

## James Bond (from Carte Blanche)

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After three and a half hours' sleep James Bond was woken at seven a.m. in his Chelsea flat by the electronic tone of his mobile phone's alarm clock. His eyes focused on the white ceiling of the small bedroom. He blinked twice and, ignoring the pain in his shoulder, head and knees, rolled out of the double bed, prodded by the urge to get on the trail of the Irishman and Noah.

His clothes from the mission to Novi Sad lay on the hardwood floor. He tossed the tactical outfit into a training kitbag, gathered up the rest of his clothes and dropped them into the laundry bin, a courtesy to May, his treasure of a Scottish housekeeper who came three times a week to sort out his domestic life. He would not think of having her pick up his clutter.

Naked, Bond walked into the bathroom, turned on the shower as hot as he could stand it and scrubbed himself hard with unscented soap. Then he turned the temperature down, stood under freezing water until he could tolerate that no longer, stepped out and dried himself. He examined his wounds from last night: two large aubergine-coloured bruises on his leg, some scrapes and the slice on his shoulder from the grenade shrapnel.

Nothing serious.

He shaved with a heavy, double-bladed safety razor, its handle of light buffalo horn. He used this fine accessory not because it was greener to the environment than the plastic disposables that most men employed but simply because it gave a better shave — and required some skill to wield; James Bond found comfort even in small challenges.

By seven fifteen he was dressed: a navy-blue Canali suit, a white sea island shirt and a burgundy Grenadine tie, the latter items from Turnbull & Asser. He donned black shoes, slip-ons; he never wore laces, except for combat footwear or when tradecraft required him to send silent messages to a fellow agent via prearranged loopings.

Onto his wrist he slipped his steel Rolex Oyster Perpetual, the 34mm model, the date window its only complication; Bond did not need to know the phases of the moon or the exact moment of high tide at Southampton. And he suspected very few people did.

Most days he had breakfast — his favourite meal of the day — at a small hotel nearby in Pont Street. Occasionally he cooked for himself one of the few things he was capable of whipping up in the kitchen: three eggs softly scrambled with Irish butter. The steaming curds were accompanied by bacon and crisp wholemeal toast, with more Irish butter and marmalade.

Today, though, the urgency of Incident Twenty was in full bloom so there was no time for food. Instead he brewed a cup of fiercely strong Jamaica Blue Mountain coffee, which he drank from a china mug as he listened to Radio 4 to learn whether or not the train incident and subsequent deaths had made the international news. They had not.

His wallet and cash were in his pocket, his car key, too. He grabbed the plastic carrier bag of the items he had collected in Serbia and the locked steel box that contained his weapon and ammunition, which he could not carry legally within the UK.

He hurried down the stairs of his flat — formerly two spacious stables.

He unlocked the door and stepped into the garage. The cramped space was large enough, just, for the two cars that were inside, plus a few extra tyres and tools. He climbed into the newer of the vehicles, the latest model Bentley Continental GT, its exterior the company's distinctive granite grey, with supple black hide inside.

The turbo W12 engine murmured to life. Tapping the downshift paddle into first gear, he eased into the road, leaving behind his other vehicle, less powerful and more temperamental but just as elegant: a 1960s E-type Jaguar, which had been his father's.

Driving north, Bond manoeuvred through the traffic, with tens of thousands of others who were similarly making their way to offices throughout London at the start of yet another week — although, of course, in Bond's case this mundane image belied the truth.

Exactly the same could be said for his employer itself.