Ferdinando Frega – Nando the Scribe

NOBODY EVER TELLS THIS STORY



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At the end of World War II, everyone was exhausted.

The defeated were losing everything they had spent years consolidating. The victors had won the war but now had to decide what the future would look like.

People were tired, yet hopeful. Nobody was willing to give up. That is human nature. But let us never forget that behind every man there is usually a woman, even if history rarely mentions her.

America was exporting its know-how to help rebuild shattered economies. At the same time, it was doing what America has always done best: business. Factories grew, profits grew, and new products appeared every year. Some answered existing needs. Others created desires people did not even know they had.

Toward the end of the 1950s, mountains of condoms flooded the market. The official reason was simple enough: protection against disease. Nobody wanted to die.

But every medal has more than one face.

The product was not particularly cheap, and using it regularly required a certain commitment from the wallet. It became a small investment.

Everybody carried at least one. Hidden. Folded. Camouflaged in a wallet, waiting for the appropriate emergency.

The result was predictable.

Birth rates began to fall.

The first company to notice was a German manufacturer of baby bottles and pacifiers. The accountants saw it before anyone else. Sales were declining. Consumption was declining. Fewer babies meant fewer customers.

Meetings followed.

Plans followed.

Investments were proposed.

But there was a fundamental problem.

You cannot buy babies in a laboratory.

They must be born.

The company struggled to find a solution. Nothing seemed to work.

Then the owner decided to visit an important Italian customer near Naples, a major wholesaler with a remarkable talent for moving large volumes of merchandise.

The business meeting went well.

That evening, the client invited him to dinner.

After dinner, in perfect Italian style, the guest was informed that a "blanket" had been arranged for the night.

Except this was no ordinary blanket.

Waiting in the bedroom was a Russian woman of seventy-five who confidently claimed to be forty.

According to her, companionship came first.

Money was merely a justification.

She insisted that gratitude explained everything.

The German was not entirely convinced.

Neither am I.

In fact, she sounded suspiciously like me and my damned one-dollar proposal.

After they had completed their evening ritual, the German businessman finally relaxed enough to confess the problem that was tormenting him.

The Russian woman listened patiently.

Then, as women have been doing for centuries while men hold meetings, she produced the idea of the century.

"Build your own condom factory."

The businessman stared at her.

He could not understand what condoms had to do with baby bottles and pacifiers.

Seeing his confusion, she continued.

"The raw material already comes from Southeast Asia. Production costs can be kept low. Transportation barely affects the final price. Sell quality products at affordable prices. Consider part of the margin an investment."

The German still did not see the connection.

Then came the real idea.

"For every hundred condoms produced, make ten defective."

The businessman almost choked.

"Defective?"

"Just a tiny hole. The size of a needle. Invisible."

Silence.

Then she added:

"The babies will take care of the rest."

The German exploded with laughter.

He was German, after all, and Germans generally prefer statistics to miracles.

But on the flight home, the laughter faded.

The idea remained.

Then it became a thought.

Then a possibility.

Then a mantra.

Eventually he called the Russian woman and invited her to join the project.

He offered her complete freedom regarding compensation.

Whatever figure she wished to write on her monthly cheque would be accepted.

Births recovered.

Consumption recovered.

The baby bottle business recovered.

And, in time, people almost forgot about condoms altogether.

Some even started washing them, hanging them out to dry, and using them again.

A little Neapolitan magic.

Ferdinando