



Marcus Pactor

Secret Agents Dream Too

The agents are between missions. Bored, empty-minded, they stumble around the house. Agent Nine smacks his hand against the window sill. Termite droppings rain like black dandruff. He taps the window again. More fall. They suggest the breakdown of internal structures. He gathers his partners.

Agent Feet considers budgetary implications. Her Asian tour will be postponed. Again. The future smacks her around like that. Every time she gets close, domestic crisis ensues. She'll have to contribute her Sherpa rental funds to a bug-killing tent. That's practical. Mature. Adults think that way, sometimes.

Times are hard for Agent Temple. His successful kills are down 17% this month and his bonus is in jeopardy. But when he sees the termite shit, the past hugs him. He welcomes the embrace, though his choice runs counter to agent training. If word gets out, he could lose his F-5 clearance. He doesn't seem to care.

Agent Temple first practiced love during the Biggie and Pac days of East-West war. He learned complex shapes and long division with KRS-One. He best loved Rakim, the microphone fiend. Today, the house seems to be coming apart. Then, life seemed glued together. It's a business of seeming, certainly, perhaps...

"We need Zyklon B," Agent Nine says.

"For termites?" Agent Feet says. "Must we go that far?"

"The droppings are symptomatic. Tap the window, like me. See them fall in the hundreds o' pieces. Symptomatic of the thousands upon gajillions in the home. It's us or them. That's something we must never forget. Basic training, right?" Agent Nine lives by the book.

"But the money. God, shit like this keeps Chase Manhattan in their golden yachts and calves."

"Shit is the precise word. Examine this scentless wonder."

"Man," Agent Temple says, "I used to crank out metaphors. Chewed gum, read X-Men, wore my hat backward. Rode bikes to the park or 7/11. Played the suburban dozens. But our bikes got sold at garage sales. Our metaphor generators died of disuse. Childhood expires. Like milk, I guess." Agent Temple smiles. "Ah, he says, that metaphor disproves the assertion..."

"Dig this wood."

"Where'd you get it?"

"Windowpane came off in my hand."

"The whole pane?"

"This part of it, Agent Feet. Symptomatic of our housing future. Should you not arrange for the transfer

of 2Gs to that tenting company?”

“Shit.”

“Shit equals infestation. Swear to Allah, the house is coming down.”

“But, hey,” Agent Temple says. “Listen: wood. Brings me back to high school, before top secret missions, before pledging allegiance to the prez, when it was cool just watching Lynn Silverburg in Sunday School while Mrs. Whositzstein discussed Kaddish or Inquisition.”

“Better leave that alone, Agent Temple. Serious business is afoot. Play by the book.”

“‘Microphone Fiend’ drumline sweetly underlining the scene. I had those lyrics cold memorized, rhyming them in my head, Silverburg making me wood up by just sitting there. The pink waistline of her paintings was visible above her jeans. Rakim’s voice represented all a man should be...”

“\$2722.58.”

“That much, huh?”

“Precisely that much.”

“It’s always more than you suppose.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Allow me to make a balance transfer.”

“Remember to record the numbers in your checkbook.”

“Of course,” Agent Feet says. I’m designated sniper and bookkeeper. I’m a headshot specialist.”

“And on finances?”

“Average at best. We keep house no better than your average citizen.”

“Thus, termite droppings.”

“Commonplace drudgery.”

“Rakim was in E-F-F-E-C-T. A smooth operator operating correctly.”

“Yes, Agent Temple. In 1988. But agents of that era had no use for Rakim. He no more understood the book than agents understood him. What could he say about Grenadan communists, Zyklon B, and termite droppings? Matters of legitimate concern.”

Legitimate concerns will never end. They are costly. 2Gs. Agent Feet will never hire a Sherpa, never see the white beauty of Nepal. She says, “Pass the wine...”

They have wine. On the poison front, purchases have been made. Agents must not taste that purchase, so hotel rooms have been booked. High-dollar purchases are made in the passive voice. The connection between expenses paid and the agent paying expenses is thus obscured. Debts and their payments create psychological frailty, you know.

In these situations, red wine is better than white. Agent Temple prefers pinot noir of vintage quality. Agent Nine is less picky, though he'll accept pinot noir. One glass, nursed, per regulation. Agent Feet digs white zinfandel. Allowances are made for Agent Feet, so long as she remains quiet with the Zinfandel and does not ask to watch The Nature Channel.

They drink wine. It does the job, but it isn't exactly Mickey's Ice or St. Ides. Still, Agent Temple dreams of Rakim's voice, Rakim's black jacket with gold trim, the one he wore in videos. In this dream, though, “Agent Temple” is sewn across the back, in blazing gold and all-caps. This jacket has never existed, never will. Termite droppings have always existed, always will. Thus the dream's necessity...