

Channel 49
STOOL PIGEON

From the Cold War...

A hapless plumber gets mixed up in low level espionage checking sewer materials emanating from a Soviet Embassy.

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STOOL PIGEON

The President himself laid the foundation for M's job. "I wanna know everything that goes into or comes out of that new Commy Embassy!" He decreed to an aide who soon after putting things into motion was indicted for past offenses against the fixed enterprise system. (Only the President who had never done anything on his own was free from scandal of this sort.)

Like a Biblical passage slipping into the fingers of generations of Talmudic and apocryphic writers, as the President's pronouncements filtered up and down various layers of sleuth-minded bureaucracies it grew from an exclamatory sentence into 20,000 pages of classified documents.

Somewhere, some obscure department desperate to justify its existence, expand its scope of operations and get to *play in the game*, wielded together a 500 page report asking for the necessary appropriations for its intended goal. It's goal was to obtain a disease/drug/alcohol profile on Soviet Embassy employees to be ascertained by examination of effluent materials. In other words somebody would have to check out the shit in the sewer pipes -- literally!

The kingpin for this operation would be an underground sanitary disposal engineer with a Top Secret S.I. (special investigation) clearance. Namely a trust worthy plumber.

None of the spies wanted this job so the Government had to spin its employee computer files for a match. This took months. Finally, a laid-off GS-6 maintenance man from the V.A. with a Viet Nam War era clearance was discovered -- M.

Fifteen departments of Government vied to become M's new employer. Eventually a joint committee of N.S.A., D.I.A. won out, promoted M to a GS-11 (26,000 + dollars per annum), made him sign a non-disclosure statement and led him to his new station via a covert tunnel under the embassy.

He was shown which gauge to watch indicating that toilets on such and such floors had been flushed and which valves to quickly turn shunting the valued sewage debris to special run-off pipes leading to top secret laboratories elsewhere in the city. And, if there was ever a leak, he was the man to fix it.

Aware of Congressional controls and fears of abuse-investigation, M was given certain production requirements he had to fulfill. X number thousand gallons of wastes daily. The numbers were totally absurd and M found it necessary to pipe off flushings from all over the embassy adding contaminating variables to the study. Thus, when a first floor

receptionist's tampon showed up in the laboratory it begat hosts of theories ranging from the Ambassador's mistress having a yeast infection to the Third Secretary being a closet pervert prone to affectations of a gender disorder.

Without knowing, M himself, become responsible for the expenditure of additional millions of dollars in contingency funds, and the formulation, typing and dissemination of 3,000 pages of documentation caused by randomly siphoning such materials.

While some foolish section chief had once hallucinated that data concerning a diarrhea epidemic could be useful in pressing for an arm's agreement, chemical methadone therapy in angling for a defection ... this information ended up sorted, computerized, filed and mostly forgotten. There was just too much information anyway. TONS of information. And only a few individuals (with limited mental resources) could use this information to make a decision. Even the summaries generally received a furtive glance and were left to lie about on a desk somewhere.

After all, planning a formal dinner party, eating, sleeping, copulating and general politics absorbed 99% of all the decision-making neuro-resources available.

To the underlings on the Congressional Committees M was just a line item in a million series of budget line items. And to the underlings in the bureaucracies M was still defended as vital to the National Security along with the shit tanks and the tampon baggies and centrifugal urine analysis equipment. Life went on.

On April the 9th, however, something unusual happened. Nothing. No sewage. M, concerned with his production quota, contacted his superior at 'Joint-Control'. His supervisor, Edward S., tired from dictating the fourth draft of a requisition, put M on hold and checked the regs (regulations). Then he got back on the horn (phone). "Says here you're responsible for leaks, not blockages. Unless it leaks don't worry about it."

"What about my quota?" M asked from his tunnel cove.

"I'll put you on down-time, it'll average out." Edward said, eager to get into his cheese sandwich and apple pie. Bad move, Ed.

The blockage backed up all the toilets. The Ambassador wished to relieve himself into fresh water. "This is not Siberia!" He harangued his lackeys.

The plumbers came in. The K.G.B. plant security man came in. Top Commies debated whether the toilet back-up was done deliberately in response for the abetted defection of an AWOL, drug-addicted U.S. Army private in Europe. Tongues wagged long and hard over this. Then the plumbing sensor instruments were found snaked up the pipes.

"To hear us fart? Are they sensitive enough to pick up conversation in our sound-proofed offices?" Was asked.

"Yes, Comrad. No, Comrad, etc ... Comrad, these sensors are for water pressure only..."

Great spy minds of the East went to work. Disarmament conferences were abandoned. Another defection was canceled. A publicity stunt postponed.

Computerized counter-intelligence solved the riddle. "They are examining our pee and our poop." A potential security breach sounded alarms.

All Embassy personnel's defecant was then checked by Soviet laboratory specialists.

"Shall we remove the sensors? Shall we protest?"

Orders from the Kremlin itself counseled for advantage. Three options were listed: 1) Fly in camel dung from Afghanistan) ... 2) Infected feces from sub-Saharan East Africa. 3) Hundreds of gallons of urine from Vodka addicts in rehab. centers, all to be erroneously fed into the sewer-system as misleading information.

The benefits and drawbacks of each plan were analyzed a thousand times. Meanwhile, top Soviet personnel had to use porta-facilities. A fifty-man unit of crack plumbers and janitors was flown in from Moscow to circumvent difficulties in sanitary facilities and 'safe' disposal of wastes.

Eventually K.G.B. operatives were put to work exploring the engineering of the American operation so that it could be replicated for American Embassies through out the Warsaw Pact.

Posing as water company workers the Red spies entered the sewer system and eventually located M's station. Soon, they uncovered M's identity and put a 24 hour 'tail' on him.

M's life story, which had never interested anyone before, was now the in-demand reading material among three levels of the Soviet Counter-Intelligence Espionage establishment.

M was in his late 30's. Apparently a ne'er-do-well. Served in the Navy, attended but flunked out of Crypto-School and was then shipped to Viet Nam. He was unemployed 3 out of 17 years since; was trained as a plumber on the G.I. Bill and never made enough money to buy a new car or own his own house. General loser material. They would crack M!

Through a connection in the Internal Revenue Service, the K.G.B. operatives found that M filed lackadaisical, poorly executed tax returns often not signed or dated properly. This was the stuff. With photocopies of this bait the K.G.B. squad code-named Oscar 7 (who knows why?) posed as I.R.S. agents and apprehended M on the street with arms full of groceries.

"Come with us." They ordered and escorted him into a two year old Ford with white U.S. Government plates.

The team leader of Oscar 7, Sergei K., posing as John Smith Jr. showed M the photocopied returns. He warned of a \$ 50,000 fine and five year prison sentence, and inquired as to how a laid-off maintenance man could afford a six pack of premium quality imported beer.

"I'm working," M protested.

"Doing what, for whom?" Sergei K. (also known as) J. Smith asked.

M had not led a glamorous life. He never wore a tuxedo to one of the President's formal dinner parties; never had a savings account with more than \$ 600 in it. Never said '*what the fuck*' and hopped on a jet for a Club-Med vacation.

He had fragmentation particles in his leg from a grenade some intoxicated prankster thought was a dud and thrown onto his boat during the war, and even though it hurt from time to time he drew no monetary benefits from it. He had no medals, no outstanding memories of fame or recognized achievement. In high school he had sat on the bench for the experimental soccer team which only lasted one season and then graduated 150 out of class of 300.

His first piece-of-ass was with a more experienced woman two years his senior and out of loneliness and confusion he had ended up marrying her, paying off her outrageous bills, fighting with her and divorcing her. Life had been a hard piece of plain cake and M was one who just barely got by.

If the K.G.B. ever had a completely average American in their hands they did with M.

They could tell he was anxious concerning their tax ruse. He had no quick avenue of defense. No attorneys on retainer, or any knowledge of how to handle a threat of potential incarceration. He was scared and they knew it. They would frighten him as much as they could, turn him loose, monitor him until ripe for plucking by team Oscar 8 who would offer money, protection and compromise. It was that simple.

"So, what the fuck you guys gonna do to me?" M asked.

"Do? Build our case." Sergei said.

"Why me? I'm nothing." M protested, growing angry at the unfairness of it. This was something Sergei wanted to avoid. Anger could be unpredictable -- fear wasn't.

"Hey look, you're just a citizen who hasn't fully complied with the law. Being lazy and ignorant of your duty is no excuse."

"It's not like I can cheat. You take out your cut. I don't even itemize."

"This must go before an Administrator in another department." Sergei said trying to affect a blank, bureaucratic, *I'm just following orders*, demeanor.

"How much money do I owe?" M demanded.

The men of Oscar 7 looked ill at ease. This was not where they expected the interrogation to go.

"It's not a question of what sums. You did not fill out the forms correctly. See, here, you put your Social Security number in the incorrect space." Sergei pointed out, knowing that in Russia the equivalent of this error could become serious.

"Oh Fuck you! That's bullshit" M shouted and then pushed his way out of the back of the car yanking his grocery bag across someone's lap. The bag ripped open and glass beer

bottles began rolling into the street. One broke.

As M angrily picked up his spilled groceries one of the K.G.B. men made a move to grab him brusquely. Too many gangster movies. Too long on the Moscow beat bullying *refuseniks* and political undesirables. Sergei whispered a sharp.., audible "Nyet" He broke cover. Bad move Sergei.

Sergei tried to recover by snapping his fingers and singing the ditty of some pop chorus with a 'NYA - NYA - NYA' sound. Then he twiddled his fingers at M in the parody of a bored wave. He was attempting to be cool and pretend that his martini-lunch had caught up with him. But M who could not pass muster on the law review or score high on the MDCAT entrance exam or do the New York Times cross word puzzle in ink knew the sound, texture, smell and aura of bullshit better than any dozen of his country-men. he knew, for instance, that his job was bullshit. Perhaps much of his life was bullshit. And this was bullshit too. His brow furrowed into the recognition of this. Holding his half-filled, torn grocery bag and several escapee bottles of beer he stepped back to check the Government license plates.

Oscar 7's driver got nervous but Sergei pinched his arm, hard.

"So, uh... we'll be in touch." Sergei grinned as the car gingerly pulled from the curb.

M's brain burned for a learned response. His work for 'Joint' had exposed him to something... He had words ready to speak... What the fuck were they?... "Spaceeba" (thank you) ... "Kirashaw (O.K.)" M said.

The car slammed to a stop. There was much traffic. Hundreds of bystanders. The look. The red-faced look on Sergei's face...

M had seen that look only one other time in his life. The boat, with engine off, drifting down a trib. of the Mekong caught some naked V.C. taking a skinny dip -- their weapons stacked feet away. Right before Gunner Swede blew their shit away with the twin .50's. That shocked', frozen look of discovery. The enemy!

Gunner Swede was no longer around. An underwater mine had ended him. His assistant Bingo was gone too. Suicide or Heroin. Only the boatswain's mate M was still around.

M gave them the finger. "Here's my social security number you Commy assholes! FUUUCK YOOO!"

Oscar 7, representing a collective of 40 years in the spy business, had been 'made' by M.

M debated the merits of reporting the uncovered operation to his superiors, enabling the game to escalate. At first, he thought it a great idea. After all, for the first time in his life he would be a hero. Mentioned in countless reports. Debriefed by teams of super-spies. But then hard thinking prevailed. The game would move up out of the sewers and into the upper floors. Inevitably the gig would be up and he would be out of a job. He had no capital or drive to become a private contractor (or enough residential/industrial experience) and no great urgency to be unemployed. In America, M knew, heroes often

had no paid value. Especially unglamorous, unknown heroes.

Yes, (the top Soviet Embassy people would be putting adulterated materials into the sewer system. But it didn't matter. M took materials that had no value to anyone, that's why they were waste products. That's why when some ordinary person vomited', highly paid teams of Ph.D.s weren't sent for by air-conditioned jet. The lowest of the lowly appeared with mop and bucket.

M kept his mouth shut and went back to work playing at the game. By now it was strictly a Soviet game. They put themselves to great inconvenience giving the West bad information which no one of any importance in the West concerned themselves with. After all the President had recently declared to another aide, "Goddamn it! I want everything there is about all the homos there are in the State Department!" And another raison detre was invented.

By halting the game on the Soviet's move M proved that he was the greatest Master Spy of all.

From the Collection: "It's A Bizarre Life" 1987

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