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Take It Easy, Mr Bond

It was one of those days when it seemed to James Bond that all life, as someone put it, was nothing but a heap of six to four against.

To begin with he was ashamed of himself – a rare state of mind. He had a hangover, a bad one, with an aching head and stiff joints. When he coughed – smoking too much goes with drinking too much and doubles the hangover – a cloud of small luminous black spots swam across his vision like amoebae in pond water. The ‘one drink too many’ signals itself unmistakably. His final whisky and soda in the luxurious flat in Park Lane had been no different from the ten preceding ones, but it had gone down reluctantly and had left a bitter taste and an ugly sensation of surfeit. And, although he had taken in the message, he had agreed to play just one more rubber. Five pounds a hundred as it’s the last one? He had agreed. And he had played the rubber like a fool. Even now he could see the queen of spades, with that stupid Mona Lisa smile on her fat face, slapping triumphantly down on his knave – the queen, as his partner had so sharply

reminded him, that had been so infallibly marked with South, and that had made the difference between a grand slam redoubled (drunkenly) for him, and four hundred points above the line for the opposition. In the end it had been a twenty-point rubber, £100 against him – important money.

Again Bond dabbed with the bloodstained styptic pencil at the cut on his chin and despised the face that stared sullenly back at him from the mirror above the washbasin. Stupid, ignorant bastard! It all came from having nothing to do. More than a month of paperwork – ticking off his number on stupid dockets, scribbling minutes that got spikier as the weeks passed, and snapping back down the telephone when some harmless section officer tried to argue with him. And then his secretary had gone down with the flu and he had been given a silly, and, worse, ugly bitch from the pool who called him ‘sir’ and spoke to him primly through a mouth full of fruit stones. And now it was another Monday morning. Another week was beginning. The May rain thrashed at the windows. Bond swallowed down two Phensics and reached for the Enos. The telephone in his bedroom rang. It was the loud ring of the direct line with Headquarters.

James Bond, his heart thumping faster than it should have done, despite the race across London and a fretful wait for the lift to the eighth floor, pulled out the chair and sat down and looked across into the calm, grey,

damnably clear eyes he knew so well. What could he read in them?

‘Good morning, James. Sorry to pull you along a bit early in the morning. Got a very full day ahead. Wanted to fit you in before the rush.’

Bond’s excitement waned minutely. It was never a good sign when M addressed him by his Christian name instead of by his number. This didn’t look like a job – more like something personal. There was none of the tension in M’s voice that heralded big, exciting news. M’s expression was interested, friendly, almost benign. Bond said something non-committal.

‘Haven’t seen much of you lately, James. How have you been? Your health, I mean.’ M picked up a sheet of paper, a form of some kind, from his desk, and held it as if preparing to read.

Suspiciously, trying to guess what the paper said, what all this was about, Bond said, ‘I’m all right, sir.’

M said mildly, ‘That’s not what the MO thinks, James. Just had your last Medical. I think you ought to hear what he has to say.’

Bond looked angrily at the back of the paper. Now what the hell! He said with control, ‘Just as you say, sir.’

M gave Bond a careful, appraising glance. He held the paper closer to his eyes. “‘This officer,” he read, “remains basically physically sound. Unfortunately his mode of life is not such as is likely to allow him to remain in this happy state. Despite many previous warnings, he admits to smoking sixty cigarettes a day.

These are of a Balkan mixture with a higher nicotine content than the cheaper varieties. When not engaged upon strenuous duty, the officer's average daily consumption of alcohol is in the region of half a bottle of spirits of between sixty and seventy proof. On examination, there continues to be little definite sign of deterioration. The tongue is furred. The blood pressure a little raised at 160/90. The liver is not palpable. On the other hand, when pressed, the officer admits to frequent occipital headaches and there is spasm in the trapezius muscles and so-called 'fibrositis' nodules can be felt. I believe these symptoms to be due to this officer's mode of life. He is not responsive to the suggestion that over-indulgence is no remedy for the tensions inherent in his professional calling and can only result in the creation of a toxic state which could finally have the effect of reducing his fitness as an officer. I recommend that No. 007 should take it easy for two to three weeks on a more abstemious regime, when I believe he would make a complete return to his previous exceptionally high state of physical fitness."

M reached over and slid the report into his OUT tray. He put his hands flat down on the desk in front of him and looked sternly across at Bond. He said, 'Not very satisfactory is it, James?'

Bond tried to keep impatience out of his voice. He said, 'I'm perfectly fit, sir. Everyone has occasional headaches. Most weekend golfers have fibrositis. You get it from sweating and then sitting in a draught.

Aspirin and embrocation get rid of them. Nothing to it really, sir.'

M said severely, 'That's just where you're making a big mistake, James. Taking medicine only suppresses these symptoms of yours. Medicine doesn't get to the root of the trouble. It only conceals it. The result is a more highly poisoned condition which may become chronic disease. All drugs are harmful to the system. They are contrary to nature. The same applies to most of the food we eat – white bread with all the roughage removed, refined sugar with all the goodness machined out of it, pasteurised milk which has had most of the vitamins boiled away, everything overcooked and denaturised. Why,' M reached into his pocket for his notebook and consulted it, 'do you know what our bread contains apart from a bit of overground flour?' M looked accusingly at Bond. 'It contains large quantities of chalk, also benzol peroxide powder, chlorine gas, sal ammoniac and alum.' M put the notebook back in his pocket. 'What do you think of that?'

Bond, mystified by all this, said defensively, 'I don't eat all that much bread, sir.'

'Maybe not,' said M impatiently. 'But how much stoneground wholewheat do you eat? How much yoghurt? Uncooked vegetables, nuts, fresh fruit?'

Bond smiled. 'Practically none at all, sir.'

'It's no laughing matter.' M tapped his forefinger on the desk for emphasis. 'Mark my words. There is no way to health except the natural way. All your troubles' – Bond opened his mouth to protest, but

M held up his hand – ‘the deep-seated toxaemia revealed by your Medical, are the result of a basically unnatural way of life. Ever heard of Bircher-Brenner, for instance? Or Kneipp, Preissnitz, Rikli, Schroth, Gossman, Bilz?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Just so. Well those are the men you would be wise to study. Those are the great naturopaths – the men whose teaching we have foolishly ignored. Fortunately,’ M’s eyes gleamed enthusiastically, ‘there are a number of disciples of these men practising in England. Nature cure is not beyond our reach.’

James Bond looked curiously at M. What the hell had got into the old man? Was all this the first sign of senile decay? But M looked fitter than Bond had ever seen him. The cold grey eyes were clear as crystal and the skin of the hard, lined face was luminous with health. Even the iron-grey hair seemed to have new life. Then what was all this lunacy?

M reached for his IN tray and placed it in front of him in a preliminary gesture of dismissal. He said cheerfully, ‘Well, that’s all, James. Miss Money Penny has made the reservation. Two weeks will be quite enough to put you right. You won’t know yourself when you come out. New man.’

Bond looked across at M, aghast. He said in a strangled voice, ‘Out of where, sir?’

‘Place called “Shrublands”. Run by quite a famous man in his line – Wain, Joshua Wain. Remarkable chap. Sixty-five. Doesn’t look a day over forty. He’ll

take good care of you. Very up-to-date equipment, and he's even got his own herb garden. Nice stretch of country. Near Washington in Sussex. And don't worry about your work here. Put it right out of your mind for a couple of weeks. I'll tell 009 to take care of the Section.'

Bond couldn't believe his ears. He said, 'But, sir. I mean, I'm perfectly all right. Are you sure? I mean, is this really necessary?'

'No,' M smiled frostily. 'Not necessary. Essential. If you want to stay in the Double O Section, that is. I can't afford to have an officer in that section who isn't one hundred per cent fit.' M lowered his eyes to the basket in front of him and took out a signal file. 'That's all, 007.' He didn't look up. The tone of voice was final.

Bond got to his feet. He said nothing. He walked across the room and let himself out, closing the door with exaggerated softness.

Outside the door, Miss Money Penny looked sweetly up at him.

Bond walked over to her desk and banged his fist down so that the typewriter jumped. He said furiously, 'Now what the hell, Penny? Has the old man gone off his rocker? What's all this bloody nonsense? I'm damned if I'm going. He's absolutely nuts.'

Miss Money Penny smiled happily. 'The manager's been terribly helpful and kind. He says he can give you the Myrtle room, in the Annex. He says it's a lovely room. It looks right over the herb garden. They've got their own herb garden, you know.'

'I know all about their bloody herb garden. Now look here, Penny,' Bond pleaded with her, 'be a good girl and tell me what it's all about. What's eating him?'

Miss Money Penny, who often dreamt hopelessly about Bond, took pity on him. She lowered her voice conspiratorially. 'As a matter of fact, I think it's only a passing phase. But it *is* rather bad luck on you getting caught up in it before it's passed. You know he's always apt to get bees in his bonnet about the efficiency of the Service. There was the time when all of us had to go through that physical exercise course. Then he had that headshrinker in, the psychoanalyst man – you missed that. You were somewhere abroad. All the Heads of Section had to tell him their dreams. He didn't last long. Some of their dreams must have scared him off or something. Well, last month M got lumbago and some friend of his at Blades, one of the fat, drinking ones I suppose,' Miss Money Penny turned down her desirable mouth, 'told him about this place in the country. This man swore by it. Told M that we were all like motor cars and that all we needed from time to time was to go to a garage and get decarbonised. He said he went there every year. He said it only cost twenty guineas a week which was less than what he spent in Blades in one day and it made him feel wonderful. Well, you know M always likes trying new things, and he went there for ten days and came back absolutely sold on the place. Yesterday he gave me a great talking-to all about it and this morning in the post I got a whole lot of tins of treacle and wheatgerm

and heaven knows what all. I don't know what to do with the stuff. I'm afraid my poor poodle'll have to live on it. Anyway, that's what happened and I must say I've never seen him in such wonderful form. He's absolutely rejuvenated.'

'He looks like that blasted man in the old Kruschen Salts advertisements. But why does he pick on me to go to this nuthouse?'

Miss Money Penny gave a secret smile. 'You know he thinks the world of you – or perhaps you don't. Anyway, as soon as he saw your Medical he told me to book you in.' Miss Money Penny screwed up her nose. 'But, James, do you really drink and smoke as much as that? It can't be good for you, you know.' She looked up at him with motherly eyes.

Bond controlled himself. He summoned a desperate effort at nonchalance, at the throwaway phrase. 'It's just that I'd rather die of drink than of thirst. As for the cigarettes, it's really only that I don't know what to do with my hands.' He heard the stale, hangover words fall like clinker in a dead grate. Cut out the schmalz! What you need is a double brandy and soda.

Miss Money Penny's warm lips pursed into a disapproving line. 'About the hands – that's not what I've heard.'

'Now don't you start on me, Penny.' Bond walked angrily towards the door. He turned round. 'Any more ticking-off from you and when I get out of this place I'll give you such a spanking you'll have to do your typing off a block of Dunlopillo.'

THUNDERBALL

Miss Money Penny smiled sweetly at him. 'I don't think you'll be able to do much spanking after living on nuts and lemon juice for two weeks, James.'

Bond made a noise between a grunt and a snarl and stormed out of the room.