007 in New York

Ian Fleming

It was around ten o'clock on a blue and golden morning at the end of

September and the BOAC Monarch flight from London had come in at the

same time as four other international flights. James Bond, his stomach

queasy from the BOAC version of 'An English Country House Breakfast', took

his place stoically in a long queue that included plenty of squalling children

and in due course said that he had spent the last ten nights in London. Then

to Immigration—fifteen minutes to show his passport that said he was 'David

Barlow, Merchant' and that he had eyes and hair and was six feet tall; and

then to the Gehenna of the Idlewild Customs that has been carefully

designed, in Bond's opinion, to give visitors to the United States coronary

thrombosis. Everyone, each with his stupid little trolley, looked, after a

night's flight, wretched and undignified. Waiting for his suitcase to appear

behind the glass of the unloading bay and then to be graciously released for

him to fight for and hump over to the customs lines, all of which were

overloaded while each bag or bundle (why not a spot-check?) was opened

and prodded and then laborously closed, often between slaps at fretting

children, by its exhausted owner. Bond glanced up at the glass-walled

balcony that ran round the great hall. A man in a rainproof and Trilby,

middle-aged, nondescript, was inspecting the orderly hell through a pair of

folding opera-glasses. Anybody examining him or, indeed, any one else

through binoculars was an object of suspicion to James Bond, but now his

conspiratorial mind merely registered that this would be a good link in an

efficient hotel-robbery machine. The man with the glasses would note the

rich-looking woman declaring her jewellery, slip downstairs when she was

released from Customs, tail her into New York, get beside her at the desk,

hear her room number being called to the captain, and the rest would be up

to the mechanics. Bond shrugged. At least the man didn't seem interested in

him. He had his single suitcase passed by the polite man with the badge.

Then, sweating with the unnecessary central heating, he carried it out

through the automatic glass doors into the blessed fresh fall air. The Carey

Cadillac, as a message had told him, was already waiting. James Bond

always used the firm. They had fine cars and superb drivers, rigid discipline

and total discretion, and they didn't smell of stale cigar smoke. Bond even

wondered if Commander Carey's organization, supposing it had equated

David Barlow with James Bond, would have betrayed their standards by

informing CIA. Well, no doubt the United States had to come first, and

anyway, did Commander Carey know who James Bond was? The

Immigration people certainly did. In the great black bible with the thickly

printed yellow pages the officer had consulted when he took Bond's

passport, Bond knew that there were three Bonds and that one of them was

'James, British, Passport 391354. Inform Chief Officer.' How closely did

Careys work with these people? Probably only if it was police business.

Anyway, James Bond felt pretty confident that he could spend twenty-four

hours in New York, make the contact and get out again without

embarrassing explanations having to be given to Messrs Hoover or McCone.

For this was an embarrassing, unattractive business that M had sent Bond

anonymously to New York to undertake. It was to warn a nice girl, who had

once worked for the Secret Service, an English girl now earning her living in

New York, that she was cohabiting with a Soviet agent of the KGB attached

to the UN and that M knew that the FBI and the CIA were getting very close

to learning her identity. It was doing the dirt on two friendly organizations,

of course, and it would be highly embarrassing if Bond were found out, but

the girl had been a first-class staff officer, and when he could, M looked after

his own. So Bond had been instructed to make contact and he had arranged

to do so, that afternoon at three o'clock, outside (the rendezvous had

seemed appropriate to Bond) the Reptile House at the Central Park Zoo.

Bond pressed the button that let down the glass partition and leaned

forward. 'The Astor, please.'

'Yes, sir.' The big black car weaved through the curves and out of the airport

enclave on to the Van Wyck Expressway, now being majestically torn to

pieces and rebuilt for the 1964-1965 World's Fair.

James Bond sat back and lit one of his last Morland Specials. By lunchtime it

would be king-size Chesterfields. The Astor. It was as good as another and

Bond liked the Times Square jungle—the hideous souvenir shops, the sharp

clothiers, the giant feedomats, the hypnotic neon signs, one of which said

BOND in letters a mile high. Here was the guts of New York, the living

entrails. His other favourite quarters had gone—Washington Square, the

Battery, Harlem, where you now needed a passport and two detectives. The

Savoy Ballroom! What fun it had been in the old days! There was still Central

Park, which would now be at its most beautiful—stark and bright. As for the

hotels, they too had gone—the Ritz Carlton, the St Regis that had died with

Michael Arlen. The Carlyle was perhaps the lone survivor. The rest were all

the same—those sighing lifts, the rooms full of last month's air and a vague

memory of ancient cigars, the empty 'You're welcomes,' the thin coffee, the

almost blue-white boiled eggs for breakfast (Bond had once had a small

apartment in New York. He had tried everywhere to buy brown eggs until

finally some grocery clerk had told him, 'We don't stock 'em, mister. People

think they're dirty'), the dank toast (that shipment of toast racks to the

Colonies must have foundered!). Ah me! Yes, the Astor would do as well as

another.

Bond glanced at his watch. He would be there by eleven-thirty, then a brief

shopping expedition, but a very brief one because nowadays there was little

to buy in the shops that wasn't from Europe—except the best garden

furniture in the world, and Bond hadn't got a garden. The drug-store first for

half a dozen of Owens incomparable toothbrushes. Hoffritz on Madison

Avenue for one of their heavy, toothed Gillette-type razors, so much better

than Gillette's own product, Tripler's for some of those French golf socks

made by Izod, Scribner's because it was the last great bookshop in New York

and because there was a salesman there with a good nose for thrillers, and

then to Abercrombie's to look over the new gadgets and, incidentally, make

a date with Solange (appropriately employed in their Indoor Games

Department) for the evening.

The Cadillac was running the hideous gauntlet of the used car dumps, and

chromium-plated swindles leered and winked. What happened to these re-

sprayed crocks when the weather had finally rotted their guts? Where did

they finally go to die? Mightn't they be useful if they were run into the sea to

conquer coastal erosion? Take a letter to the Herald Tribune!

Then there was the question of lunch. Dinner with Solange would be easy—

Lutece in the sixties, one of the great restaurants of the world. But for lunch

by himself? In the old days it would certainly have been the '21,' but the

expense-account aristocracy had captured even that stronghold, inflating the

prices and, because they didn't know good from bad, deflating the food. But

he would go there for old times' sake and have a couple of dry martinis--

Beefeaters with a domestic vermouth, shaken with a twist of lemon peel—at

the bar. And then what about the best meal in New York—oyster stew with

cream, crackers, and Miller High Life at the Oyster Bar at Grand Central? No,

he didn't want to sit up at a bar—somewhere spacious and comfortable

where he could read a paper in peace. Yes. That was it! The Edwardian

Room at the Plaza, a corner table. They didn't know him there, but he knew

he could get what he wanted to eat—not like Chambord or Pavillon with their

irritating Wine and Foodmanship and, in the case of the latter, the miasma

of a hundred different women's scents to confound your palate. He would

have one more dry martini at the table, then smoked salmon and the

particular scrambled eggs he had once (Felix Leiter knew the head-waiter)

instructed them how to make.\* Yes, that sounded all right. He would have to

take a chance with the smoked salmon. It used to be Scotch in the

Edwardian Room, not that thickly cut, dry and tasteless Canadian stuff. But

one could never tell with American food. As long as they got their steaks and

sea-food right, the rest could go to hell. And everything was so long frozen,

in some vast communal food-morgue presumably, that flavour had gone

from all American food except the Italian. Everything tasted the same—a

sort of neutral food taste. When had a fresh chicken—not a broiler—a fresh

farm egg, a fish caught that day, last been served in a New York restaurant?

Was there a market in New York, like les Halles in Paris and Smithfields in

London, where one could actually see fresh food and buy it? Bond had never

heard of one. People would say that it was unhygienic. Were the Americans

becoming too hygienic in general—too bug-conscious? Every time Bond had

made love to Solange, at a time when they should be relaxing in each

other's arms, she would retire to the bathroom for a long quarter of an hour

and there was a lengthy period after that when he couldn't kiss her because

she had gargled with TCP. And the pills she took if she had a cold! Enough to

combat double pneumonia. But James Bond smiled at the thought of her and

wondered what they would do together—apart from Lutèce and Love—that

evening. Again, New York had everything. He had heard, though he had

never succeeded in tracing them, that one could see blue films with sound

and colour and that one's sex life was never the same thereafter. That would

be an experience to share with Solange! And that bar, again still

undiscovered, which Felix Leiter had told him was the rendezvous for sadists

and masochists of both sexes. The uniform was black leather jackets and

leather gloves. If you were a sadist, you wore the gloves under the left

shoulder strap. For the masochists it was the right. As with the transvestite

places in Paris and Berlin, it would be fun to go and have a look. In the end,

of course, they would probably just go to The Embers or to hear Solange's

favourite jazz and then home for more love and TCP.

James Bond smiled to himself. They were soaring over the Triborough, that

supremely beautiful bridge into the serried battlements of Manhattan. He

liked looking forward to his pleasures, to stolen exeats between the working

hours. He enjoyed day-dreaming about them, down to the smallest detail.

And now he had made his plans and every prospect pleased. Of course

things could go wrong, he might have to make some changes. But that

wouldn't matter. New York has everything.

New York has not got everything. The consequences of the absent amenity

were most distressing for James Bond. After the scrambled eggs in the

Edwardian Room, everything went hopelessly wrong and, instead of the

dream programme, there had to be urgent and embarrassing telephone calls

with London head-quarters and, and then only by the greatest of good luck,

an untidy meeting at midnight beside the skating rink at Rockefeller Center

with tears and threats of suicide from the English girl. And it was all New

York's fault! One can hardly credit the deficiency, but there is no Reptile

House at the Central Park Zoo.

\*SCRAMBLED EGGS 'JAMES BOND'. For FOUR individualists:

12 fresh eggs

Salt and pepper

5-6 oz. of fresh butter

Break the eggs into a bowl. Beat thoroughly with a fork and season well. In

a small copper (or heavy-bottomed saucepan) melt four oz. of the butter.

When melted, pour in the eggs and cook over a very low heat, whisking

continuously with a small egg whisk.

While the eggs are slightly more moist than you would wish for eating,

remove pan from heat, add rest of butter and continue whisking for half a

minute, adding the while finely chopped chives or fine herbs. Serve on hot

buttered toast in individual copper dishes (for appearance only) with pink

champagne (Taittainger) and low music.