

Fleming, Ian - [James Bond]

The Property Of A Lady



calibre 0.9.3

THE PROPERTY OF A LADY

It was, exceptionally, a hot day in early June. James Bond put down the dark gray chalk pencil that was the marker for the dockets routed to the Double-O Section and took off his coat. He didn't bother to hang it over the back of his chair, let alone take the trouble to get up and drape the coat over the hanger Mary Goodnight had suspended, at her own cost (damn women!), behind the Office of Works' green door of his connecting office. He dropped the coat on the floor. There was no reason to keep the coat immaculate, the creases tidy. There was no sign of any work to be done. All over the world there was quiet. The In and Out signals had, for weeks, been routine. The daily top secret SITREP, even the newspapers, yawned vacuously in the latter case scratchings at domestic scandals for readership, for bad news, the only news that makes such sheets readable, whether top secret or on sale for pennies.

Bond hated these periods of vacuum. His eyes, his mind, were barely in focus as he turned the pages of a jaw-breaking dissertation by the Scientific Research Station on the Russian use of cyanide gas, propelled by the cheapest bulb-handled children's water pistol, for assassination. The spray, it seemed, directed at the face, took instantaneous effect. It was recommended for victims from 25 years upwards, on ascending stairways or inclines. The verdict would then probably be heart-failure.

The harsh burr of the red telephone sprayed into the room so suddenly that James Bond, his mind elsewhere, reached his hand automatically towards his left armpit in self-defense. The edges of his mouth turned down as he recognized the reflex. On the second burr he picked up the receiver.

"Sir?"

"Sir."

He got up from his chair and picked up his coat. He put on the coat and at the same time put on his mind. He had been dozing in his bunk. Now he had to go up on the bridge. He walked through into the connecting office and resisted the impulse to ruffle up the inviting nape of Mary Goodnight's golden neck.

He told her "M." and walked out into the close-carpeted corridor and along, between the muted whizz and zing of the Communications Section, of which his Section was a neighbor, to the lift and up to the eighth.

Miss Money Penny's expression conveyed nothing. It usually conveyed something if she knew something private excitement, curiosity, or, if Bond was

in trouble, encouragement or even anger. Now the smile of welcome showed disinterest. Bond registered that this was going to be some kind of a routine job, a bore, and he adjusted his entrance through that fateful door accordingly.

There was a visitor a stranger. He sat on M.'s left. He only briefly glanced up as Bond came in and took his usual place across the red-leather-topped desk.

M. said, stiffly, "Dr. Fanshawe, I don't think you've met Commander Bond of my Research Department."

Bond was used to these euphemisms.

He got up and held out his hand. Dr. Fanshawe rose, briefly touched Bond's hand and sat quickly down as if he had touched paws with a Gila monster.

If he looked at Bond, inspected him and took him in as anything more than an anatomical silhouette, Bond thought that Dr. Fanshawe's eyes must be fitted with a thousandth of a second shutter. So this was obviously some kind of an expert a man whose interests lay in facts, things, theories not in human beings. Bond wished that M. had given him some kind of a brief, hadn't got this puckish, rather childishly malign desire to surprise to spring the jack-in-a-box on his staff. But Bond, remembering his own boredom of ten minutes ago, and putting himself in M.'s place, had the intuition to realize that M. himself might have been subject to the same June heat, the same oppressive vacuum in his duties, and, faced by the unexpected relief of an emergency, a small one perhaps, had decided to extract the maximum effect, the maximum drama, out of it to relieve his own tedium.

The stranger was middle-aged, rosy, well-fed, and clothed rather foppishly in the neo-Edwardian fashion turned-up cuffs to his dark blue, four-buttoned coat, a pearl pin in a heavy silk cravat, spotless wing collar, cufflinks formed of what appeared to be antique coins, pince-nez on a thick black ribbon. Bond summed him up as something literary, a critic perhaps, a bachelor possibly with homosexual tendencies.

M. said, "Dr. Fanshawe is a noted authority on antique jewelry. He is also, though this is confidential, adviser to H.M. Customs and to the C.I.D. on such things. He has in fact been referred to me by our friends at M.I.5. It is in connection with our Miss Freudenstein."

Bond raised his eyebrows. Maria Freudenstein was a secret agent working for the Soviet KGB in the heart of the Secret Service. She was in the

Communications Department, but in a watertight compartment of it that had been created especially for her, and her duties were confined to operating the Purple Cipher which had also been created especially for her. Six times a day she was responsible for encoding and dispatching lengthy SITREPS in this cipher to the C.I.A. in Washington. These messages were the output of Section 100 which was responsible for running double agents. They were an ingenious mixture of true fact, harmless disclosures and an occasional nugget of the grossest misinformation. Maria Freudenstein, who had been known to be a Soviet agent when she was taken into the Service, had been allowed to steal the key to the Purple Cipher with the intention that the Russians should have complete access to these SITREPS be able to intercept and decipher them and thus, when appropriate, be fed false information. It was a highly secret operation which needed to be handled with extreme delicacy, but it had now been running smoothly for three years and, if Maria Freudenstein also picked up a certain amount of canteen gossip at Headquarters, that was a necessary risk, and she was not attractive enough to form liaisons which could be a security risk.

M. turned to Dr. Fanshawe. "Perhaps, Doctor, you would care to tell Commander Bond what it is all about."

"Certainly, certainly." Dr. Fanshawe looked quickly at Bond and then away again. He addressed his boots. "You see, it's like this, er, Commander. You've heard of a man called Fabergé, no doubt. Famous Russian jeweler."

"Made fabulous Easter eggs for the Czar and Czarina before the revolution."

"That was indeed one of his specialties. He made many other exquisite pieces of what we may broadly describe as objects of vertu. Today, in the sale rooms, the best examples fetch truly fabulous prices £50,000 and more. And recently there entered this country the most amazing specimen of all the so-called Emerald Sphere, a work of supreme art hitherto known only from a sketch by the great man himself. This treasure arrived by registered post from Paris and it was addressed to this woman of whom you know, Miss Maria Freudenstein."

"Nice little present. Might I ask how you learned of it, Doctor?"

"I am, as your Chief has told you, an adviser to H.M. Customs and Excise in matters concerning antique jewelry and similar works of art. The declared value of the package was £100,000. This was unusual. There are methods of opening such packages clandestinely. The package was opened under a Home Office Warrant, of course and I was called in to examine the contents and give

a valuation. I immediately recognized the Emerald Sphere from the account and sketch of it given in Mr. Kenneth Snowman's definitive work on Fabergé. I said that the declared price might well be on the low side. But what I found of particular interest was the accompanying document which gave, in Russian and French, the provenance of this priceless object." Dr. Fanshawe gestured towards a photostat of what appeared to be a brief family tree that lay on the desk in front of M. "That is a copy I had made. Briefly, it states that the Sphere was commissioned by Miss Freudenstein's grandfather directly from Fabergé in 1917 no doubt as a means of turning some of his rubles into something portable and of great value. On his death in 1918 it passed to his brother and thence, in 1950, to Miss Freudenstein's mother. She, it appears, left Russia as a child and lived in White Russian émigré circles in Paris. She never married, but gave birth to this girl, Maria, illegitimately. It seems that she died last year and that some friend or executor, the paper is not signed, has now forwarded the Sphere to its rightful owner, Miss Maria Freudenstein. I had no reason to question this girl, although as you can imagine my interest was most lively, until last month Sotheby's announced that they would auction the piece, described as 'the property of a lady' in a week from today. On behalf of the British Museum and, er, other interested parties, I then made discreet inquiries and met the lady, who, with perfect composure, confirmed the rather unlikely story contained in the provenance. It was then that I learned that she worked for the Ministry of Defense and it crossed my rather suspicious mind that it was, to say the least of it, odd that a junior clerk, engaged presumably on sensitive duties, should suddenly receive a gift to the value of £100,000 or more from abroad. I spoke to a senior official in M.I.5 with whom I have some contact through my work for H.M. Customs and I was in due course referred to this, er, department." Dr. Fanshawe spread his hands and gave Bond a brief glance. "And that, Commander, is all I have to tell you."

M. broke in, "Thank you, Doctor. Just one or two final questions and I won't detain you any further. You have examined this emerald ball thing and you pronounce it genuine?"

Dr. Fanshawe ceased gazing at his boots. He looked up and spoke to a point somewhere above M.'s left shoulder. "Certainly. So does Mr. Snowman of Wart-ski's, the greatest Fabergé experts and dealers in the world. It is undoubtedly the missing masterpiece of which hitherto Carl Fabergé's sketch was the only record."

"What about the provenance? What do the experts say about that?"

"It stands up adequately. The greatest Fabergé pieces were nearly always

privately commissioned. Miss Freudenstein says that her grandfather was a vastly rich man before the revolution a porcelain manufacturer. Ninety-nine percent of all Fabergé's output has found its way abroad. There are only a few pieces left in the Kremlin described simply as 'pre-revolutionary examples of Russian jewelry.' The official Soviet view has always been that they are merely capitalist baubles. Officially they despise them as they officially despise their superb collection of French Impressionists."

"So the Soviet still retain some examples of the work of this man Fabergé. Is it possible that this emerald affair could have lain secreted somewhere in the Kremlin through all these years?"

"Certainly. The Kremlin treasure is vast. No one knows what they keep hidden. They have only recently put on display what they have wanted to put on display."

M. drew on his pipe. His eyes through the smoke were bland, scarcely interested. "So that, in theory, there is no reason why this emerald ball should not have been unearthed from the Kremlin, furnished with a faked history to establish ownership, and transferred abroad as a reward to some friend of Russia for services rendered?"

"None at all. It would be an ingenious method of greatly rewarding the beneficiary without the danger of paying large sums into his, or her, bank account."

"But the final monetary reward would of course depend on the amount realized by the sale of the object the auction price for instance?"

"Exactly."

"And what do you expect this object to fetch at Sotheby's?"

"Impossible to say. Wartski's will certainly bid very high. But of course they wouldn't be prepared to tell anyone just how high either on their own account for stock, so to speak, or acting on behalf of a customer. Much would depend on how high they are forced up by an underbidder. Anyway, not less than £100,000 I'd say."

"Hm." M.'s mouth turned down at the corners. "Expensive hunk of jewelry."

Dr. Fanshawe was aghast at this barefaced revelation of M.'s philistinism. He actually looked M. straight in the face. "My dear sir," he expostulated, "do you

consider the stolen Goya, sold at Sotheby's for £140,000, that went to the National Gallery, just an expensive hunk, as you put it, of canvas and paint?"

M. said placatingly, "Forgive me, Dr. Fanshawe. I expressed myself clumsily. I have never had the leisure to interest myself in works of art nor, on a naval officer's pay, the money to acquire any. I was just registering my dismay at the runaway prices being fetched at auction these days."

"You are entitled to your views, sir," said Dr. Fanshawe stuffily.

Bond thought it was time to rescue M. He also wanted to get Dr. Fanshawe out of the room so that they could get down to the professional aspects of this odd business. He got to his feet. He said to M., "Well, sir, I don't think there is anything else I need to know. No doubt this will turn out to be perfectly straightforward (like hell it would!) and just a matter of one of your staff turning out to be a very lucky woman. But it's very kind of Dr. Fanshawe to have gone to so much trouble." He turned to Dr. Fanshawe. "Would you care to have a staff car to take you wherever you're going?"

"No thank you, thank you very much. It will be pleasant to walk across the park."

Hands were shaken, good-byes said and Bond showed the doctor out. Bond came back into the room. M. had taken a bulky file, stamped with the top secret red star, out of a drawer and was already immersed in it. Bond took his seat again and waited. The room was silent save for the riffling of paper. This also stopped as M. extracted a foolscap sheet of blue cardboard used for Confidential Staff Records and carefully read through the forest of close type on both sides.

Finally he slipped it back in the file and looked up. "Yes," he said and the blue eyes were bright with interest. "It fits all right. The girl was born in Paris in 1935. Mother very active in the Resistance during the war. Helped run the Tulip Escape Route and got away with it. After the war, the girl went to the Sorbonne and then got a job in the Embassy, in the Naval Attaché's office, as an interpreter. You know the rest. She was compromised some unattractive sexual business by some of her mother's old Resistance friends who by then were working for the NKVD, and from then on she has been working under Control. She applied, no doubt on instruction, for British citizenship. Her clearance from the Embassy and her mother's Resistance record helped her to get that by 1959, and she was then recommended to us by the FO. But it was there that she made her big mistake. She asked for a year's leave before

coming to us and was next reported by the Hutchinson network in the Leningrad espionage school. There she presumably received the usual training and we had to decide what to do about her. Section 100 thought up the Purple Cipher operation and you know the rest. She's been working for three years inside headquarters for the KGB and now she's getting her reward this emerald ball thing worth £100,000. And that's interesting on two counts. First it means that the KGB is totally hooked on the Purple Cipher or they wouldn't be making this fantastic payment. That's good news. It means that we can hot up the material we're passing overput across some Grade 3 deception material and perhaps even move up to Grade 2. Secondly, it explains something we've never been able to understand that this girl hasn't hitherto received a single payment for her services. We were worried by that. She had an account at Glyn, Mills that only registered her monthly paycheck of around £50. And she's consistently lived within it. Now she's getting her payoff in one large lump sum via this bauble we've been learning about. All very satisfactory."

M. reached for the ashtray made out of a twelve-inch shell base and rapped out his pipe with the air of a man who has done a good afternoon's work.

Bond shifted in his chair. He badly needed a cigarette, but he wouldn't have dreamed of lighting one. He wanted one to help him focus his thoughts. He felt that there were some ragged edges to this problem one particularly. He said, mildly, "Have we ever caught up with her local Control, sir? How does she get her instructions?"

"Doesn't need to," said M. impatiently, busying himself with his pipe. "Once she'd got hold of the Purple Cipher all she needed to do was hold down her job. Damn it man, she's pouring the stuff into their lap six times a day. What sort of instructions would they need to give her? I doubt if the KGB men in London even know of her existence perhaps the Resident Director does, but as you know we don't even know who he is. Give my eyes to find out."

Bond suddenly had a flash of intuition. It was as if a camera had started grinding in his skull, grinding out a length of clear film. He said quietly, "It might be that this business at Sotheby's could show him to us show us who he is."

"What the devil are you talking about, 007? Explain yourself."

"Well sir," Bond's voice was calm with certainty, "you remember what this Dr. Fanshawe said about an underbiddersomeone to make these Wartski merchants go to their very top price. If the Russians don't seem to know or

care very much about Fabergé, as Dr. Fanshawe says, they may have no very clear idea what this thing's really worth. The KGB wouldn't be likely to know about such things anyway. They may imagine it's only worth its break-up value say ten or twenty thousand pounds for the emerald. That sort of sum would make more sense than the small fortune the girl's going to get if Dr. Fanshawe's right. Well, if the Resident Director is the only man who knows about this girl, he will be the only man who knows she's been paid. So he'll be the underbidder. He'll be sent to Sotheby's and told to push the sale through the roof. I'm certain of it. So we'll be able to identify him and we'll have enough on him to have him sent home. He just won't know what's hit him. Nor will the KGB. If I can go to the sale and bowl him out and we've got the place covered with cameras, and the auction records, we can get the FO to declare him persona non grata inside a week. And Resident Directors don't grow on trees. It may be months before the KGB can appoint a replacement."

M. said, thoughtfully, "Perhaps you've got something there." He swiveled his chair round and gazed out of the big window towards the jagged skyline of London. Finally he said, over his shoulder, "All right, 007. Go and see the Chief of Staff and set the machinery up. I'll square things with Five. It's their territory, but it's our bird. There won't be any trouble. But don't go and get carried away and bid for this bit of rubbish yourself. I haven't got the money to spare."

Bond said, "No sir." He got to his feet and went quickly out of the room. He thought he had been very clever and he wanted to see if he had. He didn't want M. to change his mind.

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Wartski has a modest, ultra-modern frontage at 138 Regent Street. The window, with a restrained show of modern and antique jewelry, gave no hint that these were the greatest Fabergé-dealers in the world. The interior gray carpet, walls paneled in sycamore, a few unpretentious vitrines held none of the excitement of Cartier's, Boucheron or Van Cleef, but the group of famed Royal Warrants from Queen Mary, the Queen Mother, the Queen, King Paul of Greece and the unlikely King Frederick IX of Denmark, suggested that this was no ordinary jeweler.

James Bond asked for Mr. Kenneth Snowman. A good-looking, very well-dressed man of about 40 rose from a group of men sitting with their heads together at the back of the room and came forward.

Bond said quietly, "I'm from the C.I.D. Can we have a talk? Perhaps you'd like to check my credentials first. My name's James Bond. But you'll have to go direct to Sir Ronald Vallance or his P.A. I'm not directly on the strength at Scotland Yard. Sort of liaison job."

The intelligent, observant eyes didn't appear even to look him over. The man smiled. "Come on downstairs. Just having a talk with some American friendssort of correspondents really. From 'Old Russia' on Fifth Avenue."

"I know the place," said Bond. "Full of rich-looking icons and so on. Not far from the Pierre."

"That's right." Mr. Snowman seemed even more reassured. He led the way down a narrow, thickly carpeted stairway into a large and glittering showroom which was obviously the real treasure house of the shop. Gold and diamonds and cut stones winked from lit cases round the walls.

"Have a seat. Cigarette?"

Bond took one of his own. "It's about this Fabergé that's coming up at Sotheby's tomorrowthis Emerald Sphere."

"Ah, yes." Mr. Snowman's clear brow furrowed anxiously. "No trouble about it I hope?"

"Not from your point of view. But we're very interested in the actual sale. We know about the owner, Miss Freudenstein. We think there may be an attempt to raise the bidding artificially. We're interested in the underbidderassuming, that is, that your firm will be leading the field, so to speak."

"Well, er, yes," said Mr. Snowman with rather careful candor. "We're certainly going to go after it. But it'll sell for a huge price. Between you and me, we believe the V and A are going to bid, and probably the Metropolitan. But is it some crook you're after? If so you needn't worry. This is out of their class."

Bond said, "No. We're not looking for a crook." He wondered how far to go with this man. Because people are very careful with the secrets of their own business doesn't mean that they'll be careful with the secrets of yours. Bond picked up a wood and ivory plaque that lay on the table. It said:

It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer.

But when he is gone his way, he boasteth.

Bond was amused. He said so. "You can read the whole history of the bazaar, of the dealer and the customer, behind that quotation," he said. He looked Mr. Snowman straight in the eyes. "I need that sort of nose, that sort of intuition in this case. Will you give me a hand?"

"Certainly. If you'll tell me how I can help." He waved a hand. "If it's secrets you're worried about, please don't worry. Jewelers are used to them. Scotland Yard will probably give my firm a clean bill in that respect. Heaven knows we've had enough to do with them over the years."

"And if I told you that I'm from the Ministry of Defense?"

"Same thing," said Mr. Snowman. "You can naturally rely absolutely on my discretion!"

Bond made up his mind. "All right. Well, all this comes under the Official Secrets Act, of course. We suspect that the underbidder, presumably to you, will be a Soviet Agent. My job is to establish his identity. Can't tell you any more, I'm afraid. And you don't actually need to know any more. All I want is to go with you to Sotheby's tomorrow night and for you to help me spot the man. No medals, I'm afraid, but we'd be extremely grateful."

Mr. Kenneth Snowman's eyes glinted with enthusiasm. "Of course. Delighted to help in any way. But," he looked doubtful, "you know it's not necessarily going to be all that easy. Peter Wilson, the head of Sotheby's, who'll be taking the sale, would be the only person who could tell us for sure that is, if the bidder wants to stay secret. There are dozens of ways of bidding without making any movement at all. But if the bidder fixes his method, his code so to speak, with Peter Wilson before the sale, Peter wouldn't think of letting anyone in on the code. It would give the bidder's game away to reveal his limit. And that's a close secret, as you can imagine, in the rooms. And a thousand times not if you come with me. I shall probably be setting the pace. I already know how far I'm going to go for a client by the way but it would make my job vastly easier if I could tell how far the underbidder's going to go. As it is, what you've told me has been a great help. I shall warn my man to put his sights even higher. If this chap of yours has got a strong nerve, he may push me very hard indeed. And there will be others in the field of course. It sounds as if this is going to be quite a night. They're putting it on television and asking all the millionaires and dukes and duchesses for the sort of gala performance Sotheby's do rather well. Wonderful publicity of course. By jove,

if they knew there was cloak-and-dagger stuff mixed up with the sale, there'd be a riot! Now then, is there anything else to go into? Just spot this man and that's all?"

"That's all. How much do you think this thing will go for?"

Mr. Snowman tapped his teeth with a gold pencil. "Well now, you see that's where I have to keep quiet. I know how high I'm going to go, but that's my client's secret." He paused and looked thoughtful. "Let's say that if it goes for less than £100,000 we'll be surprised."

"I see," said Bond. "Now then, how do I get into the sale?"

Mr. Snowman produced an elegant alligator-skin notecase and extracted two engraved bits of pasteboard. He handed one over. "That's my wife's. I'll get her one somewhere else in the rooms. B.5 well placed in the center front. I'm B.6."

Bond took the ticket. It said:

Sotheby & Co.

Sale of

A Casket of Magnificent Jewels

and

A Unique Object of Vertu by Carl Fabergé

The Property of a Lady

Admit one to the Main Sale Room

Tuesday, 20 June, at 9.30 pm precisely

ENTRANCE IN ST. GEORGE STREET

"It's not the old Georgian entrance in Bond Street," commented Mr. Snowman. "They have an awning and red carpet out from their back door now that Bond Street's one way. Now," he got up from his chair, "would you care to see some Fabergé? We've got some pieces here my father bought from the Kremlin around 1927. It'll give you some idea what all the fuss is about, though of course the Emerald Sphere's incomparably finer than anything I can show you by Fabergé apart from the Imperial Easter Eggs."

Later, dazzled by the diamonds, the multicolored gold, the silken sheen of translucent enamels, James Bond walked up and out of the Aladdin's Cave under Regent Street and went off to spend the rest of the day in drab offices around Whitehall planning drearily minute arrangements for the identification and photographing of a man in a crowded room who did not yet possess a face or an identity but who was certainly the top Soviet spy in London.

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Through the next day, Bond's excitement mounted. He found an excuse to go into the Communications Section and wander into the little room where Miss Maria Freudenstein and two assistants were working the cipher machines that handled the Purple Cipher dispatches. He picked up the en clair file he had freedom of access to most material at headquarters and ran his eye down the carefully edited paragraphs that, in half an hour or so, would be spiked, unread, by some junior C.I.A. clerk in Washington and, in Moscow, be handed, with reverence, to a top-ranking officer of the KGB. He joked with the two junior girls, but Maria Freudenstein only looked up from her machine to give him a polite smile and Bond's skin crawled minutely at this proximity to treachery and at the black and deadly secret locked up beneath the frilly white blouse. She was an unattractive girl with a pale, rather pimply skin, black hair and a vaguely unwashed appearance. Such a girl would be unloved, make few friends, have chips on her shoulder more particularly in view of her illegitimacy and a grouse against society. Perhaps her only pleasure in life was the triumphant secret she harbored that that flattish bosom the knowledge that she was cleverer than all those around her, that she was, every day, hitting back against the world the world that despised, or just ignored her, because of her plainness with all her might. One day they'd be sorry! It was a common neurotic pattern the revenge of the ugly duckling on society.

Bond wandered off down the corridor to his own office. By tonight that girl would have made a fortune, been paid her thirty pieces of silver a thousandfold. Perhaps the money would change her character, bring her happiness. She would be able to afford the best beauty specialists, the best clothes, a pretty flat. But M. had said he was now going to hot up the Purple Cipher Operation, try a more dangerous level of deception. This would be dicey work. One false step, one incautious lie, an ascertainable falsehood in a message, and the KGB would smell a rat. Once more, and they would know they were being hoaxed and probably had been ignominiously hoaxed for three years. Such a shameful revelation would bring quick revenge. It would be assumed that Maria Freudenstein had been acting as a double agent, working for the British as well as the Russians. She would inevitably and

quickly be liquidated perhaps with the cyanide pistol Bond had been reading about only the day before.

James Bond, looking out of the window across the trees in Regent's Park, shrugged. Thank God it was none of his business. The girl's fate wasn't in his hands. She was caught in the grimy machine of espionage and she would be lucky if she lived to spend a tenth of the fortune she was going to gain in a few hours in the auction rooms.

* * *

There was a line of cars and taxis blocking George Street behind Sotheby's. Bond paid off his taxi and joined the crowd filtering under the awning and up the steps. He was handed a catalog by the uniformed Commissionaire who inspected his ticket, and went up the broad stairs with the fashionable, excited crowd and along a gallery and into the main auction room that was already thronged. He found his seat next to Mr. Snowman, who was writing figures on a pad on his knee, and looked round him.

The lofty room was perhaps as large as a tennis court. It had the look and the smell of age and the two large chandeliers, to fit in with the period, blazed warmly in contrast to the strip lighting along the vaulted ceiling whose glass roof was partly obscured by a blind, still half-drawn against the sun that would have been blazing down on the afternoon's sale. Miscellaneous pictures and tapestries hung on the olive-green walls and batteries of television and other cameras (amongst them the M.I.5 cameraman with a press pass from The Sunday Times) were clustered with their handlers on a platform built out from the middle of a giant tapestried hunting scene. There were perhaps a hundred dealers and spectators sitting attentively on small gilt chairs. All eyes were focused on the slim, good-looking auctioneer talking quietly from the raised wooden pulpit. He was dressed in an immaculate dinner jacket with a red carnation in the buttonhole. He spoke unemphatically and without gestures.

"Fifteen thousand pounds. And sixteen," a pause. A glance at someone in the front row. "Against you, sir." The flick of a catalog being raised. "Seventeen thousand pounds I am bid. Eighteen. Nineteen. I am bid twenty thousand pounds." And so the quiet voice went, calmly, unhurriedly on while down among the audience the equally impassive bidders signaled their responses to the litany.

"What is he selling?" asked Bond opening his catalog.

"Lot 40," said Mr. Snowman. "That diamond rivière the porter's holding on the

black velvet tray. It'll probably go for about twenty-five. An Italian is bidding against a couple of Frenchmen. Otherwise they'd have got it for twenty. I only went to fifteen. Liked to have got it. Wonderful stones. But there it is."

Sure enough, the price stuck at twenty-five thousand and the hammer, held by its head and not by its handle, came down with soft authority. "Yours, sir," said Mr. Peter Wilson and a sales clerk hurried down the aisle to confirm the identity of the bidder.

"I'm disappointed," said Bond.

Mr. Snowman looked up from his catalog. "Why is that?"

"I've never been to an auction before and I always thought the auctioneer banged his gavel three times and said going, going, gone, so as to give the bidders a last chance."

Mr. Snowman laughed. "You might still find that operating in the Shires or in Ireland, but it hasn't been the fashion at London sale rooms since I've been attending them."

"Pity. It adds to the drama."

"You'll get plenty of that in a minute. This is the last lot before the curtain goes up."

One of the porters had reverently uncoiled a glittering mass of rubies and diamonds on his black velvet tray. Bond looked at the catalog. It said "Lot 41" which the luscious prose described as:

A PAIR OF FINE AND IMPORTANT RUBY AND DIAMOND BRACELETS, the front of each in the form of an elliptical cluster composed of one larger and two smaller rubies within a border of cushioned-shaped diamonds, the sides and back formed of simpler clusters alternating with diamond openwork scroll motifs springing from single-stone ruby centers millegriffe-set in gold, running between chains of rubies and diamonds linked alternately, the clasp also in the form of an elliptical cluster.

* According to family tradition, this lot was formerly the property of Mrs. Fitzherbert (1756-1837) whose marriage to The Prince of Wales afterwards Geo. IV was definitely established when in 1905 a sealed packet deposited at Coutts Bank in 1833 and opened by Royal permission disclosed the marriage certificate and other conclusive proofs.

These bracelets were probably given by Mrs. Fitzherbert to her niece, who was described by the Duke of Orleans as "the prettiest girl in England."

While the bidding progressed, Bond slipped out of his seat and went down the aisle to the back of the room where the overflow audience spread out into the New Gallery and the Entrance Hall to watch the sale on closed-circuit television. He casually inspected the crowd, seeking any face he could recognize from the 200 members of the Soviet embassy staff whose photographs, clandestinely obtained, he had been studying during the past days. But amidst an audience that defied classification a mixture of dealers, amateur collectors and what could be broadly classified as rich pleasure-seekers was not a feature, let alone a face, that he could recognize except from the gossip columns. One or two sallow faces might have been Russian, but equally they might have belonged to half a dozen European races. There was a scattering of dark glasses, but dark glasses are no longer a disguise. Bond went back to his seat. Presumably the man would have to divulge himself when the bidding began.

"Fourteen thousand I am bid. And fifteen. Fifteen thousand." The hammer came down. "Yours, sir."

There was a hum of excitement and a fluttering of catalogs. Mr. Snowman wiped his forehead with a white silk handkerchief. He turned to Bond. "Now I'm afraid you are more or less on your own. I've got to pay attention to the bidding and anyway for some unknown reason it's considered bad form to look over one's shoulder to see who's bidding against you if you're in the trade that's to say so I'll only be able to spot him if he's somewhere up front here, and I'm afraid that's unlikely. Pretty well all dealers, but you can stare around as much as you like. What you've got to do is to watch Peter Wilson's eyes and then try and see who he's looking at, or who's looking at him. If you can spot the man, which may be quite difficult, note any movement he makes, even the very smallest. Whatever the man does scratching his head, pulling at the lobe of his ear or whatever, will be a code he's arranged with Peter Wilson. I'm afraid he won't do anything obvious like raising his catalog. Do you get me? And don't forget that he may make absolutely no movement at all until right at the end when he's pushed me as far as he thinks I'll go, then he'll want to sign off. Mark you," Mr. Snowman smiled, "when we get to the last lap I'll put plenty of heat on him and try and make him show his hand. That's assuming of course that we are the only two bidders left in." He looked enigmatic. "And I think you can take it that we shall be."

From the man's certainty, James Bond felt pretty sure that Mr. Snowman had

been given instructions to get the Emerald Sphere at any cost.

A sudden hush fell as a tall pedestal draped in black velvet was brought in with ceremony and positioned in front of the auctioneer's rostrum. Then a handsome oval case of what looked like white velvet was placed on top of the pedestal and, with reverence, an elderly porter in gray uniform with wine-red sleeves, collar and back belt, unlocked it and lifted out Lot 42, placed it on the black velvet and removed the case. The cricket ball of polished emerald on its exquisite base glowed with a supernatural green fire and the jewels on its surface and on the opalescent meridian winked their various colors. There was a gasp of admiration from the audience and even the clerks and experts behind the rostrum and sitting at the tall counting-house desk beside the auctioneer, accustomed to the Crown jewels of Europe parading before their eyes, leaned forward to get a better look.

James Bond turned to his catalog. There it was, in heavy type and in prose as stickily luscious as a butterscotch sundae:

THE TERRESTRIAL GLOBE

DESIGNED IN 1917 BY CARL FABERGÉ FOR A RUSSIAN GENTLEMAN AND
NOW THE PROPERTY OF HIS GRANDDAUGHTER

42 A VERY IMPORTANT FABERGÉ TERRESTRIAL GLOBE. A sphere carved from an extraordinarily large piece of Siberian emerald matrix weighing approximately one thousand three hundred carats and of a superb color and vivid translucence, represents a terrestrial globe supported upon an elaborate rocaille scroll mount finely chased in quatre-couleur gold and set with a profusion of rose-diamonds and small emeralds of intense color, to form a table-clock.

Around this mount six gold putti disport themselves among cloud-forms which are naturalistically rendered in carved rock-crystal finished matt and veined with fine lines of tiny rose-diamonds. The globe itself, the surface of which is meticulously engraved with a map of the world with the principal cities indicated by brilliant diamonds embedded within gold collets, rotates mechanically on an axis controlled by a small clock-movement, by G. Moser, signed, which is concealed in the base, and is girdled by a fixed gold belt enameled opalescent oyster along a reserved path in champlévé technique over a moiré guillochage with painted Roman numerals in pale sepia enamel serving as the dial of the clock, and a single triangular pigeon-blood Burma ruby of about five carats set into the surface of the orb, pointing the hour.

Height: 7" in. Workmaster, Henrik Wigström. In the original double-opening white velvet, satin-lined, oviform case with the gold key fitted in the base.

* The theme of this magnificent sphere is one that had inspired Fabergé some fifteen years earlier, as evidenced in the miniature terrestrial globe which forms part of the Royal Collection at Sandringham. (See plate 280 in *The Art of Carl Fabergé*, by A. Kenneth Snowman.)

After a brief and searching glance round the room, Mr. Wilson banged his hammer softly. "Lot 42an object of vertu by Carl Fabergé." A pause. "Twenty thousand pounds I am bid."

Mr. Snowman whispered to Bond, "That means he's probably got a bid of at least fifty. This is simply to get things moving."

Catalogs fluttered. "And thirty, forty, fifty thousand pounds I am bid. And sixty, seventy, and eighty thousand pounds. And ninety." A pause and then: "One hundred thousand pounds I am bid."

There was a rattle of applause round the room. The cameras had swiveled to a youngish man, one of three on a raised platform to the left of the auctioneer who were speaking softly into telephones. Mr. Snowman commented, "That's one of Sotheby's young men. He'll be on an open line to America. I should think that's the Metropolitan bidding, but it might be anybody. Now it's time for me to get to work." Mr. Snowman flicked up his rolled catalog.

"And ten," said the auctioneer. The man spoke into his telephone and nodded. "And twenty."

Again a flick from Mr. Snowman.

"And thirty."

The man on the telephone seemed to be speaking rather more words than before into his mouthpieceperhaps giving his estimate of how much further the price was likely to go. He gave a slight shake of his head in the direction of the auctioneer and Peter Wilson looked away from him and round the room.

"One hundred and thirty thousand pounds I am bid," he repeated quietly.

Mr. Snowman said, softly, to Bond, "Now you'd better watch out. America seems to have signed off. It's time for your man to start pushing me."

James Bond slid out of his place and went and stood amongst a group of

reporters in a corner to the left of the rostrum. Peter Wilson's eyes were directed towards the far right-hand corner of the room. Bond could detect no movement, but the auctioneer announced "And forty thousand pounds." He looked down at Mr. Snowman. After a long pause Mr. Snowman raised five fingers. Bond guessed that this was part of his process of putting the heat on. He was showing reluctance, hinting that he was near the end of his tether.

"One hundred and forty-five thousand." Again the piercing glance towards the back of the room. Again no movement. But again some signal had been exchanged. "One hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

There was a buzz of comment and some desultory clapping. This time Mr. Snowman's reaction was even slower and the auctioneer twice repeated the last bid. Finally he looked directly at Mr. Snowman. "Against you, sir." At last Mr. Snowman raised five fingers.

"One hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds."

James Bond was beginning to sweat. He had got absolutely nowhere and the bidding must surely be coming to an end. The auctioneer repeated the bid.

And now there was the tiniest movement. At the back of the room, a chunky-looking man in a dark suit reached up and unobtrusively took off his dark glasses. It was a smooth, nondescript face the sort of face that might belong to a bank manager, a member of Lloyd's, or a doctor. This must have been the prearranged code with the auctioneer. So long as the man wore his dark glasses he would raise in tens of thousands. When he took them off, he had quit.

Bond shot a quick glance towards the bank of cameramen. Yes, the M.I.5 photographer was on his toes. He had also seen the movement. He lifted his camera deliberately and there was the quick glare of a flash. Bond got back to his seat and whispered to Snowman, "Got him. Be in touch with you tomorrow. Thanks a lot." Mr. Snowman only nodded. His eyes remained glued on the auctioneer.

Bond slipped out of his place and walked swiftly down the aisle as the auctioneer said for the third time, "One hundred and fifty-five thousand pounds I am bid," and then softly brought down his hammer. "Yours, sir."

Bond got to the back of the room before the audience had risen, applauding, to its feet. His quarry was hemmed in amongst the gilt chairs. He had now put on his dark glasses again and Bond put on a pair of his own. He contrived to slip

into the crowd and get behind the man as the chattering crowd streamed down the stairs. The hair grew low down on the back of the man's rather squat neck and the lobes of his ears were pinched in close to his head. He had a slight hump, perhaps only a bone deformation, high up on his back. Bond suddenly remembered. This was Piotr Malinowski, with the official title on the Embassy staff of "Agricultural Attaché." So!

Outside, the man began walking swiftly towards Conduit Street. James Bond got unhurriedly into a taxi with its engine running and its flag down. He said to the driver, "That's him. Take it easy."

"Yes, sir," said the M.I.5 driver, pulling away from the curb.

The man picked up a taxi in Bond Street. The tail in the mixed evening traffic was easy. Bond's satisfaction mounted as the Russian's taxi turned up north of the Park and along Bayswater. It was just a question whether he would turn down the private entrance into Kensington Palace Gardens, where the first mansion on the left is the massive building of the Soviet Embassy. If he did, that would clinch matters. The two patrolling policemen, the usual Embassy guards, had been specially picked that night. It was their job just to confirm that the occupant of the leading taxi actually entered the Soviet Embassy.

Then, with the Secret Service evidence and the evidence of Bond and of the M.I.5 cameraman, there would be enough for the Foreign Office to declare Comrade Piotr Malinowski persona non grata on the grounds of espionage activity and send him packing. In the grim chess game that is secret service work, the Russians would have lost a queen. It would have been a very satisfactory visit to the auction rooms.

The leading taxi did turn in through the big iron gates.

Bond smiled with grim satisfaction. He leaned forward. "Thanks, driver. Headquarters please."

The End