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From a View to a Kill

The eyes behind the wide black rubber goggles were cold as flint. In the howling speed-turmoil of a BSA M20 doing seventy, they were the only quiet things in the hurtling flesh and metal. Protected by the glass of the goggles, they stared fixedly ahead from just above the centre of the handlebars, and their dark unwavering focus was that of gun muzzles. Below the goggles, the wind had got into the face through the mouth and had wrenched the lips back into a square grin that showed big tombstone teeth and strips of whitish gum. On both sides of the grin the cheeks had been blown out by the wind into pouches that fluttered slightly. To right and left of the hurtling face under the crash helmet, the black gauntlets, broken-wristed at the controls, looked like the attacking paws of a big animal.

The man was dressed in the uniform of a despatch-rider in the Royal Corps of Signals, and his machine, painted olive green, was, with certain modifications to the valves and the carburettor and the removal of some of the silencer baffles to give more speed, identical

with a standard British Army machine. There was nothing in the man or his equipment to suggest that he was not what he appeared to be, except a fully loaded Luger held by a clip to the top of the petrol tank.

It was seven o'clock on a May morning and the dead straight road through the forest glittered with the tiny luminous mist of spring. On both sides of the road the moss- and flower-carpeted depths between the great oak trees held the theatrical enchantment of the royal forests of Versailles and St Germain. The road was D98, a secondary road serving local traffic in the St Germain area, and the motorcyclist had just passed beneath the Paris-Mantes autoroute already thundering with commuter traffic for Paris. He was heading north towards St Germain and there was no one else in sight in either direction, except, perhaps half a mile ahead, an almost identical figure – another Royal Corps despatch-rider. He was a younger, slimmer man and he sat comfortably back on his machine, enjoying the morning and keeping his speed to around forty. He was well on time and it was a beautiful day. He wondered whether to have his eggs fried or scrambled when he got back to HQ around eight.

Five hundred yards, four hundred, three, two, one. The man coming up from behind slowed to fifty. He put his right gauntlet up to his teeth and pulled it off. He stuffed the gauntlet between the buttons of his tunic and reached down and unclipped the gun.

By now he must have been big in the driving mirror of the young man ahead, for suddenly the young man jerked his head round, surprised to find another despatch-rider on his run at that time of the morning. He expected that it would be an American or perhaps French military police. It might be anyone from the eight NATO nations that made up the staff of SHAPE, but when he recognised the uniform of the Corps he was astonished and delighted. Who the hell could it be? He raised a cheerful right thumb in recognition and cut his speed to thirty, waiting for the other man to drift up alongside. With one eye on the road ahead and the other on the approaching silhouette in the mirror, he ran through the names of the British riders in the Special Service Transportation Unit at Headquarters Command. Albert, Sid, Wally – might be Wally, same thick build. Good show! He'd be able to pull his leg about that little frog bit in the canteen – Louise, Elise, Lise – what the hell was her name?

The man with the gun had slowed. Now he was fifty yards away. His face, undistorted by the wind, had set into blunt, hard, perhaps Slav lines. A red spark burned behind the black, aimed muzzles of the eyes. Forty yards, thirty. A single magpie flew out of the forest ahead of the young despatch rider. It fled clumsily across the road into the bushes behind a Michelin sign that said that St Germain was one kilometre to go. The young man grinned and raised an ironical finger in salute and self-protection – 'One magpie is sorrow.'

Twenty yards behind him the man with the gun took both hands off the handlebars, lifted the Luger, rested it carefully on his left forearm and fired one shot.

The young man's hands whipped off his controls and met across the centre of his backward-arching spine. His machine veered across the road, jumped a narrow ditch and ploughed into a patch of grass and lilies of the valley. There it rose up on its screaming back wheel and slowly crashed backwards on top of its dead rider. The BSA coughed and kicked and tore at the young man's clothes and at the flowers, and then lay quiet.

The killer executed a narrow turn and stopped with his machine pointing back the way he had come. He stamped down the wheel-rest, pulled his machine up on to it and walked in among the wild flowers under the trees. He knelt down beside the dead man and brusquely pulled back an eyelid. Just as roughly he tore the black leather despatch-case off the corpse and ripped open the buttons of the tunic and removed a battered leather wallet. He wrenched a cheap wrist-watch so sharply off the left wrist that the chrome expanding bracelet snapped in half. He stood up and slung the despatch case over his shoulder. While he stowed the wallet and the watch away in his tunic pocket he listened. There were only forest sounds and the slow tick of hot metal from the crashed BSA. The killer retraced his steps to the road. He walked slowly, scuffing leaves over the tyre-marks in the soft earth

and moss. He took extra trouble over the deep scars in the ditch and the grass verge, and then stood beside his motorcycle and looked back towards the lily-of-the-valley patch. Not bad! Probably only the police dogs would get it, and, with ten miles of road to cover, they would be hours, perhaps days – plenty long enough. The main thing in these jobs was to have enough safety margin. He could have shot the man at forty yards, but he had preferred to get to twenty. And taking the watch and the wallet had been nice touches – pro touches.

Pleased with himself, the man heaved his machine off its rest, vaulted smartly into the saddle and kicked down on the starter. Slowly, so as not to show skid-marks, he accelerated away back down the road and in a minute or so he was doing seventy again and the wind had redrawn the empty turnip grin across his face.

Around the scene of the killing, the forest, which had held its breath while it was done, slowly began to breathe again.

James Bond had his first drink of the evening at Fouquet's. It was not a solid drink. One cannot drink seriously in French cafés. Out of doors on a pavement in the sun is no place for vodka or whisky or gin. A *fine à l'eau* is fairly serious, but it intoxicates without tasting very good. A *quart de champagne* or a *champagne à l'orange* is all right before luncheon, but in the evening one *quart* leads to another *quart* and a bottle

of indifferent champagne is a bad foundation for the night. Pernod is possible, but it should be drunk in company, and anyway Bond had never liked the stuff because its liquorice taste reminded him of his childhood. No, in cafés you have to drink the least offensive of the musical comedy drinks that go with them, and Bond always had the same thing – an Americano – Bitter Campari, Cinzano, a large slice of lemon peel and soda. For the soda he always stipulated Perrier, for in his opinion expensive soda-water was the cheapest way to improve a poor drink.

When Bond was in Paris he invariably stuck to the same addresses. He stayed at the Terminus Nord, because he liked station hotels and because this was the least pretentious and most anonymous of them. He had luncheon at the Café de la Paix, the Rotonde or the Dôme, because the food was good enough and it amused him to watch the people. If he wanted a solid drink he had it at Harry's Bar, both because of the solidity of the drinks and because, on his first ignorant visit to Paris at the age of sixteen, he had done what Harry's advertisement in the *Continental Daily Mail* had told him to do and had said to his taxi-driver 'Sank Roo Doe Noo'. That had started one of the memorable evenings of his life, culminating in the loss, almost simultaneous, of his virginity and his notecase. For dinner, Bond went to one of the great restaurants – Véfour, the Caneton, Lucas Carton or the Cochon d'Or. These he considered, whatever Michelin might say about the Tour d'Argent, Maxim's and the like, to have

somehow avoided the tarnish of the expense account and the dollar. Anyway, he preferred their cooking. After dinner he generally went to the Place Pigalle to see what would happen to him. When, as usual, nothing did, he would walk home across Paris to the Gare du Nord and go to bed.

Tonight Bond decided to tear up this dusty address book and have himself an old-fashioned ball. He was on his way through Paris after a dismally failed assignment on the Austro-Hungarian border. It had been a question of getting a certain Hungarian out. Bond had been sent from London specially to direct the operation over the head of Station V. This had been unpopular with the Vienna Station. There had been misunderstandings – wilful ones. The man had been killed in the frontier minefield. There would have to be a Court of Inquiry. Bond was due back at his London headquarters on the following day to make his report, and the thought of it all depressed him. Today had been so beautiful – one of those days when you almost believe that Paris is beautiful and gay – and Bond had decided to give the town just one more chance. He would somehow find himself a girl who was a real girl, and he would take her to dinner at some make-believe place in the Bois like the Armenonville. To clean the money-look out of her eyes – for it would certainly be there – he would as soon as possible give her fifty thousand francs. He would say to her: ‘I propose to call you Donatienne, or possibly Solange, because these are names that suit my mood and the

evening. We knew each other before and you lent me this money because I was in a jam. Here it is, and now we will tell each other what we have been doing since we last met in St Tropez just a year ago. In the meantime, here is the menu and the wine list and you must choose what will make you happy and fat.' And she would look relieved at not having to try any more, and she would laugh and say: 'But, James, I do not want to be fat.' And there they would be, started on the myth of 'Paris in the Spring', and Bond would stay sober and be interested in her and everything she said. And, by God, by the end of the evening it would not be his fault if it transpired that there was in fact no shred of stuffing left in the hoary old fairy tale of 'A good time in Paris'.

Sitting in Fouquet's, waiting for his Americano, Bond smiled at his vehemence. He knew that he was only playing at this fantasy for the satisfaction of launching a last kick at a town he had cordially disliked since the war. Since 1945, he had not had a happy day in Paris. It was not that the town had sold its body. Many towns have done that. It was its heart that was gone – pawned to the tourists, pawned to the Russians and Romanians and Bulgars, pawned to the scum of the world who had gradually taken the town over. And, of course, pawned to the Germans. You could see it in the people's eyes – sullen, envious, ashamed. Architecture? Bond glanced across the pavement at the shiny black ribbons of cars off which the sun glinted painfully. Everywhere it was the same as in the

Champs-Élysées. There were only two hours in which you could even see the town – between five and seven in the morning. After seven it was engulfed in a thundering stream of black metal with which no beautiful buildings, no spacious, tree-lined boulevards, could compete.

The waiter's tray clattered down on the marble-topped table. With a slick one-handed jerk that Bond had never been able to copy, the waiter's bottle-opener prised the cap off the Perrier. The man slipped the tab under the ice-bucket, said a mechanical '*Voilà, m'sieur*' and darted away. Bond put ice into his drink, filled it to the top with soda and took a long pull at it. He sat back and lit a Laurens jaune. Of course the evening would be a disaster. Even supposing he found the girl in the next hour or so, the contents would certainly not stand up to the wrapping. On closer examination she would turn out to have the heavy, dank, wide-pored skin of the bourgeois French. The blonde hair under the rakish velvet beret would be brown at the roots and as coarse as piano wire. The peppermint on the breath would not conceal the midday garlic. The alluring figure would be intricately scaffolded with wire and rubber. She would be from Lille and she would ask him if he was American. And, Bond smiled to himself, she or her *maquereau* would probably steal his notecase. *La ronde!* He would be back where he came in. More or less, that was. Well, to hell with it!

A battered black Peugeot 403 broke out of the centre

stream of traffic, cut across the inside line of cars and pulled in to double park at the kerb. There was the usual screaming of brakes, hooting and yelling. Quite unmoved, a girl got out of the car and, leaving the traffic to sort itself out, walked purposefully across the sidewalk. Bond sat up. She had everything, but absolutely everything that belonged in his fantasy. She was tall and, although her figure was hidden by a light raincoat, the way she moved and the way she held herself promised that it would be beautiful. The face had the gaiety and bravado that went with her driving, but now there was impatience in the compressed lips and the eyes fretted as she pushed diagonally through the moving crowd on the pavement.

Bond watched her narrowly as she reached the edge of the tables and came up the aisle. Of course it was hopeless. She was coming to meet someone – her lover. She was the sort of woman who always belongs to somebody else. She was late for him. That's why she was in such a hurry. What damnable luck – right down to the long blonde hair under the rakish beret! And she was looking straight at him. She was smiling . . . !

Before Bond could pull himself together, the girl had come up to his table and had drawn out a chair and sat down.

She smiled rather tautly into his startled eyes. 'I'm sorry I'm late, and I'm afraid we've got to get moving at once. You're wanted at the office.' She added under her breath: 'Crash dive.'

Bond jerked himself back to reality. Whoever she

was, she was certainly from 'the firm'. 'Crash dive' was a slang expression the Secret Service had borrowed from the Submarine Service. It meant bad news – the worst. Bond dug into his pocket and slid some coins over the table. He said: 'Right. Let's go,' and got up and followed her down through the tables and across to her car. It was still obstructing the inner lane of traffic. Any minute now there would be a policeman. Angry faces glared at them as they climbed in. The girl had left the engine running. She banged the gears into second and slid out into the traffic.

Bond looked sideways at her. The pale skin was velvet. The blonde hair was silk – to the roots. He said, 'Where are you from and what's it all about?'

She said, concentrating on the traffic: 'From the Station. Grade two assistant. Number 765 on duty, Mary Ann Russell off. I've no idea what it's all about. I just saw the signal from HQ – personal from M to Head of Station. Most Immediate and all that. He was to find you at once and if necessary use the *Deuxième* to help. Head of F said you always went to the same places when you were in Paris, and I and another girl were given a list.' She smiled. 'I'd only tried Harry's Bar, and after Fouquet's I was going to start on the restaurants. It was marvellous picking you up like that.' She gave him a quick glance. 'I hope I wasn't very clumsy.'

Bond said, 'You were fine. How were you going to handle it if I'd had a girl with me?'

She laughed. 'I was going to do much the same except