

***Chris Stacey***  
***presents***



# ***JAMES BOND,*** ***EDELWEISS***



***a novella from***  
***Chas Barbel & Chris Stacey***

**JAMES BOND,  
EDELWEISS**

**Chas Barbel  
&  
Chris Stacey**

**Based on the characters created  
by  
Ian Fleming**

**Also by Chris Stacey**

James Bond, On Her Majesty's Secret Service

James Bond, The Blink of an Eye

## Details

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**This edition**

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# EDELWEISS

When the red telephone rang, James Bond was already lighting his tenth Morland's cigarette of the day. The brand was one of his own, a personal blend of Turkish and Balkan tobacco. He paused, the flame of his lighter burning half an inch from the paper, while his free hand reached for the receiver.

"007."

"He wants you, James."

"I was hoping this was your calling card, Moneypenny."

"Now, now, James, no time for chit-chat. He wants you. Now. Before lunch, at least."

Bond cast one eye at the clock above his office door. 10.30.

"Ten minutes, Penny."

"This isn't a negotiation, James."

"Call it five."

Bond chuckled and softly replaced the receiver. He lit the cigarette, sucked in the deep, antagonistic scent and slake of the tobacco and smoked until the cigarette had burnt down to the first of the three distinct gold bands at the top of the filter. He remembered how he had missed the taste of a Morland's during the few days he had given up smoking following that first visit to Shrublands a few years ago. Bond had vowed never to miss that taste again.

Minutes later, he stepped out of the lift on the top floor of Universal Exports House, that undisclosed location of the British Secret Service which overlooked the north corner of Regent's Park. He strode quickly down the corridor and entered Miss Moneypenny's outer office without knocking. She was indifferently twiddling a pen between two fingers.

"You're late."

“Thirty seconds.”

“I make it a minute.” She pressed the call button. “OO7 for you, Sir.”

“Alright. Send him in.”

The green light went on above the leather panelled door. Bond said no more to the divine secretary who guarded the secrets of MI6 with her heart, her soul and a turn of her auburn-haired head.

Inside the inner office sunlight streaked through the windows. It was unusually warm, though Bond always found his superior’s office rather a cold place. M seemed never to notice whether it was hot, cold or tepid. Wafts of pipe tobacco smoke spiralled around his head, painting grey on grey. He was scribbling on a document with a thick-nibbed fountain pen.

“Sit down, James.”

James. Always a bad sign. This was something personal. Or worse, something illicit.

Bond sat and crossed one knee over the other. Relaxed, he waited, admiring not for the first time the painting of *HMS Repulse* on the wall behind the desk, the Admiral’s last command.

“Cigarette, OO7?” said M after he concluded his notation.

Bond nodded and produced his gunmetal case. If he’d known this was the form, he wouldn’t have rushed the one downstairs.

“Now, ever heard of Notorio?” asked M casually.

Bond shrugged. He knew better than to reply.

M answered his own rhetorical question. “No reason why you should. Brand of corned beef. Quite popular apparently, in certain supermarkets.”

“Can’t stand the stuff,” said Bond. “Reminds me of the Navy.”

M snorted. He struck a match and relit the pipe which had gone out. He sucked at the tip and sighed wistfully.

“Argentinian corned beef, James. Biggest suppliers of the product to the world. Brings in millions to the Argentinian economy, apparently. Notorio isn’t so big in

the UK. More a European product. Spain, Italy, Portugal, the Latin countries. It's owned by a man called Carl Devlin. Only founded the brand back in 1947, so he's clearly got a grasp on the business."

"Devlin?" repeated Bond. "Curious name. I would have expected something more Spanish."

"There's a reason for that. Devlin's a German. Émigré, 1946. Peron let him in. He wasn't called Devlin then. He was born Leo Hubermann. Mossad identified him a couple of years ago. He's a wanted Nazi war criminal. Hubermann was an SS officer stationed in Vichy France. He operated an escape route for Nazis from post-war Europe. The route was called the Leopoldine and ran through France to fascist Spain and then over the Atlantic to Argentina, where they were welcomed by Peron's sympathetic regime. He's had a little routine plastic surgery, but it couldn't disguise his features long enough for Mossad's operatives. They've got eyes like bloody hawks.

"Mossad attempted to assassinate him twice last year. They failed. Getting close to Devlin is difficult; he's very well protected. Unusual of course for a businessman to have a private army, but that's more or less what he's got. A close-knit circle of sympathisers who do as they are asked without question. Most of them, of course, are ex-Nazis or Nazi sympathisers and there are plenty of those to be found in Argentina to say nothing of Chile, Brazil, Paraguay. The whole of South America seems littered with the bastards.

"Anyway, Mossad needed an 'in' – someone they could trust who wasn't Jewish, who might pass for German, and they contacted us. They know we've employed some Germans who escaped the Soviet East. We use them to keep tabs on East German activities mostly. Well, I had a think about it. The work wasn't going to be pleasant. I knew that. I had a hard job convincing myself it was a worthwhile endeavour. Mossad insisted Hubermann, or Devlin or whatever we should call him, was instigating political turmoil in Argentina, unsettling the already right-wing government in the hope of restoring to power his friend and saviour Peron.

"Well, we have this unmarried German woman, Alexis Sebastian. Nice girl. Works in the translations department on the second floor. Or did, I should say. Alexis is a distant cousin of the dead Kaiser Wilhelm II. Comes from money and was introduced to the Queen Mother at the 1952 Deb's Ball. The aristocratic

connection would certainly make her of interest to a would-be 'nuevo aristo' like Devlin. I had her in here for a chat. Yes. Nice girl."

M paused, puffed at the pipe and swivelled his chair so Bond couldn't see the expression on his face. One of severe distress, Bond gathered. The twitching of M's pipe hand told him so.

"I knew her father before he passed away. The family escaped Berlin in '38. Set up a home tutoring business. Foreign languages to the elite. Even helped the Duke of Kent. Both parents were very useful to intelligence during the war. Never any suggestion of treason. Good man, was Ricard. Played bridge with him at Blades once. Anyway, Miss Sebastian was willing to do what Mossad required. I sent her to Buenos Aires. No cover story. Well, not much, a job at a children's school, a little political background. The new fascists, that kind of thing."

Bond nodded and lit his latest Morland's.

"She made contact, seduced Devlin and took up a situation in his household. It was exactly what Mossad wanted. Essentially, Miss Sebastian was acting as Devlin's 'companion'."

M said this final word with some distaste and swung the chair even further so Bond saw even less of a profile than he had before.

"Strange what some women will do for their country."

M stood up and walked to the window. He stared out across the cityscape, his shoulders heaving with big controlled breaths.

"Is she still there?" ventured Bond.

"We've not had any reports for three months. She was only supposed to wheedle her way inside, get an angle for Mossad to attempt a third assassination. But her intel was too good, both for Mossad and for us. A ton of economic data, about Argentine trade, politics, society, who was allied to who, grand stuff. Then it all stopped. The last we heard was from the gossip columns in *La Nación*. Apparently, Carl Devlin is engaged to be married to a German school teacher called Alexis Sebastian."

"You think she's been turned?"

M's shoulders heaved again.

"God, I hope not, James. I bloody hope not."

"Where do I come in?"

M returned to his desk. Suddenly, he was all business.

"I'm sending you to Buenos Aires. You'll be travelling as David Somerset. Universal Exports delegate to the 1966 Buenos Aires Trade Exposition. You're to make contact with the Notorio delegation and seek out Alexis. Flush her out, if you have to, and Devlin also. I've informed Mossad and they'll be keeping discreet tabs on you. If you can get him in the open, get Devlin away from his minders, even for a few minutes, they seem certain they can lift him."

"Wait." Bond sat forward slightly. "They want him alive, Sir?"

"Before they kill him, yes. Any information Mossad can glean on the whereabouts of other escaped Nazis would be a godsend to them. Of course, they may not get the chance."

M looked sharply at Bond when he said this, sharply from under the hooded hunter's eye sockets.

"I understand, Sir. And Miss Sebastian? Is there a potential security risk with the girl?" There was no reply. "Is the operation to withdraw or to eliminate?"

The hunter's eyes didn't flinch. Without looking, M took up the top file from his in-tray and handed it over the desk. Bond took the slim dossier and noted the 'Eyes Only' stamp. Quickly he opened it and read the mission statement, a six-line summary of what M had just told him and the nine-letter word starting with 'E' he had dared not.

"It's all in there, James."

The expression was hard as stone, but the voice was cracked as if struck by a mason's chisel.

There was a photograph of a woman inside the dossier. Alexis Sebastian was not a traditional beauty, but she had an enigmatic, almost powerful face, despite the soft edges. She had pale skin and high plump cheekbones with a nose slightly too large for her face. Her mouth was wider than most women's, the lips

exquisite, slightly plump too. Good for kissing, he pondered. But it was her eyes that struck him, pleading, slightly agog, lavender blue, the lids wide, as if she was about to cry. He immediately wanted to help her whatever her situation. A sweep of brown hair finished the fashionable look. Alexis could have passed for a movie star.

“She looks like a young Ingrid Bergman,” he commented.

“Who?” said M.

“Nothing, Sir. Is this photo recent?”

“Taken a couple of days before she left, so a year old. Read the dossier carefully, James, then bring it back here. You leave tomorrow from London Airport. Money Penny has the flight details.”

“Yes, Sir.” Bond closed the dossier, stubbed out his smouldering cigarette in the upturned shell casing M used as an ash tray and stood up. “If that’s all...”

“Just one thing. It’s not in the dossier. This was something only she and I talked of. Before she left, I gave her a password. Miss Sebastian called it a safe-word. It was to be used by us or her should she get in any danger and we needed to get her out quickly. I suggest you use it.”

“Of course, Sir. What is it?”

“Edelweiss.”

“Another drink, Mr Bond?”

The Aerolíneas Argentinas Comet 4 jet airliner had just crossed the equator. Through the window, the vast expanse of silver blue Atlantic Ocean was changing, darkening, as the continent of South America loomed ahead. Soon the aeroplane would pass into Brazilian airspace and begin the long descent towards the River Plate basin, Argentina and an appointment with an unknown adversary.

The stewardess smiled cheerfully, awaiting his response.

James Bond had once told the Governor of Nassau that he would one day like to marry an airline stewardess and that thought came back to him now causing a brief smile to interrupt his thoughts. The smile evaporated into melancholy as memories of his actual brief marriage came back to him. The young woman was puzzled by the expressions that flitted across her handsome passenger’s face but maintained her professional, enticing demeanour.

“Yes, I’d like that,” said Bond, and once again he offered that quick, charming half-smile. Aerolíneas Argentinas flew comfortable, regular flights, even if the planes were beginning to show signs of age. If the view outside the window was tinted with deepening apprehension, in first class at least there was always light from a brilliant smile and a pretty face.

The flight arrived only two minutes behind schedule. By the time Bond had extricated himself from the wiles of airport security and customs, he had virtually forgotten the pretty smiling stewardess. He emerged from Ezeiza Airport into the quick chill of an unloved Argentinian winter. He walked smartly to the taxi rank. Out of old habit, Bond took the third car waiting, told the driver his destination and sat back, sweltering in the unaccustomed heat inside the taxi. The driver spoke good English.

“So, you are here for business, yes, mister?”

“Just a holiday”, said Bond. “I wanted a few days break”.

“Still, I am surprised that you are here right now.”

“Oh? Why surprised?”

“Because of the football, senior! The World Cup!”

“Ah, I see. No, I’m not interested in football,” said Bond.

“Even when your country is playing host? They might win.”

“My country isn’t playing.”

“But you are English, Senior!”

“Someone might suppose that, but my country is Scotland. They never play in the World Cup.”

“Ah, Scotland,” said the driver happily. “The little men who grant wishes, the Guinness, the Saint Patrick’s Day, I know all that.”

Bond left him happy and gave him a large tip when they arrived at the Hotel Saffron. In return the driver gave him his card, one of a dozen that peeked out of the windscreen’s sun visor.

“You call me when you want to go somewhere, eh?”

“I will.”

Bond pocketed the card without looking at it. As the taxi departed, exhaust belching, Bond lifted his suitcase and entered one of Buenos Aires’s best-kept secrets. The Saffron was floored with Rosso Levanto marble, a luxurious warm red stone from Liguria in Italy. The pillars that lined the entrance and foyer were

sleek Silver Shadow White, from Argentina's own quarries, flawless in tone. The foyer was two storeys high and lit by a fabulous Delga diamond chandelier. The acoustics were such his footsteps rang with the clipped sound of a metronome.

His accommodation was an inauspicious affair on the fifth floor. Despite his tiredness, Bond made a quick recce of the room and its bathroom suite. It appeared not to be bugged. The *Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado*, the Argentine secret police, had clearly not flagged that 'Universal Exports' was written on his visa. The radiators were on and the room was prickly with heat. Thankfully, the doors to the small balcony were ajar and let in cascades of sound and small waves of cool outside air. A Latino band played in the restaurant across the street. The illuminated sign advertised *Fernet y Coca-Cola*, the fuel of every house party. Bond imagined his cab driver consuming vast quantities while watching the bloody World Cup.

The sun was setting, turning the sky orange. He closed the doors, pulled the curtains and switched on the overhead fan which rotated at a slow wit. Bond turned to unpack his battered Antler Attaché, a small, but roomy case provided by Q Branch that contained all the accoutrements for his work.

Three items were placed in the x-ray proof pouch: a tiny but powerful pocket transmitter, for emergencies, disguised as a battery operated Ferguson transistor radio; his trusty Walter PPK and holster; and a third newer piece of kit which resided in a small black cotton tie-string bag.

Bond cast the little package aside. The gadgets from Q Branch tended to get in his way. The briefing was even more terse than usual. The Colibri cigarette lighter which doubled as a camera was the nadir.

"You've got to be joking!"

"You always disparage my work, OO7," the Quartermaster had scolded, "yet you use and destroy everything I ever give you. So, pay attention."

Major Boothroyd had held up what resembled nothing more than a hefty cigarette case with a coil of wire wrapped around it. It'd probably hold six Delectados, the fat, vanilla infused kind Raoul made in his factory in Cuba.

"I've got this cracking little gadget for you..."

Bond did not unpack his clothes other than the suits he would need, which he hung in the wardrobe. He siphoned the equipment into the mini-safe. Finally, he ordered coffee from room service and a breakfast of figs, yoghurt and toast to be delivered at seven. They could get anything for you at the Saffron. After a ruthlessly disgusting Argentine coffee, he undressed to his underclothes, threw himself on the double bed and closed his eyes.

His reading material on the flight had not been the most stimulating. The business dealings of Notorio and the history of the corned beef industry had never been matters that had occupied his mind, but he did not want to be caught out at the exhibition hall tomorrow by a basic question. Before reading, he had assumed that the word "corn" had referred to the plant. Now, he knew that it referred to an amount of salt. He would have looked very foolish if he had got that wrong tomorrow. The words on the pages of the brochures flipped through Bond's mind and he drifted into a deep controlled sleep.

The Expo Centre was close to the hotel, a few streets on from the Plaza de Mayo. Bond chose to walk. Anyway, he had told the taxi driver that he was on holiday and attending the Trade Expo would appear a strange thing for a man to do for pleasure.

*Buenos Aires Trade Exhibition* was printed on the huge banner outside the large, imposing modern-looking arena. For good measure, the banner was written in Spanish, German and English. Argentinian flags were placed decoratively on either side of the entrance. Bond entered, showed his invitation and was presented with a tabard and name tag. He began to peruse the elegantly placed desks, stalls and exhibits. As he expected, the majority of attending businesses were affiliated to the coffee industry – coffee growers, coffee distributors, coffee exporters. He turned down several offers of a drink of their products and continued to wander the arena, appearing aimless, but all the while seeking the Notorio stand.

There it was, quite discreet, shovelled into a corner, and hard to spot as there was no sign above it and several interested parties were engaged in conversation with the reps, blocking the view of the two people who sat at the large, Formica topped desk.

Bond approached, hoping he was not going to be asked to sample their corned beef. A beaming young man of European extraction held up a tray and invited him to do exactly that, which Bond politely declined. Sitting at a table, inevitably drinking coffee, were Carl Devlin and Alexis Sebastian. He recognised them instantly from the photos in the files. For a moment, Bond thought she noticed him. Her eyes seemed to swivel, the brows arching a half-inch, intrigued. He looked away, not wanting to be caught staring. Christ, she was even more beautiful in the flesh than her photograph had implied.

The young man was talking, asking him something. Bond merely smiled.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I speak only English and German.”

He could see the heads of the couple jerk up sharply. The young man turned towards his superiors, but Devlin was already rising.

“Good morning,” he said. “I speak English. Can I help you?”

“Yes. Good morning to you. My name is David Somerset. I’m a representative of Universal Exports, based out of London. I don’t know if you’ve ever done any business with us ...?”

Devlin shook his head. “No, I don’t recall doing any business with a company of that name. Universal, you say? What can I do for you?”

“I’d like to discuss your current export/import arrangements to the UK. Universal is looking to expand into South America. Perhaps we can make you a better offer.”

Devlin inspected his hands, the fingers briefly interlocking.

“That sounds most interesting, Mr Somerset.”

The phrase, lined with a Latin accent, spoken in English, still hinted at his German origins. Bond’s nerves twitched. His experience with several Germans, both during the War and during his time in the service did not endear them to him. The accent rankled.

“Would you like you join us?” continued Devlin.

He waved a hand at the table where Alexis Sebastian was sitting. A different young man produced a third chair seemingly from out of nowhere. Bond sat down, refusing coffee for what felt like the twentieth time since he had entered this hall. The German had already begun to talk.

“Let me introduce myself. I am Carl Devlin and this is my assistant, Alexis Sebastian. You may recognise I am of German extraction.”

“Yes. I detected an accent. And Miss Sebastian...?”

“Also. I prefer to have former countrymen working in my employ. It is good for security, discretion and efficiency, do you not think? There is so much rumour in the world at the moment.”

“I couldn’t say. As long as your operation is legal...”

“Do not let that concern you. We have all the appropriate authorisations for operating out of Argentina and on the world markets. I am sure Universal would find us most accommodating. Please, tell us what you have in mind.”

Bond nodded and began to outline the prospective arrangement he had prepared while reading the dry, boring background details on Notorio and their dealings. Devlin was attentive, making remarks and seeking qualification and clarity. Bond avoided providing any certainties. He noticed Alexis did no more than sit calmly, looking very cool and chic. She appeared close with Devlin, responding when he asked her opinion, but offered no questions of her own.

Eventually, Devlin said: "And may I ask, Mr Somerset, what is it about our company that attracted Universal to make us this offer?"

Bond gave a small laugh.

"I work primarily as something of a freelance," he said brightly. "To be frank it was your logo, Mr Devlin: *Notorio, primero, ultimo y siempre carne de res*. 'First, last, and always beef.' I did a little research and discovered that where your company is concerned those were more than just words."

Devlin inspected his hands once more.

"I believe we may see eye-to-eye on many things, Mr Somerset."

Alexis touched his arm and indicated something behind Bond, in the melee of guests. Devlin looked. Something attracted his eye and Bond turned, but couldn't see what or who it was.

"Excuse me for a moment, Mr Somerset. I have some arrangements to make. Please, wait here with Miss Sebastian till I return".

Bond wondered what sort of arrangements those might be. Devlin stood again and departed. Bond saw him beginning an animated conversation with a bald headed, slightly hunched old man. He squinted, but couldn't look for long without attracting suspicion. He turned back and gave his full attention to Alexis.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like some coffee, Mr Somerset?" she asked.

"Very sure, thanks," Bond replied. "You have a lovely accent, Miss Sebastian. Austrian, perhaps?"

"No, I am German."

"*Ach so, du bist Deutsche,*" smiled Bond.

"I haven't been there for many years," she replied.

“I was in Austria quite recently, in the Alps. Very beautiful there. Lovely flowers, I like the Edelweiss.”

“I am sure it is very nice.”

She had replied amicably, but without reaction to his mention of Edelweiss. While Bond was thinking about what to say next, Devlin returned, his brow creased.

“Please forgive me, Alexis and I must depart. A labour problem.”

Alexis tugged at his arm. For a brief moment Bond thought there was alarm in her eyes, but the blue twin pearls calmly betrayed nothing.

“Carl, the Charity Ball?” she said hopefully.

“Oh, of course.” Devlin was suddenly all smiles. “Mr Somerset, our company is holding a charity ball this evening in the Hotel Saffron. You must join us.”

“Now there’s a coincidence,” said Bond. “That’s where I’m staying. Someone suggested the Leopoldine, but I’ve never heard of it.”

Devlin’s habitual smile switched to a grimace.

“Nor have I, Mr Somerset.” A more faltering version of his smile retuned in an instant. “I will have an invitation delivered to your room. Now, if you will excuse us, we must return to my offices. It was a pleasure to meet you and we will see you tonight at the Charity Ball, yes?”

“Yes. I am looking forward to it already.”

Bond’s remarks were said to Devlin, but he was looking at Alexis. Bond sensed his moment had passed. Not wanting to suffer more attacks of coffee drinking, he headed directly for the exit and took the same walk back through the busy plaza towards his hotel. He was pleased at the reaction his words had had on Devlin, but concerned that the word ‘Edelweiss’ had provoked nothing from Alexis. Her beauty had affected him more than he had expected and he found himself looking forward to seeing her again. She had suddenly become more than just the objective of an operation.

Amongst the hustle of the Argentinian capital, Bond didn't see the figure of a burly, swarthy man come out from the shadows near the hall and follow him back to the hotel.

Bond freshened up in his hotel room. The showers in the Saffron were possibly the most powerful he'd ever experienced - deliciously hot, then sparkling cold. He lay on the comfy double bed, naked except for a blue Terry cloth robe, and thought about Alexis's bow-shaped mouth, how delicious it might be to kiss it, and wondering why she'd not responded to 'Edelweiss'.

Promptly at six, he rose and ordered a plate of scrambled eggs on rye bread, toasted on one side, black coffee and a Vesper Martini from room service. "With a teaspoon of Kina Lillet," he said. The drink, one Bond had invented himself many years ago and dedicated to a former lover – his mind closed down like a trap on the memories – had become a standard for some of Europe's very best barmen in the continent's very best hotels. He was pleasantly surprised to find the recipe had made it as far as Buenos Aires. He could probably thank Giuseppe Cipriani. Once tasted, the famous hotelier and restaurateur had insisted the Vesper went on the menu card.

Bond dressed in his Anthony Sinclair dinner suit, accepted the food and drink when delivered and ate quickly, tidily, grimacing over the coffee. Afterwards, he stood out on the balcony, smoking a Morland's and drinking the rasping cocktail, watching the traffic build on the avenue below as the sun declined behind the towers of the city. The big saloon cars abused the atmosphere, choking the air with fumes. It was the aroma of seedy power. As Bond watched, an elegant limousine pulled up smartly below and Carl Devlin, wearing full evening dress, stepped out. He turned and held out a hand to Alexis, who emerged shimmering in a layered, silver-threaded ballgown, a diamond tiara perched in her hair. The fawning hotel manager, who Bond had glimpsed briefly on his arrival, greeted Devlin personally.

There was more seedy power on display at the Crocus Ballroom. Bond flashed his invitation at the doorman and entered briskly through the revolving door. The Crocus was another of Buenos Aires's well-kept secrets, marble pillared and dripping with gold and crystal excesses. The ballroom was sumptuous, with tiered seating leading from the polished oak floor to the exclusive booths tucked against the walls and corners. Everything was upholstered in crocus-blue velvet. A bit gaudy, considered Bond, but then the aesthetics of interior décor barely interested him.

He caught sight of Devlin and Alexis sitting at a large table near the edge of the dance floor. They were surrounded by a group of men and women he didn't recognise. None of the faces were those from the Expo. These were older men, slightly distinguished. Their fair hair, often greying, and stout shoulders and chests hinted at Teutonic breeding. Bond wondered why they didn't just unravel a Swastika pennant and drape it over the table. The drink of choice appeared to be champagne.

Bond took a glass from a passing waiter. Dom Perignon '57. There was no faulting Devlin's tastes in alcohol, assuming he'd paid for it and not the charity foundation. Slowly, carefully, Bond circled the ballroom floor, trying to catch Alexis's gaze. Either she was deliberately avoiding him or she hadn't noticed him at all. Neither option hinted at anything good.

The orchestra finished a Viennese waltz and as the couples retreated from the floor, Bond made his approach. He finished his glass of champagne, placed the empty flute on a busy table and strode directly toward Carl Devlin, forcing a smile to break his lips.

"Mr Devlin, wonderful to see you again."

"And you also, Mr Somerset." Devlin's reply was as cool as Antarctic winter. He stood to politely shake hands. "You are just in time for the charity's demonstration."

"Oh?"

"Perhaps you didn't read your invitation?"

"It said dancing. Food. And drink."

"I am a leading benefactor to the Eva Peron Dance School. You may recall she started her career as a tango dancer for hire. The School seeks out the best prospects in Buenos Aires and educates them in both dance and traditional schooling. When they graduate we help them find opportunities on the stage and screen or in competition."

"Very admirable."

Bond noticed Alexis stand up from the table, leaving a pair of well-heeled ladies to their cigarettes. She glided towards Devlin and Bond, one hand extended.

“Has Mr Somerset made a donation yet, Carl?”

“My apologies,” said Bond. “I will speak with Universal Exports. I am certain we can arrange a substantial bank transfer. What would you say to twenty thousand?”

Alexis glowed.

“That’s very generous, Mr Somerset,” said Devlin. After a pause, during which his eyes shifted slowly from Alexis to Bond and back, he continued: “I hope the demonstration lives up to your donation.”

“Demonstration?”

“You may enjoy this, Mr Somerset”, continued Devlin. “Traditionally, the Argentine Tango was danced only by men. It is an aggressive dance designed to demonstrate a man’s ego, a form of fighting. Over women perhaps. Or cards. It was less fatal than a knife fight.”

“Or a war.”

“The slums of Buenos Aires never started a war, Mr Somerset.”

“When there are women involved, there is always a war,” said Bond blithely.

“That’s very philosophical, but you won’t see any death on this dancefloor. These students will dance in the old style. Mano-y-Mano. Come, you may learn something.”

“I expect I’ll learn that I have two left feet.”

Devlin raised his right hand dramatically above his head, millimetres away from being a Sieg Heil salute, and snapped his fingers once. Immediately, the band leader took up the baton and the orchestra started to play an exuberant, energetic tango. From the wings, a troupe of male dancers appeared, dressed in all black suits with white shirts and red braces. The suits were loose around the legs and shoulders, tapering to the waist, allowing movement and flow. Already Bond sensed a rhythm in each dancer’s walk, a glide and pause, not a stride and stop.

“They call the walk *El Camino*,” explained Alexis. “It’s the foundation of the dance. Now, watch.”

As the music came to a temporary halt, each man took their partner to hand, only the fingers touching, and then as the first beats thrummed out from the guitars a uniform swirl of movement erupted on the ballroom floor. The dancers moved with grace and precision, backwards, forwards, heads flicking and faces masked in concentration.

“This is *La Base*, the basic movements,” continued Alexis. “Without mastering these, the dancer has no hope of emulating the best.”

“You’re very knowledgeable,” said Bond. “Did you dance in Germany?”

“Not very much. I learned mostly here. I visit the dance school often.”

“Do you dance?”

“Yes. And I ride.”

Bond couldn’t resist a smile. “Bicycles?”

“Good lord, no, Mr Somerset. Horses.”

“Of course. Do you prefer to ride side saddle or astride?”

Alexis said nothing. She pointed at the nearest pair of male dancers. “See? *An ocho*. A figure of eight. Very graceful. Danced backwards. Usually performed by the woman, of course.”

“That must take lots of practice.”

“Not as much as riding.”

Their eyes briefly, teasingly met. Then Bond turned to watch the display. The dancers were excellent, flamboyant and vibrant. The initial oddity of seeing men dancing with each other did not seem so peculiar under the lights of the Crocus Ballroom. As the drama of the routine increased and each partnership played out the will-they-wont-they relationship, their movements, flicks and kicks became more violent, brisk and robust. The audience was captivated. Other than the occasional exclamation – an “Oh” of excitement or admiration – the only sound was the pulsating throb from the orchestra and the sudden clap and snap of the tango shoes on the sprung loaded floor. Even Alexis’s commentary had ceased.

The crescendo of music and dance reached its climax in a sudden whirl of fury and partner pushed partner and the two separated, stalking away and stopping abruptly in a strident pose as the last notes hummed to silence. The audience erupted in applause, with whoops of congratulation and many bravos.

“I see your investment is well nurtured, Mr Devlin,” said Bond. “Perhaps Universal Exports should develop a similar charitable strategy.”

Devlin considered his reply for a little longer than was natural.

“I know some people who can help your company with that,” he said. “Very good accountants. Everything is tax deductible.”

“Yes. Perhaps. When we have a working business arrangement. You’d be amazed what’s deductible in my line of work.”

“Yes, I’m sure. And yes, let us wait. Tonight is for entertainment and leisure. Come, enjoy yourself.”

The orchestra was beginning to play another tune; Bond recognised a foxtrot.

“Perhaps Alexis would like to enjoy herself?” he ventured. “She said she attended the dance school. Perhaps I could...”

“Of course! You know, she danced for the Kaiser when she was a child.”

Devlin seemed to think nothing of the suggestion. He gestured towards Alexis and she stepped forward, a thin smile of politeness on her lips. Bond led her onto the slowly filling dancefloor.

“Did you really dance for the Kaiser?”

“I was tiny.”

“And well connected.”

Bond took her in hand, his back straight, side on. He led with his left and she followed him effortlessly.

“Not as well connected as you, Mr Somerset.”

Bond was about to ask what she meant. Alexis beat him to the punch. “There are not many people from Universal Exports who would mention ‘Edelweiss’.”

“I thought you’d forgotten your own safe-word.”

“Of course not. Listen. I can’t be seen talking to you, to anybody, for long. Carl is extremely jealous.”

“Is there anywhere we can meet?” Bond completed an underarm turn and she spun into his embrace. “Somewhere more discreet than this?”

“The Royal Victoria Polo Grounds,” she replied instantly. “I have arranged to go riding there tomorrow.”

“When?”

“Two o’clock. After lunch.”

“I’ll meet you there.” Bond entered a toe-heel backward step. “What will you tell Devlin?”

“I will tell him you are charming and charismatic.”

“Is that wise?”

“No. But it’s true. You missed a step.”

Bond paused in his dance, almost flustered. He stepped away from her, offered a short bow and kissed the hand he still held. As he walked across the now crowded dancefloor he felt Alexis looking at him. The hairs on the nape of his neck crinkled. Someone else was watching him too. Carl Devlin, no doubt, his fingers interlocked, intrigued by this charming and charismatic Englishman.

As Bond exited the Crocus Ballroom a swarthy, chunky man watched him leave. He was dressed in a cheap dinner jacket and shirt with an outsized bow tie tickling his bristly chin. He rubbed that chin with a fat finger and scowled.

The Royal Victoria Polo Grounds were situated in the leafy suburb of San Isidro. It was an exclusive barrio, so far outside the city centre it was virtually in the countryside. The main streets were flanked with upmarket boutique shops. The stately homes hugged the shores of the Tigre Delta. Many were barriered with private guard posts and some homes shared gated compounds with their neighbours. There was a swish tennis centre, a beautiful park and even a sailing club.

Bond could have taken the train, but he fingered the cab driver's business card in his pocket and decided to avoid the city's infamously unreliable public services. The number connected him to a central office and he asked for Car No.7643.

"Estaban?"

"Si, Estaban."

The operator did not sound certain. "Okay, Senor. Uno momento." Bond could hear an exchange of Spanish in the background. The operator returned. "Okay, Senor. Half-past-noon?"

"Excellent."

Estaban arrived promptly, windows down, horn honking, full of the joys of football and possibly too much Fenet y Coca-Cola.

"We won, Senor! Two-nil versus Switzerland. The men of Robin Hood and cheese. Ha! We show them some real men, how they play and fight, no?"

"If you say so."

"Ermino Onega. He plays for River Plate. My team. My team. And the scores the goal. Oh, how we show them Robin Hoods. *El Mas Grande. El Mas Grande.*"

Estaban broke into song. Bond could only assume it was a tune of the terraces. Bawdy and offensive no doubt, but his Spanish wasn't up to the task of interpretation. The sounds coming out of the cabbie's mouth seemed to tell the story well enough.

When he finished the third chorus, Bond tapped him on the shoulder and handed over a large denomination note.

“What do you know about corned beef, Estaban?”

“Corned beef?”

“Notorio corned beef.”

“Pah! Nazi beef. Bastards. They pay bad wages. Bad conditions. Peron let all the Nazis in. Bastardo.” He spat out the open window. “I don’t like Peron. But I dislike the Nazis even more.”

Estaban dropped Bond at the top of the gravel drive. A uniformed doorman swept forward to open the rear door and saluted as Bond exited.

“Don’t wait, Estaban. I can find another cab back to the hotel.”

Estaban shrugged nonchalantly.

Bond passed into the lobby. There was a reception desk surrounded by saddles that hung on baton hooks screwed into the wall. The stirrups waved gently in the breeze.

“Buen dia. Hablas Inglés?”

“Si. Can I help you, Senor?” ventured the pretty receptionist, in very cultured English.

“I was looking for Senorita Sebastian. I understand she rides here at two?”

“Si, Senor. You are a little early.” She looked at his lounge suit. “And you are not dressed for the club. You are the Senorita’s guest?”

“Yes.”

“Then we must find a suitable uniform for you.” Her practiced eye looked him up and down. “Something not too tight, I think.”

Bond was allowed to choose riding jodhpurs, boots and a hat from the stores. The receptionist paid a little too much close attention to the fitting, he thought, but the experience was certainly memorable. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been dressed by a woman. His mother, possibly.

Alexis Sebastian arrived promptly at two. She came in her own car, a green Fiat 124 Sports Spider. The sound of its engine as it pulled into the car port seemed to alert everyone. Everyone male that is, guests included.

She was already kitted in a women's flared riding britches, a close fitting top jacket over a high-necked but open-topped blouse and a black wide brimmed riding hat, augmented with two red ribbons. A third ribbon decorated her throat. Bond thought she looked stunning and so did most of the assorted members. She wafted past them all, swishing her riding crop against her boots with a snap, and made a bee-line directly for Bond.

*"Hallo! Herr Somerset. Ich habe nicht erwartet, sie zu treffen!"*

"I didn't expect to see you either," replied Bond, also in German. "I had the afternoon free. Last night, you mentioned riding and I thought it might be nice to renew my acquaintance with the saddle."

She gave a lopsided smile. "You are in luck. This is my stables. I have a horse here. A beautiful mare called Donner. I will see if the stable boys can fix you up with her sibling, Blitzen."

The stable boys were more than happy to oblige.

Bond realised why when he mounted and Blitzen attempted to throw him. Bond clung onto the pommel and the reins, digging his heels into the flanks. He rode out the sudden bucking with a grim fascination. It had been years since he last rode a horse. The technique had not deserted him. When Blitzen realised this mount was not going to be thrown, she calmed down and whinnied appreciatively.

Alexis giggled.

"Come on, Mr Somerset, I won't trick you again. You ride very well. But I don't like to ride fast. I like to take things slowly. We will walk and trot." She smiled and added in a whisper: "So we can talk."

It was a beautiful, cool afternoon. The sun streaked through the box elders, the big verdant leaves dripping with moisture. The air was scented and alive with crickets. A butterfly followed the two horses as they trotted lazily along the track. The Royal Victoria Polo Grounds had access to bridle paths that ran along the shores. The wind whipped in the closer they got to the coast, catching at Alexis's ribbons and her hair. Out of earshot of anyone else, they spoke in English.

“My name isn’t really David Somerset,” he told her eventually, after a long discussion about her life in Germany before the war. “It’s Bond. James Bond.”

She nodded and brought Donner to a standstill.

“I thought I recognised you. Your face appeared in a few service dispatches. They said you’d died.”

“A mistake.”

“A bad one.”

“Is being with Devlin a mistake too?”

“No. I don’t know. It’s got complicated.”

“How?”

“James. Can I call you James?” He nodded and she continued. “James, let’s walk a while.”

They dismounted and led the horses by the reins. The flag butterfly fluttered between them, its sky blue wings as clear and clean as Alexis’s eyes.

“James,” she continued. “It isn’t that I like Carl. I don’t. I tolerate him. I have put myself in a very important position in his household. He needs me, perhaps more than he needs anybody.”

Bond listened. Her voice was cracking. It was as if she had to convince herself.

“But I slipped up. They found my communications equipment. That silly thing Q Branch gives all its foreign sleeper agents.” Bond looked puzzled. “You know, the stupid one-way communicator that looks like a transistor radio. It makes an awful racket. One day, when I was using it, one of the servants overheard the white noise, came in and offered to retune the radio. I told him not to bother, but old Pedro took it anyway, without my knowledge. The next thing I know, all hell has broken out. Carl was outraged. He said there was a traitor in his household. Of course, I thought it was me. But one of the guards had seen Pedro with the transistor radio. The poor old man was trying to fix Q Branch’s circuit boards and getting in a right pickle. He was too scared to tell them it was mine, or perhaps he was too loyal to me. I liked old Pedro. He disappeared. Later, I was told he died.”

“Died?”

“Killed.” Alexis shuddered. “Carl really is ruthless. He has a debonair exterior, James. He is efficient. He is ordered. He is practical. Even in his love, he is, well, regular, satisfying without being exciting. That’s his breeding, his mother’s family, the aristocratic side of him. That’s why he likes me. We bond over the old times that neither of us remember. But then there is the darkness. The hard-nosed businessman, the brutal employer, the leader of the Leopoldine. I was shocked you used the word yesterday. It really struck a chord. On the way back to the estate, he was asking all sorts of questions about you. I couldn’t answer, of course. I said we hardly spoke, but Carl was certain we knew each other. ‘Before you met me,’ he accused, ‘before you came to Buenos Aires.’ He was quite mad with jealousy.”

Bond stopped walking and touched her elbow.

“Perhaps he ought to be,” he said.

“Oh, James. Don’t. Not yet. Not now. Carl already knows I lived in London before coming to Argentina. His mother recognised me from the Debutants Ball.”

“In ’52?” Bond was surprised. “That was years ago. I saw the pictures in your file. You’ve changed a lot. Grown up. You were pretty then. You’re beautiful now.”

He didn’t mind saying it, even though he knew it was unprofessional.

“Wait. You said it again: ‘his mother’. What’s she got to do with all this?”

“She lives on the estate,” Alexis replied. “She didn’t come out with the initial exodus. She was too aristocratic. A few of the old families were still admired in British high society after the war. She lived in Mayfair for a few years before moving to South Africa. But she’s sick now and he asked her to join him here. I’m sort of her nurse, sort of her confidant.”

“A good cover.”

“I thought so. She was so happy when I told her about the engagement. It will break her heart when I leave.”

“You do want to leave?”

“More than anything.” Her words came quickly now, rushed by the excitement. “Getting engaged was my last chance, James. I had no way to contact the Service. The radio was my only outlet. I know from my time in the Translation Division that all the newspapers are read from all over the world. I knew Carl would publish a notice for inclusion in all the society columns. I took a chance that the service would read it.”

“Your hunch was right.”

“And I was right about another hunch. There is something very suspicious happening at Notorio. It was what I wanted to report on the day the radio broke.”

“Tell me.”

“People keep disappearing. You remember that emergency yesterday, why Carl was called away?” Bond did and said so. “That was because a work man had contracted some sort of disease. Not an infection. Symptoms of radiation. That bald headed man is Dr Anderson. He’s a scientist and I overheard them talking of it one night.”

“Alexis,” Bond said calmly, “you may be beautiful, but you are also brilliant and extremely brave. I can’t imagine what you’ve been through holed up in that wolf’s lair.”

Automatically, she reached for him and they embraced. He remembered she wasn’t as short as he expected when their noses battered each other. The intimacy made Alexis break the embrace.

“Let’s go back.”

They remounted and returned to the Polo Grounds at a brisk trot. The stable boys took the horses and Bond invited her onto the terrace for drinks. There was a polo match in session. Bond hated polo, but the late afternoon glow and the sound of mallet on ball was strangely romantic. It lightened his mood.

They sat on a low outdoor settee. He ordered two gin and tonics. As they sipped and made small talk for show, Bond inched closer to Alexis.

“Alexis, I need to talk business,” he said sternly, but with a smile. “You know how this is.”

“Yes, James.”

She leaned forward also.

“You said Devlin is jealous; that he has you watched all the time. Is anyone watching us now?”

“Yes. There is a man at the bar. He followed me here. He follows me everywhere.”

“But not riding?”

“He doesn’t like horses.”

“Does he report back to Devlin everything you do?” Bond asked, half-glancing towards the bar. There was a young, sturdy looking European man clinging to a tall glass topped up with lemonade. He was dressed in slacks and a sweater. His eyes were trained on Bond and Alexis. He didn’t even hide it.

“Everything.”

Bond moved closer. “Then let’s give Devlin something to be jealous about.”

He kissed the left corner of her mouth. It was cool to his lips. She breathed a sigh.

“James. I wanted you to do that since the dance last night.”

“I know. You have a beautiful mouth.”

He kissed the other corner. Her lips opened and allowed him to kiss her properly. When they broke, her tongue lapped at his teeth.

“James, what can we do?”

“There’s nothing we can do,” he said, nuzzling her ear. “Not yet. I’m putting you in a very dangerous position. I don’t like it, but I need to make Devlin mad at us. The madder he gets, the more likely he is to make mistakes.”

“I understand.” She caressed his mouth with her lips. “What can I do?”

“There must be some written evidence about what Dr Anderson is doing, why there is radiation poisoning. I need to break into Notorio’s head office.”

“You don’t need to do that, James,” she breathed, kissing him again, firmly. As her lips parted temporarily, she whispered: “Carl keeps all the most important documents in his house-safe on the estate.”

“Does he now?” Bond replied. His hand moved to her thigh. He could see the young man embarrassedly studying his lemonade. “Perhaps I should pay you a social call?”

“You can do better than that. Come tonight. Carl is holding a dinner party. Dr Anderson will be there. Perhaps you can...”

Bond broke her suggestion with his mouth. “Break in? Yes. Afterwards. With your help.” He squeezed her thigh. “Pretend to be sick. Take some sleeping pills with you. When everyone has retired, is there a way you can let me in?”

“There is a cellar. The delivery hatches are at the rear.”

“Alright. I’ll find it. Alexis, when you pretend, you must be convincing.”

An idea was forming in Bond’s mind about how he could extricate Alexis from Devlin’s clutches. Before he could fully formulate it, she murmured: “James, kiss me again.”

He did. This time he wasn’t doing it for show. Alexis recognised his urgency, his armour, recognised she might lose control. She placed a hand on his chest, pushing gently, enough to make him cease.

“Now, we must make this convincing also,” she said quietly. “You need to have a proper invite to Carl’s estate or you’ll never get past the guards. I shall invite you to dinner. Nice and loud so our young friend can hear. You must come at eight. Carl is very prompt about dinner.”

After the ruse, and after Alexis had departed, the young man mere seconds behind, Bond went to the changing room to swap clothes. His mouth still tingled from the kisses. What a delicious mouth. He wanted to kiss it more. And often.

He asked the receptionist to call him a taxi and went onto the front porch to smoke a Morland’s cigarette. He was surprised to see Estaban’s car sitting in a parking bay, the ‘hired’ flag raised in the window. He walked over, smoking, brooding.

“I said I didn’t need you anymore, Estaban. What’s this all about?”

The man flipped the catch and opened the rear door. He leaned out of his window, baying in that sing-song tone he had: “Hey! Senor! You need a ride?”

The man’s turn of phrase and knowing leer disturbed Bond’s thoughts. Disturbed them too late. He just had time to see the shadows lurking beside the next car before the two men moved fast and hard towards him. Something exploded on the base of his skull and James Bond toppled head first and unconscious through the open car door.

The pain in his wrists came first. They were tightly bound behind him, tying him to a wooden chair. Bond opened his eyes, blinking hard at the pain in his head, and looked around. He was in a cellar of some sort. Packing cases were stacked against the walls. A single unshaded bulb hung from its wires directly overhead.

He was not alone. The cab driver sat against a wall, a toothpick jutting out from between his lips, and another man stood against the door with his arms crossed. There was the sweet stench of tobacco in the air. It came from only a few feet away.

Seated in front of Bond was a cheerful looking fat man. Tobacco smoke seeped from between the man's teeth like dragon's breath. That was the vanilla scent Bond detected. It was wafted towards him by the fat man who was waving Bond's passport casually in the air.

"So, you are awake, Mr ..." He looked at the passport. "... Somerset. David Somerset." He laughed. "Or whoever you are."

Bond did nothing more than sniff and flex his bruised neck muscles.

"Oh yes, we know all about you Mr David Somerset with your fake passport – " He pulled Bond's Walter PPK from his inside jacket pocket and twirled it extravagantly in his massive fist " – and interesting taste in luggage. Perhaps, you might care to tell me why an Englishman is here in Buenos Aires rather than at home, enjoying the football."

The cab driver spoke excitedly. "He says he is not English, Roman. He says he is Welsh – you know, kilts and bagpipes".

"Quiet, Estaban!" The fat man's voice was like a whiplash. "I will do the talking." The cab driver was going to object but a raised, flat flabby hand stopped him from opening his loud mouth. "And I will not thank you for using my name so freely."

The cab driver mumbled something in Spanish that may have been an apology and tried to melt into the wall.

"I am here on holiday, Senor Roman," said Bond. "The real question is why should you be concerned about that."

“Because your holiday takes you into the circles of Carl Devlin. Or should I say Herr Leo Hubermann. It is well known that the man is a Nazi”.

Bond shrugged as best as a man tied to a chair can shrug. “I believe such men are not in short supply all over South America”.

Roman took a long suck on his cheroot and nodded to the burly man guarding the door. The man stepped speedily over and gave Bond a sharp backhander across his face. Even though he had had enough time to prepare for the assault, the force of the blow rattled Bond’s teeth. Painfully, he shook his head from side to side.

“You are pleased to make jokes, Mr Somerset?” said Roman. “Now, tell me who you are and what you are doing here.”

Bond’s thinking processes had been dulled by being knocked out. Coming round from unconsciousness was always the worst time for interrogation. They taught you that in the service manuals, but there was no substitute for the real thing and Bond had many experiences of genuine torture. The burly man’s blow did Bond a huge favour in snapping him out of reverie and back to something like his normal self.

“Why don’t we start with what you are not telling me, Senor Roman: that you are not with the *Secretaría* otherwise I would be in a prison cell not a cellar. And you are not CIA, who would never employ natives of whichever country they are currently ‘assisting.’ Which, after you openly revealed your knowledge of Leo Hubermann, leads me to conclude you are with Mossad.”

“Mossad?” Roman chuckled and wiped a thumb slowly across his bristling chin. “They can’t operate here. They try and the government keeps kicking them out. They work through proxy agents.”

“Are you a proxy agent, Roman?”

The fat man chuckled.

“Me? We are here to talk about you, Mr Somerset. Perhaps it is you who is a proxy agent. Or are you a weatherman?”

“A what?”

Bond paused, blinking under the fierce light. Somewhere, buried in the recess of his mind, he linked the threads of the conundrum. It was so obvious, he should have foreseen it.

“I’m no more a proxy agent than you are, Roman. Let me ask you: is the weather warm where you come from?”

The cheroot blazed red as Roman sucked in a breath. When he replied, he spoke slowly and carefully. “It is warmer than where you are from.”

“But sometimes a spot of rain – ”

Roman finished off the recognition code: “ – must fall to help the crops.”

There was a moment’s silence. Roman and Bond stared at each other. The tobacco smoke drifted slowly into the air. Roman smiled wide, gripping the cheroot between his teeth. He turned his head and barked a burst of Spanish. The burly man produced a knife and began to cut through the ropes holding Bond to the chair. Freed, Bond stood and stamped his feet while rubbing his wrists to get the circulation back.

“Please accept my apologies, Mr Somerset,” said Roman as he stood and offered his hand.

“It’s Bond. James Bond.”

Bond grinned and took Roman’s hand. The grip was firm. The shake sharp.

“James Bond? Really? I thought you had died.”

“Everyone says that.”

“News travels slow to Argentina.” Roman waved for some water and poured a glass was poured for Bond. “Here. Take this.” Next he held out Bond’s PPK. “And this.”

The water was cool and refreshing and stung as it slithered down Bond’s dry throat. He must have been out for a couple of hours. Roman was still talking, excitedly, like the cab driver.

“You know, I could have saved us both a lot of trouble if I had only asked you what company you represent.”

“Universal Exports,” replied Bond. “You should have checked my entry visa.”

“I don’t have access to the records. As you say, the *Secretaría* are not exactly friendly. Let me introduce myself. I am Roman Rojas. I work for Station A. These are my associates. Estaban you know and this is Thiago. Our Head Of Station did not mention that you would be here. If we had known, well, all this...”

“He wasn’t informed,” said Bond. “This was intended to be a very small scale and subtle operation.”

“Still,” continued Roman. “I would like to know why you are taking such a close interest in the activities of Carl Devlin.”

“He’s of intense interest to Mossad. That’s who I thought you represented.”

“And they are keeping watch on you. But we got to you first. This man Devlin, we know he is a war criminal. We know he wants to destabilise the government. That Charity Ball you attended? It was a front. A fundraiser for extreme political parties and rabble rousers. The bastards will have the Peronistas back in power if we are not careful.”

Roman paused and sucked on the cigar. His voice turned grave. “We also know that his associates in Argentina run a uranium mine. We believe Russian bound shipments of corned beef contain tins full of high-grade uranium ore. We’ve wanted access to Notorio’s shipments for years.”

“Devlin sounds a menace, Roman, but my job here is more concerned with his companion, Miss Sebastian.”

“Yes. We saw you with Miss Sebastian. An agent such as yourself, operating undercover, initiating an intimate relationship with Devlin’s mistress. Hm. However you describe it, Mr Bond, it is certainly of interest.”

“You can call me James, Roman.”

“Alright, James. So, tell me, you have made an arrangement with the delightful Miss Sebastian, yes? No, don’t answer that. I know it is true. We saw you. We heard you. If we are to impound Notorio’s cargo ships, the government needs evidence of illegal ore shipments. We’ve not been able to gather any. But perhaps...”

“We may be thinking along similar lines, Roman,” said Bond. “I was made aware of Mossad’s interest in Devlin. I thought it was purely as a war criminal, but it seems there is something bigger happening, something that may benefit all western countries.”

“And Miss Sebastian?”

“Alexis – Miss Sebastian – found out about the uranium ore also, which is why I need to lift her. And quickly.”

Bond paused and Roman sensed there was something troubling Bond.

“But...?”

“She can get me access to Devlin’s papers! The papers you need to impound the ships. I intended to get her away from Devlin as soon as I could, but she convinced me not to. You have doubly convinced me.” Bond put down the empty glass. “You and your team may be of some help. We’ll need to work and plan fast. I have to be at Devlin’s estate for 8pm.”

Roman laughed, his belly shaking. “I work fast with fuel. What do you say we discuss this with a beer?”

“Drinking? Now, there we can definitely find mutual agreement”.

Bond had become accustomed to the architecture in Buenos Aires resembling that of various styles native to Europe. He had not expected Devlin's mansion to be in so flagrant a Gothic character that it could have been transported brick by brick from Munich or perhaps one of the smaller cities of Bavaria.

He was greeted at the door by a stiff-backed butler, who guided him to the elegant dining room whose centre stage was an expensively decorated table, long enough to seat twenty-a-side, but today only laid for ten, all places at the far end of the salon. A group of four men stood beside an enormous stone fireplace. A little further away, two well-heeled women were talking to a seated elderly lady, whose face was fixed in a permanent smile. Devlin had already detached himself from this group, Alexis on his arm.

He stepped forward, greeting Bond with caution.

"My dear Somerset, I am so happy you could come tonight."

"How could I refuse so gracious an invitation?" said Bond.

"Alexis said she met you at the Polo Grounds." Devlin's tone was nothing more than coldly efficient. "I am so glad you could entertain her."

"I wouldn't call horse riding entertainment, Mr Devlin. More a pain in the backside."

Devlin didn't laugh. Or even smile. He snapped his fingers and a waiter stepped swiftly over, a tray with glasses on his outstretched arm. Bond accepted one at carefully concealed random. Dom Perignon again. It was as if Devlin had always been expecting him. During the exchange, Alexis remained aloof and silent.

"Now," began Devlin, releasing Alexis from her position at his elbow with a fish-like swish of his arm. "Let me introduce you to some of my friends."

Devlin led Bond over to the enormous stone fireplace. Flames crackled on a huge slice of a tree trunk. Coal fizzled. The small group of men that had gathered around the hearth were all of Devlin's age. They all drank champagne and conversed in hushed tones and in German.

"My friends, this is Mr David Somerset," said Devlin cheerfully, and in English. "He is here from Universal Exports, London, and wishes to do business with Notorio. I will allow you to introduce yourselves".

Devlin backed off, leaving the four to reluctantly talk with Bond. He immediately recognised them from the Charity Ball. Their accents were borderline British but hints of Teutonic phrasing and tones could be heard if one was listening for them. Bond was. Introductions were made, and he could tell that they had been reading British newspapers before picking their current names. John, Paul, and George were common enough British Christian names – and Bond assumed they all thought Ringo just might stand out – unless one were wearing earmuffs. Bond carefully filed the names away for later research. The fourth, bald-headed man introduced himself as ‘Doctor Anderson’. He offered only a thin smile and touched Bond’s hand for the minimum time necessary for courtesy.

A gong sounded. Devlin asked his guests to be seated. Their places were marked with embossed name cards. Bond found himself seated with the ladies, all opposite the men. He would normally have enjoyed this scenario, but this time it felt as if the pleasure was a sort of punishment. Five pairs of German eyes watched him closely as he took his seat, and he found himself sitting next to the smiling elderly lady.

“Oh, you are from Somerset, then?” she said happily.

“Er, no, my name is Somerset, David Somerset, Senora ...?”

“I am Leopoldine Devlin, Mr Somerset,” she announced.

Bond raised an eyebrow.

“I am Carl’s mother,” she continued grandly.

“I’m delighted to meet you,” said Bond. “And do you live in Buenos Aires, Senora?”

“Oh, no, too loud, too loud,” smiled the old lady. “I stay at Os Alpes Do Sol. It is very beautiful there. You must please come and visit me”.

“But of course,” said Bond. “I’d be delighted. Where is Os Alpes Do Sol?”

“In the countryside.”

Two waiters appeared, one carrying a ceramic soup terrine. While he held the huge, heavy dish with barely an ounce of effort, his colleague used a ladle to serve exactly half-a-bowl-full of *gulaschsuppe*. The heady aroma of cured beef

and hot peppers curled at Bond's nostrils. The chatter around the table fell away as the food was attended to. The old lady took no notice.

"My son has a lovely house here, don't you think? I try to visit him here often".

Bond unobtrusively looked around the other guests. He attempted to catch Alexis's eye. She was seated beside the old lady, as a nurse might be. Devlin sat opposite her, a position that enabled him to keep eyes on his mistress, his mother and his unwanted guest.

"I am hoping to do some business with your son," replied Bond cheerfully, defying the ringing silence.

"So! You are interested in corned beef?"

"No, I am afraid not, Senora, but I am interested in importing and exporting."

The dowager suddenly beamed her biggest smile yet.

"I love port. It is much better than champagne, is it not?"

"Ah, er, yes, it can be most satisfying."

She waved a waiter over and peremptorily ordered port for them both. Bond politely declined the offer to join her. He tasted the excellent soup. After a minute or so, as everyone ate, the noise level rose. Bond tried to listen in on the German dialogues, but couldn't hear enough, thanks mostly to the old lady's nattering.

"So, you are from Somerset, Mr David?" she asked.

The port arrived and she drained half the glass in a single mouthful. A trickle of ruby red residue dribbled from the corner of her mouth. Alexis dabbed at the spillage with a napkin.

"Mother!" she admonished.

"It's quite alright, dear. Mr David is a guest. From Somerset, no less, isn't that right, Mr David?"

"Quite right."

Bond was beginning to understand Leopoldine Devlin and her ailments. He happily consented that Somerset was indeed where he was from. The old lady

continued to quiz him, repeating the same questions and phrases. Bond continued to respond. He wondered if this was some sort of test every new arrival at Devlin's needed to endure.

The soup was taken away and replaced with plates of Argentinian veal, fried potatoes and red cabbage with onions. Despite its peasant appearance, Bond rather enjoyed the meal, its simplicity being its major favour.

"I live at Os Alpes Do Sol," the dowager stated for what must have been the fifteenth time. "You must come and visit there. It is so very beautiful."

"As beautiful as Somerset?"

"Ah, I love Somerset! I visited it many times when I stayed in England."

"And when was that?"

"After the fall of the Fuhrer. We had to escape the Soviets, you understand. The British took us in, of course. The Queen. She is German, you understand, German. The Fuhrer. He should have been King of Germany."

Her reminiscences were getting louder.

"Emperor of the German Empire! Overseer of All Europe! My son, Carl, –"

Devlin had been occupied with his other guests. Now, attention attracted by his name, he assessed the situation quickly, tersely. His open palm slapped down on the table top with a loud clap.

"Mother, I think you are getting tired," he said. "You should go to bed."

He pushed his seat back and made to rise.

Alexis held up her hand, silently restraining him. The dowager lady scoffed.

"Oh nonsense Carl, I feel fine. Some more port –"

"No, Mother, you must go to bed."

Devlin snapped his fingers. Two of the butler staff, who had been stood beside the door – perhaps for just such an occasion, Bond wondered – quickly attended to the protesting dowager. Alexis calmly reassured her. Devlin, however, was more animated. He stood from the table and walked around the room to lend

his stern assistance. It was only his immediate presence that ensured Leopoldine Devlin accepted her son's instruction.

Despite the minor furore, everyone politely stood as the elder statesperson, accompanied by the host, exited the dining room. Bond took the opportunity to seat himself beside Alexis. The move did not go unnoticed by the other guests. There was a prolonged, strained silence bar the scraping of cutlery on plates.

"I didn't think she was all that tired," Bond said, easing the tension.

"Carl is very protective of her," Alexis replied.

"She was talking about a place called Os Alpes Du Sol," said Bond. "In fact, she invited me to visit her there."

"It's her favourite place," said Alexis. "A villa in Brazil where Carl takes her on holiday. She doesn't live there all the time."

"Do you ever go there?"

"I have not. Carl uses it to entertain his friends. Apparently, we will go there for our own honeymoon."

"That'll be wonderful, I'm sure," said Bond, adding in a hushed tone: "If you ever get married."

"Don't."

Alexis blushed. Bond realised his mistake, realised the other guests could see her reaction even if they had not heard the exchange. She too knew the error was visible.

As Devlin re-entered the room, Alexis quickly turned away from Bond, offering a concerned glance at her fiancé.

"Is Mother alright?"

"Of course." Devlin remained standing, half-way towards his own seat. He noticed the switch of seats Bond had negotiated. Staring at the now empty seat, he said slowly: "Is everything alright here, Alexis?"

"I was worried about Mother."

"You look unwell."

"I'm feeling tired, Carl. The heat in here. The champagne perhaps. I think I would like to go and lie down".

"Nonsense, Alexis, you have our guest to look after. You are the best English speaker here. Who else can entertain, Mr Somerset?"

"I'm sorry, Carl, I don't think I can."

"Please don't stay on my account," interjected Bond, sensing Devlin's rising suspicions. "Dinner's almost finished. And it's been a long day."

"Yes," added Alexis. "It has been a long day. I really must go."

Alexis didn't wait for Devlin's permission. She stood up, quite abruptly, screwed up her napkin and then, nervously tossed it onto her plate. As she hurried away, Bond sensed rather than saw everyone's eyes watching this dramatic display of disobedience.

"I expect I exhausted her at the Polo Club," he said.

Devlin gave him a sharp, exceptionally cold glance. He seemed to want to follow Alexis, thought better of it and then returned to his seat. He lifted his champagne flute and took a small sip, all the while studying Bond over the rim of the glass.

"Quite," he said.

Bond moved quietly in the darkness of the gardens. The box hedges and ornamental pines that gave the mansion such an European identity surrounded the buildings, flanking the driveway and surrounding a series of freshwater ponds. The layout reminded him of Hampton Court maze, designed to confuse as well as decorate. He carefully and silently wound a way through the tall hedges approaching the east wing as Alexis had instructed.

His departure from dinner had received no more than a curt handshake from Devlin. The cool reception had turned rather frosty after Alexis feigned her sickness. As one of the butlers escorted him out of the dining room, Bond saw the five German men conversing in low tones. Dr Anderson was gesticulating wildly. The two women, whose names Bond had never learned, had joined them in the conference.

Now, Bond waited and watched as the final guests made their exits and one by one the lights inside the mansion went out. The only sound was his own breathing. He crept towards the exterior stairs which led to the cellar door and hid in the recess. A quarter of an hour had elapsed when he heard a series of grainy crunches on the gravel path. It was one of the staff. The boots stepped by the stairs without stopping. A few moments later there was a soft creaking and the cellar door opened a crack. A dim light shone from inside. Bond slipped down the last steps. Alexis showed her face and motioned for him to join her inside.

“James!”

“Are you sure no-one will come into your room and find you’re not there?” he asked.

His businesslike manner seemed to upset her.

“I told the servants I would be taking sleeping pills and didn’t want disturbed till eight tomorrow.”

Her eyes were shining as she looked at him. He pressed his lips on hers, holding her body close. Now, her disappointment turned to surprise.

“James, do we have time for ...?”

“You know I’d love to, but we can’t,” he said, kissing her again. “You have to show me Devlin’s study. And quickly. There are patrols outside.”

Without another word, she led the way from the cellar to a corridor near the dining room and onto the last door near a window. Alexis had a bunch of keys in her hand.

“The staff’s set. I took them from the pantry.”

She selected one, placed it in the keyhole and, gritting her teeth against a sound that never arrived, she unlocked the door to what proved to be a study. The drapes were pulled. The only light came from an illuminated fish tank which contained Siamese Fighting Fish. Books lined the walls and leather chairs were positioned around a large heavy table of dark wood. Seven champagne flutes were on the table and a half-drunk bottle of Krug champagne was sitting in a bucket of melting ice. Bond noted Devlin switched to a German brand when not in company.

“We can talk here. The room is soundproofed.” Alexis pointed across the room. “See that painting?”

Bond nodded. It was behind Devlin’s desk: Bergen’s oil of the famed battleship *Bismarck*, dreaded in World War Two by the British navy until its sinking in the North Atlantic in 1941.

“The safe is behind it, but I can’t help you get inside. I don’t know the combination”.

Bond had been prepared for this. He slid the painting aside to reveal the safe. He reached inside his jacket and produced the metal, cigar-shaped box festooned with coils of wire which led to a flat, circular attachment. He held the circular piece against the safe and it stayed there, evidently magnetic. A low hum emanated from the box. Numbers began to light up a series of small windows on the side of the box. Bond read them and turned the safe’s combination dial accordingly.

“That’s amazing,” whispered Alexis.

“Big in Japan, I believe. Everyone will be talking about this soon,” said Bond, opening the door with a grin.

Inside, he found large stacks of Argentinian bank notes, bundled by the thousand, but Bond’s attention was on the documents on the lower shelves.

“Turn on the lamp,” he said.

Flicking through the documents in the half-light, he could see these were almost all in German and concerned the movement of uranium ore from a mine in the Malargüe region to Notorio’s canning facility. They were to be placed in corned beef tins, each with a subtle mark to distinguish them from regular tins. This work was to be carried out at night by a separate team from the usual staff, who would know nothing about it. That would explain Dr Anderson’s panic when another team member took sick from radiation poisoning.

Bond quickly took out the Colibri camera and photographed all the relevant documents. He replaced them, was about to relock the safe, when he noticed a file marked *Aufenthaltsstatus*: immigration status. Taking it out he saw a series of official-looking papers, several relating to the people he had met over dinner. They were false identity papers granted by the Peron government in 1946 and beside them were the recipient’s original identification documents, all in Nazi black-and-white. Exactly the kind of details Mossad would be interested in. Quickly, Bond also photographed these, put them neatly back on the shelf and relocked the safe.

“Alexis,” Bond started, urgently, “I want you to come with me. I can’t protect you here. Not now. If you come, I’ll keep you safe from him.”

“I can’t, James. It’s impossible,” she said, biting her lip. “It would raise too many suspicions. Carl is already jealous after you kissed me at the Pony Club”.

“Alright,” said Bond. He picked up the bottle of Krug champagne. “That’s something to celebrate at least.”

Kissing Alexis once more, he poured them both a glass and they drank. It slaked their thirst and calmed their ardour.

“Listen, Alexis, I’ve had an idea.” She was about to object, Bond placed a finger to her lips. “Hear me out. Why don’t you feign being pregnant?”

“What?” she said, stunned.

“Early stages, obviously. It’ll tie in with your feeling unwell earlier. Normally you would phone your doctor, of course, but I want you to call this number.” Bond

handed her a card. "It's a friend of mine named Roman. He will come, in the disguise of a gynaecologist and take you to the hospital – and freedom."

"Oh, but I couldn't, I mean – "

"It'll be easier than you think. Trust me. Call that number in the morning."

Bond kissed her again and they headed for the cellar. He gave Alexis a final swift goodbye kiss and slipped out and up the stairs. As the door closed behind him, he thought he heard a second noise, a light scraping. He paused. Nothing. Quickly he sprinted across the gravel drive and into the rows of box hedges. There it was again. Louder this time.

He stepped across the avenue and was caught in the sudden blaze of a white hot torch beam. A voice rang harshly out: "*Halt!*"

He threw himself to the left. A throwing knife hit the tree behind where he had been standing only a second ago. Bond raced through the trees, zigzagging as he went, aware the pounding footsteps behind were catching up fast. Then abruptly, they vanished. Bond didn't dare stop and turn to see what had happened. He kept running between the hedgerows, heading vaguely for the exit. From nowhere, the assailant lunged at him, seeming to appear as if from the night itself. Bond was knocked off his feet and landed on his back, winded. It was the young man who had offered him corned beef at the Expo. He was leaning over Bond's prone figure, drawing a second knife from over a shoulder. Bond's knee viciously rammed into the man's groin. There was a cry of pain. Bond's left hand, taut like an axe, cracked into the exposed neck. The young man collapsed with a single pitiful groan. Instinctively, Bond grabbed the knife and thrust it directly for the heart.

Dammit.

Panting, Bond got to his feet and began to run again. It was only seconds before he reached the wall. He leapt, grabbed the top and pulled himself up and over into the quiet of the street beyond. Now, where was Estaban's taxi?

A fat bald man in a dark suit was walking towards him. With calm equanimity, he wished Bond a lugubrious "Good evening" and kept walking.

Bond blinked. "And good evening to you," he said.

A second later, he took to his heels and found the taxi and its driver waiting around the next corner.

Carl Devlin was in his night clothes, a dressing robe pulled tight. He wore plimsols on his feet. The groundsman was fully dressed, as if always on alert even in the dead of night. It was cold in the darkest hours.

Devlin looked at the dead guard's body without any emotion.

"Notify his family in the morning," he said curtly.

Devlin turned and walked back to the mansion, taking the easiest route through the maze of hedgerows. Inside, he was about to ascend the stairs when a thought occurred to him. Nothing more than an inkling, but nonetheless...

The safe appeared not to have been touched. All the documents were in place, the combination untampered. The dial was even positioned back on the number 7 as he always left it. And yet...

The bottle of Krug champagne rested on the leather inlay of his desk. Slowly Devlin's fingers interlocked and the tips touched his chin. He was certain the champagne had been left in the ice bucket. Around the base of the bottle a little puddle of condensation had formed. There were two flutes beside it, half-empty. One, he noticed, had a sheer ruby gloss on the rim. The exact colour of his fiancée's lipstick. His favourite shade. The colour he had insisted she wore to the dinner party.

"It's been three days," said Bond. "I don't like it."

"Nor do I, James," replied Roman. "Estaban reports a lot of activity around the mansion today. People leaving. He hasn't followed them or else he can't look out for Alexis."

They were sitting in Roman's local *parrilla*, an unremarkable place of small covers, cheap wine goblets and blue-and-white check tablecloths. The chef served lunches as hearty as anything Blades could throw at you. Heartier probably and steeped in fat. The steaks were enormous and bloody, and the big fries came cut rough, salty and crisp. The Malbec Origin was worth that of an expensive Claret but came priced for Beaujolais.

"But she hasn't made an appearance, Roman," continued Bond. "Maybe it's time we took action, regardless."

"Maybe it was the man you killed. It might have spooked them."

"I think they were spooked enough already. That performance over dinner was simply bizarre. The Germans were supposed to be Devlin's work colleagues. More like conspirators. They never once mentioned corned beef."

Roman snorted.

"Good thing. Horrible stuff. Reminds me of the army."

Bond raised an eyebrow. He sipped the strong gin and tonic, a pre-lunch drink which he found more palatable than the local coffee. Roman seemed to agree on that too.

"So, let's say Alexis is being held there against her will," the Argentine started. "You want to get her out. When would be the best time to do it? At night? At dawn? What?"

"At dinner," said Bond after a brief moment of consideration. "The place is alive with guards, but Devlin and any of his guests will be in the mansion. The waiting staff too. So it would only be the guards we have to worry about."

"Alright. Let me speak with Mateo."

"No," said Bond. "Don't involve your Head of Station. This is supposed to be unofficial. I'm not supposed to be here, remember? What about Estaban and

Thiago? They like their football. Men of the streets. Do they know some people who might be able to help us. Unofficially, as it were.”

Roman grinned and swallowed his G & T in a single swift gulp.

“I think so.”

Kitted all in black the nine men maraudered through the hedgerows, Bond half-ahead, almost leading the way. Estaban, a big Smith & Wesson clutched in his hand, was a half-pace further on. Roman and Tiago, being the largest, moved slower and held the rear. The armed party dodged between hedgerows, swiftly, silently. The handful of extra men came from the shanty towns. Supporters of River Plate, Estaban's home team. Once they knew a pretty woman was in danger and that the danger was a cabal of Nazis, they needed no second invitation to arm themselves, blacken their faces and join the expedition. They carried typical weapons: machetes, hunting daggers, flick knives and knuckle dusters. Two of them possessed old Colt pistols.

Bond skirted the final box hedge. They had encountered no one.

A swathe of light suddenly bathed the arena. Searchlights on the roof of the mansion fanned out across the gardens, catching at shadows. The ominous rattle came almost as fast. Bullets started to cut through the air. Machine guns. More than one. Bond rolled onto the turf, sheltering in the hedges. One of the following group, a young man called Manuel, was caught in the crossfire and torn to pieces by the shots, his body dancing like a scarecrow in the wind before falling to the ground still twitching.

Bond instantly took aim at one of the coursing lights. One bulb shattered. All Bond's firing did was attract attention to his whereabouts. The divots of exploding grass as the bullets inched closer stunned Bond into moving left. Estaban followed. A young man came running down the path. One of Devlin's guards. Estaban cut him down with a single shot.

"The lights, Estaban," ordered Bond.

"Yes. Yes."

It took him three goes and the second light went out. Now, guards and housekeepers were pouring out of the mansion. Some form of chaos started to ensue as man fought man and bodies began to sink to the ground, injured or dying or dead. A machete was swung through the air. A hatchet clanged against it. A gun shot. A man fell from the mansion parapet, his body thumping on the drive like a bag of cement. Shouts. Screams. Victory. Death.

Bond inched his way around the line of trees and made it to the cellar steps where he had infiltrated the other night. He kicked in the lock and entered the basement. The bottles of wine stood on their racks. The hams hung on their hooks. It was quiet in the cool room. Nervelessly quiet.

Bond passed into the corridor above. The dining room was empty. It wasn't laid for dinner. There was no sign of any guests. Only the fire glowed, casting a ghostly orange hue across the interior. Bond walked on, the PPK held out ahead of him, finger on the trigger anticipating the need to shoot and shoot first. He eased open the door to the study. Nobody. Silent. Dark. The curtains were pulled, shutting out even the moonlight. Bond switched on a side lamp. In its halo, he saw the open coffin resting on the big table in the centre of the room. He walked forward. His face fell.

Alexis Sebastian lay on the cushions. They'd dressed her in a beautiful ivory gown, probably what she was meant to have worn for her wedding. Alive she would have looked beautiful, vibrant and enticing, but rigor mortis had begun to set in and instead Alexis was pale, gaunt and frightened. The bastards hadn't even closed her eyes. Bond reached out with his free hand and dragged the cold shutters down with his fingers.

*"Was ist das?"*

Bond spun on one heel. It was the butler. The man stood in the doorframe, almost blocking it, and an arm was raising, a gun clasped in the hand. The man was slower than Bond, uncertain. The Walther PPK cracked twice and the butler's head snapped back as if struck by a hammer. He crumpled to the floor. Bond gasped, snatching at breath. He took a seat and stared at the coffin without reaction. There was a sudden ache in his chest.

The noise of the fighting began to dissipate. Roman entered the study, stepping over the butler's corpse.

"Devlin's not here," he said. "What have we now?"

Roman stared into the coffin.

*"Jesuchristo."*

Bond tapped the barrel of his gun thoughtfully.

“When I came to dinner, there was a crazy old woman here.”

Roman was surprised at his friend’s matter-of-fact attitude. “Yes, you told me,” he replied, “but – ”

“She kept talking about a holiday home. A place called Os Alpes Do Sol. The Southern Alps. Estaban said people had been coming and going all day. What if Devlin was one of them?”

“Where was this place?”

“Brazil.”

Roman stared at Alexis’s once beautiful, now peaceful face. Then he stared at Bond, whose eyes were like gunsights, pinpoint accurate, cold and hard. Very hard. And very cold.

“You want to follow him?” he asked.

“Yes.”

Os Alpes Do Sol was a white washed, brick built villa of immaculate taste situated on a hillside in the Mato Grosse du Sol, in a valley of lush verdant trees, trickling streams and a multitude of colourful flowers and chirruping birds.

The villa wasn't enormous, but its living spaces were all open-plan and one wall was lined with glass doors which opened onto a veranda and the extensive flower gardens. However, despite the concessions to modern luxury, the architecture still held a certain brutalist texture that hinted at the legacy of its owner.

The villa was not as well-staffed as the mansion in Buenos Aires. Here only two local women, a chambermaid and a cook, were employed. Both had just been ordered to immediately vacate the premises. They did as they were told without objection. The bald headed German who had arrived uninvited for lunch had the air of death about him and they didn't like it.

The group of four male guests who congregated in the lounge area were dressed in formal, lightweight suits and ties. Outwardly, they may have looked relaxed, as if on a holiday or visiting neighbours for cocktails. Closer inspection however revealed they stood straight-backed, tall and steady. They had military bearings. They spoke in German.

Dr Anderson had been the last to arrive, his flight delayed for some last minute phone calls to the embassy. Despite the furore Alexis's death had caused, Dr Anderson had managed to ensure Notorio's business dealings still functioned. Just. It felt as if a net had suddenly been cast and was dragging them all, slowly and surely, to their doom. Dr Anderson was not about to let that happen. Too much of his life, his fortune, his dreams, were tied up in the shady dealings of Notorio.

"Devlin didn't suspect her," said one of the men.

"No one suspected her," replied Dr Anderson. "In a way, Devlin was protected by his own stupidity. She couldn't betray him without revealing herself and putting her life at risk. That now is exactly her fate. She was stuck in that engagement and this man Somerset provided her with a way out."

Dr Anderson picked up his cup and saucer and drank carefully. It was ironic, he considered, to be drinking tea while discussing a British Secret Service Agent.

“Somerset is an alias used by a British spy well-known to our Soviet allies. They say he is called James Bond. He works for a branch of the British spy network called the ‘Double-O Section’.”

“If he is in Argentina, will it be safe for us to return?”

“Perhaps, soon. In the meantime we must take the initiative,” continued Dr Anderson. “Things are getting too far out of our control. The police have an arrest warrant for Devlin. It was foolish to not hide the woman’s body immediately. Devlin had exposed himself. And whatever she has done, it has exposed us also. The Argentinian government has impounded our cargo ships. The customs authorities are raiding our warehouses. Our local business managers are running scared.”

“They know nothing, Doctor, not enough.”

“Not enough is too close to enough. No. This is serious. The Soviets need the uranium urgently. They must have the missiles to maintain the arms race. They are currently seeking a diplomatic solution with the government. My contacts at the embassy assure me the Argentines do not wish to restrict our trade completely. It will be a few weeks, perhaps. In the meantime, the Soviets, with the approval of the government, have issued me an ultimatum which may smooth progress.”

“Which is?”

“There must be a new Managing Director of Notorio Corned Beef.”

The three men nodded. Another of them went to the veranda doors. He could see Devlin on the lawn talking to his mother. The batty woman was cheerfully singing. It was that damn American song, a bastardisation of an Austrian folk tune. Silently, he wondered if she would ever shut up.

“He’s outside, Dr Anderson. Now may be as good a time as any.”

The men walked slowly onto the veranda. One of them reached inside his jacket pocket and fingered the garotte wire he always carried, a habit he had started in extermination camps and never given up. After all, on occasions such as this...

“Carl!” called Dr Anderson.

The host looked away from his mother. He was smiling. Leopoldine often made him smile, even when she was being a nuisance. She'd been picking her favourite flowers this morning and messily putting them into a vase. Devlin's smile vanished when he saw the cohort glaring at him. The cloud covered the sun and Os Alpes Do Sol was pitted into deep shadow.

"Carl, will you come in, please?" called Dr Anderson. "I wish to talk to you."

Os Alpes Do Sol could only be approached up a single lane dirt track which wound its way up the side of a long valley. James Bond could see the villa perched on its promontory almost a whole hour before they arrived there. It was certainly remote and it was certainly beautiful.

The flotilla of cars, some official, some not, but all packed with officials, ground to a halt one after another on the oval driveway. There did not appear to be anybody at home. One policeman rattled the door knocker, to no effect. Bond shared worried glances with Roman.

“Don’t tell me this has been a wasted journey,” Roman said. “All that bloody paperwork. I swear the bloody Department of bloody Political and Social Order wanted me to answer everything in bloody duplicate.”

“It’s a good thing Brazil and Argentina are just about on speaking terms,” answered Bond, “or it might have been bloody triplicate.”

He walked around the side of the villa, followed by Roman and one of the police officers. There was an iron gate with enough tracing on it for Bond to climb over. He didn’t wait for anyone to follow.

The garden was laid out like an exhibit of the Chelsea Flower Show. Immaculate. Ordered. Bustling with colour. He walked past the abundant displays and up to the French doors which lined the rear of the villa. They were closed but not locked. He could see an old woman kneeling on the floor, shaking, wailing. There was a body next to her and the body was mutilated. Devlin’s blood soaked the plush carpet. His head was at a curious angle. Bond pushed the sliding door and entered the lounge. As he drew closer, he could see the head was almost severed from its shoulders. He stood for a moment, watching the scene. The dowager continued to sob and cry and shriek as if he wasn’t there.

Bond left her, went through to the lobby and opened the front door.

“There’s nobody here,” he said. “Nobody we can talk to anyway.”

Roman accompanied the first few policemen in.

“What’s that terrible noise?” he said.

Bond twitched. He led his friend back into the lounge and showed him the revenge metered out by one fugitive Nazi war criminal onto another.

“Dear God,” murmured Roman. “Who’s the woman?”

“His mother.”

“*Jesuchristo.*” Roman crossed himself.

Two policemen had managed to separate mother from son and sat her in an armchair, but she did not stop crying, the sound of her sorrow echoing in the tomb-like interior of the villa.

Bond almost had sympathy for her. Almost.

“There’s nothing for us to do here,” he said. “Come on, Roman, let’s go.”

“Yes, let’s. This is hell.

“And he probably deserves it.”

As Bond departed, his eye caught sight of a small turquoise vase sitting on the mantelpiece. The flowers must have been picked from the garden. The villa was too remote for delivery. Anyway, these flowers were not native to the Mato Grosse.

Edelweiss.

**James Bond will return**