s bad influence.

‘I can’t believe you did that!’ chocolate, squirt gun, not to mention the crazed stories of International Daring Do and Custom Checkpoint Flirtation, ‘She’ll never settle down now! What were you thinking?’ And the kicker, just wait for it, ‘And on the day you’re leaving, it’s like you don’t care.’

So, ‘Why doesn’t she spend the night with me?’ as if *Espionage Auntie* had only just now considered the

possibility, adding diplomatically after further, fake deliberation, ‘And you could join us... or enjoy the weekend to yourself.’

And how does that saying from the *God Father* go, seriously, he must have been a *God Mother* given his cunning, something about how it’s best to give the opposition an offer, they simply cannot refuse...