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Written by John Gardner

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ICEBREAKER

John Gardner



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1

THE TRIPOLI INCIDENT

The Military Trade Mission Complex of the Socialist People's Republic of Libya is situated some fifteen kilometres south-east of Tripoli. Set close to the coast, the Complex is well-hidden from prying eyes, screened on all sides by sweet-smelling eucalyptus, mature cypresses, and tall pines. From the air it might easily be taken for a prison. The kidney-shaped area is enclosed by a boundary of three separate, six-metre-high cyclone fences, each topped by a further metre of barbed and electrified wire. At night, dogs roam the runs between the fences, while regular patrols, in Cascavel armoured cars, circle outside the perimeter. The buildings within the compound are mainly functional. There is a low barracks, constructed in wood, for the security forces; two more comfortable structures act as 'hotels' – one for any foreign military delegation, the other to house their Libyan counterparts.

Between the 'hotels' stands an imposing, single-storey block. Its walls are over a metre thick, their solidity disguised by the pink stucco finish and an arched, cloistered façade. Steps lead to a main door, and the interior is cut down the centre by a single corridor. Administrative offices and a radio room extend to left and right of this passage which ends, abruptly, at a pair of heavy, high doors leading to a long, narrow room, bare but for its massive conference table and chairs, together with facilities for showing films, VTR, and slides.

There are no windows in this, the most important room of the

Complex. Air conditioning maintains an even temperature, and a small metal door at the far end, used by cleaners and security personnel, is the only other entrance.

The Military Trade Mission Complex is used about five or six times a year, and the activities within are constantly monitored – as best they can be – by the intelligence agencies of the Western democracies.

On the morning it happened there were, perhaps, one hundred and forty people working within the compound.

Those in the capitals of the West who keep a weather eye on Middle Eastern events knew a deal had been struck. Although the likelihood of an official statement remained minimal, eventually Libya would receive more missiles, aircraft, and assorted military hardware to swell its already well-stocked arsenal.

The final session of the negotiations was to begin at nine-fifteen, and both parties stuck rigidly to protocol. The Libyan and Soviet delegations, each consisting of around twenty people, met in front of the pink stucco building, and, after the usual cordial greetings, made their way inside and down the corridor to the high doors, which were opened, on their well-oiled, noiseless hinges by two armed guards.

About half of the two delegations had already advanced into the room when the whole phalanx halted, rooted in shock by the sight that met their eyes.

Ten identically dressed figures formed a wide crescent at the far end of the room. They wore combat jackets and grey denim trousers tucked into leather boots. Their appearance was made more sinister by the fine camouflage netting which covered their faces and was held in place by black berets, each of which carried a polished silver badge. The badge was that of a death-head above the letters NSAA, the whole flanked by lightning runes.

Incredible, for Libyan officers had checked the room less than fifteen minutes before the two delegations arrived outside the building.

The ten figures assumed the classic firing posture – left legs

forward, bent at the knee, with the butts of machine pistols or automatic rifles tucked hard into their hips. Ten muzzles pointed towards the delegates already in the room, and at the remainder in the corridor outside. For a couple of seconds the scene was frozen. Then, as a wave of chaos and panic broke, the firing started.

The ten automatic weapons systematically hosed the doorway with fire. Bullets chewed through flesh and bone in a din magnified by the enclosed surroundings.

The burst of fire lasted for less than a minute, but when it stopped, all but six of the Soviet and Libyan delegates were either dead or fatally wounded. Only then did the Libyan troops and security officers go into action.

The assassination squad was exceptionally disciplined and well-trained. The fire fight – which lasted for some fifteen minutes – caught only three of the intruders while they remained in the room. The remainder escaped through the rear entrance, taking up defensive positions within the compound. The ensuing running battle claimed another twenty lives. At the end, the whole ten-man team lay dead with its victims, like pieces from some bizarre jigsaw puzzle.

At nine o'clock GMT the next morning, Reuters received a message by telephone. Within minutes the text was flashed to the media around the world.

The message read:

> In the early hours of yesterday morning, three light aircraft, flying low to escape radar detection, cut their engines and glided in over the well-guarded Military Trade Mission Complex just outside Tripoli, the capital of the Socialist People's Republic of Libya.
>
> An Active Service unit of the National Socialist Action Army landed, undetected, by parachute, within the grounds of the Complex.

> Later in the day, this unit struck a blow for International Fascism by executing a large number of people engaged in furthering the spread of the evil Communist ideology, which remains a threat to world peace and stability.
>
> It is with pride that we mourn the deaths of this Active Service unit while carrying out its noble task. The unit came from our élite First Division.
>
> Retribution for fraternisation, or trade, between Communist and non-Communist countries, or individuals, will be swift. We shall cut away the Communist bloc from the remainder of the free world.
>
> This is Communiqué Number One from the NSAA High Command.

At the time, it struck nobody as particularly sinister that the arms used by the NSAA group were all of Russian manufacture: six Kalashnikov RPK light machine guns and four of the RPK's little brothers – the light, and very effective, AKM assault rifle. Indeed, in a world well used to terrorism, the raid itself was one headline among many for the media, who put the NSAA down as a small group of Fascist fanatics.

A little under a month after what came to be known as 'the Tripoli Incident', five members of the British Communist Party held a dinner to entertain three visiting Russian Party members, who were on a goodwill mission to London.

The dinner was held in a house not far from Trafalgar Square, and coffee had just been served when the ringing of the front doorbell called the host from the table. A large amount of vodka, brought by the Russians, had been drunk by everybody present.

The four men standing outside the front door were dressed in paramilitary uniforms similar to those worn during the Tripoli Incident.

The host – a prominent and vociferous member of the British Communist Party – was shot dead on his own doorstep. The

remaining four Britons, and three Russians, were dispatched in a matter of seconds.

The killers disappeared and were not apprehended.

During the post mortems on these eight victims, it became clear that all had died from shots fired from Russian-manufactured weapons – probably Makarov or Stetchkin automatic pistols; the ammunition being identified as made in the USSR.

Communiqué Number Two, from the NSAA High Command, was issued at nine o'clock GMT the next day. This time, the Active Service unit was named as having belonged to 'the Adolf Hitler Kommando'.

In the following twelve months, no fewer than thirty 'incidents' involving multiple assassinations ordered by the NSAA High Command became headline news.

In West Berlin, Bonn, Paris, Washington, Rome, New York, London – for the second time – Madrid, Milan, and several Middle Eastern cities, prominent Communists were killed, together with people engaged in official, or merely friendly, discussions with them. Among those who died were three outspoken British and American trade unionists.

Members of the assassination squads also lost their lives, but no prisoners from the organisation were taken. On four occasions, NSAA men committed suicide to escape capture.

Each of the assassinations was quick, carried out with careful planning and a high standard of military precision. After every incident, the inevitable High Command Communiqué was issued, presented in the stilted language common to all ideologies. Each Communiqué gave details of the supposed Active Service unit involved, and the old names, such as the First Eichmann Kommando and the Heinrich Himmler SS Division, brought back ugly memories of the infamous Third Reich. To the world's police and security services, this was the only constant: the one clue. No evidence came from the bodies of dead NSAA

men and women. It was as though they had suddenly appeared, fully grown, born into the NSAA. Not a single corpse was identified. Forensic experts toiled over small hints; security agencies investigated their leads; missing persons bureaux followed similar traces. All ended at brick walls.

One newspaper sounded like a poster for some 1940s' movie:

> They come out of nowhere, kill, or die, or disappear – returning to their lairs. Have these followers of the dark Nazi Age returned from their graves, to wreak vengeance on their former conquerors? Until now, the bulk of urban terrorism has been motivated by leftist ideals. The self-styled and efficient NSAA brings with it a new, and highly disturbing, dimension.

Yet, in the shadows of that hidden, and secret, world of intelligence and security communities, people were beginning to stir uneasily as though awakening from bad dreams only to find that the dreams were reality. It began with exchanges of views, then, cautiously, of information. Finally they groped their way towards a strange, and unprecedented, alliance.

2

A LIKING FOR BLONDES

Long before he joined the Service, James Bond had used a particular system of mnemonics to keep telephone numbers in his head. Now he carried the numbers of a thousand or so people filed away, available for immediate recall, in the computer of his memory. Most of the numbers came under the heading of work, so were best not committed to writing in any case.

Paula Vacker was not work. Paula was strictly play and pleasure.

In his room at the Inter-Continental Hotel, at the northern end of Helsinki's broad arterial Mannerheimintie, Bond tapped out the telephone number. It rang twice and a girl answered in Finnish.

Bond spoke in respectful English. 'Paula Vacker, please.'

The Finnish operator lapsed easily into Bond's native tongue: 'Who shall I say is calling?'

'My name's Bond. James Bond.'

'One moment, Mr Bond. I'll see if Ms Vacker's available.'

Silence. Then a click and the voice he knew well. 'James? James, where are you?' The accent was only lightly touched by that sing-song lilt so common to the Scandinavians.

Bond said he was at the Inter-Continental.

'Here? Here in Helsinki?' She did not bother to disguise her pleasure.

'Yes,' Bond confirmed, 'here in Helsinki. Unless Finnair got it wrong.'

'Finnair are like homing pigeons,' she said with a laugh. 'They don't often get it wrong. But what a surprise. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?'

'Didn't know myself,' Bond lied. 'Sudden change in plan.' That at least was partly true. 'Just had to pass through Helsinki so I thought I'd stop over. A kind of whim.'

'Whim?'

'A caprice. A sudden fancy. How could I possibly pass through Helsinki without seeing Paula Beautiful?'

She laughed; the real thing. Bond imagined her head thrown back, and mouth open, showing the lovely teeth and delicate pink tongue. Paula Vacker's name suggested she had Swedish connections. A direct translation from Swedish would make her Paula Beautiful. The name was well-suited.

'Are you free tonight?' It would be a dull evening if she were not available.

She gave her special laugh again, full of humour and without that stridency some career women develop. 'For you, James, I'm always free. But never easy.' It was an old joke, first made by Bond himself. At the time it had been more than apt.

They had known each other for some five years now, having first met in London.

It was spring when it happened, the kind of London spring that makes the office girls look as if they enjoy going to work, and when the parks are yellow carpets of daffodils.

The days were just starting to lengthen, and there was a Foreign Office binge, to oil the wheels of international commerce. Bond was there on business – to watch for faces. In fact there had been words about it, for internal security was a matter for MI5, not for Bond's Service. However, the Foreign Office, under whose auspices the party was being held, had won the day. Grudgingly, 'Five' compromised, on the understanding they would have a couple of men there as well.

From a professional viewpoint the party was a flop. Paula, however, was another matter.

There was no question of Bond seeing her across a crowded room, you just could not miss her. It was as though no other girls had been invited; and the other girls did not like it one bit – especially the older ones and the Foreign Service *femmes fatales* who always haunt such parties.

Paula wore white. She had a tan needing no help from a bottle, a complexion which, if catching, would put all the make-up firms out of business, and thick blonde hair, so heavy that it seemed to fall straight back into place even in a force ten gale. If all this were not enough, she was slender, sexy, had large grey-flecked eyes, and lips shaped for one purpose.

Bond's first thoughts were wholly professional. What a flytrap she would make, he decided, knowing they had problems getting good flytraps in Finland. He stayed clear for a long time, making sure she had come unescorted. Then he moved in and introduced himself, saying that the Minister had asked him to look after her. Two years later, in Rome, Paula told him the Minister had himself tried it on quite early in the evening – before Mrs Minister arrived.

She was in London for a week. On that first evening Bond took her to a late supper at the Ritz, which she found 'quaint'. At her hotel, Paula gently gave him the elbow – king size.

Bond laid siege. First, he tried to impress, but she did not like the Connaught, the Inn on the Park, Tiberio's, the Dorchester, the Savoy, or the Royal Garden Roof; while tea at Brown's she found merely 'amusing'. He was just about to take her on the Tramps' and Annabel's circuit when she found Au Savarin in Charlotte Street for herself. It was 'her', and the *patron* came and sat at their table, towards the end of meals, so that they could swap risqué stories. Bond was not so sure about that.

They became firm friends very quickly, discovering mutual interests – in sailing, jazz, and the works of Eric Ambler. There was also another sport which finally came to full fruition on the fourth evening. Bond, whose standards were known to be exacting, admitted she deserved the gold star with oak leaves. In turn

she awarded him the oak leaf cluster. He was not sure about that either.

Over the following years they stayed very good friends, and – to put it mildly – kissing cousins. They met, often by accident, in places as diverse as New York and the French port of Dieppe, where he had last seen her the previous autumn. This night in Helsinki would be Bond's first chance to see Paula on her home ground.

'Dinner?' he asked.

'If I can choose the restaurant.'

'Don't you always?'

'You want to pick me up?'

'That, and other things.'

'My place. Six-thirty? You've got the address?'

'Engraved on my heart, pretty Paula.'

'You say that to all the girls.'

'Mostly, but I'm honest about it; and you know I have a special liking for blondes.'

'You're a traitor, staying at the Inter-Continental. Why aren't you staying Finnish, at the Hesperia?'

'Because you get electric shocks off the lift buttons there.'

'You get them at the Inter-Continental too. It's to do with the cold and the central heating . . .'

'. . . and the carpets. I know. But these are more expensive electric shocks, and I'm not paying. I can charge it, so I may as well have luxurious electric shocks.'

'Be very careful what you touch. Any metals give shocks indoors here, at this time of the year. Be careful in the bathroom, James.'

'I'll wear rubber shoes.'

'It wasn't your feet I was thinking about. So glad you had a whim, James. See you at six-thirty', and she rang off before he could come up with a smooth reply.

Outside, the temperature hovered around twenty-five degrees Centigrade below. Bond stretched his muscles, then relaxed,

taking his gunmetal case from the bedside table and lighting a cigarette – one of the 'specials' made for him, by arrangement with H. Simmons of Burlington Arcade.

The room was warm and well-insulated, and there was a glow of immense satisfaction as he exhaled a stream of smoke towards the ceiling. The job certainly had its compensations. Only that morning Bond had left temperatures of forty below, for his true reason for being in Helsinki was connected with a recent trip to the Arctic Circle.

January is not the most pleasant time of year to visit the Arctic. If, however, you have to do some survival training of a clandestine nature in severe winter conditions, the Finnish area of the Arctic Circle is as good a place as any.

The Service believed in keeping its field officers in peak condition and trained in all modern techniques. Hence Bond's disappearance, at least once a year, to work out with 22 Special Air Service Regiment, near Hereford; and his occasional trips to Poole in Dorset to be updated on equipment and tactics used by the Royal Marine Special Boat Squadron.

Even though the old élite Double-0 section, with its attendant 'licence to kill in the course of duty', had now been phased out of the Service, Bond still found himself stuck with the role of 007. The gruff Chief of Service known to all as M had been most specific about it. 'As far as I'm concerned, you will remain 007. I shall take full responsibility for you, and you will, as ever, accept orders and assignments only from me. There are moments when this country needs a trouble-shooter – a blunt instrument – and by Jove it's going to have one.'

In more official terms, Bond was what the American Service speaks of as a 'singleton' – a roving case officer who is given free rein to carry out special tasks, such as the ingenious undercover work he had undertaken during the Falkland Islands conflict in 1982. Then he had even appeared – unidentifiable – on a television newsflash, but that had passed like all things.

In order to keep Bond at a high, proficient level, M usually

managed to set up at least one gruelling field exercise each year. This time it had been more cold climate work, and the orders had come quickly, leaving Bond little time to prepare for the ordeal.

During the winter, members of the SAS units trained regularly among the snows of Norway. This year, as an added hazard, M had arranged that Bond should embark on a training exercise within the Arctic Circle, under cover, and with no permission either sought or granted from the country in which he would operate – Finland.

The operation, which had no sinister, or even threatening, implications, entailed a week of survival exercises, in the company of a pair of SAS men and two officers of the SBS.

These military and Marine personnel would have a tougher time than Bond, for their part would demand two clandestine border crossings – from Norway into Sweden, then, still secretly, over the Finnish border to meet up with Bond in Lapland.

There, for seven days, the group would 'live off the belt', as it was called: surviving with only the bare necessities carried on their specially designed belts. Their mission was survival in difficult terrain, while remaining unseen and unidentified.

This week would be followed by a further four days, with Bond as leader, in which a photographic and sound-stealing run would be made along Finland's border with the Soviet Union. After that, they would separate – the SAS and SBS men to be picked up by helicopter in a remote area, while Bond took another course.

There was no difficulty about cover in Finland, as far as Bond was concerned. He had yet to test-drive his own Saab Turbo – 'The Silver Beast' as he called it – in harsh winter conditions.

Saab-Scania hold an exacting Winter Driving Course each year, within the Arctic Circle, near the Finnish ski resort of Rovaniemi. Arranging an invitation to take part in the course was easy, requiring only a couple of telephone calls. Within twenty-four hours Bond had his car – complete with all its

secret 'extras', built in at his own expense by Communications Control Systems – freighted to Finland. Bond then flew, via Helsinki, to Rovaniemi, to meet up with driving experts, like his old friend Erik Carlsson, and the dapper Simo Lampinen.

The Driving Course took only a few days, after which – with a word to the massive Erik Carlsson, who promised to keep his eye on the Silver Beast – Bond left the hotel near Rovaniemi in the early hours of a bitterly cold morning.

The winter clothing, he thought, would do little for his image with the ladies back home. Damart thermal underwear is scarcely conducive to certain activities. Over long johns, he wore a track suit, heavy rollneck sweater, padded ski pants and jacket, while his feet were firmly laced into Mukluk boots. A thermal hood, scarf, woollen hat and goggles protected his face; Damart gloves inside leather gauntlets did the same for his hands. A small pack contained the necessities, including his own version of the SAS/SBS webbing belt.

Bond trudged through snow, which came up to his knees in the easier parts, taking care not to stray from the narrow track he had reconnoitred during the daylight hours. A wrong move to left or right could land him in snowdrifts deep enough to cover a small car.

The snow scooter was exactly where the briefing officers said it would be. Nobody was going to ask questions about how it got there. Snow scooters are difficult machines to manhandle with the engine off, and it took Bond a good ten minutes to heave and pull this one from its hiding place beneath solid and unyielding fir branches. He then hauled it to the top of a long slope which ran downwards for almost a kilometre. A push and the machine moved forward, giving Bond just enough time to leap on to the saddle and thrust his legs into the protective guards.

Silently, the scooter slid down the long slope, finally coming to a stop as the weight and momentum ran out. Though sound carried easily across the snow, he was now far enough from the

hotel to start the engine safely – after taking a compass bearing, and checking his map with a shaded torch. The little motor came to life. Bond opened the throttle, engaged the gear and began his journey. It took twenty-four hours to meet up with his colleagues.

Rovaniemi had been an ideal choice. From the town one can move quickly north to the more desolate areas. It is also only a couple of fast hours' travel on a snow scooter to the more accessible points along the Russo-Finnish border; to places like Salla, the scene of great battles during the war between the Russians and Finns in 1939–40. Farther north, the frontier zone becomes more inhospitable.

During summer, this part of the Arctic Circle is not unpleasant; but in winter, when blizzards, deep-freeze conditions, and heavy snow take over, the country can be treacherous, and wretched, for the unwary.

When it was all over and the two exercises with the SAS and SBS completed, Bond expected to be exhausted, in need of rest, sleep, and relaxation of the kind he could only find in London. During the worst moments of the ordeal his thoughts had been, in fact, of the comfort to be found in his Chelsea flat. He was, then, quite unprepared to discover that, on returning to Rovaniemi a couple of weeks later, his body surged with an energy and sense of fitness he had not experienced for a considerable time.

Arriving back in the early hours, he slipped into the Ounasvaara Polar Hotel – where Saab had their Winter Driving Headquarters – left a message for Erik Carlsson saying he would send full instructions regarding the movement of the Silver Beast, then hitched a lift to the airport and boarded the next flight to Helsinki. At that point, his plan was to catch a connection straight on to London.

It was only as the DC9–50 was making its approach into Helsinki's Vantaa Airport, at around 12.30 pm, that James Bond

thought of Paula Vacker. The thought grew, assisted no doubt by his new-found sense of well-being and physical sharpness.

By the time the aircraft touched down, Bond's plans were changed completely. There was no set time for him to be back in London; he was owed leave anyway, even though M had instructed him to return as soon as he could get away from Finland. Nobody was really going to miss him for a couple of days.

From the airport, he took a cab directly to the Inter-Continental and checked in. As soon as the porter had brought his case to the room, Bond threw himself on to the bed and made his telephone call to Paula. Six-thirty at her place. He smiled with anticipation.

There was no way that Bond could know that the simple act of calling up an old girlfriend, and asking her out to dinner, was going to change his life drastically over the next few weeks.