

THE SECRET AGENT

The scent and smoke and sweat of a casino are nauseating at three in the morning. Then the soul-erosion produced by high gambling – a compost of greed and fear and nervous tension – becomes unbearable and the senses awake and revolt from it.

James Bond suddenly knew that he was tired. He always knew when his body or his mind had had enough and he always acted on the knowledge. This helped him to avoid staleness and the sensual bluntness that breeds mistakes.

He shifted himself unobtrusively away from the roulette he had been playing and went to stand for a moment at the brass rail which surrounded breast-high the top table in the ‘salle privée’.

Le Chiffre was still playing and still, apparently, winning. There was an untidy pile of flecked hundred-mille plaques

in front of him. In the shadow of his thick left arm there nestled a discreet stack of the big yellow ones worth half a million francs each.

Bond watched the curious, impressive profile for a time, and then he shrugged his shoulders to lighten his thoughts and moved away.

The barrier surrounding the 'caisse' comes as high as your chin and the 'caissier', who is generally nothing more than a minor bank clerk, sits on a stool and dips into his piles of notes and plaques. These are ranged on shelves. They are on a level, behind the protecting barrier, with your groin. The caissier has a cosh and a gun to protect him, and to heave over the barrier and steal some notes and then vault back and get out of the casino through the passages and doors would be impossible. And the caissiers generally work in pairs.

Bond reflected on the problem as he collected the sheaf of hundred thousand and then the sheaves of ten thousand franc notes. With another part of his mind, he had a vision of tomorrow's regular morning meeting of the casino committee.

'Monsieur Le Chiffre made two million. He played his usual game. Miss Fairchild made a million in an hour and then left. She executed three "bancos" of Monsieur Le Chiffre within an hour and then left. She played with coolness. Monsieur le Vicomte de Villorin made one million two at roulette. He was playing the maximum

on the first and last dozens. He was lucky. Then the Englishman, Mister Bond, increased his winnings to exactly three million over the two days. He was playing a progressive system on red at table five. Duclos, the 'chef de partie', has the details. It seems that he is persevering and plays in maximums. He has luck. His nerves seem good. On the 'soirée', the chemin-de-fer won x , the baccarat won y and the roulette won z . The boule which was again badly frequented still makes its expenses.'

'Merci, Monsieur Xavier.'

'Merci, Monsieur le Président.'

Or something like that, thought Bond as he pushed his way through the swing doors of the *salle privée* and nodded to the bored man in evening clothes whose job it is to bar your entry and your exit with the electric foot-switch which can lock the doors at any hint of trouble.

And the casino committee would balance its books and break up to its homes or cafés for lunch.

As for robbing the *caisse*, in which Bond himself was not personally concerned, but only interested, he reflected that it would take ten good men, that they would certainly have to kill one or two employees, and that anyway you probably couldn't find ten non-squeal killers in France, or in any other country for the matter of that.

As he gave a thousand francs to the 'vestiaire' and walked down the steps of the casino, Bond made up his

mind that Le Chiffre would in no circumstances try to rob the caisse and he put the contingency out of his mind. Instead he explored his present physical sensations. He felt the dry, uncomfortable gravel under his evening shoes, the bad, harsh taste in his mouth and the slight sweat under his arms. He could feel his eyes filling their sockets. The front of his face, his nose and antrum, were congested. He breathed the sweet night air deeply and focused his senses and his wits. He wanted to know if anyone had searched his room since he had left it before dinner.

He walked across the broad boulevard and through the gardens to the Hotel Splendide. He smiled at the concierge who gave him his key – No. 45 on the first floor – and took the cable.

It was from Jamaica and read:

KINGSTONJA XXXX XXXXXX XXXX XXX BOND SPLENDE
 ROYALE-LES-EAUX SEINE INFERIEURE HAVANA CIGAR
 PRODUCTION ALL CUBAN FACTORIES I915 TEN MILLION
 REPEAT TEN MILLION STOP HOPE THIS FIGURE YOU
 REQUIRE REGARDS

DASILVA

This meant that ten million francs was on the way to him. It was the reply to a request Bond had sent that

afternoon through Paris to his headquarters in London asking for more funds. Paris had spoken to London where Clements, the head of Bond's department, had spoken to M. who had smiled wryly and told 'The Broker' to fix it with the Treasury.

Bond had once worked in Jamaica and his cover on the Royale assignment was that of a very rich client of Messrs Caffery, the principal import and export firm of Jamaica. So he was being controlled through Jamaica, through a taciturn man who was head of the picture desk on the *Daily Gleaner*, the famous newspaper of the Caribbean.

This man on the *Gleaner*, whose name was Fawcett, had been book-keeper for one of the leading turtle-fisheries on the Cayman Islands. One of the men from the Caymans who had volunteered on the outbreak of war, he had ended up as a Paymaster's clerk in a small naval intelligence organization in Malta. At the end of the war, when, with a heavy heart, he was due to return to the Caymans, he was spotted by the section of the Secret Service concerned with the Caribbean. He was strenuously trained in photography and in some other arts and, with the quiet connivance of an influential man in Jamaica, found his way to the picture desk of the *Gleaner*.

In the intervals between sifting photographs submitted by the great agencies – Keystone, Wide-World, Universal, I.N.P., and Reuter-Photo – he would get peremptory

instructions by telephone from a man he had never met to carry out certain simple operations requiring nothing but absolute discretion, speed, and accuracy. For these occasional services he received twenty pounds a month paid into his account with the Royal Bank of Canada by a fictitious relative in England.

Fawcett's present assignment was to relay immediately to Bond, full rates, the text of messages which he received at home by telephone from his anonymous contact. He had been told by this contact that nothing he would be asked to send would arouse the suspicion of the Jamaican post office. So he was not surprised to find himself suddenly appointed string correspondent for the 'Maritime Press and Photo Agency', with press-collect facilities to France and England, on a further monthly retainer of ten pounds.

He felt secure and encouraged, had visions of a B.E.M. and made the first payment on a Morris Minor. He also bought a green eye-shade which he had long coveted and which helped him to impose his personality on the picture desk.

Some of this background to his cable passed through Bond's mind. He was used to oblique control and rather liked it. He felt it feather-bedded him a little, allowed him to give or take an hour or two in his communications with M. He knew that this was probably a fallacy, that probably there was another member of the Service at Royale-les-Eaux who was reporting independently, but it did give the illusion

that he wasn't only 150 miles across the Channel from that deadly office building near Regent's Park, being watched and judged by those few cold brains that made the whole show work. Just as Fawcett, the Cayman Islander in Kingston, knew that if he bought that Morris Minor outright instead of signing the hire-purchase agreement, someone in London would probably know and want to know where the money had come from.

Bond read the cable twice. He tore a telegram form off the pad on the desk (why give them carbon copies?) and wrote his reply in capital letters:

THANKS INFORMATION SHOULD SUFFICE

BOND

He handed this to the concierge and put the cable signed 'DaSilva' in his pocket. The employers (if any) of the concierge could bribe a copy out of the local post office, if the concierge hadn't already steamed the envelope open or read the cable upside down in Bond's hands.

He took his key and said good night and turned to the stairs, shaking his head at the liftman. Bond knew what an obliging danger-signal a lift could be. He didn't expect anyone to be moving on the first floor, but he preferred to be prudent.

Walking quietly up on the balls of his feet, he regretted the hubris of his reply to M. via Jamaica. As a gambler he knew it was a mistake to rely on too small a capital. Anyway, M. probably wouldn't let him have any more. He shrugged his shoulders and turned off the stairs into the corridor and walked softly to the door of his room.

Bond knew exactly where the switch was and it was with one flow of motion that he stood on the threshold with the door full open, the light on and a gun in his hand. The safe, empty room sneered at him. He ignored the half-open door of the bathroom and, locking himself in, he turned up the bed-light and the mirror-light and threw his gun on the settee beside the window. Then he bent down and inspected one of his own black hairs which still lay undisturbed where he had left it before dinner, wedged into the drawer of the writing-desk.

Next he examined a faint trace of talcum powder on the inner rim of the porcelain handle of the clothes cupboard. It appeared immaculate. He went into the bathroom, lifted the cover of the lavatory cistern and verified the level of the water against a small scratch on the copper ball-cock.

Doing all this, inspecting these minute burglar-alarms, did not make him feel foolish or self-conscious. He was a secret agent, and still alive thanks to his exact attention to the detail of his profession. Routine precautions were to him no more unreasonable than they would be to a

deep-sea diver or a test pilot, or to any man earning danger-money.

Satisfied that his room had not been searched while he was at the casino, Bond undressed and took a cold shower. Then he lit his seventieth cigarette of the day and sat down at the writing-table with the thick wad of his stake money and winnings beside him and entered some figures in a small note-book. Over the two days' play, he was up exactly three million francs. In London he had been issued with ten million, and he had asked London for a further ten. With this on its way to the local branch of the *Crédit Lyonnais*, his working capital amounted to twenty-three million francs, or some twenty-three thousand pounds.

For a few moments Bond sat motionless, gazing out of the window across the dark sea, then he shoved the bundle of banknotes under the pillow of the ornate single bed, cleaned his teeth, turned out the lights and climbed with relief between the harsh French sheets. For ten minutes he lay on his left side reflecting on the events of the day. Then he turned over and focused his mind towards the tunnel of sleep.

His last action was to slip his right hand under the pillow until it rested under the butt of the .38 Colt Police Positive with the sawn barrel. Then he slept, and with the warmth and humour of his eyes extinguished, his features relapsed into a taciturn mask, ironical, brutal, and cold.