

*This novel is dedicated to Randi and Max,
and to the people of Hong Kong*

Author's Note

The architecture and layout of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank is as described in Chapter Eleven. The events and action contained therein, however, are totally imaginary, as the corporation's highly effective security system would realistically prevent such a scenario. Furthermore, the company EurAsia Enterprises Ltd is entirely fictional and is not intended to represent any existing trading and shipping firm.

Lastly, the actual location for the handover ceremony has not been decided upon at the time of writing. (In fact, China has not yet even agreed to a joint ceremony!) My choice of Statue Square as the site is based on its historical significance and geographical importance to the city, as well as speculation by Hong Kong associates.

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Shamelady

20 JUNE 1997, 9:55 P.M., JAMAICA

Someone long ago had called it the ‘Undertaker’s Wind’ but hardly anyone in Jamaica referred to it by that name anymore. The Undertaker’s Wind was supposed to blow the bad air out of the island at night. In the morning, the ‘Doctor’s Wind’ would come and blow the sweet air in from the sea. The Undertaker’s Wind was certainly at work that night, whipping the long red strands of the Englishwoman’s hair around her head like the flames of a torch.

The woman was dressed in a skin-tight black diving suit and stood on the cliff above the grotto looking out to sea. Forty stone steps cut into the cliff led down to the grotto, in front of which was a small, sandy beach. It was very dark in the grotto, for the cliffs blocked the moonlight. Up above it was just bright enough for every tree, plant and stone to emit an eerie glow.

The woman glanced at her watch and tapped the button to illuminate the time. He would not be late. He never was.

The grotto and its private beach faced the Caribbean,

not far from Port Maria on the North Shore of the island. The small community of Oracabessa was just along the coast to the west, and Cuba was a hundred miles to the north. The area was considered Jamaica's most lovely coastal country. The woman had never been here prior to this evening, but she knew the layout of the place inside out. It was her job to know. The land was private property and a modest, three-bedroomed house had been built above the grotto near the top of the stone steps. If her plans were successful, the house would later be the location for an evening of unbridled passion and pleasure. The man with whom she hoped to share the pleasure had a reputation which preceded him. Other women who had known him had indiscreetly prepared her for the man's intense sexual allure. Although accomplishing the Primary Objective was her main goal tonight, one of her motives for participating in the evening's escapade was a rather selfish Secondary Objective – the physical rewards she would give and receive after the job was done. She couldn't help it. Danger stimulated her sexually. It was why she had sought a career as a mercenary, a contemporary Boadicea. It was why she liked to play with fire.

'I'm here,' a male voice whispered behind her.

'You're on time,' she said.

'Of course I am,' the blond man said in a thick Cockney accent, moving closer to stand beside her, looking out to sea. He, too, was dressed in a black diving suit. 'You know what to do?' He gazed at her, taking in the shapely body.

The woman knew she was beautiful and that men found her attractive. She enjoyed being able to manipulate them. As she looked at the man, she wondered again if the night would end as she desired.

He had blond curly hair, a muscular build and classical Roman features. Most women, she thought, would gladly follow him anywhere.

‘When he arrives, I get him to come up to the house. You’ll “surprise” us and kill him.’

The man smiled. ‘Too right.’

They were both in their mid-twenties and had trained for weeks to get this far, but already possessed the skill and expertise required by any assassin to perform a simple execution. The job in hand tonight was anything but simple, their target a formidable one.

‘Leave the first part to me, Mr Michaels,’ she said, smiling and rubbing her hand across the man’s chin. ‘Give us a little time, and I’ll have him thoroughly distracted.’

‘Well, don’t get carried away. I don’t want to have to take you out with him.’

‘You sound pretty sure of yourself. Remember who he is.’

‘He’s history.’

As if on cue, a Royal Navy jet suddenly appeared, passing about half a mile from them, heading north out to sea at about 200 knots. They could just see the figure jumping from it.

‘There he is,’ the blond man said. ‘Right on time.’ They clasped hands and he kissed her roughly on the

mouth. 'See you later, love . . . when we're done.' And then he was off as she began to walk down the steps into the darkness of the grotto.

The man who made the low-altitude jump from the plane had opened his SAS Modified XL Cloud Type Special Forces rectangular parachute before exiting the aircraft and the jump master threw it out of the plane behind him. It served as not much more than a brake in the short fall, an extremely dangerous manoeuvre over water; but the jumper was a pro who knew what he was doing. He was one of the Double Os.

The woman reached the bottom of the steps and peered out to sea. The man hit the water hard, and for a few moments only his dark parachute could be seen floating on the surface. Then he emerged and divested himself of the parachute. She walked to the edge of the water so that he could see her. The tall, well-built man swam steadily until he was able to stand and walk towards her. He tore off the face mask and snorkel and tossed them aside, and then he stepped out of his fins.

Like the blond man, he had a sexual presence that was so overpowering she had to catch her breath before she spoke.

'The bad air is blowing out tonight,' she said.

'But the sweet air will surely come in the morning,' he replied as agreed.

'Right on time, Double O Seven. I'm 05, but you can call me Stephanie. You okay?' She pronounced the number 'oh-five.'

'I'm fine, thanks, and my name's Bond. James Bond.'

‘It’s pretty dangerous, isn’t it, jumping at such a low altitude?’ she asked, taking his outstretched hand.

‘So long as the parachute is already open when you leave the plane, it’s okay. Did you bring the transmitter?’

In the dim light, his features looked harsher than Stephanie had remembered them. The first time she had seen him was two weeks ago, at the funeral, when she had been struck by his air of casual self-confidence. Dark and handsome, he had piercing blue-grey eyes. His short black hair had just a hint of grey at the temples, was parted on the left, and carelessly brushed so that a thick black comma fell down over the right eyebrow. There was a faint three-inch scar on his right cheek. The longish straight nose ran down to a short upper lip, below which was a wide and finely drawn but cruel mouth.

‘It’s up in the house, Mr Bond. Come, I’ll show you.’ She took his hand and gently pulled him towards the stone steps, then dropped it and walked on ahead. Bond followed her, eyes and ears alert.

She had been told to observe him at the funeral, at which he had remained stubbornly stoical. Commander Bond, like the other pall-bearers, was dressed in Royal Navy uniform with three rows of ribbons. Everyone who was anyone had been there, including Sir Miles Messervy, the recently retired ‘M’, head of SIS; the new ‘M’, a woman only just beginning to take command of the Secret Service; Sir Miles’s faithful secretary, Money Penny; Major Boothroyd, the Armourer; and even the Prime Minister. When a country loses someone

of the stature of Admiral Derek Plasket, all the important people are sure to be there to pay their last respects.

Admiral Plasket was something of a legend. A war hero, he had organised a commando assault team that specialised in raiding Nazi bunkers, collecting intelligence to be passed onto the Allied forces. After the war he had been Special Advisor to the Secret Service, and a personal friend of the old M.

As she had been instructed, Stephanie Lane had kept her eye on Bond throughout the ceremony. He had performed his duties with military precision, standing to attention and displaying no emotion whatsoever. Only afterwards, when she saw him embrace Moneypenny, did she detect some semblance of warmth.

Stephanie had continued her surveillance of 007 for two more weeks, taking note of his daily habits. She had followed him to his flat off the King's Road in Chelsea, where he lived alone. She tailed him to Blades, that exclusive gentleman's club which had only recently begun to admit women. She observed him enter the gaudy building across the Thames from the Tate Gallery, which was the SIS headquarters. Finally, after fifteen days, the operation had been arranged and the time had now come. Stephanie had a lot riding on the outcome of this mission, for James Bond was the target in tonight's Objective and she and her partner must anticipate his every move.

When the attack came, it surprised her – she had thought Michaels would wait until she and Bond were in the house, but he appeared at the top of the stone steps from out of darkness. With a perfectly executed

manoeuvre, the man spun and jump-kicked Bond full in the face. The assault surprised Bond as well, for he fell backwards down the steps. Stephanie stood aside while the blond assassin, who was armed with an ASP 9mm semi-automatic handgun, ran down the steps after him.

Bond had rolled halfway down the steps and then stopped. He didn't move. He lay on his back at a grotesque angle, his head lower than his legs, his shoulders twisted unnaturally.

Michaels raised his gun and pointed it at the still body. 'Wait,' Stephanie whispered. 'I think he's broken his neck!'

Cautiously, the man moved down to Bond's body and crouched to examine him more closely.

It was then that Bond made his move. He jackknifed out of his frozen position, thrusting both forearms into the blond man's face. In a split second, he formed a spear-hand and slammed it down on the man's right wrist, knocking the ASP onto the steps.

Recovering quickly, Michaels butted Bond in the stomach. Both figures tumbled down to the bottom of the steps and rolled out onto the sand, ending up with the younger man on top with his hands around Bond's throat.

This boy's strong, Bond thought.

Stephanie ran down the steps and stood waiting, feeling the adrenalin surge through her body as the two men fought. It gave her a thrill to imagine they were fighting over her. Her breathing became shallow and she felt weak at the knees.

With a superhuman effort, Bond thrust his arms between the other man's elbows and delivered dual lightning sword-hand chops, which made Michaels loosen his grip. Then, with split-second timing, Bond jerked his head forward against the man's nose, breaking it and causing him to cry out in pain.

Then they were both on their feet, each waiting for the other to make the next move.

Bond's Walther PPK was in a waterproof holster attached to the belt round his diving suit. Unfortunately, that was tightly buttoned and it would take more than two seconds to retrieve the weapon. Bond knew he didn't have two seconds. The young man was good – a bit inexperienced, perhaps, but not someone to underestimate. Bond was ready to concede that the other man was the stronger since, although he was in excellent physical shape, Bond was no youngster anymore.

The blond man made a move. With a shout, he leaped in the air and delivered a *Yobi-geri* kick to Bond's chest, knocking him back. The blow was meant to cause serious damage, but it landed too far to the left of the sternal vital-point target. Michaels was momentarily surprised that Bond didn't fall, but he immediately drove his fist into Bond's abdomen. That was the assassin's first mistake – mixing his fighting styles. He was using a mixture of karate, kung fu and traditional western boxing. Bond believed in using whatever worked, but he practised hand-to-hand combat in the same way as he gambled: he picked a system and stuck with it.

By lunging at Bond's stomach, the man had left

himself wide open, enabling Bond to backhand him to the ground. Giving him no time to think, Bond sprang on top of him and punched him hard in the face, but Michaels used his strength to roll Bond over onto his back, and, thrusting his forearm into Bond's neck, exerted tremendous pressure on 007's larynx once again. With his other hand, the young man fumbled with Bond's waterproof holster, attempting to get at the gun. Bond managed to elbow his assailant in the ribs, but this only served to increase his aggression. Bond got his hands round the man's neck but it was too late; Michaels deftly retrieved the Walther PPK 7.65mm from the holster and jumped to his feet.

'All right, freeze!' he shouted at Bond, standing over him, the gun aimed at his forehead. 'I hit you in a vital point earlier but you didn't go down,' he said with incredulity, looking at Bond as if he were a ghost.

007 caught his breath and said, 'That was your first mistake. You were a half-inch too far to the left.'

The man straightened his arm, ready to shoot.

'And now you're making your second mistake,' Bond said.

'Oh, yeah?' Michaels whispered. 'Not from where I'm standing.'

Bond snapped his legs up and kicked him hard in the groin. Michaels screamed, doubled over, dropped the gun and fell to the ground.

'You were exposing a vital point, my friend,' Bond said, getting to his feet and retrieving his Walther PPK. 'And I do mean vital.'

He leaned over the writhing man. 'Who are you?' The man only groaned. 'Are you going to talk?' Then he remembered the girl.

Stephanie stood behind them, by the steps. She was uncertain whether to run or drop to her knees.

'Come here,' Bond commanded. She stepped forward, looking at the man groaning on the ground. 'Do you know him?' Bond snapped.

She shook her head convincingly. 'No.'

Bond handed her the Walther. 'Then retire him.'

She looked surprised.

'He's an assassin. He came here to kill me,' Bond said. 'He knows I live here. I don't care who he is, just get rid of him.'

She took the pistol and aimed it at her partner. The blond man's eyes widened. Bond watched her closely. She hesitated, staring at the man on the ground intently.

'05, I gave you an order,' Bond said firmly.

The wind howled as the woman stood there frozen.

After ten tense seconds, Bond said, 'All right. Relax.'

Stephanie dropped her arm and looked dismayed.

'I couldn't do it,' she said. 'I just couldn't pull the trigger.'

Bond walked over to her and took the gun. 'If it's a matter of not blowing one's cover, a good agent may have to kill an ally or a friend. Don't ever forget that. You gave yourself away, 05. In the old days, if I had been KGB, or worse, I would have immediately perceived that you not only recognised 03 here, but knew him well.'

‘Yes,’ she sighed. ‘You’re right. You really get the unexpected thrown at you in these training missions. I’m sorry. I didn’t think you’d win the fight – it confused me.’

‘Double Os must expect nothing *but* the unexpected,’ Bond said. He crouched down to the man he now called 03.

‘How are you, 03? You put up a bloody good fight, lad. You almost had me at one point,’ Bond said with good humour. ‘You blew the mission, Michaels, but you’ll get good marks, don’t worry.’

The man groaned and then vomited.

‘Yes, well, sorry about that, 03,’ Bond said. ‘You’ll feel all right in a few hours. Sometimes Double Os have to learn their lessons the hard way. Remember what you learned about vital-point targets. God knows I did! Better luck next time.’

Bond stood, turned and walked up the stone steps, and Stephanie ran after him.

‘So did you *know* he was going to be here?’ she asked.

Bond shook his head. ‘No, but I suspected something, especially when you didn’t try to help me. These Double O training sessions you two are taking are also exercises for me. I’m unaware of your objectives and you are unaware of mine. Someone in London orchestrated the entire scenario. Apparently my challenge was dealing with someone who has penetrated the privacy of my home. And I take it you two had a mission to assassinate me?’

She laughed. 'Yes, real kamikaze stuff, isn't it? A Single-O agent assassinating a Double O!' Bond smiled too.

'Is Agent Michaels going to be okay? Not that he was one of my favourite people. He was always chatting me up.'

'He'll be fine. I don't fight dirty unless I have to, but he left me no choice. Besides, he was careless. I didn't hurt him badly – he'll be up and on his way back to Kingston in no time. In any other situation he would have been killed. My kick was nothing compared to a carpet beater.'

'A what?' she asked.

'Never mind,' he said as he led her onto the top of the cliff. In contrast to the darkness below, up here the moon was very bright, flooding the grounds of the estate in a chalky white light.

Bond had purchased the property a year ago. Even though the heyday of a British Jamaica was long gone, Bond had always loved the island. For years, the memories and dreams he'd had of Jamaica haunted him. He had a compelling desire to be there. When a well-known British journalist and author died, the property became available and Bond bought it. Thus, in addition to his flat in London, he now owned a secluded holiday home on his favourite island. Since buying it, Bond had spent all his available time between missions at the sparsely furnished house. He called it Shamelady, after a plant that grows wild along Jamaica's North Shore, a sensitive plant that curls up if touched.

Stephanie Lane followed Bond inside. He immediately began removing his wet suit, stripping down to briefs. He seemed oblivious to the fact that a beautiful woman was watching him undress. 'You know, you should be dead, too,' Bond said. 'If you can't hide convincingly behind a cover, then the cover's no good.'

'I'll remember that,' she promised. She watched him with increasing interest as she fingered the Walther PPK that he had placed on a coffee table. 'Isn't this gun a little old-fashioned?' she asked. 'It's not standard issue, is it?'

'No, it was once, though,' Bond said. 'I was using an ASP for a few years, and I just recently got an urge to use the old one again. I don't know, it feels very . . . familiar, and I've decided to use the Walther again from now on. Old habits die hard.'

Stephanie picked up the gun and pointed it at him.

'So if I shoot you now, I will achieve my Primary Objective after all,' she said with no trace of humour.

Bond squinted at her. There was silence. His cold stare dared her to fire.

She pulled the trigger. It clicked empty. Her mouth dropped open.

Bond held out the clip in his hand. 'You don't think I'd put a loaded pistol down with a stranger in the room, do you? Sorry, 05. You flunked this one.' Bond walked into the bedroom. 'I'm going to take a shower. Make yourself comfortable. But before you get too relaxed, turn on the transmitter and see if there's anything from London.'

Did Stephanie detect a hint of flirtation in his voice? She smiled. When she heard the shower running, she opened an attache case she had left in the house earlier. Inside was a small black device that looked like an ordinary beeper. She flicked a switch and the code '33' appeared on an illuminated display. Bond would want to know this.

She stepped into the bedroom and called to him: 'It says 33!'

Bond shouted back from the shower, 'Damn! That means I have to go back to London as soon as possible. Some kind of emergency . . .'

Stephanie was disappointed. Well, she thought, she had to take what she could get. She unzipped her wet suit, peeled it off and stepped into the bathroom.

She had failed in accomplishing her Primary Objective that evening . . . but if she acted now she would have a little time. It was a shame that the night of pleasure she had anticipated earlier would not last until dawn. If she was lucky, though, she still had an hour or two.

At least she had got the right man. Secondary Objective accomplished! Naked, she pushed back the shower curtain and got in with him.