

Undercurrents

Bit Man

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My Uncle Vito and I were talking the other day about alleged underworld involvement in CIA assassination plots.

"Do you think it's true?" I asked as we sat sipping wine in the wee small hours of the morning waiting for his restaurant to close.

"Maybe. By the way, don't talk too close to that bottle of Ruffino."

"Huh?"

"I think the restaurant might be under observation."

"C'mon Uncle Vito. Don't you think you could be a little sensitive about Italo-CIA connections?"

"Don't say that. I have good reason."

Uncle Vito unbuttoned his butterfly bowtie. He lit a long cigar and looked me straight in the eye.

"Last week, I think it was Monday, a midget comes into the place for dinner. He looks like any other midget except for the fact that he has half a mustache."

"Half a..."

"That's right. My waiter Tony, an observant fellow, notices the midget and alerts me. Being the host I am I wander over to the table and extend my appreciation for his patronage."

"Do you do that normally?"

"Not really. But the circus is coming to town in a few weeks and I figure if I treat him nice he tells his friends about the place."

"Good thinking."

"Yea. Well, he motions me to sit down. When I do I notice he not only has half a mustache but a glass eye and wooden hand as well. It was creepy."

"Really. Did he talk about it?"

"That's the creepy part. He was a deaf mute. He wrote me notes. Here, look."

Uncle Vito dug into his vest pocket and came out with scraps of cocktail napkins. He placed them carefully before me.

"Here's the first one."

The handwriting was child-like yet bold. It read 'Every man knows the limit.'

"I couldn't figure that out," Uncle Vito said, "so I asked him to explain."

"Did he?"

"Nah. He just wrote 'Get out of town.' I started to become nervous because I never met a midget I didn't like."

"What happened?"

"Well, you've gotta realize that my restaurant is a popular place. The top names in Washington come here. I didn't want to create a scene. So I left his table."

"Do you think the CIA would really want to get rid of you?"

"It's possible. I've made powerful friends and enemies, depending on whether the chef got up on the right side of the bed. Anyway the real clincher came when I went home and read three other notes the midget left. I noticed a strange pattern."

"A pattern?"

"Yea. He had a funny habit of transferring the letter H for the letter B."

"What does that mean?"

"I asked a knowledgeable friend of mine. The midget turned out to be the famous Carmine Smallo, agent-in-charge of Italo-CIA harassment."

"Why the H's for B's?"

"Because in his sick mind he pictures himself a hit man. But he's only a bit man. Nothing more."

The restaurant closed and I ran home in the dark whistling all the way.