

The Spy From Outer Space

Sally Walker, THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA, JULY 16, 1989 , Part I of III

What do you do when the CIA comes a-calling and insists you are the best-kept secret in its archives?

Sally Walker, the well-known crusader for animal welfare, recreates an Intriguing encounter with Langley's operatives in this delightful tale.

One day as I was sitting in my office trying to write one more positive and constructive article about Indian zoos, my typist, Shanti, said a couple of men had come to see me ... foreign men. Now, I am an American but I have lived in India so long that the word 'foreigner' means a non-Indian to me also. I groaned inwardly. Probably they were a couple of zookeepers from the UK or USA comes to avail of a free roof over their head. I have put my name on the Keeper Accommodation List of the two countries zookeeper associations and can expect such visitors at any moment.

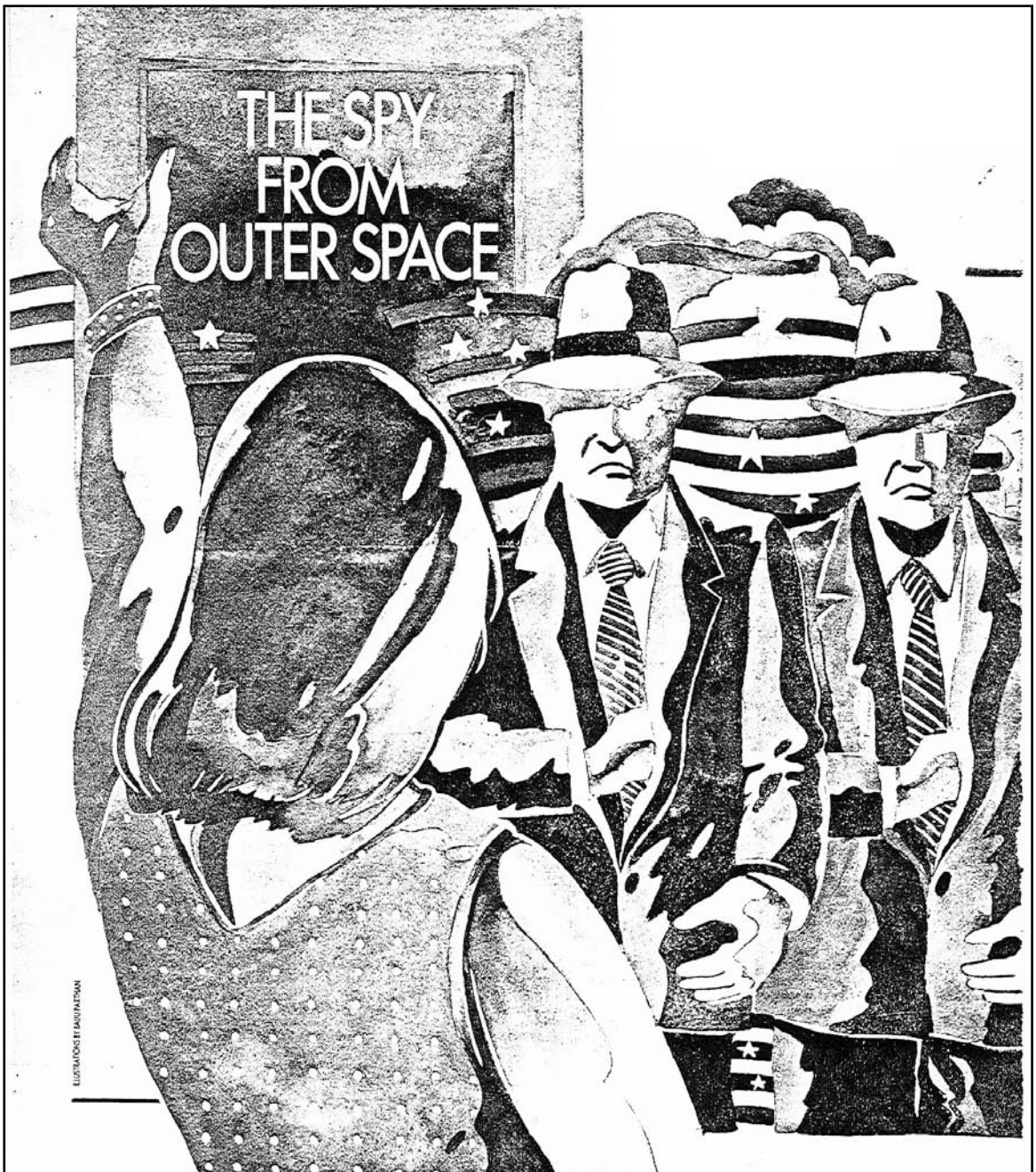
Of course I like zookeepers and they always put me up when I go to America and to England, but I have come not to like foreigners in India. They are troublesome... always asking for boiled water and less chillies, etc. And they are sensitive! you just can't say anything to them without hurting their gigantic egos.

Anyway, I asked Shanti to show them in and to my surprise they were wearing suits. Not safari suits, but real suits dark despite the heat, with long sleeved white shirts and blue striped ties. They were clean-shaven, had fresh short haircuts and reeked of some conservative brand of after-shave lotion that I could not identify.

"They must be businessmen of some sort". I thought to myself, "probably in town for a few days, but already homesick for white skin and boiled vegetables". Coimbatore is an industrial city and does get foreigners in as consultants from time to time, so this was not an unrealistic supposition,

although I have lived here in Coimbatore for years and never met a foreign consultant. But then I don't 'socialise' in the normal sense of the word either; in fact I live rather like a hermit.

Before I could speculate further, the men reached into their inside coat pockets and pulled out identification. Now, they did this in unison, as if it was a military drill. That should have told me something in itself. Since they presented the cards at precisely the same instant - in unison, yet! - it was little embarrassing. I mean, what is the protocol? Whose card do you look at first, when both men seemed





exactly the same age, height, build, rank, etc. I played it safe and looked at the one on the right. Later I realized that this was wrong, because may right was their left, and vice versa.

I guess that's important but what was more important is what it said on the identification of both men, and that was that they were CIA agents. CIA agents in my house? My heart started pounding. My first thought was my visa. They were not going to extend my visa. I was going to have leave again. Maybe even be deported. I sat down. Immediately my senses returned; CIA agents didn't have anything to do with my visa. It's CBI agents, the Indian guys, that worry about that.

I felt momentarily relieved, but only momentarily. I have read enough spy novels and left-wing press to know that CIA agents, along with KGB agents, M15 agents, the Mossad and various other terrorist groups are not nice people. In fact, although my associations with the CBI have been very indirect, I would have felt much safer had two (or even 20) of them been sitting in front of me, instead of these creeps.

I would not be wise to think longer or they would get suspicious so I said, as brightly as possible, "Well, and what can I do for you gentlemen today. You're a long way from home, isn't it? Ha! Ha!" I added, "Want some butter-milk? as an afterthought. It was a hot day in Coimbatore.

The two men were staring me straight in the eye. When I spoke they turned their heads (again in total Unison) and looked at one another, and they turned back to me. It was a beautifully choreographed act, I must admit. Some unspoken signal must have passed between them because the one on my left (their right, see why I think I made a mistake) spoke.

"Are you Sally Walker?" he asked, peeping into a file as he had forgotten the name of the person he had come all this way to see.

"Well," I said, thinking fast "I am one Sally Walker. There are several Sally Walkers in the world, you know. Some of them are real and some are fictional. There was little Sally Walker who lost her shoe in a nursery rhyme I knew when I was little. Fats Domino had a single record out about another Little Sally Walker (undoubtedly the same one all grown up if Fats Domino was singing about her). Then I have met some Sally Walkers in my life and heard about more of them from people I know. Uh, which Sally Walker is it that you want?"

Without even blinking, or looking into this file the man said : "Sally R Walker, Sally Raulston Walker, formerly Sara Jean Raulston of Goldsboro, North Carolina, married for two years to Charles Albert Walker of Greensboro, divorced, dirty hippy for five years, married seven years to Professor Richard E Mortensen of Los Angeles, divorced, living in India for 13 years, three visits to USA. Yoga student, Kannada student, Sanskrit Student, organizer of Friends of Mysore Zoo, organizer of Zoo Outreach Organisation, brown hair, age 44 years, green eyes, contact lenses, circular shaped birthmark on left buttock..."

"Excuse me," I said, "you needn't go on. This is an amazing coincidence, because all those names are the same but I am not the Sally Walker you want. It's not possible".

The man looked nonplussed. In fact, both men looked nonplussed. Their whole aura of self-confidence just dissolved – again, in perfect unison, as if both of them were going to collapse into themselves like pricked balloons, leaving their dark suits, long-sleeved shirts and blue striped ties sitting up there. I should have kept quiet at that point but I just never know when to stop talking so I said: "I was never dirty. Even when I was a hippy taking LSD and methedrine, I always took a bath." I smiled confidently, a real Colgate smile to prove how clean I was – and am.

In a few seconds that remark got logged into the computer-brains of my visitors and immediately as it registered, self-confidence began to

ooze back in. They looked at one another again, relieved, and back at me, disgusted. All still in unison.

The spokesman assumed a little smile. You know the kind, the kind when you don't open your mouth, when you just stretch your lips a little without changing the expression in your eyes. It usually means somebody is pissed off but is not allowed to show it.

"Ms. Walker," he said, "I think that was unnecessary. You are definitely the Sally Walker we know."

"And love", I said immediately in a military sort of tone.

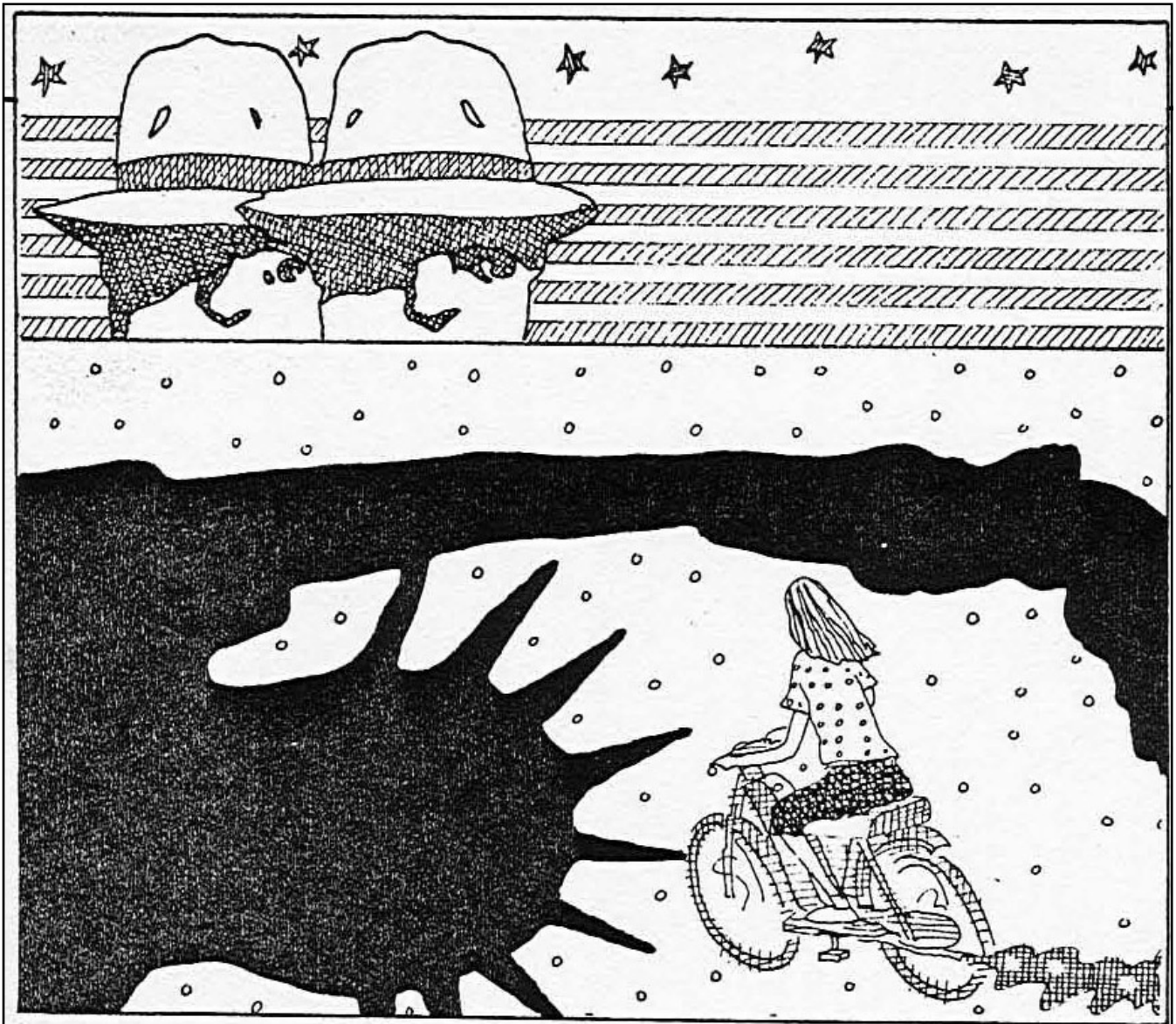
"And love", the spokesman repeated automatically, before he could stop himself. These computer brain types have their weaknesses.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," I said, knowing I had gone too far. "Please excuse me. I'm a little nervous. I don't meet foreigners that often. I mean.."

"Ms. Walker, I'll come right to the point," he said. "Yes", I said, "please."

"Ms. Walker, we have been getting reports about you for years and years now and we're about fed up. We have our agents in place and very little gets by us. We are here to tell you that you have become an embarrassment to the Government of the United States."

Well, if that isn't laying it on the line, I don't know what is. But what could they be talking about actually. Certainly not everything I've done in India could be an embarrassment to the United States. On the other had so many things I have done could be. And no matter what these creeps said, I was sure they didn't know everything I had done, or not done. I tried to run over the list quickly in my mind. It was impossible. But it was more likely to be things I had not done than things I had done: I had not for example, got my driver's license in Tamil Nadu, and when I drove my moped I rarely wore a helmet. Even my license plates were not entirely correct. Well, maybe not; maybe it was some of the articles I had written which were critical of the way the Wildlife Department were running



the zoos. Or maybe it was some of the articles I had written which were critical of the United States! My mind bogged.

I decided to play the innocent. "Oh, dear" I said, a comment any lady can easily afford. "An embarrassment to the United States. Oh, me! Whatever have I done?"

Obviously I had said something these apes wanted to hear. Both relaxed visibly – in unison, of course. A kindly expression came over the face of the spokesman as he spoke, "Ms. Walker, we have had hundreds and hundreds of complaints from the CBI who themselves have processed hundreds and hundreds of complaints about you from citizens of India, stating that a CIA agent, namely you, was being allowed to live in the country like a free bird and questioning them why they were not doing anything about it."

"Oh, dear," I said again.

"The CBI," he went on, "is irritated because they have spent millions of rupees investigating you and are unable to turn up anything more incriminating on you than that you haven't paid the insurance on your moped."

"Oh, I forgot about that," I said, "Don't they care if I don't have a driver's licence? What about my helmet? Do they want me to get killed? Don't they care about me? I was hurt and stating to get slightly hysterical.

The spokesman assumed a patient look, "Ms. Walker," he said patiently, "when an intelligence agency investigates an individual from a foreign country suspected of intelligence gathering, the agency doesn't look for the crime committed by the alleged agent, but the crimes not committed.

Understand?" He peered at me in a self-satisfied way, as if everything should now be clear, it wasn't.

"No, I don't understand," I said

He sighed and looked at his clone. Some unspoken signal passed and the clone took over.

"Ms. Walker," he said condescendingly, "no foreign agent will come over here and commit crimes. That would call attention to him. But neither will he commit no crimes at all; that would also call attention to him. It's not normal to be too perfect, you know."

"I know," I said, glad to be certain of something.

He went on: "The fact that you have not paid your moped insurance is just the kind of crime a spy would commit in a foreign country. It is definitely an offense, yet it is not so much of an offense to call undue attention to his activities. See?"

"Oh, now I understand," relief flooding me. "Well, I'll just go and pay my

moped insurance tomorrow and everything will be all right, isn't it?'

The clones did their head-turn routine again and said as on: "No, it won't be all right. You haven't understood a thing we said."

"Perhaps you better explain a little more," I said shaken by their speaking in unison. They hadn't done that before.

"The fact is, Ms. Walker," said one, "that you have called so much attention to yourself doing all kinds of things that a good agent should not do, that the only thing in your favour is that you haven't paid your moped insurance."

"You see," said the first, getting very businesslike, "there are two kinds of agents: agents we all know (and love) and agents we don't know (or love). Agents we all know and love are sort of registered agents, or spies that any foreign country expects to have around. We have them over there; they have us over here. We know they know and they know we know and it's just all in the family, you see."

"I see", I said, although I didn't - yet

The other kind are deeeep cover agents that even we don't know about. So we can't inform them that they are there. We can't sort of 'register' them. These are the dangerous kind- for both countries.

"Yes, I can see that. But what does that have to do with me?"

The clones looked alarmed. Then annoyed. "It's very irritating to have to spell this out, Ms. Walker, when we are sure you know all about it, but to show you that we know also and that we are on to you, here's the nitty gritty. No self-respecting spy acts like you do! No spy would ever write so many articles for newspapers; no spy would ever start organizations; no spy would ever criticize the government; no spy would ever write mean cartoons about the forest department; no spy would ever interfere in the administrative matters of a State; no spy would ever make their own visa arrangements. We always arrange visas for our registered spies."

"So, OK, that clinches it then. I'm not a spy. What's the problem?" I said. I was beginning to enjoy myself.

The first clone put his head into his hands and started weeping. The second started shouting and banging his head on my table. "Of course, you're a spy. All that is your cover! You *know* nobody would ever suspect somebody who acts like you do of being a spy. It's the best cover in the world. Even we didn't know all these years. We kept saying, 'Oh, no, she couldn't be. She wouldn't do that if she were.' The CBI also kept saying the same thing. They've never had so many accusations about anybody before from the public.. and the public is always wrong. The public thinks every foreigner is a CIA agent! And, therefore, because so many people say you are (a spy), you couldn't possibly be, you see? But you are. It's obvious".

The other clone whined through his tears: "Now the CBI doesn't believe in us anymore. They say either we're lying or we're so inept that we don't even know our own spies, even when their name is in the paper. We look like fools. Fools! And it's all your fault. You see?" He put his head back in his hands.

I did see. They were absolutely right. If I was a spy I would do exactly what I had done; start a zoo society. What better way to get information. It looks so innocent.

And you can smuggle out information in so many ways. You can train myna birds to talk on a secret command. You can train animals that are chosen as State gifts to kill dignitaries and diplomats which receive them. You can undermine governments by getting politicians and bureaucrats to fight in zoo authority meetings. It's perfect.

"Sirs," I said respectfully, "I can see your problem. You think I'm one of you and I'm an embarrassment to the profession, right?"

They nodded their heads in unison: "We work so hard," they said tearfully, "Oh, it's all so *hard*. And somebody like you comes along and just has a good time at our expense".

"There, there, " I said, "Why don't you have some buttermilk and go home. I'll handle this. Go and fret no more".

After they had their buttermilk I gave them a handkerchief to wipe their upper-lips and patted their shoulders all the way to the gate. Poor things; what an ordeal. George Bush must have trained them. But this was good information they had passed on. I went back to my desk and called Shanthi.

"Shanthi, get me the CBI on the phone," I said. I had a perfect cover an ordinary human being that people think is a CIA agent whom the CBI and the CIA thinks is deeeeeeep cover CIA agent - maybe they would give me a job, I mean. Nobody would ever suspect I was a CBI agent. I could clean up the whole country!

Note: Little does anyone suspect the real truth. Does she or doesn't she? Can she or can't she? Has she or hasn't she? Will she or won't she? Is she or isn't she? In fact, Sally Walker isn't anything so innocent as a CBI agent, or so clumsy as a KGB agent, or so uptight as M15, or so confused as a CIA agent. Sally Walker is actually something much more insidious than that. Sally Walker is, in fact, - da! da! da! daaaaaa! . . . **The Spy from Outer Sssppppaaaaccceeee!**

Editor and author's Note :

Apologies are in order for the black and white illustrations which appeared in living colour in the original magazine, the well-known and much missed Illustrated Weekly of India. I came across a copy the original article a few weeks ago but now, at publication time, it has vaporised and all we had were xerox copies. If the original is found before the series is over, we will publish them



Colleagues and friends as well as enemies who read this series of articles in the Weekly then have urged me for some years to reprint it in ZOOS' PRINT and only now have I succumbed their wishes. It will be interesting to see what others think two decades later.

One thing I found very amusing about the reaction to the series then was the fact that many people asked friends of mine if the article was fictional! In those days, the 70's and throughout the 80's, it was a logical conclusion that IF you were an American living as opposed to taking a 2-week tour in India, then you were almost certainly a Spy. Since this very phenomenon which inspired me to write the series, this query gave me tremendous satisfaction and lots of laughs. LOL! as they say in social media ! Sally Walker TSFOSp