

The number 27 looms large in front of me just as a hotel porter passes by. I "fumble" in my pocket to kill a few seconds as I wait for privacy to enter Passion Pavlova's room with my ever-handy Amex card. The room is a carbon copy of mine in layout. Its temporary occupant is always so meticulously tidy. Only the bathroom shelf conveys any clues as to her personality and lifestyle, with its array of high-end toiletries, make-up, and a couple of brightly coloured Creed perfume bottles.

The floodlit cathedral reaches through the parted full-length curtains into the dark recesses of the hotel room. There is sufficient light here for me to work. I can even see to secure an escape cord to the balcony overlooking the bustling pavement two floors below.

A computer sits on the table at the foot of the double bed. Fortunately, I have several 'toys' at my disposal. Apart from the frictionless escape cord now tied to the balustrade, I have a watch that doesn't just tell the time. A backward twist of the stopwatch start button reveals a small tailor-made USP. Place the USP into the computer, and hey presto, I have a password/safe breaker. No encrypted computer can prevent my inevitable access to its files and folders and their transference to my wrist. Data securely good to go. The computer screen glows while streams of numbers and letters dance before my eyes. I search for a file containing a specific Russian agent name: Baz Boomble. It does not take long to find.

It's now a few minutes to 2100 hours.

*Bolly, come on*, I whisper impatiently to myself.

I drag the file icon into the USP icon and initiate the download onto my timepiece. The file isn't large, but the download time ticks by unbearably slowly.

*Was that a noise outside?*

The transfer's still not complete. *Was it a noise?*

*Yes, damn it!*

I hear Passion talking to someone on the other side of the hotel room door. There's no time to close down the computer, to hide my tracks.

Time to cut and run.

In a split second I reach the balcony, even as I hear the hotel card release the lock on the door.

Bright light blankets the room. Pavlova, all glossy hair perfect teeth, designer chic and rat-like cunning, has flicked the wall switch.

She gasps.

'My god, my computer is on! I didn't leave it like this!'

Pavlova is with a man, Baz Boomble. He grips her shoulder.

'Has it been accessed?'

'Yes. It looks like someone has copied data from the field operator files!'

I'm climbing – with infinite slowness - over the balcony rail. I take the wire between my hands. I try to make no noise.

But to no avail. They both rush towards the balcony.

I look up to see the glint of anger in Pavlova's eyes.

But with a safe, quick slide down the wire, I'm on the dusty and busy pavement below.

Pavlova looks at me, and turns back into the room, shouting to Boomble.

'Quick, follow her! I'll get my gun.'