

The Killer Instinct

Sally Walker, THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA, August 5, 1990, Part III of III

Having successfully penetrated the Indian espionage agency, e.g. SAW, Seeing and Asking Wing, our intrepid female spy graduates to vigilance and killer training. Another installment of Sally Walker's spoof on the cloak-and-dagger brigade.

One day, soon after completing my vigilance and killer training with the special Indian espionage service, the Seeing and Asking Wing (SAW), I was sitting in my office answering a letter. The letter was from a man who wanted to know if he could raise a tiger in his house (I often get such letters, being a sort of zoo lady). My then typist, Shanti, came in and said there were two foreigners who wanted to see me.

"Are they the same two men who come here a couple of weeks ago?" I asked. I had been waiting for them.

"Yes, madam," Shanti said, "they are definitely the same men, but they are dressed funny and they have stuck on fake mouches".

Shanti is a master of understatement and is sometimes very funny without even meaning to be. I have to watch myself so as not to hurt her feelings by laughing. She had stated this so seriously, without a grain of realization that the two CIA agents in mufti who couldn't even fool a young typist were pretty ridiculous. I controlled myself. "Please show them in," I said, choking back my laughter.

My need to laugh intensified when the two men appeared. They were quite obviously in mufti, or what they thought might be mufti. It certainly hadn't fooled Shanti, though, and she often doesn't notice even very obvious details. They were disguised as, low-income foreign tourists, or hippies, ten years after the last hippie died. They had put on wigs and mouches and earrings. They wore knee pants in Hawaiian print with suspenders with Madras plaid shirts. They looked absurd and no one would ever suspect them of being genuinely anything except costume party refugees, or ... CIA agents in India!

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," I said. "You're looking quite elegant in those bright coloured clothes. But I think the business suits suited you better."

They looked at one another (in unison, mind) and then they looked one another up and down. Then they looked at me with an unpleasant expression. "Sit down, sit down," I said pleasantly. "Don't mind me. I just thought I'd say what I thought."

They sat down right together and crossed one leg over the other at the ankle, right together, proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that they were very confident heterosexuals indeed. Then they smiled - in unison - equally unpleasant smiles.

"And what, may I ask, do I owe the pleasure of your esteemed company

again so soon, gentlemen," I said, laying on the Lucknow manners.

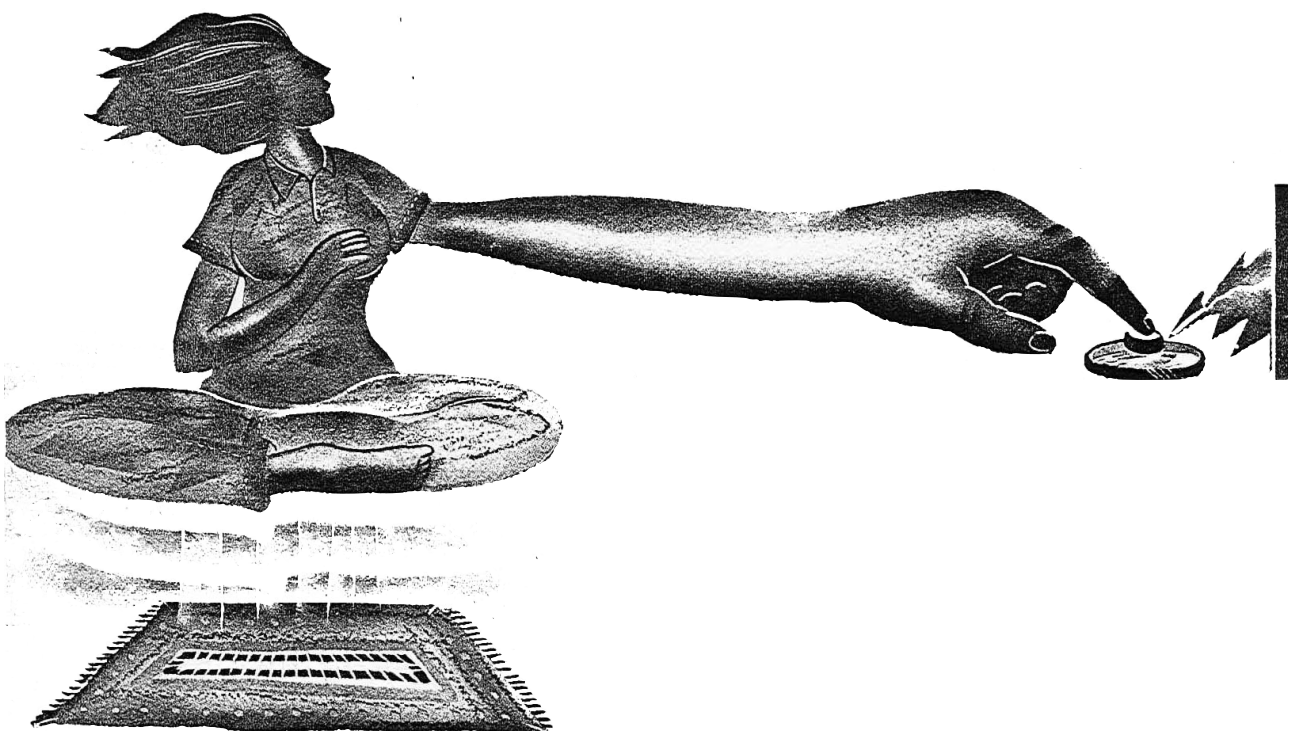
The pair looked at one another (in unison) and some signal passed between them, for one of them addressed me thus:

"Ms Walker, he said, pausing after my name, "we know about your visit to the CBI office and Sri Singh to look for a job. And we know about your being sent to the other Singh in the SAW office instead. In general, we know the gist of your discussion with the SAW Singh." He looked as though he had said everything he wanted to say for the whole day. There was such a self-satisfied look on his face that I knew he thought this information would surprise me, or frighten me.

But I wasn't surprised at all. Nothing would surprise me about the CIA. So I said, "Ah, yes, well. Then I guess you also know that the SAW Singh wasn't very happy about your failure to register with him when you came to see me here last, isn't it?"

The agent's eyes bulged.

I went on, enjoying myself, "He wasn't just 'not very happy' he was furious! Is that why you're wearing those funny costumes? So Singh won't recognize you? Well, you'd better do better than that! Ha! Ha! Ha!"





The two agents looked shocked, then insulted, then fearful. Of course, they couldn't admit it.

"Well," admitted the one on the left, "actually we don't know the full substance of your discussions. We know enough to hang you, however, and that's why we're here," he finished firmly. Then he leaned forward and asked anxiously, "What did Singh say about us, now...?"

"If you know enough to hang me, why don't you know what Singh said about you?" I asked. I was not really happy about him speaking to me that way. I decided to play it cool.

"Singh said," I continued, "that it was a very serious offence for spies to make a visit to a city without registering with their sister agency. In this case, that's SAW. If you didn't see SAW, Singh says you're sunk!"

The two CIA agents looked at one another anxiously. "What do you mean?" they said, in unison.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, gentlemen. He'll probably just take away your theatre passes or something. But why did you break protocol like that. Just imagine if all spies acted like you do? What kind of shape would the world be in?"

Of course, I was being sarcastic. I think the world is in awful shape as it is – and spies checking in with one another as a courtesy when they spy in another city is not going to make the world a better place to live in. Not the way I want to live anyway.

I had wanted to reassure them so they would get on with the business at hand, and it worked. They both relaxed and I called for some buttermilk.

After the buttermilk both of them seemed to feel much better and they leaned back (in unison) with a mellow expression on their faces. At an unspoken signal, one of them began to speak. "Ms Walker," he said, "we know you have agreed to spy for SAW and we are here in that regard. We would like to discuss this with you."

"There's really nothing to discuss, gentlemen," I said, "It's a straightforward business arrangement. They have trained me and I have signed a secret contract. Under the terms of the secret contract, I am an official non-official spy for SAW. I will be given assignments commensurate with my ability. I will be treated like any other Indian spy. However, I will not draw a salary because I am deriving other benefits from the job."

"What!" the two CIA spies said in unison. "You're not drawing a salary! What madness! What injustice. How cheap! You mean these picey devils aren't even paying you? We ought to go break their heads!" (It's amazing how the protective instinct comes out in American men, particularly when it concerns money and also when it concerns their countrymen, or countrywomen. All said and done, family is family.)

"Don't get all exercised," I said. "And don't insult my adopted county. I said I am getting other benefits and I am. I don't require a salary from SAW. Under the terms of our secret contract I will be allowed access to the deepest secrets in SAW as well as to all of their agents. When my research is completed I am going to write novels about SAW and create a genre of spy fiction for India. It doesn't have one, you know. Have you ever read a spy novel about India?"

"Why, no," they said together and looked bemused. "Come to think of it, we haven't. It's kind of odd, isn't it? Every other country has spy fiction about it, or at least, happening in it."

"Exactly, gentlemen," I exclaimed. "And now perhaps you can understand my involvement with SAW."

"Certainly," they said, "but we are here to make you another offer."

"Another offer?" I queried suspiciously. What was up now?

"Why yes," they said happily, "we want you to spy for us!"

"Spy for the CIA!" I exclaimed, "Do you think I'm crazy? A person could get killed spying for the CIA – *by* the CIA- I've read all those spy novels from America. You guys are real badmashes. And besides, the CIA doesn't have a very good reputation politically, as well as morally. Most people say that you guys start all the trouble so the USA can go in and put out the fire and be a big hero."

Both of the patriotic spies looked hurt. Immediately I regretted using harsh words. Perhaps I went too far. After all, I lived in India and studied the scriptures. It very clearly says: Speak the truth that is sweet; speak not the truth that is not sweet.

"You're being very unfair Ms Walker," they said. "In any case, it doesn't matter. You have no choice. You are going to spy for us, whether you want to or not."

"Are you threatening me?" I said, shocked. "What are you going to do, kill me? That would be just like the CIA. I guess all those novels are right!"

"No, no. Nothing like that," the left agent said, it's much worse really, what we have in mind for you."

The other agents - the one on the right - took over. "Yes, Mrs. Walker, we know you now and we know just how to get at you. We know your vulnerable spots."

He paused for effect, smiling in a self-satisfied way and continued, "You see, if you don't cooperate with us we are going to spread the word around that you are in fact a known deeeep cover agent for us and have been all along. The head of the CIA will back us up if necessary. Then you will lose your job with SAW. You will also be deported and that means you can't do your ZOO work anymore. At least, not in India.



And you love India. We know that. So we've got you."

He looked a little proud of himself that he had strung so many sentences together and he sat back confidently, awaiting my acquiescence.

The import and impact of what he said dawned on me and great crocodile tears formed in my eyes and spilled out over my cheeks. The sounds preliminary to deep, heaving sobs issued forth from my throat. My face contorted with grief. Putting my face in my hands I collapsed forward, overcome by emotion.

Actually, I was reaching for a button what had been awkwardly placed on the side of the file cabinet. Ah! Got it! There was a sort of sizzling sound then a whoosh - and the CIA agents collapsed (in unison again) in a heap of dust on the floor where their feet had been. It worked! The handy-dandy, home-constructed human disintegrator that they taught us to make in the SAW killing class really worked! How thrilling. Now I just had to put the button in a more convenient

place. I wouldn't get the opportunity to fall forward every time.

I called my housekeeper, Saroja, and asked her to sweep up the dust. "Shanti," I said. "those gentlemen have left by the back door, but look at the mess they made. Isn't our door mat at the front entrance? Didn't these peoples' 'mums' teach them to wipe their feet before coming into the house?"

"But madam," Shanti said, "they left their shoes at the front door itself. Were their feet only really so dirty? And why did they go away without their shoes?"

"Well, my God, Shanti, how should I know. May be the shoes were just part of their disguise or something. Anyway, how else would this dust have got here?"

I sat down to think this over. They left their shoes at the front door. They weren't chappals; they were shoes. Lace up shoes. The kind that you have to stand and unlace to get off. I looked closer at the shoes. They were Indian-made foreign lace-up shoes.

Slowly but surely, the penny dropped. Americans don't leave their shoes at the front door – unless they are very Indianised, in any case, which these guys weren't. Moreover, Americans might buy Indian chappals but they would never, never buy Indian-made foreign lace-up shoes.

The horrible, the simply unthinkable, the absolutely incredible truth dawned. Those guys weren't CIA agents at all – they were Indian agents disguised as CIA agents disguised as American hippies! In my anxiety to avoid becoming a traitor to India. I had disintegrated two Indian agents. Oh, my God. What to do?

First, the ashes. Their families would want them. Saroja thought I was a little strange when I told her to keep the dust that I had just asked her to sweep up safely, but she did it.

I couldn't imagine which service these guys were with. Were they SAW agents come to check on my loyalty? No, they were the same men that had come before: I was sure of that. Maybe they came the first time trying to recruit me, knowing how I would react to two supposed CIA agents. On the other hand, maybe they were CBI agents, checking on the activities of SAW. The services in the West do that in spy novels all the time. I could never figure it out.

Poor Singh. He took a chance recruiting me and now I had gone and used the superb SAW killer training to murder two of his agents. I bet he'll be miffed. I bet he could lose his job. Even I could get sacked!

This was a crisis of monumental proportions. I was baffled. The whole operation on which I had invested 15 years of deeeeeeeeeeep cover work could be ruined with this snafu. And just when I had managed to infiltrate SAW!

My operative, I mean my real operative, not Singh of SAW, had instructed me not to contact him under any but the most urgent of circumstances. In fifteen years of deeeeeeeeeeep cover, I had contacted him only once. That, was, incidentally, when my visa was not extended and I had to leave India. Thinking such a powerful being would be helpful I had appealed to him, but he was not sympathetic and told me in no uncertain terms that a spy from outer space was expected to have the mental wherewithal to sort out such problems for herself!

But surely this was different. This was really beyond my control. Even my powers of extrasensory perception did not pick up the fact that the CIA agents were really Indian agents. I needed better facilities – that was obvious.

I told Shanti and Saroja that I was going to rest for some time and that I should not be disturbed. I went into my bedroom and closed the door. Assuming the full lotus position I closed my eyes and repeated the special mantra given to me by my space operative in the sky. After half an hour, my body levitated about one inch into the air, meaning the mantra was working and that I had a 'line' to space station satellite. Directly a voice came clear as if it were right in the city: buzzzzzzz, whirrrr, click, click, click, eeeeeeeuuuuuuwe-ah.... "Please wait, "click click click. "Now you are in the queue." Click click click. "Please wait....," click click click.... " Now you are in the queue."

"Heavens, " I thought. "Space certainly has got crowded since the last time I contacted my operative. It's just like New Delhi."

Finally, a real voice replaced the recording. "Gooooooood afternoon, this is trunk book-king. May I help you?"

"Trunk booking?" I said to the real voice. "Here I am in the full lotus posture trying to contact outer space and you say you are trunk booking. What's going on here?"

I was so upset I lost my levitation and crashed unceremoniously to the floor, but fortunately I did not lose my contact.

The voice said, "I'm sorry madam, this is outer space trunk book-king. May I help you?"

Well, this was something. However, I had no recourse. "Yes, operator, I want secret agent identification number two three eight one nine."

"Thank you, madam.
Three two eight one nine."
"No, operator, two three eight one nine."

"That's what I said, madam, three two eight one nine."
"No, operator, you reverse the first two digits. It's two three, not three two."
"You want to reverse the charges?"
"No, I want you to reverse the first two digits of the number."

"The first two digits? You mean two three?"
"Yes, operator, it should be three two."
"Three two eight one nine, madam?"
"Right, operator, and I do want to reverse the charges."
"Now, you want to reverse the charges, madam?"
"Yes, operator."
"You're being very difficult, madam."
"Just get me the call, operator, it's been a bad day."
"All right, madam, I'll call you back."

As I waited for the operator to call me back. I again chanted the mantra to resume my levitation. It might be a long wait and the floor was hard.

As the moments passed I became more and more and more anxious. What would my operative say? Would he be angry or pleased? Were the Indians agents friend or foe to our operation? Were they Indian agents or some other country's agents that leave their shoes at the door and wear Indian-made foreign lace-up shoes? Would he allow me to continue or take me to some other planet? What will become of me?

Oh woe. Worries, worries, worried! Life is not easy when you are ... dum da dum dum! . . . a spy from outer space.

