

TALK OF THE DEVIL

IAN FLEMING



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BANG BANG, KISS KISS

HOW I CAME TO WRITE *CASINO ROYALE*

*Ian Fleming often gave accounts of how he came to write
Casino Royale. This one was written in 1956.*

I really cannot remember exactly why I started to write thrillers. I was on my holiday in Jamaica in January 1951 – I built a house there after the war and I go there every year – and I think my mental hands were empty. I had finished organising a Foreign Service for Kemsley Newspapers and that tide of my life was free-wheeling. My daily occupation in Jamaica is spearfishing and underwater exploring, but after five years of it I didn't want to kill any more fish except barracudas and the rare monster fish and I knew my own underwater terrain like the back of my hand. Above all, after being a bachelor for 44 years, I was on the edge of marrying and the prospect was so horrifying that I was in urgent need of some activity to take my mind off it. So, as I say, my mental hands were empty and although I am as lazy as most Englishmen are, I have a Puritanical dislike of idleness and a natural love of action. So I decided to write a book.

The book had to be a thriller because that was all I had time for in my two months' holiday and I knew there would be no room in my London life for writing books. The atmosphere of casinos and gambling fascinates me and I know enough about spies to write about them. I am also interested in things, in gadgetry of all kinds, and it occurred to me that an accurate and factual framework would help the reader to swallow the wildest improbabilities of the plot.

I sat down at my typewriter, and writing about 2000 words in three hours every morning, *Casino Royale* dutifully wrote itself. I rewrote nothing and made no corrections until my book was finished. If I had looked back at what

I had written the day before I might have despaired at the mistakes in grammar and style, the repetitions and the crudities. And I obstinately closed my mind to self-mockery and ‘what will my friends say?’ I savagely hammered on until the proud day when the last page was done. The last line ‘The bitch is dead now’ was just what I felt. I had killed the job.

But then I started to read it and I was appalled. How could I have written this bilge? What a fool the hero is. The heroine is the purest cardboard. The villains out of pantomime. The torture scene is disgusting. And the writing! Six ‘formidables’ on one page. Sentences of screaming banality. I groaned and started correcting.

When I got back to London, I did nothing with the manuscript. I was too ashamed of it. No publisher would want it and if they did I would not have the face to see it in print. Even under a pseudonym, someone would leak the ghastly fact that it was I who had written this adolescent tripe. There would be one of those sly paragraphs in the *Londoner’s Daily*. Shame! Disgrace! Disaster! Resign from my clubs. Divorce. Leave the country.

Then one day I had lunch at the Ivy with an old friend and literary idol of mine, William Plomer of Jonathan Cape, and I asked him how you get cigarette smoke out of a woman once you have got it in. ‘All right,’ I said, ‘This woman inhales, takes a deep lung full of smoke, draws deeply on her cigarette – anything you like. That’s easy. But how do you get it out of her again? Exhales is a lifeless word. “Puffs it out” is silly. What can you make her do?’

William looked at me sharply. ‘You’ve written a book,’ he said accusingly.

I laughed. I was pleased that he had guessed, but embarrassed. ‘It’s not really a book,’ I said, ‘only a *Boys Own Paper* story. But the point is,’ I hurried on, ‘I got my heroine full of smoke half way through and she’s still got it in her. How can I get it out?’

I needed no more pressuring from William. He was a friend and would tell me the horrible truth about the book without condemning me or being scornful or giving away my secret. I sent him the manuscript. He forced Cape to publish it. The reviewers, from the *Times Literary Supplement* down, were almost staggeringly favourable. People were exuberant, excited, amused. I wrote ‘Author’ instead of journalist in a new passport.

And so it went on. I took Michael Arlen’s advice: ‘write your second book before you see the reviews of your first. *Casino Royale* is good but the reviewers

may damn it and take the heart out of you.' In 1953, in Jamaica, I wrote *Live and Let Die*, in 1954 *Moonraker*, and in 1955, *Diamonds are Forever*, which Cape is publishing just before Easter. When I sent the manuscript of this to William Plomer I said, 'I've put everything into this except the kitchen sink. Can you think of a plot about a kitchen sink for the next one? Otherwise I am lost.' But this time William couldn't help me.

And now I am off to Jamaica again with a spare typewriter ribbon and a load of absolutely blank foolscap through which James Bond must somehow shoot his way during the next eight weeks.