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Secret Paperwork

The two thirty-eights roared simultaneously.

The walls of the underground room took the crash of sound and batted it to and fro between them until there was silence. James Bond watched the smoke being sucked from each end of the room towards the central Ventaxia fan. The memory in his right hand of how he had drawn and fired with one sweep from the left made him confident. He broke the chamber sideways out of the Colt Detective Special and waited, his gun pointing at the floor, while the Instructor walked the twenty yards towards him through the half-light of the gallery.

Bond saw that the Instructor was grinning. 'I don't believe it,' he said. 'I got you that time.'

The Instructor came up with him. 'I'm in hospital, but you're dead, sir,' he said. In one hand he held the silhouette target of the upper body of a man. In the other a polaroid film, postcard size. He handed this to Bond and they turned to a table behind them on which there was a green-shaded desk-light and a large magnifying glass.

Bond picked up the glass and bent over the photograph.

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It was a flashlight photograph of him. Around his right hand there was a blurred burst of white flame. He focused the glass carefully on the left side of his dark jacket. In the centre of his heart there was a tiny pinpoint of light.

Without speaking, the Instructor laid the big white man-shaped target under the lamp. Its heart was a black bullseye, about three inches across. Just below and half an inch to the right was the rent made by Bond's bullet.

'Through the left wall of the stomach and out at the back,' said the Instructor, with satisfaction. He took out a pencil and scribbled an addition on the side of the target. 'Twenty rounds and I make it you owe me seven-and-six, sir,' he said impassively.

Bond laughed. He counted out some silver. 'Double the stakes next Monday,' he said.

'That's all right with me,' said the Instructor. 'But you can't beat the machine, sir. And if you want to get into the team for the Dewar Trophy we ought to give the thirty-eights a rest and spend some time on the Remington. That new long twenty-two cartridge they've just brought out is going to mean at least 7,900 out of a possible 8,000 to win. Most of your bullets have got to be in the X-ring and that's only as big as a shilling when it's under your nose. At a hundred yards it isn't there at all.'

'To hell with the Dewar Trophy,' said Bond. 'It's your money I'm after.' He shook the unfired bullets in the chamber of his gun into his cupped hand and laid them and the gun on the table. 'See you Monday. Same time?'

'Ten o'clock'll be fine, sir,' said the Instructor, jerking

down the two handles on the iron door. He smiled at Bond's back as it disappeared up the steep concrete stairs leading to the ground floor. He was pleased with Bond's shooting, but he wouldn't have thought of telling him that he was the best shot in the Service. Only M was allowed to know that, and his Chief of Staff, who would be told to enter the scores of that day's shoot on Bond's Confidential Record.

Bond pushed through the green baize door at the top of the basement steps and walked over to the lift that would take him up to the eighth floor of the tall, grey building near Regent's Park that is the headquarters of the Secret Service. He was satisfied with his score but not proud of it. His trigger finger twitched in his pocket as he wondered how to conjure up that little extra flash of speed that would beat the machine, the complicated box of tricks that sprung the target for just three seconds, fired back at him with a blank .38, and shot a pencil of light at him and photographed it as he stood and fired from the circle of chalk on the floor.

The lift-doors sighed open and Bond got in. The liftman could smell the cordite on him. They always smelt like that when they came up from the shooting gallery. He liked it. It reminded him of the Army. He pressed the button for the eighth and rested the stump of his left arm against the control handle.

If only the light was better, thought Bond. But M insisted that all shooting should be done in averagely bad conditions. A dim light and a target that shot back at you was as close as he could get to copying the real

thing. 'Shooting hell out of a piece of cardboard doesn't prove anything' was his single-line introduction to the Small-Arms Defence Manual.

The lift eased to a stop and as Bond stepped out into the drab Ministry-of-Works-green corridor and into the bustling world of girls carrying files, doors opening and shutting, and muted telephone bells, he emptied his mind of all thoughts of his shoot and prepared himself for the normal business of a routine day at Headquarters.

He walked along to the end door on the right. It was as anonymous as all the others he had passed. No numbers. If you had any business on the eighth floor, and your office was not on that floor, someone would come and fetch you to the room you needed and see you back into the lift when you were through.

Bond knocked and waited. He looked at his watch. Eleven o'clock. Mondays were hell. Two days of dockets and files to plough through. And weekends were generally busy times abroad. Empty flats got burgled. People were photographed in compromising positions. Motor-car 'accidents' looked better, got a more cursory handling, amidst the weekend slaughter on the roads. The weekly bags from Washington, Istanbul and Tokyo would have come in and been sorted. They might hold something for him.

The door opened and he had his daily moment of pleasure at having a beautiful secretary. 'Morning, Lil,' he said.

The careful warmth of her smile of welcome dropped about ten degrees.

'Give me that coat,' she said. 'It stinks of cordite. And don't call me Lil. You know I hate it.'

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Bond took off his coat and handed it to her. 'Anyone who gets christened Loelia Ponsonby ought to get used to pet names.'

He stood beside her desk in the little anteroom which she had somehow made to seem a little more human than an office and watched her hang his coat on the iron frame of the open window.

She was tall and dark with a reserved, unbroken beauty to which the war and five years in the Service had lent a touch of sternness. Unless she married soon, Bond thought for the hundredth time, or had a lover, her cool air of authority might easily become spinsterish and she would join the army of women who had married a career.

Bond had told her as much, often, and he and the two other members of the Double Zero Section had at various times made determined assaults on her virtue. She had handled them all with the same cool motherliness (which, to salve their egos, they privately defined as frigidity) and, the day after, she treated them with small attentions and kindnesses to show that it was really her fault and that she forgave them.

What they didn't know was that she worried herself almost to death when they were in danger and that she loved them equally; but that she had no intention of becoming emotionally involved with any man who might be dead next week. And it was true that an appointment in the Secret Service was a form of peonage. If you were a woman there wasn't much of you left for other relationships. It was easier for the men. They had an excuse

for fragmentary affairs. For them marriage and children and a home were out of the question if they were to be of any use 'in the field' as it was cosily termed. But, for the women, an affair outside the Service automatically made you a 'security risk' and in the last analysis you had a choice of resignation from the Service and a normal life, or of perpetual concubinage to your King and Country.

Loelia Ponsonby knew that she had almost reached the time for decision and all her instincts told her to get out. But every day the drama and romance of her Cavell-Nightingale world locked her more securely into the company of the other girls at Headquarters and every day it seemed more difficult to betray by resignation the father-figure which the Service had become.

Meanwhile she was one of the most envied girls in the building, and a member of the small company of Principal Secretaries who had access to the innermost secrets of the Service – 'The Pearls and Twinset' as they were called behind their backs by the other girls, with ironical reference to their supposedly 'County' and 'Kensington' backgrounds – and, so far as the Personnel Branch was concerned, her destiny in twenty years' time would be that single golden line right at the end of a New Year's Honours List, among the medals for officials of the Fishery Board, of the Post Office, of the Women's Institute, towards the bottom of the OBEs: 'Miss Loelia Ponsonby, Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Defence.'

She turned away from the window. She was dressed in a sugar-pink and white striped shirt and a plain dark blue skirt.

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Bond smiled into her grey eyes. 'I only call you Lil on Mondays,' he said. 'Miss Ponsonby the rest of the week. But I'll never call you Loelia. It sounds like somebody in an indecent limerick. Any messages?'

'No,' she said shortly. She relented. 'But there's piles of stuff on your desk. Nothing urgent. But there's an awful lot of it. Oh, and the powder-vine says that 008's got out. He's in Berlin, resting. Isn't it wonderful?'

Bond looked quickly at her. 'When did you hear that?'

'About half an hour ago,' she said.

Bond opened the inner door to the big office with the three desks and shut it behind him. He went and stood by the window, looking out at the late spring green of the trees in Regent's Park. So Bill had made it after all. Peenemunde and back. Resting in Berlin sounded bad. Must be in pretty poor shape. Well, he'd just have to wait for news from the only leak in the building – the girls' restroom, known to the impotent fury of the Security staff as 'the powder-vine'.

Bond sighed and sat down at his desk, pulling towards him the tray of brown folders bearing the Top Secret red star. And what about 0011? It was two months since he had vanished into the 'Dirty Half-Mile' in Singapore. Not a word since. While he, Bond, No. 007, the senior of the three men in the Service who had earned the Double Zero number, sat at his comfortable desk doing paperwork and flirting with their secretary.

He shrugged his shoulders and resolutely opened the top folder. Inside there was a detailed map of southern Poland and north-eastern Germany. Its feature was a

straggling red line connecting Warsaw and Berlin. There was also a long typewritten memorandum headed *Mainline: A well-established Escape Route from East to West*.

Bond took out his black gunmetal cigarette-box and his black-oxidised Ronson lighter and put them on the desk beside him. He lit a cigarette, one of the Macedonian blend with the three gold rings round the butt that Morlands of Grosvenor Street made for him, then he settled himself forward in the padded swivel chair and began to read.

It was the beginning of a typical routine day for Bond. It was only two or three times a year that an assignment came along requiring his particular abilities. For the rest of the year he had the duties of an easy-going senior civil servant – elastic office hours from around ten to six; lunch, generally in the canteen; evenings spent playing cards in the company of a few close friends, or at Crockford's; or making love, with rather cold passion, to one of three similarly disposed married women; weekends playing golf for high stakes at one of the clubs near London.

He took no holidays, but was generally given a fortnight's leave at the end of each assignment – in addition to any sick leave that might be necessary. He earned £1,500 a year, the salary of a Principal Officer in the Civil Service, and he had a thousand a year free of tax of his own. When he was on a job he could spend as much as he liked, so for the other months of the year he could live very well on his £2,000 a year net.

He had a small but comfortable flat off the King's Road, an elderly Scottish housekeeper – a treasure called May – and a 1930 41/2-litre Bentley coupé, super-charged, which he kept expertly tuned so that he could do a hundred when he wanted to.

On these things he spent all his money and it was his ambition to have as little as possible in his banking account when he was killed, as, when he was depressed, he knew he would be, before the statutory age of forty-five.

Eight years to go before he was automatically taken off the Double Zero list and given a staff job at Headquarters. At least eight tough assignments. Probably sixteen. Perhaps twenty-four. Too many.

There were five cigarette-ends in the big glass ashtray by the time Bond had finished memorising the details of *Mainline*. He picked up a red pencil and ran his eye down the distribution list on the cover. The list started with 'M', then 'C.o.S.', then a dozen or so letters and numbers and then, at the end, '00'. Against this he put a neat tick, signed it with the figure 7, and tossed the file into his OUT tray.

It was twelve o'clock. Bond took the next folder off the pile and opened it. It was from the Radio Intelligence Division of NATO, 'For Information Only' and it was headed 'Radio Signatures'.

Bond pulled the rest of the pile towards him and glanced at the first page of each. These were their titles:

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*The Inspectoscope – A machine for the detection
of contraband.*

Philopon – A Japanese murder-drug.

*Possible points of concealment on trains. No. II.
Germany.*

The methods of SMERSH. No. 6. Kidnapping.

Route five to Peking.

*Vladivostock. A photographic Reconnaissance by
US Thunderjet.*

Bond was not surprised by the curious mixture he was supposed to digest. The Double Zero Section of the Secret Service was not concerned with the current operations of other sections and stations, only with background information which might be useful or instructive to the only three men in the Service whose duties included assassination – who might be ordered to kill. There was no urgency about these files. No action was required by him or his two colleagues except that each of them jotted down the numbers of docketts which he considered the other two should also read when they were next attached to Headquarters. When the Double Zero Section had finished with this lot they would go down to their final destination in ‘Records’.

Bond turned back to the NATO paper.

‘The almost inevitable manner,’ he read, ‘in which individuality is revealed by minute patterns of behaviour is demonstrated by the indelible characteristics of the “fist” of each radio operator. This “fist”, or manner of

tapping out messages, is distinctive and recognisable by those who are practised in receiving messages. It can also be measured by very sensitive mechanisms. To illustrate, in 1943 the United States Radio Intelligence Bureau made use of this fact in tracing an enemy station in Chile operated by "Pedro", a young German. When the Chilean police closed in on the station, "Pedro" escaped. A year later, expert listeners spotted a new illegal transmitter and were able to recognise "Pedro" as the operator. In order to disguise his "fist" he was transmitting left-handed, but the disguise was not effective and he was captured.

'NATO Radio Research has recently been experimenting with a form of "scrambler" which can be attached to the wrist of operators with the object of interfering minutely with the nerve centres which control the muscles of the hand. However—'

There were three telephones on Bond's desk. A black one for outside calls, a green office telephone, and a red one which went only to M and his Chief of Staff. It was the familiar burr of the red one that broke the silence of the room.

It was M's Chief of Staff.

'Can you come up?' asked the pleasant voice.

'M?' asked Bond.

'Yes.'

'Any clue?'

'Simply said if you were about he'd like to see you.'

'Right,' said Bond, and put down the receiver.

He collected his coat, told his secretary he would be

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with M and not to wait for him, left his office and walked along the corridor to the lift.

While he waited for it, he thought of those other times, when, in the middle of an empty day, the red telephone had suddenly broken the silence and taken him out of one world and set him down in another. He shrugged his shoulders – Monday! He might have expected trouble.

The lift came. ‘Ninth,’ said Bond, and stepped in.