

Fiction  
The Unbinding  
By Walter Kirn  
Installment 32

[MyStory.Com]

Rob has left me in the hotel room and driven off toward Colonel Geoff's apartment, deeper into the city of false artifacts. Undercover men—what slaves they are! They're slaves to their superiors, who abuse and oppress them because they're slaves themselves. They're slaves to their disguises, which force them to wear the suit of mediocrity. Mostly, though, they're slaves to their suspicions, which belong not to them but to those who raise suspicion.

And who, these days, can raise it with a few keystrokes, as the Colonel set out to do last January when he borrowed Sabrina's phone (poor dupe) while she was steaming wontons in his kitchen. This is the text message that started everything; the curious sentence that made the Colonel Lord and fed the stream of other suggestive utterances—many of them mine, and most of them casual, sincere, and unpremeditated—that have kept him Lord:

Back in position, operating freely, living like a bloody sheikh, and having a goddamn blast—praise heaven!

He forwarded this to three recipients and three types of devices, whose numbers and addresses came from a long list that I'd picked, almost at random, off the Net. A cell phone used by the madam of a brothel located near a Nevada Air Force base, a BlackBerry belonging to a publicist, and the "Contact Us" section of the home page of the American Kennel Club in New York. The spell took 40 or 50 seconds to cast and exactly nine weeks to bring the entity that it was meant to conjure forth.

A Magickal welcome, Rob. The Colonel knew they'd send someone, and it was you. The only surprise was the route our invitation (and the phone number attached to it) followed

to your boss's desk. We expected that it would be snatched from the ionosphere—and perhaps it was—but it was also, we're quite confident, passed along terrestrially by the same hotblooded minuteman at the AKC who immediately texted back as follows to our decoy's pink Samsung: "i scan the blogs i visit drudge im hip to codes back channels cyber dead drops and say fu 2 all u sobs 4 all the usa."

But maybe Rob wasn't privy to much background stuff. Maybe his box is at the flowchart's edge, with barely any inward-pointing arrows, and all they put in his valise was Sabrina's name and address. That was the Colonel's first impression, at least, as we followed Rob through a Whole Foods after I'd flushed him from the brush by illegally asking Peter P. for AidSat's files on Sabrina Grant and then, apropos of absolutely nothing, repeatedly brought up her name during Active Angel calls. And here on MyStory, of course, my hotline to the Potomac.

"Not the type they lavish long briefings on," said the Colonel, watching Rob squeeze honeydews. "I think they gave us Agent OOO. Licensed to kill, but has to check with mommy. That Timex with the Velcro strap definitely doesn't fire darts. He hasn't approached you yet?"

"Not yet."

"But he's the one?"

"He joined my health club a few days ago. He lifts the same amount of weight no matter what muscle group he's working on. Leg press or tricep extension—50 pounds."

"I should have told you this before: Whenever you say 'Sabrina Grant' on AidSat, mutter the words, sound spasmodic, like it's a tic. The company can't punish you for it then. Also, only use her name in calls coming from cities with a Federal Reserve branch."

"I'll need a list."

“Run a search on AOL. It’ll sprinkle more grains of sugar for the ants. They don’t need much of it once they’ve started feeding. Just live your life and you’ll spill plenty by accident.”

We rounded the corner of the soy milk aisle and there was Rob again, scooping loose protein powder into a baggie. He wanted sinew. Sad. Next stop, fish oil for a quicker brain. Then over to skin care for a jar of eye cream and a file to smooth his heels and elbows.

“Preparing for mummification,” the Colonel said.

When Rob left me behind at the hotel here, I assume that he placed me under guard, perhaps by the room-service waiter who brought our dinners but couldn’t answer my questions about the mushrooms mixed with the wild-rice pilaf. Peace, My Sentries. Through studying under Colonel Geoff—whom I’ve known somewhat longer than my writings have indicated—I’ve learned to assume that I’m always under guard and, more important, always under scrutiny. Every word that I speak, every message that I write, and every action that I perform (with certain sacred exceptions) is partly addressed, or in some way conscious, of a hovering third party—if not an infinite host of them.

“Lead the Trespasser,” is the Colonel’s maxim.

The idea has an interesting history, whose relevance to the current situation will reveal itself to the discerning. It comes from a treatise that the Colonel co-wrote during his service days with a Princeton social anthropologist and an ex-Communist Jewish screenwriter. The Colonel nicknamed the myth-op behind the document “Destroy All Saucers!” Its goal was to change the standard Hollywood Martian—that stiff-legged, monosyllabic big-eyed bug that some in the military were convinced was a subversive caricature of the dronelike Cold War soldier—into a more enchanting, more personable “Interstellar Emissary.” Unlike the Martians, who traveled to our planet full of absolutist

zeal, intent on either dominating us or saving us from our own ignorance, the IE merely wanted to know humanity, mix with it, and obscurely reassure it that all is well Out There. The Pentagon funded the project, the Colonel told me, because its deepest thinkers had grown convinced that moviegoers unconsciously identified beings from space with our nation's governing class.

That's where "Lead the Trespasser" came in. In the script that the myth-op hoped to generate (the many scripts, that is, since the IE was a template for all new spacemen, not a one-time-only alien), the Earthlings would shrink from the IE at first, and some of them, inevitably, would attack it. These fools would be instantly incinerated, unleashing even greater world anxiety. Soon, however, a wise man would appear and help human beings adopt a subtler strategy toward the visitor. They'd let the IE circulate among them while carrying on with their daily lives. They'd test it, too. They'd drum up a scare about a worldwide drought and hope the IE would show pity and send the rains.

Finally, toward the end, the Earthlings would acknowledge the IE and admit to it what they'd been up to. Angry over being toyed with, it would prepare to annihilate mankind. Then the wise man would step in again. He'd suggest that instead of reacting with primal fury, the IE ought to show some civilized respect for an intelligent society capable of engaging it in play. Perhaps a new relationship was possible? The IE could remain as a sort of grand custodian and mediator of disputes, and mankind would supply it with X (X being some substance that the IE required to survive but had run out of back where it was born).

That was the myth-op. The Colonel said it failed. Yes, the portrayal of movie spacemen softened ("A bit too much in that Kubrick thing," he said, "though I did love the fruity purring of that computer"), but the genre soon regressed into juvenile spectacle. Worse, not a single apothegm or dictum from his intensively researched treatise was ever uttered on-screen. This embittered him. Especially after that ponderous silliness "Use the Force, Luke" gained such renown.

I've discussed this matter at such length because it explains, I hope, my fearlessness as I sit here at my keyboard, disclosing to you, the Imminent Third Party, all that we, the Anubists, Know and Will. Soon, our whole project will be plain. It's not a plot, it's a procedure. It's not a conspiracy, it's a practice. That all can master, in their own degrees, but only a few of us have pledged our lives to.

And then there's Rob. The naked undercover man. The incorporated intruder. Who crashed a party posing as a caterer but still doesn't see that it's his name on the cake.

On both cakes, actually.

The "Welcome Home" cake and the "Bon Voyage" cake.

Which cake we'll serve will be up to him, our guest.

Right now he's driving north. Because I'm not at work and can't connect to the pill-size AidSat earjack chewing-gummed inside his dashboard vent, I don't know what Rob is playing on his stereo. If experience is any guide, it's either the Eagles *Greatest Hits* or Sinatra's *In the Wee Small Hours*. I'm grateful to Rob for exposing me to the Sinatra, and I'm grateful as well for *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*, which I can't say I've managed to watch yet without fast-forwarding but whose title is like a mantra to me now. Its silent repetition clears my mind. Perhaps that's all minds are made of: words and tunes. I try to let them guide me. Don't be surprised if six months or so from now a talkative young man named Frank Aguirre doesn't start acting up in Yahoo! chat rooms, listing his favorite slasher films on Netflix, barraging his senators with moody e-mails, and slowly cross-referencing himself to life the way Kent Selkirk did.

I hope it's the Sinatra that Rob has on as he turns left onto the Colonel's street. More truth in it. More loss. More need.

Sing with him. Ache with him, Rob.

It might just save you.

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