

Secret Agent

STORY 1

by Bob Cole

Conrad got to the rope ladder one step ahead of the snarling Rottweilers. Getting over the wall had been easy, just as he had planned. But the ferocious guard dogs were a new addition since he had taken this assignment. He hated surprises.

He uttered a silent prayer of thanks for Carmen as he climbed toward the second-floor window. Conrad's beautiful assistant was attending the party inside the mansion. She had managed to unlatch a window and lower the slender ladder. Without her, he'd be dog food.

Safely inside, he pulled up the ladder and sighed with relief. Gliding quietly to the bedroom door, he opened it a slit and listened. Two men, talking in hushed tones, were headed his way.

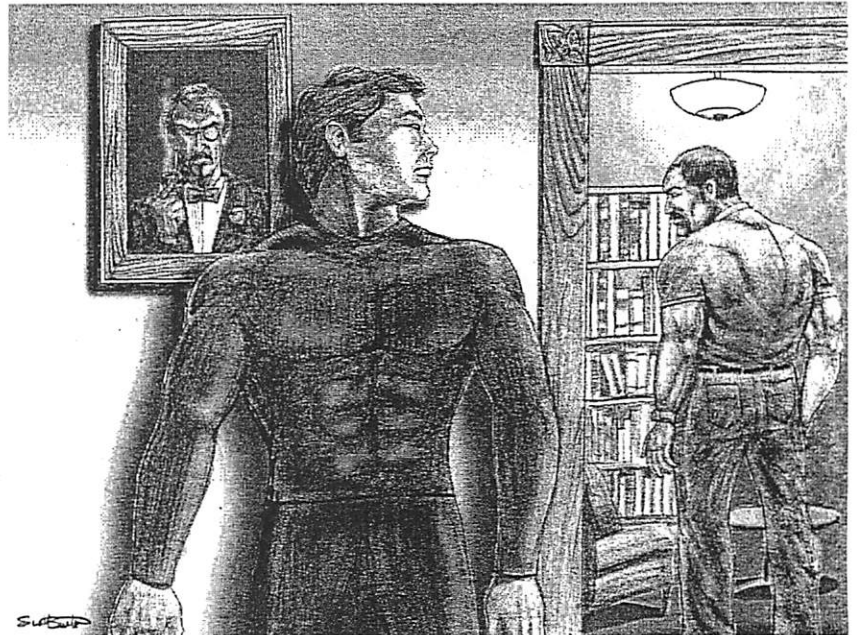
"Relax, man," the first voice was saying.

"Something made those dogs start barking," said the second voice, "and you know the Chief doesn't like to take any chances. Now get serious. We need to check every room on this floor."

"I'll take this one," said Voice Number 1, from right outside the door where Conrad stood.

"Meet me at the stairs," ordered Voice Number 2, "and keep your eyes open."

Conrad crouched behind the door as it swung open. The owner of Voice Number 1—a hefty guy, maybe 250 pounds—stuck his head and shoulders into the room. Conrad let him enter, then silenced him with a sharp blow to the back of his neck.



While the other guard searched the next room down the hall, Conrad eased past that doorway. He found the room he wanted and entered it quietly; there was the enormous desk, right where it was supposed to be, in front of the window.

Concealing himself in the shadows by the door, Conrad awaited the arrival of Thug Number 2. This one was as easy to silence as his buddy had been. "Naptime," Conrad said with a small smile, as he dragged the unconscious man away from the door. Then he tied him securely and taped his mouth, just as he had done for the first one.

Turning to the huge oak desk, Conrad clenched his teeth as he carefully picked the lock on the center drawer.

"Now let's see," he muttered, "where would I hide plans that could get me sent to prison for the rest of my life? Not in these file folders, that's for sure. How about—here?"

As he spoke, he slid open a secret compartment in the bottom of one of the desk drawers.

"There you are," Conrad said softly. "Come to papa." He tucked the documents into his coat pocket, then slipped out of his black coveralls, adjusted his tie, and smoothed his hair.

"Party time," he said to himself, glancing at his immaculate reflection in a mirror. "But I think Carmen and I won't be staying long. Someone might begin to wonder where these two boys went."

He walked casually to the top of the curving marble staircase and went downstairs to join the party.

