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Nobody Lives For Ever

Written by John Gardner

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NOBODY LIVES FOR EVER

John Gardner



***For Peter and Peg
with affection***

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THE ROAD SOUTH

James Bond signalled late, braked more violently than a Bentley driving instructor would have liked, and slewed the big car off the E5 motorway and on to the last exit road just north of Brussels. It was merely a precaution. If he was going to reach Strasbourg before midnight it would have made more sense to carry on, follow the ring road around Brussels, then keep going south on the Belgian N4. Yet even on holiday, Bond knew that it was only prudent to remain alert. The small detour across country would quickly establish whether anyone was on his tail, and he would pick up the E40 in about an hour or so.

Lately there had been a directive to all officers of the Secret Service, advising 'constant vigilance, even when off duty, and particularly when on leave and out of the country'.

He had taken the morning ferry to Ostend, and there had been over an hour's delay. About half-way into the crossing the ship had stopped, a boat had been lowered, and had moved out, searching the water in a wide circle. After some forty minutes the boat had returned and a helicopter appeared overhead as they set sail again. A little later the news spread throughout the ship. Two men overboard, and lost, it seemed.

'Couple of young passengers skylarking,' said the barman. 'Skylarked once too often. Probably cut to shreds by the screws.'

Once through Customs, Bond had pulled into a side street, opened the secret compartment in the dashboard of the Bentley Mulsanne Turbo, checked that his 9mm ASP automatic and the

spare ammunition clips were intact, and taken out the small Concealable Operations Baton, which lay heavy in its soft leather holster. He had closed the compartment, loosened his belt and threaded the holster into place so that the baton hung at his right hip. It was an effective piece of hardware: a black rod, no more than fifteen centimetres long. Used by a trained man, it could be lethal.

Shifting in the driving seat now, Bond felt the hard metal dig comfortably into his hip. He slowed the car to a crawl of 40 kph, scanning the mirrors as he took corners and bends, automatically slowing again once on the far side. Within half an hour he was certain that he was not being followed.

Even with the directive in mind, he reflected that he was being more careful than usual. A sixth sense of danger or possibly M's remark a couple of days ago?

'You couldn't have chosen a more awkward time to be away, 007,' his chief had grumbled, though Bond had taken little notice. M was noted for a grudging attitude when it came to matters of leave.

'It's only my entitlement, sir. You agreed I could take my month now. If you remember, I had to postpone it earlier in the year.'

M grunted. 'Money Penny's going to be away as well. Off gallivanting all over Europe. You're not . . . ?'

'Accompanying Miss Money Penny? No, sir.'

'Off to Jamaica or one of your usual Caribbean haunts, I suppose,' M said with a frown.

'No, sir. Rome first. Then a few days on the Riviera dei Fiori before driving across to Austria – to pick up my housekeeper, May. I just hope she'll be fit enough to be brought back to London by then.'

'Yes . . . yes.' M was not appeased. 'Well, leave your full itinerary with the Chief-of-Staff. Never know when we're going to need you.'

'Already done, sir.'

'Take care, 007. Take special care. The Continent's a hotbed of villainy these days, and you can never be too careful.' There was a sharp, steely look in his eyes that made Bond wonder whether something was being hidden from him.

As Bond left M's office, the old man had the grace to say he hoped there would be good news about May.

At the moment, May, Bond's devoted old Scottish housekeeper, appeared to be the only worry on an otherwise cloudless horizon. During the winter she had suffered two severe attacks of bronchitis and seemed to be deteriorating. She had been with Bond longer than either cared to remember. In fact, apart from the Service, she was the one constant in his not uneventful life.

After the second bronchial attack, Bond had insisted on a thorough check-up by a Service-retained doctor with a Harley Street practice, and though May had resisted, insisting she was 'tough as an auld game bird, and no yet fit for the pot', Bond had taken her himself to the consulting rooms. There had followed an agonising week, with May being passed from specialist to specialist, complaining all the way. But the results of the tests were undeniable. The left lung was badly damaged, and there was a distinct possibility that the disease might spread. Unless the lung was removed immediately and the patient underwent at least three months of enforced rest and care, May was unlikely to see her next birthday.

The operation was carried out by the most skilful surgeon Bond's money could buy, and once she was well enough, May was packed off to a world-renowned clinic specialising in her complaint, the Klinik Mozart, in the mountains south of Salzburg. Bond telephoned the clinic regularly and was told that she was making astonishing progress.

He had even spoken to her personally the evening before, and he now smiled to himself at the tone of her voice, and the somewhat deprecating way she had spoken of the clinic. She was, no doubt, reorganising their staff and calling down the wrath of her Glen Orchy ancestors on everyone from maids to chefs.

'They dinna know how to cook a decent wee bite here, Mr James, that's the truth of it; and the maids canna make a bed for twopence. I'd no employ any the one of them – and you paying all this money for me to be here. Yon's a downright waste, Mr James. A *crinimal* waste.' May had never been able to get her tongue round the word 'criminal'.

'I'm sure they're looking after you very well, May.' She was too independent to be a really good patient.

Trust May, he thought. She liked things done her way or not at all. It would be purgatory for her in the Klinik Mozart.

He checked the fuel, deciding it would be wise to have the tank filled before the long drive that lay ahead on the E40. Having established that there was nobody on his tail, he concentrated on looking for a garage. It was after seven in the evening, and there was little traffic about. He drove through two small villages and saw the signs indicating proximity to the motorway. Then, on a straight, empty, stretch of road, he spotted the garish signs of a small filling station.

It appeared to be deserted and the two pumps unattended, though the door to the tiny office had been left open. A notice in red warned that the pumps were not self-service, so he pulled the Mulsanne up to the Super pump and switched off the engine. As he climbed out, stretching his muscles, he became aware of the commotion behind the little glass and brick building. Growling, angry, voices could be heard, and a thump, as though someone had collided with a car. Bond locked the car using the central locking device and strode quickly to the corner of the building.

Behind the office was a garage area. A white Alfa Romeo Sprint stood in front of the open doors. Two men were holding down a young woman on the bonnet. The driver's door was open and a handbag lay ripped open on the ground, its contents scattered.

'Come on,' one of the men said in rough French, 'where is it? You must have some! Give.' Like his companion, the thug was dressed in faded jeans, shirt and sneakers. Both were short, broad shouldered, with tanned muscular arms – rough customers by

any standards. Their victim protested, and the man who had spoken raised his hand to hit her across the face.

'Stop that!' Bond's voice cracked like a whip as he moved forward.

The men looked up, startled. Then one of them smiled. 'Two for the price of one,' he said softly, grabbing the woman by the shoulder and throwing her away from the car.

The man facing Bond held a large wrench, and clearly thought Bond was easy prey. His hair was untidy, tight and curly, and the surly young face already showed the scars of an experienced street fighter. He leaped forward in a half crouch, holding the wrench low. He moved like a large monkey, Bond thought, as he reached for the baton on his right hip.

The baton, made by the same firm that developed the ASP 9mm pistol, looked harmless enough – fifteen centimetres of on-slip, rubber-coated metal. But, as he drew it from its holster, Bond flicked down hard with his right wrist. From the rubber-covered handle sprang a further, telescoped twenty-five centimetres of toughened steel, which locked into place.

The sudden appearance of the weapon took the young thug off guard. His right arm was raised, clutching the wrench, and for a second he hesitated. Bond stepped quickly to his left and swung the baton. There was an unpleasant cracking noise, followed by a yelp, as the baton connected with the attacker's forearm. He dropped the wrench and doubled up, holding his broken arm and cursing violently in French.

Again Bond moved, delivering a lighter tap this time, to the back of the neck. The mugger went on to his knees and pitched forward. With a roar, Bond hurled himself at the second thug. But the man had no stomach for a fight. He turned and started to run; not fast enough, though, for the tip of the baton came down hard on his left shoulder, certainly breaking bones.

He gave a louder cry than his partner, then raised his hands and began to plead. Bond was in no mood to be kind to a couple of young tearaways who had attacked a virtually helpless

woman. He lunged forward, and buried the baton's tip into the man's groin, eliciting a further screech of pain which was cut off by a smart blow to the left of the neck, neatly judged to knock him unconscious but do little further damage.

Bond kicked the wrench out of the way, and turned to assist the young woman, but she was already gathering her things together by the car.

'You all right?' He walked towards her, taking in the Italianate looks – the long tangle of red hair, the tall, lithe body, oval face and large brown eyes.

'Yes. Thank you, yes.' There was no trace of accent. As he came closer, he noted the Gucci loafers, very long legs encased in tight Calvin Klein jeans, and a silk Hermes shirt. 'It's lucky you came along when you did. Do you think we should call the police?' She gave her head a little shake, stuck out her bottom lip and blew the hair out of her eyes.

'I just wanted petrol.' Bond looked at the Alfa Romeo. 'What happened?'

'I suppose you might say that I caught them with their fingers in the till, and they didn't take kindly to that. The attendant's out cold in the office.'

The muggers, posing as attendants, had apologised when she drove in, saying the pumps out front were not working. Could she take the car to the pump around the back? 'I fell for it, and they dragged me out of the car.'

Bond asked how she knew about the attendant?

'One of them asked the other if he'd be okay. He said the man would be out for an hour or so.' There was no sign of tension in her voice, and as she smoothed the jungle of hair, her hands were steady. 'If you want to be on your way, I can telephone the police. There's really no need for you to hang about, you know.'

'Nor you,' he said with a smile. 'Those two will also be asleep for some time. The name's Bond, by the way. James Bond.'

'Sukie.' She held out a hand, the palm dry and the grip firm. 'Sukie Tempesta.'

In the end, they both waited for the police, costing Bond over an hour and a half's delay. The pump attendant had been badly beaten and required urgent medical attention. Sukie did what she could for him while Bond telephoned the police. As they waited they talked and Bond tried to find out more about her, for the whole affair had begun to intrigue him. Somehow, he had the impression that she was holding out on him. But, however cleverly he phrased his questions, Sukie managed to sidestep with answers that told him nothing.

There was little to be gleaned from observation. She was very self-possessed, and could have been anything, from a lawyer to a society hostess. Judging by her appearance and the jewellery she wore, she was well off. Whatever her background, Bond decided that Sukie was certainly an attractive young woman, with a low-pitched voice, precise economic movements and a reserved manner that was possibly a little diffident.

One thing he did discover quickly was that she spoke at least three languages, which pointed to both intelligence and a good education. As for the rest, he could not even discover her nationality, though the plates on the Sprint were, like her name, Italian.

Before the police arrived in a flurry of sirens, Bond had returned to his car and stowed away the baton – an illegal weapon in any country. He submitted to an interrogation, and was asked to sign a statement. Only then was he allowed to fill up the car and leave, with the proviso that he gave his whereabouts for the next few weeks, and his address and telephone number in London.

Sukie Tempesta was still being questioned when he drove away, feeling strangely uneasy. He recalled the look in M's eyes; and began to wonder about the business on the ferry.

Just after midnight, he was on the E25 between Metz and Strasbourg. He had again filled the tank, and drunk some passable coffee at the French frontier. Now the road was almost deserted, so he spotted the tail lights of the car ahead a good

four kilometres before overtaking it. He had set the cruise control at 110 kph after crossing the frontier, and so sailed past the big white BMW, which appeared to be pottering along in the fifties.

Out of habit, his eyes flicked to the car's plates and the number registered in his mind as did the international badge D, which identified the car as German.

A minute or so later, Bond became alert. The BMW had picked up speed, moving into the centre lane, yet remaining close to him. The distance varied between about five hundred to less than a hundred metres. He touched the brakes, switched back from cruise control and accelerated. One hundred and thirty. One hundred and forty! The BMW was still there.

Then, with about fifteen kilometres to go before the outskirts of Strasbourg, he became aware of another set of headlights directly behind him in the fast lane, and coming up at speed.

He moved into the middle lane, eyes flicking between the road ahead and the mirror. The BMW had fallen back a little, and in seconds the oncoming lights grew, and the Bentley was rocked slightly as a little black car went past like a jet. It must have been touching 160 kph and in his headlights Bond could get only a glimpse of the plates, which were splattered with mud. He thought they must be Swiss, as he was almost certain that he had caught sight of a Ticino Canton shield to the right of the rear plate. There was not enough time for him even to identify the make of the car.

The BMW remained in place for only a few more moments, slowing and losing ground. Then Bond saw the flash in his mirror: a brutal crimson ball erupting in the middle lane behind him. He felt the Bentley shudder under the shock waves and watched in the mirror as lumps of flaming metal danced across the highway.

Bond increased pressure on the accelerator. Nothing would make him stop and become involved at this time of night, particularly on a lonely stretch of road. Suddenly he realised

that he felt oddly shaken at the unexplained violence which appeared to have surrounded him all day.

At one-eleven in the morning, the Bentley nosed its way into Strasbourg's Place Saint-Pierre-le-Jeune and came to a standstill outside the Hotel Sofitel. The night staff were deferential. *Oui, M. Bond . . . Non, M. Bond.* But certainly they had his reservation. The car was unloaded, his baggage whipped away, and he took the Bentley himself to the hotel's private parking.

The suite proved to be almost too large for the overnight stay, and there was a basket of fruit, with the compliments of the manager. Bond did not know whether to be impressed or on his guard. He had not stayed at the Sofitel for at least three years.

Opening the minibar, he mixed himself a martini. He was pleased the bar stocked Gordon's and a decent vodka, though he had to make do with a simple Lillet vermouth instead of his preferred Kina. Taking the drink over to the bed, Bond selected one of his two briefcases – the one that contained the sophisticated scrambling equipment. This he attached to the telephone and dialled Transworld Exports (the Service Headquarters' cover) in London.

The Duty Officer listened patiently while Bond recounted the two incidents in some detail. The line was quickly closed, and Bond, tired after the long drive, took a brief shower, rang down for a call at eight in the morning, and stretched out naked under the bedclothes.

Only then did he start to face up to the fact that he was more than a little concerned. He thought again of that strange look in M's eyes; then about the Ostend ferry and the two men overboard; the girl – Sukie – in distress at the filling station, and the appalling explosion on the road. There had been too many incidents to be mere coincidence, and a tiny suspicion of menace started to creep into his mind.

THE POISON DWARF

Bond sweated through his morning workout – the twenty slow pushups with their exquisite lingering strain; then the leg lifts, performed on the stomach; and lastly the twenty fast toe-touches.

Before going to the shower, he called room service and gave his precise order for breakfast: two thick slices of wholewheat bread, with the finest butter and, if possible, Tiptree Little Scarlet jam or Cooper's Oxford marmalade. Alas, Monsieur, there was no Cooper, but they had Tiptree. It was unlikely they could supply De Bry coffee, so after detailed questioning he settled for their special blend. While waiting for the tray to arrive, he took a very hot shower, followed by another with the water freezing cold.

A man of habit, Bond did not normally like change, but he had recently altered his soap, shampoo and cologne to Dunhill Blend 30, as he liked their specially masculine tang – and now, after a vigorous towelling, he rubbed the cologne into his body. Then he slipped into his silk travelling Happi-coat to await breakfast, which came accompanied by the local morning papers.

The BMW, or the débris that was left, seemed to be spread across all the front pages, while the headlines proclaimed the bombing to be everything from an atrocious act of urban terrorism to the latest assassination in a criminal gang war that had been sweeping France over the last few weeks. There was little

detail, except for the information given by the police, that there had been only one victim, the driver, and that the car had been registered in the name of Conrad Tempel, a German businessman from Freiburg. Herr Tempel was missing from his home, so they presumed he was among the fragments of the motor car.

While reading the story. Bond drank his two large cups of black coffee without sugar, and decided that he would skirt Freiburg later that day, after driving into Germany. He planned to cross the frontier again at Basle. Once in Switzerland, he would make his way down to Lake Maggiore in the Ticino Canton and spend a night in one of the small tourist villages on the Swiss side of the lake. Then he would make the final long run into Italy and the lengthy sweat down the autostradas to Rome. He would spend a few days with the Service's Resident and his wife, Steve and Tabitha Quinn.

Today's drive would be less taxing. He did not need to leave until noon, so he had a little time to relax and look around. But first there was the most important job of the day, the telephone call to the Klinik Mozart, to enquire after May.

He dialled 19, the French 'out' code, followed by the 61 which would take him into the Austrian system, then the number. Doktor Kirchtum came on the line almost immediately.

'Good morning, Mr Bond. You are in Belgium now, yes?'

Bond told him politely that he was in France, would be in Switzerland tomorrow, and in Italy the following day.

'You are burning a lot of the rubber, as they say.' Kirchtum was a small man, but his voice was loud and resonant. At the clinic he could be heard in a room long before he arrived. The nurses called him *das Nebelhorn*, the Foghorn.

Bond asked after May.

'She still does well. She orders us around, which is a good sign of recovery.' Kirchtum gave a guffaw of laughter. 'I think the chef is about to cash in his index, as I believe you English say.'

'Hand in his cards,' Bond said, smiling to himself. The Herr Doktor, he was sure, made very studied errors in colloquial

English. He asked if there was any chance of speaking to the patient, and was told that she was undergoing some treatment at the moment and would not be able to talk on the telephone until later in the day. Bond said he would try to telephone again during his drive through Switzerland, thanked the Herr Doktor, and was about to hang up when Kirchtum stopped him.

'There is someone here who would like a word with you, Mr Bond. Hold on. I'll put her through.'

To Bond's surprise, he heard the voice of M's PA, Miss Money-penny, speaking to him with that hint of affection she always reserved for him.

'James! How lovely to talk to you.'

'Well, Moneypenny. What on earth are you doing at the Mozart?'

'I'm on holiday, like you, and spending a few days in Salzburg. I just thought I'd come up and see May. She's doing very well, James.' Moneypenny's voice sounded light and excited.

'Nice of you to think of her. Be careful what you get up to in Salzburg, though, Moneypenny – all those musical people looking at Mozart's house and going to concerts . . .'

'Nowadays all they want is to go and see the locations used in *The Sound of Music*,' she replied, laughing.

'Well, take care all the same, Penny. I'm told those tourists are after only one thing from a girl like you.'

'Would that you were a tourist, then, James.'

Miss Moneypenny still held a special place in her heart for Bond. After a little more conversation Bond again thanked her for the thoughtful action of visiting May.

His luggage was ready for collection, the windows were open and the sun streamed in. He would take a look around the hotel, check the car, have some more coffee and get on the road. As he went down to the foyer he realised how much he needed a holiday. It had been a hard, tough year, and for the first time Bond wondered if he had made the right decision. Perhaps the

short trip to his beloved Royale-les-Eaux would have been a better idea.

A familiar face slid into the periphery of his vision as he crossed the foyer. Bond hesitated, turned and gazed absently into the hotel shop window, the better to examine the reflection of a man sitting near the main reception desk. He gave no sign of having seen Bond, as he sat casually glancing through yesterday's *Herald Tribune*. He was short, barely four feet two inches. Neatly and expensively dressed, he had the look of complete confidence characteristic of so many small men. Bond always mistrusted people of short stature, knowing their tendency to over-compensate with ruthless pushiness, as though it were necessary to prove themselves.

He turned away, having made his identification. The face was known well enough to him, with thin, ferret-like features and the same bright, darting eyes as the animal. What, he wondered to himself, was Paul Cordova – or the Rat as he was known in the underworld – doing in Strasbourg? Bond knew there had been a suggestion some years ago that the KGB, posing as a United States Government agency, had used him to do a particularly nasty piece of work in New York.

Paul, the Rat, Cordova was an enforcer – a polite term for a killer – for one of the New York Families, and his photograph and record were on the files of the world's major police and intelligence departments. It was part of Bond's job to know faces like this, even though Cordova moved in criminal rather than intelligence circles. But Bond did not think of him as the Rat. To him, the man was the Poison Dwarf. Was his presence in Strasbourg another 'coincidence'? Bond wondered.

He went down to the parking area, checked the Bentley carefully, and told the man on duty that he would be picking it up within half an hour. He refused to let any of the hotel staff move the car. Indeed, there had been a certain amount of surliness on his arrival because he would not leave the keys at the desk. On his way out, Bond could not fail to notice the low, black,

wicked-looking Series 3 Porsche 911 Turbo. The rear plates were mud-spattered, but the Ticino Canton disc showed clearly. Whoever had raced past him on the motorway just before the destruction of the BMW was now at the hotel. Bond's antennae told him that it was time to get out of Strasbourg. The menacing small cloud had grown a shade larger.

Cordova was not in the hotel foyer when he returned. On reaching his room, Bond put through another call to Transworld Exports in London, again using the scrambler. Even on leave it was his duty to report on the movements of anyone like the Poison Dwarf, particularly so far away from his own patch.

Twenty minutes later, Bond was at the wheel of the Bentley, heading for the German border. He crossed without incident, skirted Freiburg, and by afternoon again crossed frontiers, at Basle. After a few hours' driving he boarded the car train for the journey through the St Gotthard Pass, and by early evening the Bentley was purring through the streets of Locarno and on to the lakeside road. Bond passed through Ascona, that paradise for artists, both professional and amateur, and on to the small and pleasing village of Brissago.

In spite of the sunlight and breathtaking views of clean Swiss villages, and towering mountains, a sense of impending doom remained with Bond as he travelled south. At first he put it down to the odd events of the previous day and the vaguely disconcerting experience of seeing a New York Mafia hood in Strasbourg. Yet, as he neared Lake Maggiore, he wondered if this mood could be due to a slightly dented pride. He felt distinctly annoyed that Sukie Tempesta had appeared so self-assured, calm and unimpressed by his charm. She could, he thought, at least have shown some sort of gratitude. Yet she had hardly smiled at him.

But when the red-brown roofs of the lakeside villages came in sight, Bond began to laugh. Suddenly his gloom lifted and he recognised his own pettiness. He slid a compact disc into the stereo player and a moment later the combination of the view

and the great Art Tatum rattling out *The Shout* banished the darkness, putting him into a happier mood.

Though his favourite part of the country lay around Geneva, Bond also loved this corner of Switzerland that rubbed shoulders with Italy. As a young man he had lazed around the shores of Lake Maggiore, eaten some of the best meals of his life in Locarno, and once, on a hot moonlit night, with the waters off Brissago alive with lamp-lit fishing boats, in the very ordinary little hotel by the pier, had made unforgettable love to an Italian countess.

It was to this hotel, the Mirto du Lac, that he now drove. It was a simple family place, below the church with its arcade of cypresses, and near the pier where the lake steamers put in every hour. The *padrone* greeted him like an old friend, and Bond was soon ensconced in his room, with the little balcony looking down to the forecourt and landing stage.

Before unpacking Bond dialled the Klinik Mozart. The Herr Direktor was not available and one of the junior doctors told him politely that he could not speak to May because she was resting. There had been a visitor and she was a little tired. For some reason the words did not ring true. There was a slight hesitation in the doctor's voice which put Bond on the alert. He asked if May was all right, and the doctor assured him that she was perfectly well, just a little tired.

'This visitor,' he went on, 'I believe a Miss Money Penny . . .'

'This is correct.' The doctor was the one who sounded most correct.

'I don't suppose you happen to know where she's staying in Salzburg?'

He did not. 'I understand she is coming back to see the patient tomorrow,' he added.

Bond thanked him and said he would call again. By the time he had showered and changed, it was starting to get dark. Across the lake the sunlight gradually left Mount Tamaro, and lights went on along the lakeside. Insects began to flock around the

glass globes, and one or two couples took seats at the tables outside.

As Bond left his room to go down to the bar in the corner of the restaurant, a black Series 3 Porsche 911 crept quietly into the forecourt and parked with its nose thrust towards the lake. Its occupant climbed out, locked the car and walked with neat little steps back the way he had driven, up towards the church.

It was some ten minutes later that the people at the tables and in the hotel bar heard the repeated piercing screams. The steady murmur of conversation faded as it became obvious the screams were not part of some lighthearted game. These were shrieks of terror. Several people in the bar started towards the door. Some men outside were already on their feet, others were looking around to see where the noise was coming from. Bond was among those who hurried outside. The first thing he saw was the Porsche. Then a woman, her face white and her hair flying, her mouth stretched wide in a continuous scream, came running down the steps from the churchyard. Her hands kept going to her face, then wringing the air, then clutching her head. She was shouting, '*Assassino! Assassino!*' – Murder – as she pointed back to the churchyard.

Five or six men got up the steps ahead of Bond and clustered round a small bundle lying across the cobbled path, shocked into silence at the sight that confronted them.

Bond moved quietly to the perimeter of the group. Paul, the Rat, Cordova lay on his back, knees drawn up, one arm flung outwards, his head at an angle, almost severed by a single deep slash across the throat. Blood had already spread over the cobbles.

Bond pushed through the gathering crowd and returned to the lakeside. He had never believed in coincidences. He knew that the drownings, the affair at the filling station, the explosion on the motorway, and Cordova's appearance, here and in France, were linked, and that he was the common denominator.

His holiday was shattered. He would have to telephone London, report, and await orders.

Another surprise awaited him as he entered the hotel. Standing by the reception desk, looking as elegant as ever in a short blue-tinged leather outfit, probably by Merenlender, stood Sukie Tempesta.