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Licence to Kill

Written by John Gardner

Based on the screenplay by Michael G. Wilson and Richard Maibaum

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LICENCE TO KILL

John Gardner

Based on the screenplay
by Michael G. Wilson
and Richard Maibaum



An Orion paperback

First published in Great Britain in 1989
by Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.
This paperback edition published in 2012
by Orion Books Ltd,
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane,
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-4091-3576-0

Typeset at The Spartan Press Ltd,
Lymington, Hants

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CR0 4YY

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

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1

GET ME TO THE CHURCH ON TIME

To use Royal Navy slang, James Bond was *adrift*. His old friend Felix Leiter, one-time member of the CIA, and former Pinkerton agent, would have said he was playing hookey, while the big black man, known as Sharky, summed it up. 'You just tell 'em you gone fishin' James,' he said. 'Lord, I wish I was goin' fishin' 'stead of bein' dressed up like a monkey.' He ran his fingers under the stiff white collar, then turned up the air-conditioning of the Bentley.

All three men were dressed in morning suits: pinstripe pants, stiff collars with dove-grey cravats, grey waistcoats and black swallowtail coats. Top hats rested on their laps, and three buttonholes – white roses, wrapped in silver foil speared by pins – sat in a container balanced on the ledge above the polished burr walnut fascia of the dashboard.

'When they teach you to drive these things,' Bond had told the agent now at the wheel, 'they say you should always think of a glass of champagne standing above the dash. The trick is never to spill a drop . . . Whoops, there goes half a glass!'

'James, you have got . . . ?' Felix began, not even smiling.

'The ring?' Bond smiled, producing the little box and flicking it open to reveal the solid gold band. 'That's the fourth time you've asked me, Felix. You're as nervous as a Victorian virgin and you've been through all this before.'

Leiter grunted. 'They say it's worse the second time.' His face creased into a smile. 'Anyway, I've got other things on my mind.'

'Other things?' Bond raised his eyebrows. 'You're marrying an old friend of mine, Felix. Della Churchill and I go back a long way, so beware.'

'We go back a long way as well, James, so you should know I get edgy when the job intrudes on normal life.'

'What could be more important than your wedding day?' They were cruising over Seven Mile Bridge, part of the oversea highway that runs for over one hundred miles from Miami right down the Florida Keys to Key West, where Felix Leiter was now stationed with the Drug Enforcement Agency. In a little over two hours he would be standing next to the beautiful Della in front of the altar of St Paul's church on Duval Street which was better known for its bars and restaurants than the church.

'Oh, nothing, I suppose.' Leiter's voice did not carry any conviction.

'Come on, Felix, what is it?'

'Well, I guess it's Sanchez.'

'Franz Sanchez? The drugs king?'

Leiter nodded. 'For the past five years, I've been waiting for him to set foot on soil or sand where US law can deal with him. But the callous SOB rarely moves out of Central America.'

'What's that got to do with today: with your wedding?'

Leiter scratched his head. 'You remember the phone-call I got during that toxic stag party you threw for me last night?'

'Only vaguely.' Bond smiled again. 'I think I got bitten by a swarm of insects of the Pommery variety.'

'Well, just take my word for it. I got a call.'

'And?' Bond was quietly dragging the London file on Franz Sanchez into the forefront of his mind. The British Secret Intelligence Service felt it necessary to keep files on all kinds of villains: particularly those connected with terrorism or drugs, for large-scale drug dealers could easily be used to finance terrorism. Franz Sanchez, so named because of a supposed conjunction between a fascist German woman and a wealthy Panamanian businessman.

'There's a chance that he'll be lured into the open any time now.'

In his head, Bond saw the photographs of the man. Tall, dark, undoubtedly handsome in a brutal sort of way and, it was said, one of the wealthiest men in the world, all his money and power emanating from the huge drug distributing market he controlled from his hide-out in the Central American city of Isthmus. Bond recalled one note in the file which said, *Sanchez is a man who believes that anyone who opposes him can either be bought or killed*. In other words, he possessed that most dangerous of psychological defects *folie de grandeur*, fuelled by the power he wielded through drugs and money.

'Why lured now?'

'You've read his file?'

Bond nodded.

'Then you know of his lady friend.'

'Miss Thing . . . Not Miss World . . . Miss . . .'

'Miss Galaxy. Star beauty queen. The delectable Ms Lupe Lamora, though I don't believe *that* name for a moment.'

'Quite a lady.'

'Yes, and darned stupid as well. She's left him. Gone off with one of his former business partners. Guy called Alvarez.'

'That figures,' Bond shrugged.

'They're a dangerous mix, and Lupe's elopement with Alvarez is enough to flush Sanchez out.'

Bond laughed. 'I know what I'd rather be doing, Felix. I'd prefer a honeymoon with Della to the hurly-burly of the Sanchez-Alvarez-Lamora triangle. This is dull talk on your wedding day.' He glanced out to the left and the Old Seven Mile Bridge which ran almost parallel with the structure over which they travelled: the longest stretch of the highway to run directly over the ocean on this hundred-mile-plus highway, which was the beginning, or end, of US Route One.

It all looked tranquil enough, though Bond had reason to remember the dangers that could lurk along the Florida Keys.

For no particular reason he twisted, glancing back and there, almost on cue, he saw the white predatory shape of a helicopter approaching them fast from behind.

A second later they all heard the clatter of the engine, and, within seconds the beast was flying alongside to their right – a big S-61B with US coastguard in black against the white side of the machine. The door was open and a figure smiled down, waving and holding a printed 'Follow Me' notice.

Felix Leiter waved back.

'Friend of yours?' Bond asked.

Leiter was sitting bolt upright. 'Yea, my DEA partner at Key West. Hawkins.'

Quietly Sharky muttered an 'Uh-oh.'

They drove on for about a mile, watching the helicopter which had moved forward, speeding low over the bridge, then hovering and landing. By the time the Bentley arrived Hawkins was out of the door clutching a pile of papers.

Felix Leiter made a quick movement with his gloved left hand, expertly adjusting the mechanism of his artificial leg. Bond felt a wave of bleakness as he always did when he saw his old friend manipulate the false limbs, for the shark that had so mutilated Leiter a long time ago now, had been meant for him and, in a strange way, Bond felt responsible.

The mood passed as he saw how nimbly Felix moved towards Hawkins. The disabilities were not apparent unless you knew about them.

Both Hawkins, a lean, tall and tanned man, and Leiter were already in animated conversation by the time Bond and Sharky reached them.

'He's out,' Leiter laughed with pleasure. 'The bastard's left his lair.' His finger stabbed towards the map held by Hawkins. 'There,' he said with undisguised glee, the finger hovering over the tiny island of Cray Cay in the Northern Bahamas. 'Not far as these things fly. If we hustle we can catch him.'

Bond flinched, 'Felix, your bride . . .'

But Leiter was not even listening. 'You got everything?' You could feel the anxiety and static.

'You betcha,' Hawkins grinned. 'Green light from Nassau; Indictment; Arrest Warrant; Extradition Request; and Mullins here for extra muscle.' Mullins, a very large black agent, nodded, smiling down from the chopper's door.

'You're leaving nothing to chance, then?' Bond's prepared sarcasm was lost on Leiter, who was obviously in a very serious mood and merely shook his head violently.

'Damned right I'm not. Sanchez is the prize and we're going to get him at last.'

'And Della?' Bond put a hand on Leiter's arm, feeling the hard metal of the artificial wrist under his fingers.

'Oh, James, for God's sake explain it to her. Just ask her to hang on. With luck and a prevailing wind we'll be back. You'll get me to the church on time.'

'No way, Felix. You're going to be two hours late at best.'

'Well, just tell her to wait.' Leiter was adamant. 'She'll understand. She knows about duty.'

Bond shook his head. 'I wouldn't bank on it. Nor am I going to face Della. I'd rather come along with you. Just for the ride, of course.'

Sharky shrugged and began to walk back to the Bentley. Over his shoulder he mouthed, 'I'll tell her. But, for pity's sake, you move your asses. Right?'

Leiter was already climbing into the helicopter. He looked down at Bond following him. 'You're only coming as an observer, you got that?'

'Naturally,' Bond's face was a mask. 'Would I try to interfere?'

Within seconds the helicopter was lifting off, setting course, flying at full stretch. Below, Sharky looked up unhappily as he drove on towards Key West. He knew Della's temper and, like Bond, would rather face the ruthless and violent danger of Franz Sanchez than the scalding tongue of Della Churchill.

*

Cray Cay supported a small resort community, one airstrip and a few scattered larger clapboard houses. The nearest, and largest, of these stood only a few hundred yards from the end of the airstrip where Franz Sanchez's white-liveried Gates Learjet landed, then taxied back to the threshold, turning in readiness for a quick take-off. Several light aircraft stood, unmanned, around the threshold, and there was a little red Piper Cub parked near the house.

The S-61B coastguard helicopter was only thirty miles away as Sanchez unhurriedly climbed from the jet, looked around and sniffed the air like a man savouring a new and delightful morning. He was followed down the deployed steps by his close henchman, known to everyone simply as Perez, and a pair of well-chosen hoods – Braun, a German who had a price on his head back in his native Berlin; and Dario, squat, greasy and generally unpleasant.

The two pilots made their way back from the flight deck and Sanchez signalled for them to stay close to the aircraft as a jeep rumbled to a halt nearby. The driver, a short man built in the same mould as the other heavies, addressed Sanchez with deference. 'They're in the house over there, patron,' pointing at the large single storey construction. 'The woman and Alvarez're inside. They have one guard, but he's usually drunk or asleep.'

'And which is it at the moment?' Sanchez spoke quietly, radiating calm. To hear him you would not have thought of him as a man of violence.

'Asleep, patron. On the steps: you can see him from here. And I think the others are asleep also. They were up until four this morning. At least lights were burning until then. I stayed on watch as you ordered.'

'You've done well. It won't be forgotten. Follow us after we go in.' He nodded at the man in the jeep. Then, to the others, 'It's a short walk, and a pity to wake them. However . . .' he jerked his head in the direction of the house.

A few yards from the steps Sanchez motioned to Perez,

nodding towards the sleeping guard and sliding a finger across his own throat. Perez smiled and moved ahead, his hand reaching into the inside of his jacket from which he extracted a short length of cord.

The sleeping man neither heard nor felt a thing. Perez looped the cord around the guard's neck in the classic garrotting motion, pulling quickly and hard. It was so well done that the man's neck was broken before he suffered any pain from a slow strangulation.

Quietly, with Sanchez in the lead, they went up the steps and into the house. For a moment, Sanchez stood in the cool of the hallway, as though instinctively seeking out his prey, finally jerking his head towards a door to the left. Silently he opened it and entered the room.

Alvarez slept on the far side of the bed, his hair tousled and his face in repose. Sanchez prided himself on his knowledge of human frailty, and he understood the younger man's motives. Women had always been Alvarez's weak point. Often Franz Sanchez had told him they would lead to his death. As for the beautiful Lupe, whose long dark hair spread across the pillow like a thick question mark, well, she could be forgiven. After all she was only a woman and women had a habit of falling for younger men with glib tongues, and a good line of chat. Sanchez had often remarked to Alvarez that he should not promise his women so much, 'Your problem, my friend,' he had said, 'is that you always have to tell them you love them. It is a great folly this, because they all have a tendency to believe you. One day you will say this to the wrong woman.'

That day, he thought, had now come.

His eyes moved back to the sleeping man. There was a pistol within reach on the bedside table. Quietly Sanchez drew his own automatic and began to whisper. 'Alvarez . . . Wake up . . . Alvarez . . . time to start work.' Then, louder, 'Alvarez!'

The sleeping man's eyes popped open, fear crossing his face as he locked eyes with Sanchez. Then he moved, grabbing out towards the night table.

Sanchez fired twice and the table leapt into the air, sending the weapon skittering across the room. Perez and Braun, taking their cue from their chief, hauled the young man from the bed, holding him in an arm lock, so that he stood naked between them, his eyes full of the terror reflected by the screams coming from the now wide-awake Lupe.

'Hush, pretty one. Ssssh.' Sanchez put away his pistol and stepped towards her. 'Don't be afraid. It's me . . . Franz. I wouldn't harm you. You know that. Punish you, perhaps, but never harm you.' Then his eyes flicked up towards Alvarez who, in spite of the warmth of the room, was shivering between Dario and Braun.

'What did he promise you, honey?' he asked Lupe. 'Did he promise you his heart?'

The silence was unbearable: the group frozen like some waxwork tableau. Then Sanchez spoke again, harsh and commanding. 'Give the lady what our friend Alvarez promised her.'

Dario and Braun looked at him blankly.

'Give her this fool's heart.'

Dario's eyes widened, seeming to plead for a moment.

'Do it! Now!' snapped Sanchez.

From under his jacket Dario produced a long serrated hunting knife.

'Out there!' Sanchez nodded towards the door through which his two hoodlums hustled the now whimpering Alvarez.

Taking three steps away from the bed, Sanchez closed the door, then returned to Lupe who also shook with terror, sitting bolt upright with only the flimsy sheet held in front of her to cover her breasts, which showed clearly through the material: her nipples erect as though the terror and violence aroused her.

'Franz . . .' she managed to say, her voice cracked, the throat dry with terror. 'Franz, I didn't mea . . .'

Sanchez smiled down at her, ruffling her thick hair with his hand. 'It's okay, baby, we all make mistakes,' his voice soothing.

'I only . . .' she began again.

'Sssssh, my dear. Not a word. Not another word.' His hand twisted on her head, so that she turned her whole body to relieve the pressure. The sheet fell away exposing the wonderful shoulders and the slim curve of her back. Her skin, Sanchez often thought, looked to have the texture of silk.

Sanchez slid his right hand inside his jacket again, drawing a whip from his belt. It had been fashioned from the long tail of a stingray and he laid it, almost lovingly across Lupe's naked back before lifting it and bringing it down with a terrible crack. The girl shuddered and screamed, again and again as Sanchez brought the whip down covering her smooth back with ugly bloody stripes, painting a picture of surrealist violence on the canvas of her skin. Yet, even as she sobbed and screamed with pain, Lupe's voice was drowned by the blood-curdling shrieks of Alvarez in the hallway.

A few seconds later, the screaming stopped and the unmistakable sound of a helicopter's engine, growing louder, rumbled and clattered from the sky.

Sanchez flung the girl away from him across the bed. 'Get some clothes on. Quick. We must move.'

The coastguard chopper came in low over the beaches, then crossed the airstrip, the pilot juggling with the cyclic and collective controls, his feet moving on the rudder bars like a dancer so that the large machine seemed to stand on its aft rotor, then turned to sweep back across the area.

'There,' yelled Hawkins above the chattering din of the rotors, his hand outstretched. They could all see the jeep in front of the low house and, as they passed, something was thrown from one of the far windows.

'Jesus,' Leiter swallowed hard. 'That looked like a mutilated body. Head for the Learjet.'

Hawkins made signals to the pilot who turned again and brought his machine hovering in to block any attempted take-off by the jet.

As they reached the ground, Leiter, Hawkins and the agent

called Mullins, who had done nothing but smile amiably since the take-off from Seven Mile Bridge, grabbed at the rack of weapons fitted to the starboard side of the cabin, each selecting an M16 carbine. Leiter saw the look in Bond's eyes and, smiling, passed him an automatic pistol. 'Only if absolutely necessary,' he cautioned.

Bond shrugged and checked the magazine and action of the Browning 9mm.

Mullins was first out of the door, followed by Leiter who shouted that he wanted Sanchez alive. 'I have to take him back breathing,' he called after Mullins whose bulk was already in the doorway of the jet. Hawkins covered the two pilots who quietly raised their hands, showing they were neither armed nor looking for trouble.

'Nobody in the airplane.' Mullins returned, and in the breath of silence that followed, they all heard the noise of the jeep, audible above the slowly-turning rotors.

'That'll be them!' Bond pointed to a dust cloud moving fast from the direction of the house.

'Upstairs!' Leiter was already scrabbling back into the chopper which was hovering as Bond, bringing up the rear, eased himself to the door.

The jeep was a couple of hundred yards away, weaving through the dusty ground between patches of dark-green undergrowth. The vehicle swung, skidding dangerously from side to side as the chopper, nose down, approached low, trying to block its escape.

They could see several men aboard, and Felix put a few rounds from his M16 in front of the vehicle. Instead of stopping the jeep, the shots brought a hail of fire from its occupants. Inside the helicopter the agents flinched as the thuds and metallic whines battered at the fuselage. The pilot spun the machine on its axis and began to hover, descending in front of the jeep. At the height of the firefight, nobody saw Sanchez roll free of the

jeep into the scrub, turning, crouching and running, bent close to the ground, back towards the house.

As the chopper came to about ten feet from the ground, Bond, who had been standing in the doorway, leapt out, rolled and brought the pistol up in a one-handed grip, loosing off three sets of double shots, aimed at the wheels.

Two of the tyres exploded and the jeep went into a long uncontrolled skid, slamming sideways, starting to roll, then ending up on its side.

As the jeep came to a standstill with a grinding crunch, so Bond moved forward, both arms outstretched and the pistol a simple extension of his hands. He fired another couple of shots as he glimpsed figures flitting into the undergrowth, shouting a 'Come on? This way!' to the others.

There was a girl in the jeep. Alive, conscious but looking shocked and with tear stains damp on her cheeks. Bond rested his hands on her shoulders, asking if she needed help. But the girl simply glanced towards the undergrowth into which the men had disappeared and shook her head.

'You need a doctor,' he said, looking closer. There was something very wrong with this beautiful young woman.

'Keep your hands off me. Get away. Get right away. Don't you dare touch me!' she spat at Bond, and at that moment Hawkins reached the jeep.

'They're in the bushes somewhere.' Bond let go of the girl and took two steps towards the undergrowth.

'Stop!' The shout was from Leiter who was signalling the helicopter forward. 'There! There!' He pointed, and, for the first time they saw, and heard, the little Piper Cub which had been parked near the house. It was gathering speed and the pilot raised his hand in a salute.

'Sanchez!' Leiter was white with anger. 'We've lost him. He can be in Cuban airspace in twenty minutes.'

The helicopter reached them just as the Cub became airborne.

'We can outrun him in this.' Bond was already clambering

back into the helicopter. To the pilot he shouted, 'Can you keep up with that Piper?'

The pilot nodded and the machine began to rise again.

'You're supposed to be an observer, James. What're you trying to do, get yourself killed?'

'If I don't get you to the church within a reasonable margin of time, Della's going to kill me anyway,' he said with an almost studied nonchalance. 'And in twenty minutes you'll be right on time, only it's going to take us at least an hour and a half, not counting stopping time to pick up Sanchez. Prepare for squalls, Felix.'

Leiter's brow creased as he saw Bond reach out for the winching gear, complete with hook and line.

'What the hell're you doing?'

'Just what Sharky advised. I'm going fishing. Sanchez's just below us now. I'm going to give you a wedding present. Operate the winch, Felix, and instruct the pilot.' With a smile, Bond swung out on the line, wrapping it around his leg with a practised flick.

The airflow caught his body and he swung backwards in a stomach-rolling twist. Glancing down, the world twirled, spinning, and Bond wondered what in heaven's name he thought he was doing. This was not only damned uncomfortable, but also bloody dangerous. Some forty feet below him was the Cub's red tail-fin, and he motioned to Felix who started to winch him down.

Slowly the light aircraft grew larger and Bond began to be caught in both its slipstream and the downdraught of the rotors. Below the aircraft there was the best part of a thousand-foot drop into the sea. He felt his hair being blown around, and it was necessary to close his eyes because of the forces eddying about his face.

Bond grabbed towards the airplane's tail, missed, swung sideways, grabbed again and missed again.

Behind him there was a flapping noise which distracted him

until he realised it was simply the tails of his morning coat blowing and cracking in the wind. In spite of the fear that engulfed him, Bond began to laugh. He was thinking that he must look a ludicrous sight, like some movie stuntman doing a particularly daring act for the cameras.

Suddenly the chopper seemed to put on speed and Bond threw his arms around the top of the tail-fin, his body crashing painfully into the rudder.

In the cockpit, Sanchez felt the weight and fought the controls, deftly tinkering with the trim tabs to restore the airplane's balance.

But Bond had begun to inch himself down the rudder, making the plane yaw to and fro, his body swinging from side to side as Sanchez made sharp corrections. Bond traversed lower, feeling for the towing-ring set behind the tail wheel.

His hands were sore, burning with pain, and he fought desperately to pull at the line which hung below his foot, trailing backwards in the wind with the hook jerking at the rope. It seemed to take hours, a few minutes in reality, to draw the line upwards and grasp the hook, one arm wrapped around the tail, the other hand on the hook, fighting the pressure until he had brought it up and around the Piper Cub's tow-ring. But, at last it was done. Bond hung on, his head straining upwards trying to see if Felix and the pilot had the right idea.

They had. The big helicopter slowed and the rope took the strain. Bond, clinging on like the proverbial grim death, prayed that there had been no parachute in the Cub's cockpit. Not that it would have mattered much. Jumping into the sea in these waters would almost certainly mean a blow-out for the sharks.

Sanchez would have been a fool if he had not worked out what the helicopter and its crew were attempting. He had bucked the aircraft from side to side, tried reducing power and then slamming the little Lycoming engine through the gate. Nobody, he thought, could possibly remain on the tail, but he continued to feel the drag increasing. Then, to his horror, he

found the aircraft was beginning to wallow. Even with the engine at full throttle, the controls had become mushy and the airspeed began to bleed-off steadily.

At stalling point, Sanchez, who was not known for fear, cried out. The controls went slack and the horizon began to rise above him as the airplane's nose dropped sickeningly, then stopped, the ground below swinging and spinning, yet the force of gravity having no effect.

It took Sanchez a full minute to realise that he was sitting in an airplane suspended from a helicopter's winch which was slowly being drawn upwards.

The latter action was only to allow Bond to get back inside the helicopter to the jubilant trio of Leiter, Hawkins and Mullins.

Once he was through the door, they let the line out a little so that, when they returned to the coastguard helipad, on the north-west side of the town, they could dump the plane softly on to the tarmac.

When they did arrive back, people poured out of hotels and shops to watch this strange sight of a light aircraft swinging, suspended under the helicopter.

People drinking in Sloppy Joe's and Captain Tony's came out on to the sidewalks; folks who had been patiently waiting in church for the wedding, stampeded for the door as the news passed through St Paul's like a brush fire; the good ol' boys sitting around Garrison Bight, and the smart young people around the modern Marina could hardly believe their eyes.

'Airplane wreck, I guess,' said one of the good ol' boys.

'If'n God had meant us to fly he'd've given us jet engines 'stead of assholes,' another good ol' boy spat accurately into the gutter.

Outside St Paul's church, Sharky pleaded with the beautiful Ms Della Churchill who had, only minutes before, called the whole wedding off.

'They're here, Della. Just twice more around the block and they'll be sitting up front there, with the preacher ready to go.'

Della took a deep breath, then relented. 'Okay, only twice more though.'

Sharky leapt into the Bentley telling the driver to go like hell. Over his shoulder he shouted back at Della, 'Twice more. Slowly, though. Very slowly.'

As it was, the future Mrs Leiter went around four more times at a crawl. Only then were Felix Leiter and his best man, James Bond, in place, their white roses pinned correctly, though their morning clothes looked decidedly the worse for wear.

So, almost three hours late, the strains of the bridal chorus from *Lohengrin* piped out and Della, an irritated glint in her eyes behind the veil, came beautifully down the aisle to go through the wedding ceremony at last.

'Well, they got me to the church, almost on time,' Felix said later on their way back to his delightful gingerbread house which had cost him a fortune, his entire CIA kiss-off money together with accrued interest.

2

UNWANTED GUESTS

James Bond found himself a quiet corner in the main room of Felix Leiter's house, nursing a glass of champagne, running his eyes over the guests, looking for what he thought of as 'likely winners'. He had spotted one earlier, outside the church. A tall and striking brunette dressed in a crisp pink suit. Yet, somehow the suit was not right, as though the girl preferred to slouch about in jeans and a T-shirt. It was only a quick impression that Bond could never have explained, but, as lovely as she was, the girl seemed out of place and, in his constant inquisitive hunt for the secret of women, he was anxious to talk with her.

His eyes searched the room, but the girl was missing so he began to review possible second choices. It was not as though he had all the time in the world, for he was already late on site for an assignment M, his chief, had authorised a week ago.

Around him the wedding party shrieked, laughed, babbled and appeared to be going true to form. He wandered over to the buffet where white-coated waiters assisted in dispensing plates of jumbo prawns, accompanied by the usual hot red sauce; salmon, both cold and smoked, and a great assortment of salads. Bond saw there were puddings also and eyed the local Key Lime pie which, if not a gourmet dish, he always found cleared the palate wonderfully.

Two girls, talking animatedly about diets and what they dared eat, stood together on his left, so Bond quietly intruded with a remark about the millions of calories that lay in front of them.

They seemed happy enough after he had introduced himself and they, in turn, announced themselves to be Lizzie Owen, a short, bubbly and attractive young woman who turned out to be an artist, and a shy blonde who simply gave her name as Pat. Bond marked the latter as possibly his best chance for the evening and began the tedious business of small-talk, leading gently to more serious matters. Half an hour later he had discovered that Pat had come to Key West for a week, en route for Australia. That had been nine years ago.

'Some people regard this place as the really tacky end of Florida,' she told him. 'But it has a strange sense of unreality. It's a place of escape. Mind you, I really don't know how people like Hemingway ever managed to get any creative work done here.'

Bond was about to make some light remark about Key West being different in Hemingway's time, when he saw Della, looking radiant and very happy, heading in his direction. As she approached she raised her right hand displaying a long and lethal cake knife.

'James!'

Bond thought he had rarely seen her so happy. He put his hands up in mock surrender, looking at the knife. 'Take whatever you want. Just don't do your Anthony Perkins imitation.'

She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him hard on the lips.

'Hey, hey. You're a happily married woman now.'

'Just claiming my rights. Bride gets to kiss the best man.' She was the tiniest bit tipsy.

Bond held her away from him, his arms resting on her shoulders. 'I thought it was the other way around; but no matter. Anything goes.'

'It certainly does.' She brandished the knife. 'It's time to cut the cake, but where's the groom? I'll tell you where the groom is; he's closeted in his study, and with another woman.'

'The cad. Want me to get him?'

'Seriously, James, could you? We really should cut the cake.'

'Anything for a lady, especially if she's got a knife.' He told Lizzie and Pat not to go away, quietly took the cake knife from Della, then went up the stairs to Felix's study. Reaching the door he tapped and walked straight in.

Felix was sitting at his desk in the centre of the room, operating his computer. Next to him, leaning over his shoulder to look at the screen, was the delightful brunette he had seen outside the church.

They both looked up in surprise, but neither showed any sign of guilt.

'I'm sorry, I didn't know you had . . .' Bond began.

'Come on in, James, we're almost finished.' He turned to the girl and handed her a sealed envelope. 'There you go, Pam.' Then, turning to Bond, 'James, meet Pam.'

Pam gave him an almost curt, utterly disinterested, nod. She touched Leiter on the shoulder and said, 'Goodbye, then, Felix. See you around.' She went to the door without another look at Bond who gave his old friend a quizzical look.

Leiter smiled, 'Strictly in the line of duty, James. Nice girl but business only.'

'Business or not, you've got a house full of guests and they're waiting to cut the cake and make lame speeches with slightly risqué jokes. In other words, Della's on the warpath and sent me to get you.'

Leiter turned to his computer and performed one keystroke. 'Okay, let me just save this and I'll be ready to face anyone. Take a seat, I'm afraid the DEA never sleeps and they want a full report yesterday.'

Bond sat, knowing that, even on a wedding day, people like Felix – and himself come to that – had to put their jobs and duty first. Leiter was still talking, 'I've a great deal to thank you for my old friend. Without you, we wouldn't have got Sanchez. I think I told you he hasn't been out of his home base in a long time.'

Bond grunted. 'You couldn't extradite him from Central America?'

Leiter shook his head. 'No way. That guy's intimidated, killed, or bribed most of the government officials from here to Chile. Down there, they have only one law – Sanchez's law, *Plomo o Plata*.'

'Lead or silver,' Bond quietly translated.

'Right.' Leiter closed down his computer and was about to get up when the door burst open and a tough-looking, grey-haired man came barging in, a big cigar clamped between his teeth.

'Ed!' Leiter greeted the newcomer with surprised delight. 'James, meet Ed Killifer, our senior agent down here.'

Killifer seemed to have hardly heard the introduction for he spoke directly to Felix, 'Double congratulations, old buddy. Great job you did. Now, just you take your time over the honeymoon.' Then he turned to Bond. 'Guess you must be James Bond, the guy who went along for the ride?'

Bond made a modest gesture.

'Some ride, uh? A great job. Don't know how to thank you, James.'

'Give the credit to Felix. Between the three of us I'd rather have my name left out of this.' He warmed to Killifer, mentally summing him up as one of those hardworking, dedicated, salt-of-the earth agents. A fast disappearing breed from most intelligence, security and drug enforcement organisations.

'You'll never credit what that bastard did when we started to interrogate him.'

'I'd believe anything of Sanchez.' Felix's smile had disappeared.

'The son-of-a-bitch actually said he'd never come to trial. That he had too many people in his pocket. I told him he was facing at least a hundred and thirty-nine felony counts, and none of his famous million-dollar bribes would get him out of this. You know what he said? Two million's what he said. Cool as an iced beer. Hawkins looked like his socks had been blown off. That scumbag was offering *us* two million US.'

Bond frowned as Killifer continued, 'I told him. "None of your filthy money's gonna get you out of this one, Sanchez. You're hooked." ' Turning to Bond, 'Hooked! Good huh? I told him straight that he wasn't in some banana republic now. He just looked at me. Funny kinda look he has. Then he said, "Very righteous, Mr Killifer, but I think I'll be home very soon." Some hope. They've got a cell set up for him in the high-security block at Quantico and they're gonna ring the place with Marines. No way is he gonna get out.'

'Come on, Ed, come and have a drink. We're just going to cut the cake.' Leiter was now standing.

'No, sorry, pal, but I just came over to kiss the bride and wish you luck. I'm still on duty, we're leaving in half an hour. Everything's set to take *Mr* Sanchez to Quantico. We go all the way to Virginia, and I won't rest till I've handed him over.' He thrust out his hand to Leiter, pumping his arm as though trying to dislodge it from its socket. 'See you around, buddy, and you take care of that bride.' He turned and gave Bond a firm, dry handshake. 'Nice to have met you, Bond. Hope there'll be another time. See you around, okay?' He gave an expansive wave with his right hand, the big cigar tucked between his fingers, and left the room.

'One of the best men in the business.' Leiter slid out the 3·5 disk and tapped it with his forefinger. 'First rule when you're working with micros. Always keep a backup safely stored away. You never know. If something happens, you lose all the data.' He then tucked it away behind a framed photograph of Della which stood next to a nice little plaster repro of one of the soldiers from the famous Qin Shiuang's terracotta army. He took the cake knife from Bond. 'Let's face the music. Della should be just about ready to kill me.' At the door he stopped placing the gloved false hand on Bond's arm. 'I don't have to tell you how grateful I am – for everything.'

'What are friends for?' Bond asked, realising that he really wanted to quiz Felix about the lovely young dark-haired beauty

who had been in the study, but holding his tongue. He would look for her later, and maybe . . . Well, who knew?

At the Drug Enforcement Agency headquarters across the Key, they were ready to move Sanchez out for the journey to Quantico, and they were taking no chances. An armoured van stood near the doors, and the prisoner, looking quite unconcerned, was led from the building in chains which ran from his wrists to his ankles, which were also shackled with just enough chain to allow him an undignified shuffle. He was flanked by a pair of marshals, each armed with a shotgun, while another two marshals' cars stood by. On the helipad a police chopper stood, its rotors at idle.

Ed Killifer, having made his appearance at the wedding reception, brought his car to a halt in his marked parking slot, got out and walked over to Sanchez and the marshals, the eternal cigar clamped between his lips. He smiled grimly at Sanchez. 'All ready for the joyride?'

'They didn't even give me time to pack an overnight case.' Sanchez was infuriatingly confident.

'Where you're going, you'll need a couple of million night cases.' Killifer was near to sneering. 'Okay boys, let's hit the road.'

They helped Sanchez into the back of the armoured van where other chains were padlocked to steel rings on either side of the uncomfortable bench which ran along one wall of the van. With a nod, Killifer slammed the doors and one of the marshals inside pulled the locking mechanism.

'Have to be a Houdini to get out of that,' Killifer muttered as he walked to the front of the van, picked up a shotgun and climbed in next to the driver. 'Okay,' he shouted boisterously. 'Wagons Ho!'

Slowly the convoy pulled away, a marshal's car in front of the armoured van, another behind, and the police helicopter patrolling the sky overhead.

Once on Route One, they picked up speed: everyone, from the police in the chopper to Killifer beside the armoured van driver alert, and ready for anything.

About a mile out of Key West, on a small stretch of bridge, the lead car signalled the convoy to slow down. Ahead a sign read 'Caution! Bridge Under Repair.' A section of the metal guard-rail on the right had been removed and coned off to mark a stretch of temporary wooden fencing.

The police, high above, watched the first marshal's car pass the spot, but, as the armoured van came abreast of the coned wooden fence, so the van suddenly seemed to speed up and slew sideways.

The bonnet hit the fence which shattered under impact. For a second the van appeared to leap outwards and hang in space. Then, as though in slow motion, it dipped and plunged into the muddy water below.

Both the marshals' cars screamed to a halt and the chopper descended, turning low over the spot where the van had hit the water. The air was full of the crackle of radios calling for special backup.

The armoured van sank almost lazily into the deep water. In the rear, next to Sanchez, the two armed marshals struggled in the last remaining air. As the interior filled, one of them managed to get the door open, and, leaving Sanchez to his certain death, the marshals were sucked out, exploding on the surface with the last big air bubble. The first thing they saw was the police chopper dangling its winch line to help them.

Far below, the van came to rest on the bottom, throwing up a cloud of sand, and sending a shoal of snapper skimming off for the shelter of a labyrinth of rocks. From under the bridge came what at first seemed to be larger fish, making the sponges and trailing flora of the sea wave gently as though in a light breeze. But these were not fish. Figures in wetsuits, with breathing masks, air bottles and flippers moved swiftly along the ocean floor. They came in two sets of three, the first trio heading

directly for the van, the others remaining as though on guard, spear-guns at the ready, for more dangerous things than red snapper inhabited these waters. The first diver swam quickly into the rear of the van. He carried a spare breathing pack and mouthpiece which he rammed into Sanchez' mouth until the man began to suck in air and open his eyes.

Meanwhile, the second frogman was busy dealing with the chains, using a heavy-duty bolt-cutter. When they had Sanchez free, they fitted the air bottle around his shoulders and helped him to swim clear.

At the front, in the van's cabin, the other frogman was fitting a mouthpiece and air bottle to Killifer, dragging him out as though taking a hostage.

Within seconds a large plexiglass-domed undersea sledge appeared, its motors slowing so that the pilot could hover close to the van. The three divers almost lazily brought Sanchez and the captive Killifer over to the sledge and helped them aboard, while the guards snaked away, moving through the busy and beautiful world, with its own brand of flowers and strange-shaped rocks, at a surprising speed. A minute later, the pilot of the sledge opened the throttle and the long, shark-like vehicle moved away, back in the direction of Key West, clinging low near the ocean floor as it built up speed.

Bond had been unable to find the dark girl in the pink suit whom Felix had introduced as Pam, so he settled for the blonde Pat whose shyness had almost completely disappeared. Night had come, as usual in Key West, with a spectacular sunset and the wedding party had wound down.

'Time to go,' Bond said to the blonde. 'Fancy dinner? I'm staying at the Pier House.'

'Oh, I couldn't eat another thing, Mr Bond.' She looked up at him with sloe eyes. 'Except perhaps you.'

Bond smiled. 'Good, I rather fancy a light snack in my room.'

They headed for the door where Felix and Della waited, saying goodbye to their guests.

'Just one little thing before you go, James.' Della gave Pat a rather wickedly jealous smile.

'Not another knife?'

'No,' Felix stepped forward, his good hand moving to his pocket. 'The best man always gets a gift.' He withdrew a small velvet box which he handed to Bond. 'A small mark of thanks,' he paused, 'from the Leiters.'

Inside the box, nestling in a velvet tray, lay a solid gold Dupont cigarette lighter. Bond smiled as he took it out to see the engraved words *James. With love ever Della & Felix*.

'It's the thought that counts,' Bond said. 'You're both tempting me now that I'm down to five a day.' He flicked the lighter and they jumped back as the butane flame leapt skywards. 'Jeeerusalem!' Bond mouthed, capping the flame quickly.

Della giggled. 'It does need some adjustment. But the thought was there.'

Bond thanked them and they embraced. 'Look after her, Felix. Look after her well.' He held Leiter's eyes with his, still thinking of the strange girl in pink he had encountered in his friend's study.

Della leaned forward to kiss him, whispering, 'I don't have to tell you to have a good night.'

Bond helped Pat into the Five-Sixes cab that waited for them and was still waving as the cab turned the corner out of sight.

'Well, Mrs Leiter, how about me carrying you across the threshold?'

'Watch it, Felix, you're no good to me with a strained back.'

They were both laughing as they reached the bedroom. But there the hilarity stopped. Felix froze inside the door, Della still in his arms, head thrown back as the laughter died.

Leiter recognised the two men who stood in the window, the drapes softly moving around them. He had seen the pair among

Sanchez's men at Crab Cay and now they were here, unwelcome guests at his wedding.

One of the men, the Germanic-looking of the two, had a pistol in his hand. Slowly Leiter put his bride down on her feet and stepped in front of her. 'Leave her out of this,' he said quietly. 'I'm a different matter, but she had nothing to do with my work.'

'Sure,' the man called Dario moved forward. 'Sure, Mr Leiter, we'll leave her here. Don't worry about it.' As he spoke a short-barrelled shotgun seemed to appear suddenly in his hands, and with one movement he clubbed Leiter to his knees.

Braun had to push in and grab Della, jamming a hand over her mouth to stop her screams.