Next Of Kin

by Flantastic

Summary

Thomas Carter is just a middle-manager until a terrifying attack on Mi6 propels him into the role of Quartermaster.

In the midst of trying to balance his new role with a chaotic personal life, he meets the legendary 007, a man with a dark secret that will have a profound effect on the new Q.

Roughly following the events of Skyfall and SPECTRE, this is the story of the creation of a Quartermaster.

Notes

I'm finally posting this, a fic that I've been writing on and off for almost two years. It is complete (bar the editing) and will run to at least 20 chapters (I think)*. I will add to the tags with each update and I'm aiming to post a new chapter twice a week.

*it's 18. There's a couple of biggies in there! 😊

Thank you to everyone who has ever commented or kudos'd my other stories. It means so
much to me to be able to do this. x
If there was one thing that Thomas Carter enjoyed, it was a challenge. Maybe that was why he loved working for Mi6 so much. He had begun there straight after leaving Oxford University. He didn’t actually apply to join them but apparently when you graduated with a first in Computer Engineering at the age of twenty (having already graduated with the same in Engineering Science just two years previously), you didn’t need to. Especially not when you’d just been offered a scholarship to M.I.T. to complete your doctorate. Major Geoffrey Boothroyd, the head of Research and Development at Mi6, had personally selected Tom to be offered an apprenticeship within his branch and admitted some months afterwards that they’d been worried that Tom studying in Massachusetts might have led to him being recruited by the Americans once he’d finished his studies there.

He’d started out as a simple programmer in the Computer Science division of the Research & Development Branch (or “Q Branch” as it was more commonly known in honour of Major Boothroyd’s official designation) before working his way up through the ranks. Q Branch had four divisions in all, the others being Vehicles, Biological/Chemical and Weapons. Computer Science was the smallest of the four divisions. There were just six members of staff under the division’s manager (by contrast, Weapons boasted twenty-two technicians). There was very little rivalry between the divisions as most projects involved input from at least two of them, and larger pieces required co-operation from all four. Weapon’s modified the agents Walther’s to produce greater accuracy, for instance, but it was Computer Science who designed the palm-encoding software. Vehicles retrofitted standard cars with defensive capabilities but Biological/Chemical developed the optimum fuel for the flamethrowers. Over them all, Q managed the projects, ably abetted by his number two, Vanessa Collins (or “R” as she was known).

Computer Science worked mainly on programming and encryption. Tom had shown himself to be particularly talented at the latter which had led to a headhunting attempt by GCHQ the year after he’d joined MI6. He’d turned them down flat, not even willing to consider doubling his wages to go and work for them in their codebreaking and hacking endeavours. Boothroyd had been grateful for his loyalty and made a point of mentoring him from then onwards. That was how in 2007, shortly after his twenty-seventh birthday, Tom had become the manager of his division.

~00Q~

Tom stretched and took a sip of tea from the mug beside him. It was stone cold but he barely noticed, intent as he was on reading through the code in front of him. His assistant manager Una Morris had brought it his attention. It was part of the software that was supposed to control the oil-slick deployment mechanism on the Vehicles division’s new Aston Martin retrofit. What should have been a smart function that made allowances for the heat of the road surface, the weather and the
size of the vehicle behind was failing every time and dumping the entire contents of the oil reservoirs. It should have been straightforward but Una had been having trouble spotting the glitch. Tom put the mug down and chuckled as he saw it. He moved a stray command to its correct position and saved his work. He looked up and grinned.

“How long did that take?”

Una laughed as she stopped the timer function on her phone.

“Under two minutes!” She exclaimed, laughing at her own frustration, “There were three of us scanning that for over half an hour this morning!”

Chuckling Tom moved the file back onto a USB drive before handing it to her.

“That should be fine now. Let Rashman in Vehicles have a play with it and tell him to let us know what he thinks.”

“Will do. Fancy another cuppa?”

Tom glanced up at the clock.

“Better not. The interdivisional is in ten minutes.”

The weekly interdivisional meeting was held in one of the conference suites on the seventh floor. Tom had glanced at the agenda earlier that morning. There were a dozen projects up for discussion but top of the list was the new Aston. It was all rather sad really. The car had been intended for 007, James Bond, but he’d been listed as missing, presumed dead, after a mission in Istanbul had gone wrong. Now it looked as though that car would go to 009.

Tom closed the laptop he’d been using and picked up his notepad and pen. The other division heads teased him for using such an old school method of collecting his thoughts but he just shrugged at them. He found it oddly soothing to write rather than type when formulating new ideas. He paused by Una’s desk to see if Rashman had acknowledged her email yet and then went to leave, telling her he’d be an hour or so as he intended to pick up a sandwich after the meeting. He was almost in the hallway when he suddenly heard an alarm sound followed closely by a shout from Brian Smith, one of his coders.

“Mr Carter? Sir? You need to see this.”

Ducking back into the room, he hurried over to Brian’s terminal, concerned by the worry in the man’s voice. Glancing at the screen Tom swore as he realised what he was looking at. Bond and another agent had died trying to recover a stolen hard-drive that was full of sensitive information about deep-cover operatives. Someone was trying to hack into it. He immediately swerved off to the main terminal in the centre of the room.

“Main screen, now!” He barked, dumping his notepad and pen and grabbing his headset. He dialled M’s extension as he started to type. Villiers answered.

“M’s office.”

“I need to speak to her immediately. Code red.”

“She’s been in a meeting in Whitehall. She should be making her way back by now.”

“Does she have her laptop with her?”
“No but Tanner accompanied her. He should have his.”

“No! Tanner accompanied her. He should have his.”

“Understood.”

Tom rang off and immediately dialled Tanner’s mobile.

“Yes?”

“It’s Tom Carter in Q Branch. Open your laptop. I’m linking you to my screen. Someone is trying to decrypt the stolen hard drive.”

“Yes?”

“Yes now!” Tom snapped, typing in commands and following the digital breadcrumbs the hackers were leaving.“I’m tracing the encryption source. Localising now… it’s centring in the UK… London…”

Tom could hear Tanner relaying the information to M and M’s responses as he watched his trace close in on Vauxhall. He felt a shiver of unease as he realised the data packet was linking to MI6’s own network. He typed furiously, trying to ring fence the hacker but they were like water, slipping through every protocol he tried. He kept talking to Tanner as he worked, hearing a strange doubling of his own words as Tanner continued to pass on the information on to M.

“It’s coming from MI6. The data packet is linking to our network… correction… this is behind our firewall.”

“I can’t stop it.” Tom said, the tension tightening in his shoulders. The room he was in had fallen silent and he was aware that everyone was watching him. “I need to shut it down…”

“We should shut it down.” Tanner relayed to M.

“No!” Tom heard M say. “Track it! We have to know where it’s coming from.”

“Strip the headers. Trace the source.” Tanner told him.

Tom redoubled his efforts, unable to understand how the hackers were getting past him so easily.

“How the hell did they get into our system?” M snapped.

“Getting it traced back now… it appears… it appears to be your computer Ma’am…”

“Shut it down!” M commanded. Tom immediately changed tactics, typing in the command that should have abruptly killed all the power to the computer terminals on M’s floor. Instead a screen popped up. It had a picture of M set into a Union Jack and a tinny rendition of ‘God Save The Queen’ started to play. As Tom watched a mock-up of their headquarters fell onto M’s head like a crown and the face started to giggle grotesquely. He heard M ask, “What is this?” but he didn’t have an answer for her. His keyboard had become unresponsive. Whatever it was, he could only watch. Suddenly the screen flickered and M’s face was replaced by a sugar skull for a second before it and the flag burned away. All that was left was the words ‘THINK ON YOUR SINS’.

The line to Tanner went dead as the man hung up and Tom dragged his headset off and looped it around his neck.

“I want a full system restart,” Tom commanded the room at large. “Una. Contact Operations, tell them we’ll be implementing a shutdown in one minute’s time. Brian. See to it that Medical have
any patients on life support switched over to portable equipment immediately. Tracy, call Mi5 and...

He was cut off by an ear-shatteringly loud explosion. The lights flickered momentarily and then cut out as the whole room shook and ceiling tiles and chunks of masonry showered down over them. Everyone instinctively ducked and Tom felt a stunning blow to the back of his head as something struck him. He froze for a second, unable to work out if he was hurt or not. He lifted his hand and felt the back of his head. There was wetness but nothing that felt truly frightening. He stood up shakily and became aware that the evacuation sirens were wailing. No one seemed to be moving though...

“You need to leave.”

Tom spoke to the people in the room but no-one took any notice of him. They were all standing slowly, gazing around themselves with bemused expressions on their faces.

“We need to get out of here.” He said, a little louder.

Realising no-one was paying him the slightest bit of attention Tom threw his headset up onto his desk. Taking a deep breath, he began to speak as confidently and as loudly as he could without yelling (he hoped).

“We need to evacuate! Get moving to the exits!” Still no-one took any notice of him. Brian was still huddled under his desk and Una seemed to be bewildered, gazing around herself at the darkened room. He decided to focus on her. He went over to her and grabbed her arm. “Una! Evacuation protocol! Who is responsible for assisting Harris?” Cecil Harris was a team member who suffered from a debilitating form of arthritis. She was an excellent employee despite her mobility issues but stairs were a problem for her. Una blinked slowly and then seemed to come back online.

“Claire and Bob. Claire’s not in today.”

“Assist Bob in helping her get to her evacuation point then go to yours. Do you know where you’re heading?” In the event of a mass evacuation, there were dozens of evacuation points around the area. It had been planned that way to avoid large numbers of employees congregating in a single location together. Una nodded. “Hop to it then, get moving. ALL OF YOU,” He added, raising his voice momentarily to get all the staff’s attention “get to your evacuation points. Make sure you are registered and then go straight home. If you require medical assistance you will be offered it outside. If you see anyone struggling, help them. If you find someone who can’t be moved let me know. Now go. Calmly and briskly please.”

Maybe it was seeing Una moving with a purpose that prompted the staff to finally begin to evacuate. Instead of following them Tom went through into the main area where the majority of the Vehicle division’s staff worked. This room was in more of a mess than his own little area had been. People were crying and he could see that part of the ceiling had actually fallen in. A few of the staff had already left but Tom could see that a number had been left too shocked to move. Taking a deep breath, he started to call out instructions, rallying them all into getting themselves to safety...

~00Q~

It was almost two hours before Tom finally left the building. In that time he’d made sure that every
single member of staff that had been in Q-Branch had left before him. He’d then taken the time to initiate the secure transfer of data to their Beta site before shutting down the main servers. Once everything was secure he made his way to Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens and his own evacuation point.

There was a woman waiting by the tennis court that Tom recognised. He’d seen her in Q-Branch a couple of times back when she’d worked as an agent. That was before she had accidentally killed James Bond though and been subsequently removed from the field.

“Moneypenny, isn’t it?”

She looked up from the device in her hand. It looked like a normal Kindle but Tom knew it would hold the details of every member of staff at Vauxhall who was supposed to evacuate to her point. She smiled, apparently relieved to see him.

“It is.” She held out the device and Tom pressed his thumb against the scanner that had been added. His details flashed up and she glanced at them. “I’m glad you made it,” she said softly, “I thought…”

“What?”

“It’s just… one of the staff said that all the Q-Branch managers had been caught in the blast…”

Tom looked back at the building which was still smouldering and his heart fell.

“I never even thought… I mean, it didn’t occur to me…” He said quietly. The weekly interdivisional meeting was always held in Conference Room C. It was the smallest of all the conference rooms and sat directly below M’s office. M’s computer… If the blast had originated there… All of the managers had been in there… Q and R… O’Reilly from Weapons, Barker from Vehicles and Jessop from Biological/Chemical… He was supposed to be there. He would have been there if Brian hadn’t called him back when he did. His knees suddenly felt weak and he dropped down into a crouch, feeling sure he was going to throw up. “Fuck.”

After a moment he felt Moneypenny’s hand smooth over his back as she crouched down and hugged him one-handedly.

“Are you okay? Do you need a doctor? I can see your head’s been bleeding…”

Tom stared as his hands for a moment and then curled them into fists.

“No.” He said quietly. “I need to get to the Beta site. Someone needs to go there to finalise the preparations… to activate Q-Branch’s section.”

“I’ve finished here. You were the last person I was waiting for. I’ll come with you. I can help.”

Tom looked up at her, searching her face.

“You thought that all the managers were dead. Why did you wait so long for me?”

She smiled.

“A little hope never did anyone any harm.”
Moneypenny gave him a lift to the Beta site and then helped him go through everything, unlocking the various rooms assigned to Q-Branch’s divisions, checking that all the air conditioning, lighting, computers and security equipment was working correctly throughout the labyrinthine subterranean facility. She’d eventually left at midnight after he’d promised he was going home himself soon after her. He’d lied though and immediately found himself a terminal to work at. He emailed every member of Q-Branch staff informing them of the change of location and asked them to report for work the following morning at nine o’clock. All leave had been cancelled.

He spent the next few hours emailing various requests before finally hacking into Medical’s intake register, only to realise that his worst fear had been confirmed.

Major Geoffrey Boothroyd (Designation: “Q”); D.O.B 24/12/1945; Staff number: 14250785; Intake status: Deceased

Vanessa Collins (Designation: “R”); D.O.B 18/04/1964; Staff number: 18205663; Intake status: Deceased

Derek O’Reilly; D.O.B 27/03/1970; Staff number: 1856854; Intake status: Deceased

David Barker; D.O.B 18/12/1962; Staff number: 18004851; Intake status: Deceased

Laura Jessop; D.O.B 05/06/1972; Staff number: 1917241; Intake status: Deceased

Every other Q-Branch Manager along with Q himself and his second-in-command, all dead. There were three other names on the list. Tom recognised them as all being staff from Operations, one of them Tanner’s assistant. Eight dead in all. He sat and stared at the screen until his vision blurred. Only then did he rest his head on his wrists and allow himself to quietly weep for his lost colleagues.

By eight o’clock in the morning everything was prepared. Staff started to arrive a few minutes afterwards and by half past eight the main room was full. There were tears and murmured conversations which petered out as Tom walked into the middle of the room to speak. He kept his voice low but clear.

“Thank you for coming in today. I know how hard this must be for you all… for all of us. There were some rumours amongst the staff yesterday and it is my sad duty to inform you all that they are true. The official word came at six o’clock this morning. Q, R and our three division heads- Jessop, O’Reilly and Barker all passed away in the explosion yesterday, along with three members of Operations, Smith, Ramamurthy and Hastings.” There was an unhappy murmur from the assembled staff and Tom allowed them a moment to let the news sink in. “I understand how much of a shock this is and so I contacted Doctor Hall last night. He assures me that he and his team of counsellors will be on-site constantly for the foreseeable future. He wanted me to stress that there will be someone available, should any of you wish to talk to someone impartial.” He paused, collecting his thoughts. He wanted to make sure that what he said next came across compassionately.

“I realise that yesterday was hideous. But I also realise that when we signed our employment contracts with MI6 there was always a possibility that we might have a day like yesterday. We need to pull together now. We need to do the best job that we possibly can to support the agents in the
field. They will continue to be deployed and we must continue to equip them to the very best of our abilities. We can only do that by pulling together. By keeping it business as usual.” He looked around the room at the faces of the staff assembled there. “If any of you don’t feel that you can work effectively today or in the days to come I will understand – I think we’ll all understand – and I thank you, I really do, for coming in today but before you sign yourself off please know this; we need you. We need you to work with us as a team. As a family. I haven’t had any official instruction from the director but it is very likely that a replacement for Q will be drafted in from another satellite station very soon. Until that happens, as the only surviving division manager I am assuming control of the branch and I would ask you all to help me to keep it running to the best of all of our abilities. Does anyone have any questions?”

“Yeah, I do.” Murphy was a mechanic from Vehicles and he stepped forward looking furious. “Why weren’t you in the interdivisional meeting? How did you survive? It’s all a bit fucking convenient!”

Tom stared at the man. It took him a moment to process what he’d just said and when he did he struggled to control the anger that flared to life in him.

“It was convenient for me, yes.” He said quietly. “It was convenient for me that I was called back into my department as I was leaving for the meeting. It was convenient that I was prevented from going to my death like my counterparts in the other divisions. Like the woman who took care of me when I was an apprentice here. Like the man who was like a fucking father to me!” Tom felt himself lose control of his temper and right at that exact moment he could not have given less of a shit if he’d tried. “If you have even the slightest suspicion that I might have been involved with the events of yesterday then you go straight to M and you fucking report your concerns to her. You don’t fucking well stand here and accuse me when I have spent every minute since the explosion working my arse off to keep this branch up and running, for the sake of all of you but more importantly for the sake of the men and women who put their lives on the line in the field. Now if you don’t like the fact that I have assumed authority here, something that according to our managerial hierarchy I should remind you, I am required to do, then you can get the hell out of my branch!”

There was a silence during which Tom stared at Murphy. He was trembling with rage, refusing to back down. Eventually Murphy glanced away.

“That’s what I thought.” Tom said quietly. He addressed the rest of the room, dismissing him. “I’ve seen to it that the kitchen on this level is fully stocked. There’s even donuts. I suggest you all get yourself a cup of tea or coffee and a snack and go to your new division locations. You all have your own workstations which I’ve clearly labelled. Go and find them, get yourself familiarised with your new environment.” He looked at his watch. “We start work at ten.”

As people turned to filter out he called over the four division’s deputy managers.

“Come with me please?”

There was a large office that overlooked the main work area. Tom supposed he could have moved into it until Q’s replacement came but he was happy with his workshop down in Computer Science’s new area. The big office was handy to have a quiet meeting in though. He perched himself on the side of the desk and waited for Una to close the door.

“You know what I’m about to ask you, don’t you?” He asked them once they were standing in a semi-circle around him.

“You want us to step up and manage our divisions.” Ben Fannon from Biological/Chemical said.
Tom nodded.

“I have no idea what M will decide to do with us. Like I said, I think a replacement Q will be drafted in at some point and then we can concentrate on sorting out the divisions. There’s a possibility I may be asked to become R but I think it unlikely. As O’Reilly was fond of telling me, leading the smallest division I was only ever really a junior member of senior management.” He smiled, despite everything, remembering the way Derek would tease him about only having six members of staff under him. “But we need to keep up and running to the best of our abilities. I’ve worked with each of you one-on-one over the past few years and I know that you’re all more than capable but I don’t want any of you to feel pressurised into taking on the role…”

“We’ll do it.” Sylvia Smith from Weapons said, glancing at the others. They all nodded. “And we think M would be a fool not to have you as our new R. The last twenty-four hours have proved that to us beyond doubt.”

Tom felt himself blush.

“I don’t know about that.” He muttered, embarrassed.

“Well we do.” Una said with a smile.

~00Q~

Tom spent the rest of the morning on the telephone and emails. The staff had relocated to the Beta site but all of Q-Branch’s projects needed to be transferred over. To do this he needed to secure access to the building at Vauxhall (which needed, in turn, to be assessed by structural engineers first) before he could arrange the logistics of physically moving everything. By 1pm he was able to ask each of the new (temporary) division managers to nominate two members of staff to go back and start cataloguing everything from the half-built Aston down to the contents of people’s desk drawers and lockers.

Once his orders had been followed Tom had summoned Murphy to the large office. The man had looked nervous to see that Tom had asked Doctor Hall and the new acting head of Vehicles, Robert Gough, to join them. Tom began by apologising to Murphy for losing his temper with him earlier that morning. He also told him that he understood why he’d acted the way he had. Murphy had worked under his previous manager David Barker for almost twenty years. At this the big man had broken down and the four of them had talked quietly at length until Murphy had calmed down and apologised for his own behaviour. As they got up to leave Murphy shook his hand.

“It’s a hell of a job you’ve taken on but I reckon you’ll do alright.”

Tom had smiled and thanked him as he opened the door for him. His smile faltered when he came face-to-face with M and Tanner.

“Ma’am?”

“Carter, is it?”

“Yes Ma’am.”

“We need to talk.”

M sat herself behind the desk as the other staff left and spread out a dossier in front of her. Tom sat opposite her and Tanner stood to one side. She sorted through the papers and Tom could see that amongst them was a paper copy of his personnel file. He waited nervously for her to speak and
eventually she cleared her throat.

“According to the records from yesterday’s event, the majority of Q-Branch staff had logged in with their respective evacuation points within twenty-three minutes of the explosion.” Tom wasn’t sure if she was expecting a response or not so he stayed quiet. “In fact, it would have been the first branch to completely evacuate had you not personally taken one hundred and seven minutes to reach Miss Moneypenny.” She looked up and straight at him. “Why did it take you so long to evacuate the building Mr Carter?”

“The building had suffered a major attack.” He replied, “Even down on our floor we had some serious structural damage and we were some way away from the point of the explosion. I spent the extra time ensuring the safe backup of data to the Beta site. I then manually shut down the primary server array. I guessed that the building’s security would have been compromised and that non-agency approved emergency services would be moving in.”

M glared at him and then consulted her notes again.

“So this would have been a full hour before I authorised all staff’s transferral to the Beta site.”

“Um...”

“You pre-empted my orders!” She snapped. “Did you know that Accounts still don’t have a computer turned on in their department yet?”

“I...” Tom was confused by her change of subject

“Operations only have three members of staff at work today.”

“But they suffered casualties...” Tom tried to say.

“And Q-Branch have lost every member of management excepting yourself and yet I have just been through your department. The vast majority of your staff are here at work as if nothing happened!”

“They’re a good team...”

“No. There are fine members of staff throughout this organisation and yet your department is the only one that is functioning with any kind of efficiency today. It really is quite remarkable.” M’s final words were kindly spoken and they took Tom by surprise. “I’ve done this job for more years than I care to recall and yet I’ve rarely seen leadership and initiative such as you’ve displayed since yesterday. Keep it up.”

“Ma’am?”

“You’re my new quartermaster. From this moment forward the role and title is yours on a provisional basis. We’ll review your position in what? Three months’ time? Tanner will help you to thrash out any details if you need him to. Right!” She stood up and gathered her papers back into the file. “I need to see what the bloody hell has happened to my transportation department.”

With that she walked out of the door. Tanner hung back for a moment and grinned at him.

“Congratulations Q.”

~00Q~

Q sat in the big office and stared at his computer, trying to see if there was anything that he’d
missed. Q-Branch had been allocated three articulated lorries with which to transfer over all their projects and he was making sure that he had included everything on the manifests. He was hoping to get away with using each lorry just once so they could be reallocated to other divisions if need be. His new ‘R’ entered. Ben Fannon was the no-nonsense former deputy manager of the Biological/Chemical division.

“How’s it going Q?”

The name still rang false in his ears but he smiled.

“Pretty much there I reckon R. Who did you ask to liaise with the teams at Vauxhall?”

“I’m going to do it myself.” He replied. “They’re going to need someone with managerial clearance to oversee the loading and the new division managers are all rushed off their feet here still.”

He nodded and then yawned. And then stifled it.

“Good call.”

“When did you last get some sleep?” He asked, spying him critically.

“What time is it?”

“Ten AM.”

“Then, Tuesday.” The explosion had occurred on Monday afternoon. It was now Thursday. R opened his mouth to say something but Q shook his head. “I’m fine.” He pointed to the camping cot that had been set up in the corner of what appeared to have become his office. “I’ve napped.”

R frowned.

“You’ll be no good to us if you burn yourself out in the first week.”

“Noted.”

“Let me make you a cup of tea before I head off at least.”

He picked up the mug on Q’s desk before leaving. He passed Tanner coming in.

“Knock knock?”

“Come on in Mr Tanner. What can I do for you?”

“M sent me down to check up on you. Well, she said it was to give you some instructions but reading between the lines, she wants me to see how you’re doing.”

Q smiled as he sent the manifest he’d been working on to a shared file for R to pick up and closed down the document.

“I’m doing OK. I think.” R came back in with his tea which he put on his desk before leaving quietly and closing the door. Tanner sat down. “Our projects are on their way over and once I get word that’s all finalised I’m going to go home and sleep.”

“That’s important.” Tanner said. “Look, I don’t want to come across like an old fart but I’ve been running Operations for five years now and I’d like to give you some advice.”
Q sat back and waited expectantly.

“I know that you’ve been burning the candle at both ends this week and that’s fine – we all have – but bear in mind that this isn’t a 24/7 job. There will be times when you have to be here but generally, day-to-day, your branch should be able to run itself. Overtime is inevitable – nervous breakdowns from over-work aren’t. Get your managers and deputy managers sorted. Once they’re in place, get them to employ technicians to fill the roles that are empty now. I see you made Fannon your new ‘R’. It’s funny, I would have thought that you would have chosen Una Scott from your old division.”

“I would have,” Q admitted, “I did, in fact, but Una suggested I offer it to Ben instead. Una pointed out that I should select the deputy who worked in the department that I knew the least about. I’m fine with engineering and computers but hardly a genius when it comes to biology and chemistry.”

Tanner nodded as if he agreed it had been a good decision.

“My second bit of advice is this;” he said, “they extend your security clearance when you’re promoted for a good reason. When you get time, make sure that you read all of your staff’s personnel files. That goes for the agents that you deal with too. You might be surprised at the unusual skills that some of the people working here have. Did you know, for instance, that I can speak eight languages fluently?”

“I didn’t, no.” Q said with a smile.

“And yet that information is in my personnel file. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, I’m here. If you ever need any help or advice, let me know. Whether it’s triangulating spy satellites or just being someone that you can share a pint down the pub with. I’ve been where you are. Let me help you if I can.” Q was touched and he told Tanner as much. He just shrugged. “Boothroyd helped me out when I first took over Operations. I’m just passing it on. But now, onto business!” He tapped on his tablet and brought up a screen. “M has asked me to inform you that we have an agent going out into the field and you’re not going to believe this but it’s 007.”

Q raised an eyebrow.

“Really? Has M employed a new one already?”

“No. That’s the strange thing. It’s Bond! He’s come back.”

“James Bond?” Q asked, stunned. “But he was killed in Istanbul.”

“Well,” said Tanner sweeping his tablet and transferring its data onto Q’s screen, “It turns out that the reports of his death were greatly exaggerated…”
Q had decided to meet Bond at the National Gallery rather than ask the agent down to his new branch (the first trailer had arrived just after lunch and the place was organised chaos). Q walked down the front steps of the gallery on trembling legs. He wasn’t sure if it was from a lack of decent food and sleep or the piercing blue eyes of the agent he’d just met with.

He’d seen Bond before, everyone in Q-branch had, the man had spent enough time hanging around Boothroyd between missions, but it had been the first time he’d ever spoken to him. Sitting next to him Q had realised how solid he was. He was huge, a fact which had been brought home to Q when the agent had taken his radio off him and his large rough fingers had brushed up against his. The double-oh agents were all killers and likely not the kind of people that you’d want to take home to meet your mother, but it was quite something to be so close to one. It had been a bit like sharing a bench with a shark in human form.

Q thought he’d handled himself rather well, snarking back at Bond’s gentle teasing with aplomb. Eventually Bond had shaken his hand and given him the ghost of a smile and Q had definitely not felt a flutter of attraction. Nope. No Sir-eee. Not at all. In any case, Q had a boyfriend thank you very much and he was absolutely sure that Bond wouldn’t swing his way anyway. What would someone like him want with a skinny little twerp like Q?

Meeting with Bond had been his last duty of the day. He’d informed R that he was finally heading home for some decent sleep and would be back in the following morning. Thinking of his boyfriend Rich, Q reached into his pocket and withdrew his personal mobile phone. It had spent the last three days in his locker in the stricken Vauxhall building and he had been handed it as he set out to meet Bond. It was a fine day and Q had been cooped up for days so he decided to walk to Waterloo Station to catch his overland train home. He turned on his phone and was unsurprised to see that there were five missed calls, all of them from Rich. He dialled his answer service and listened to them as he walked.

Oh my fucking God babe, where are you? Are you at work? I've just seen on the news! Fuck babe. I'll ring the emergency number. Fuck! I hope you’re okay. Love you baby.

Q smiled at Rich’s words and he felt a pang of regret that he hadn’t been able to ring him. MI6 had protocols in place to help relatives and partners in the event of an emergency and to enable staff to concentrate on their jobs without worrying about their loved ones. There was a hotline number that all staff were asked to sign up a nominated person to. That person could then get news and updates about their loved one and put their minds to rest whenever they wanted. He forwarded to the next message.

I tried that number, I can’t get through. Please ring me! Please let me know you’re okay! Okay... okay bye.

Q sighed as he deleted Rich’s second message. It was timed two minutes after the first call. He couldn’t have tried the hotline number more than once and there would have been hundreds of concerned people ringing if the explosion had been on the national news. The next message had come nine minutes later.
I got through to that number and the woman was really fucking rude! She wanted to know all kinds of details about me! She’s said you’re not on the casualty list but she won’t tell me where you are. Fucking hell babe. Just ring me back!

Q began to feel a niggle of irritation. He highly doubted that the person that Rich spoke to was rude but he might have put money on him being obnoxious with her. Q loved him, he really did, but he had a terrible habit of acting like a twat when things didn’t go his way. Rich must have been somewhat mollified though, despite his words, as his next message didn’t come for another six hours.

It’s been all day and I know you’re not hurt so where the fuck are you Thomas? Is this some kind of joke? Am I not getting the joke? Why won’t you fucking ring me?

“Oh for fuck’s sake!” Q muttered, drawing a shocked gaze from the old woman passing him. Six hours. Six hours and already Rich had assumed that Q was deliberately disrespecting him. Q realised that he hadn’t given Rich much of a passing thought that day but he was damned if he’d be guilted into feeling bad about it. He’d been too busy coping with everything that had happened. Gritting his teeth, he skipped to the final message which Rich had left on Tuesday.

I’ve had enough of this. Fuck you if you can’t even be bothered to ring me. Where the fuck are you anyway? Don’t you care about me at all? I’ve had enough of this shit! I’m going to Bernadette’s.

Q felt a flash of anger. Of all the times that Q might have wanted Rich to maybe not act like a spoilt, attention-seeking brat, the week that the fucking building he was working in exploded with him in it was probably it. He used the call-back function and impatiently waited for Rich to answer.

“Oh so you’ve decided to ring have you?”

Q wasn’t sure what he was about to say but at Rich’s words he lost it completely. He could hear the pout on his face and it made him furious.

“You piece of shit!” He spat. “Five members of my department died Rich and all you could think about is how butt hurt you felt because I couldn’t ring you! My phone was in my locker like it has been every single time I’ve gone into work in the four years we’ve been together and I turned it back on to ring you the very first chance I got!”

“Well, you didn’t have to make me worry like that…” Rich complained.

“THAT’S WHY THERE’S A HOTLINE YOU MORON!” Q yelled, not caring that people were staring. He took a breath. “It’s there so that you can put your mind at rest and we can do our fucking jobs. Those of us that survived, that is.” He added viciously.

“Well I’ve had enough. I would have thought that you’d…”

“That I’d what? Drop everything and come running? I had a job to do and I’m very sorry if you aren’t the absolute centre of my fucking universe…” He stopped himself when something occurred to him. “I’m sorry Rich,” He said quietly, “but you’re not. Not anymore. I don’t think you have been for a while.”

“Tom…”

“It’s over Rich. I can’t do this anymore. Stay with Bernie, she won’t mind. I’ll get your stuff packed up and shipped over to you. Not tonight though. I’m too fucking tired.”

Q heard Rich start to say something in response but he hung up and then turned the ringer off on his phone. He had no interest in continuing their conversation. He walked determinedly the rest of the
way to the train station, trying to ignore just how damn tired he was feeling.  He’d been alright while he was still working but the week’s stress and fatigue were catching up with him with every step.

It took a herculean effort but he managed to stay awake all the way to his stop.  Strawberry Hill was a nice leafy suburb and he’d been thrilled when he’d realised that his MI6 wage would allow him to buy a home there.  He was currently living in an attic flat.  It was lovely, all sloping ceilings and wide windows.  He had shared it with Rich but now he guessed it would just be him and his two cats, a small grey tabby he’d named Turing and an elderly ginger Maine Coon, Clarke.  He’d inherited Clarke when his neighbour from the flat below him, a rather dashing Bosnian doctor, had finished his residency and had been offered a fabulous job which meant he would need to move back to Zenica.  He’d been thrilled to be moving back closer to his family but he’d asked Q if he’d like to keep Poopsie (as she was known back then) as she and Turing had a habit of meeting up on the building’s fire escape and snuggling together whenever it was sunny.  She was not in the best of health and her old owner had worried about the trauma of moving her overseas.  Q had agreed.  Before he’d known what her dreadful name actually was, Q had gotten into the habit of calling her ‘Turing’s little Clarke’ (after the famous mathematician’s colleague, Joan Clarke) so when she moved in her name changed.  He’d had her for two years.

He was about to let himself into the front door when he was stopped by an enquiring ‘mrroww?’ from above.  He looked up and sighed when he saw it was Turing, peering down from the lowest landing of the fire escape.

“Hello sweetheart.  Did that arsehole leave the window open?  I’ll be up in a moment.”  He quickly unlocked the door and went in.  He grabbed the pile of letters that had been left for him on the communal sideboard and dashed up the stairs.  That fucking prick Rich.  He must have just stropped out of the door, not even bothering to make sure that the lounge window was closed and…  “Oh no, please tell he didn’t.” Q muttered. Judging by the timestamps on the messages Q had picked up, Rich had left two days before.  If he couldn’t be bothered to even shut the window…

He opened his front door and ran into the kitchen where he found Clarke waiting for him.  There was a thump as Turing jumped in through the lounge window and then he was by Q’s side too.  Their bowls were empty.  No food.  No water.  Q strode over to the cupboard where he kept their food and he heart sank when he realised Clarke’s medication for her kidneys was where he had left it.

“Fuck!” He spat.

He took the tablets and popped one out of the blister pack.  His hands trembled as he gently picked up Clarke.

“Oh babykit.  What did he do?  Did he just walk out on you?” He sat her down on the draining board and quickly tilted her head back, opening her mouth and dropping the tablet in.  She swallowed it with her usual comical ‘how dare you violate me?’ look of disdain which soon disappeared when he stroked her throat soothingly and kissed the top of her head.  “You’re a good girl, aren’t you?  My special little lady.”  Lifting her back down onto the floor he busied himself refilling their bowls.  A portion of wet food each, a bowl of biscuits to share and a bowl of water.  He stroked both their backs as they started to devour their food and then gave then both another portion of the wet as an afterthought.  He then went to the bathroom to clean out their litter trays.

Once everything was sorted and Q had closed the window he dialed Rich’s number again.  Rich had barely picked up before Q started to shout.

“You fucking selfish arsehole!  You fuck off out of here and don’t even feed the cats?  Clarke has bad kidneys but you don’t even make sure she has enough water?  Jesus fucking Christ Rich!  She’s
seventeen years old! Were you trying to kill her? You ignorant fucking dickhead!” Furious, he hung up and then turned his phone off for good measure. If MI6 wanted him they would ring his work phone. He went through to the bedroom and stripped off before padding through to the shower.

The hot water felt good. He smiled as he was joined by first Turing and then Clarke, both sneaking into the room to use their nice clean litter trays. When he was done he paused to clean his teeth and then sort out their trays again before washing his hands and going back into the bedroom. Both of the cats were waiting for him, Clarke on the spare pillow on the other side of the King-sized bed and Turing just below her. Despite the fact it was barely five o’clock in the evening they both seemed ready to settle down with Q. He drew the curtains and slipped into bed naked beside them.

He lay in the half-light and tried to relax. He was so wound up. Every time he thought he was beginning to nod off he would remember something that had happened over the past three days. The explosion, the look of fury on Murphy’s face, the thought of his beloved cats being abandoned…

He shook his head slightly and frowned as he tried to think of something else, something more pleasurable. What about Bond? He was nice to think about. What about the way his eyes were as blue as cornflowers? The way his fingers brushed against Q’s as he’d taken his radio?

He shifted under the covers and then stretched out. He didn’t often go to bed naked (when he was alone, that was) but the day had been warm and it was rather erotic to feel the cotton of his sheets brush over the shaft of his cock as he moved. He reached down to touch himself there.

Bond. He was big. Not that much taller than Q, he would guess, but much thicker set. His shoulders were broad and his hands were large. Q thought about his hands. He was impeccably manicured but Q remembered the slight roughness to his fingertips and tried to imagine how they would feel as they traced a line down the side of Q’s neck to the peak of his nipple…

Q kicked off the covers and started to stroke himself more firmly. Bond has been unshaven and Q imagined him forcing his legs open to lick at him, his hot tongue lashing over Q’s perineum and down to his arsehole as his rough chin hair pushed up against his buttocks. Bond laying his hand over Q’s scrotum and pushing up out of the way as he devoured him, making him wet before laying over him and pushing into him roughly with his thick cock and…

Q bucked and whimpered as he shot his load, splashing come up over his belly and chest. He shivered as he slowed his stroking. He turned his head and huffed out a laugh as he saw Clarke sitting on the other pillow, studiously licking her bum.

“Not impressed by me wanking then?” He asked her quietly.

She glanced up briefly as he sat up to find a tissue before diving straight back in. He laughed again as he wiped himself down before throwing the tissue into the bin. He glanced down the bed to see Turing was fast asleep and snoring gently.

“Someone’s got the right idea.” Q murmured as he lay down again. His tension temporarily assuaged, he closed his eyes and was asleep in moments.
“I told him you were scared of flying.” Eve said.

Q didn’t look up from the report on the latest Aston Martin project that he’d been half-heartedly trying to read.

“Told who?” He asked, frowning at the cost of reworking the currently malfunctioning ejector seat mechanism.

“Bond.”

Q finally glanced up to see Miss Moneypenny leaning up against the doorway to his workshop. She was looking good – far better than someone who had spent twenty-three of the previous thirty-six hours on aeroplanes had any right to, really.

“Why did you do that?”

She shrugged.

“Thought it sounded better than telling him that you didn’t trust yourself to keep your hands off him...”

“Oh fuck off. I was simply too busy to go running halfway around the world after him, you know that.” He remarked without rancour as he moved onto his emails. Eve had been hanging around the Beta site for a couple of weeks now and they’d hit it off remarkably well. They’d got onto the subject of Bond over lunch one day and although Q wasn’t exactly sure what she’d seen in his face when he’d talked about meeting him, she’d been gently ribbing him about fancying the man ever since. He opened an email from Tanner regarding staffing levels over the coming bank holiday. He tried to concentrate on it. “Shouldn’t you be off somewhere, running around after whatisface?”

“His name is Gareth Mallory. You might want to remember that, he’s going to be your boss very soon.” She replied, coming into his room and sitting in the chair across his desk from him.

“Hmm. I like the one I’ve got, thanks.”

“As do a lot of people.” She said soberly. “But politics are politics and her days are numbered I’m afraid.”

Q finally stopped pretending to read with a sigh.

“What do you want Moneypants?”

“A cup of tea might be nice.”

Q sighed dramatically and stood up, stretching his back out.

“Fine. I suppose you’ll be wanting one of my biscuits too.” He groused as if it was the biggest imposition in the world. In actual fact, he didn’t suppose he’d had a cuppa for several hours and the last one had been cold by the time he’d remembered it was there. He flicked on the kettle which sat
on the counter in the corner of his room and fished a bottle of milk out of the minifridge beside it.
“So how was Shanghai?”

“Beautiful. Bond was a complete tart of course.” Q’s heart sank as she began to tell him all about
shaving him with a cutthroat razor and the agent’s gentle attempts to bed her. “He was so sweet,
trying to snatch little kisses, running his fingers over me. Complete gentleman though, once he
realised that I wasn’t interested…” As she talked Q busied himself making their drinks. Bond was a
lady’s man. Of course he was. It wasn’t the first time that Q had been attracted to a straight man and
he was damn sure that it wouldn’t be the last but even so, he couldn’t help having a lingering feeling
of regret when he thought about Bond. The way their fingers had touched when he’d passed him his
radio and the almost affectionate look that Bond had given him when he first called him by his still-
new-to-his-own-ears title…

“And then I saw him fight. Bloody hell…”

Q looked up, surprised at the change in Eve’s tone. He picked up the two cups of tea he’d made and
brought them over to his desk before going back for his biscuit tin. He opened it and offered it to
Eve who took out a chocolate Bourbon.

“What was it like?” Q asked. He’d seen grainy CCTV footage of a couple of the double-ohs in
action but never anything like that up close.

“He was like a wild animal.” Eve said, staring at the biscuit in her hand. “One minute suave and
joking and… Bond and the next… he was vicious. Brutal. We’re all told that double-ohs are killers
but knowing it and seeing it are two completely different things. I’ve always been good with a
gun… although Bond probably wouldn’t agree with me on that… but, Jesus. He could kill
someone with his bare hands. I’m sure of it.”

“I did wonder, when I first met him.” Q mused, blowing over the top of his mug and taking a
tentative sip. “It was like sitting next to a predator. Quite a remarkable feeling.”

“Hmmm. Imagine having all that raw power pinning you down in bed…” She quipped, an evil look
of mischief in her eye. Q felt himself blush furiously and he suddenly found the surface of his tea
fascinating. He cleared his throat.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.”

Eve started to laugh but was then interrupted by a knock on Q’s open door. It was R.

“Sorry to disturb you Sir but one of the agent’s radios has been activated.”

“Oh? Whose?”

“007’s, Sir.”

“Speak of the devil.” Q remarked, glad of the change of focus, as he got up and went through into
the main room. “Where is he?”

“He seems to be on a ship, approaching a small deserted island off the coast of Japan. Hashima
Island known colloquially as Gunkanjima.”

“Battleship Island.” Q said, reading the ident on the huge map which was on the main screen. It
showed the south-east corner of Japan. There was a red-light winking, showing Bond’s location. He
zoomed in. “Do we have any satellites in the area so that we can see what’s going on over there?”
“No Sir. Next one passing won’t be for another five hours.”

“That’s too long.” Q responded. He picked up the phone on his work station and dialled the Operations Department.

“Tanner.”

“It’s Q. Bond’s activated his tracker. Emergency frequency. He’s going to need support. Sending you the co-ordinates now.”

“Understood. Accessing the Royal Navy’s database now.” There was a brief pause. “There’s an aircraft carrier on manoeuvres currently fifty miles west of that position. I’ll arrange a little back up for our Commander.”

“We’ll keep an eye on his position. Let you know where exactly he ends up if he moves.”

Q rang off.

“Ludlow. Keep tracking that signal and open a comm-line to Operations. They’ll need to know exactly where 007 is at all times.”

“Yes Sir.”

“Call me if you need anything else.” Q went back into his office and sat down again. He took another sip of his tea. It had just cooled enough to be perfect. Eve was still in there and she demurely drank her own tea, a half-smile on her face. “What?” He asked.

“You went quite pink before, you know.”

“Tea was hot.” Q said, putting down his mug and picking up his tablet again.

“Hmmm.”

Q tried to read for almost a minute before putting down the tablet again.

“What do you mean, hmmm?”

“I get the impression he’s quite keen on you too, you know.”

Q snorted.

“Well, I doubt that. Not exactly his usual type, am I?”

It was Eve’s turn to laugh.

“Not entirely sure you’d need to be but no, he was talking about you in Shanghai. He seemed… fond of you.”

“He hardly knows me.”

“But he has met you and he thinks you’re cute. I can tell.”

Q sighed.

“Look, much as I appreciate your attempts to propel me into the arms of the nearest government-sanctioned assassin, might I remind you that not only have I just come out of a long-term
relationship, I am still on probation and don’t want to stuff it up by bumping uglies with the most notorious womaniser in the building.”

“What a charming turn of phrase.” Eve said dryly.

Q smiled to himself.

“Are you going to piss off and let me do some work now?”

Eve drained her cup.

“I need to go and find Mallory. I’d imagine he’s finished annoying M for the day by now. Thanks for the tea.”

“You’re welcome.” Q responded, already losing himself in budgets and costings.

He worked his way through three design proposals before he was interrupted by R again.

“Sir, I wasn’t sure if you’d be interested but the radio Bond activated is picking up a conversation.”

“Oh? Do we know who he’s talking to?”

“No Sir.”

“Patch it through to me anyway and make sure Operations can hear it. We might be able to get something interesting from it.”

“Yes Sir.”

Q put on his headphones and clicked on the link that had just appeared on his screen. The audio was crackling and muffled but Q could just about make out the sound of a man speaking. Q frowned. Was he talking about rats? It was difficult to tell but there was no mistaking Bond’s voice when he suddenly spoke.

“I made my own choices.”

The other man was talking again. Q started to tweak the feed and clean up the sound. It was no good though. Bond must have hidden the radio in his pocket or something. Maybe they could do something with it post-recording.

“Station H. Am I right? Hong Kong?”

Q frowned. It really was almost impossible to hear what the other man was saying. So why did Bond suddenly mention one of MI6’s old outposts? The other person started talking again. Had he just said something about being an agent? This was fascinating…

“Don’t forget my pathetic love of country.”

Q jumped a little, making himself laugh. He’d been straining so hard to hear what the other man was saying, Bond’s voice suddenly sounded booming.

“…not ready, knowing you'll likely die. Mommy was very bad! Hmm? Ooh. See what she's done to you.”

Q frowned. He could suddenly hear the other man as clear as Bond. He must have moved in close to him.
“Well, she never tied me to a chair.”

“Her loss.”

Fucking hell, Q thought, Bond was restrained and sounding like he was chatting at Sunday Brunch. Q shook his head. The double-oh agents really were a breed apart…

“Are you sure this is about M?”

“It's about her. And you, and me. You see, we are the last two rats. We can either eat each other... Hmm? Or eat everyone else. How you're trying to remember your training now. What's the regulation to cover this? Well, first time for everything. Yes?”

There was a fumbling sound, as if something was moving over Bond’s clothing. Q’s mouth went dry as he tried to imagine what was happening…

“What makes you think this is my first time?”

“Fuck me.” Q whispered. He wondered if he should stop listening. It sounded as if Bond was being groped by the man… and it sounded as if it had happened to him before. He glanced up at the door, as if someone was going to walk by and catch him listening to Bond being abused by his captor…

“Oh, Mr. Bond! All that physical stuff…”

The man’s voice went quiet again but Q could still understand him. He wondered if he’d just sat back or stood up maybe…

“Chasing spies!” The man laughed. “So old-fashioned! Your knees must be killing you. England. The Empire! MI6! You're living in a ruin as well... you just don't know it yet. At least here there are no old ladies giving orders and no little - Bip! - gadgets from those fools in Q-Branch. If you wanted, you could pick your own secret missions. As I do. Name it. Name it. Destabilize a multinational by manipulating stocks - Bip - Easy! Interrupt transmissions from a spy satellite over Kabul – Pop! - Done. Hmm. Rig an election in Uganda. All to the highest bidder.”

Q rankled at the man’s dismissive words about Q branch but Bond’s next words left a sliver of ice down his back;

“Or a gas explosion in London.” Bond replied.

“Just point and click.”

Jesus. This was the man. The arsehole responsible for the explosion at Vauxhall…

“Well, everybody needs a hobby.”

“So, what's yours?”

“Resurrection.”

“Let me show you something…”

Whatever the man said next was lost as the sound of muffling intensified. It sounded as if Bond was moving around, walking maybe. After listening for another minute, it became apparent that he wasn’t going to get anything else. He turned off the feed and dialled R’s extension.

“Yes boss?”
“Whose monitoring Bond’s feed?”

“Morris.”

“OK, good. Tell Ops they can borrow her if they need a hand in cleaning up the audio. Una’s a damn sight better at it than any of Tanner’s staff.” He paused. “Although maybe try to make it sound a bit more diplomatic than that?”

“I will Sir.” Q could hear R’s amusement in his reply.

He rang off and tried to concentrate on the report he’d been reading but his mind kept returning to Bond.

Bond, in the enemy’s lair.

Bond, restrained and vulnerable.

Bond, with his assailant running his hands over him.

What makes you think this is my first time?

~00Q~

A few hours later he was starting to think about going home when Tanner rang.

“I have a little task for the Q-Branch techies. Can you meet me at the entrance to the catacombs?”

Q grabbed his notepad and pen and made his way down. He’d not been to that part of the complex before but as far as he knew, only Medical was currently based there. He was surprised then when Tanner met him at the lift and led him away from Doctor Conroy’s stronghold. They walked for over a hundred yards before Tanner stopped at set of metal doors and used a biometric sensor pad to unlock it. He then followed him down a deserted office to a set of blast doors which he pushed through. The next section of corridor had a modern opaque glass wall down one side, set in amongst the old pillars. Tanner activated a final sensor and the section of wall in front of them cleared and then slid aside to reveal…

Q whistled appreciatively.

“Nice.” He said, admiring the structure in front of him. “Very ‘Silence of the Lambs’!”

There was a raised octagonal dais, on which stood a glass cell. It was empty except for a low stool.

“Not sure even Hannibal Lecter could get out of this cell…” Tanner mused.

“So what do you need our assistance for?”

“The cell, and a couple of others like it, were installed recently. Our plan was to finish installing all the other security measures once they were in place. The last to be installed was to be the CCTV system. Unfortunately, the attack on Vauxhall rather stuffed up the schedule and now we need this one up and running within the next twelve hours.”
“Oh? Why the hurry?”

“The man that Bond was sent to find? He got him and they’re bringing him in.”

“The man who attacked us.”

“Quite so. We need full coverage in here. I realise that totally rewiring the place might be a bit of an ask…”

“No need.” Q said, starting to walk the room and making notes. “We have a stock of miniature cameras that have a thousand-hour rechargeable battery life and work off an encrypted wifi network. I can cover every angle covertly…” A thought occurred to him. “Do you want me to add in a few larger wall-mounted cameras? Make our guest think he knows where the cameras are? I think we’ve got some old ones somewhere.”

“Ideal. Whatever you think.” Tanner replied.

“Excellent. I’ll get a couple of the night shift down here as soon as they come in.”

Tanner looked at his watch.

“Christ, you’re not working the night shift as well are you?”

“No. I’ll be off home as soon as I’ve sorted this. Back for the day shift.”

Q finished making his notes and then they made their way back to lift together.

“If you’re knocking off soon, how about a pint?” Tanner suggested.

Q hesitated but then smiled.

“Why the hell not?”
The Golden Guinea was a bustling little pub directly across the bridge from MI6. Q and Tanner managed to get a booth and then decided to order dinner; Steak and Chips for Tanner, Bangers and Mash for Q. The food was reasonably priced and there was lots of it. They munched their way through their meals and washed them down with several pints of real ale. By nine o’clock Q was feeling slightly pie-eyed and more relaxed then he had been for weeks. He cradled his half-empty glass and debated having another while listening to Bill (quietly) regale him with tales about work.

“So then double-oh eight goes running off through this bloke’s chateau, still dressed in her slinky ballgown and six-inch heels and she’s got three of the boss’s goons chasing her and she’s weaponless because of the security search on the way in.”

“How the fuck did she get out of there?”

“She said she turned a corner and finds herself in one of those long corridors with all the family portraits in and above the fireplace there’s this wooden plaque with the bloke’s great-great-great-great-grandad’s ceremonial sword on it!”

Tanner paused and Q suddenly had the feeling he was missing something.

“So?”

“So, she was junior European fencing champion three years running! She killed all three of them with it.”

“Fuuuck…”

“Honestly mate, have you not got around to reading all the agent’s files yet?”

Q took a swig of his pint.

“I’ve been a bit busy.” Seeing Tanner was about to say something he cut him off. “Look, I read all my own staff’s, then started on the double-ohs. I got as far as double-oh three.”

“You need to keep going. You’re not going to believe some of the shit six and seven have got up to in their time.”

“I shudder to think.” Q grinned. He downed the rest of his pint. “Want another?”

Bill did.

~00Q~

Q got home around eleven, tottering slightly. He’d had a really good night with Bill. He loved nights like that. Arranging and then going out on a weekend piss-up with friends was nice but Q
really loved an unexpected night out; when a drink or two after work turned into a bit of a session with good company and a few too many drinks and a lot of laughs. Neither he nor Bill thought that public transport had been a good idea after so much alcohol (although Bill hadn’t seemed half as drunk as Q felt) so they’d called for a staff driver. Bill had recently moved to Mortlake so he was dropped off on the way to Q’s place in Strawberry Hill. Not that Q noticed. He was dozing almost before they left Vauxhall and slept most of the way home. The driver was understanding though. He gently woke Q once they’d arrived at his house and then waited by the car, keeping watch as Q fumbled for his keys and eventually managed to let himself in. He locked the front door behind himself and then started the long trudge up the three flights of stairs to his flat. As he passed the final little landing he paused. The light was on in his flat and he could hear the television.

When he’d first become Q he’d baulked at the idea of carrying a concealed gun, which was standard protocol for MI6 department heads, so he’d compromised and agreed to have a taser. His messenger bag was slung across his shoulder and he reached into it as he climbed the last flight, closing trembling fingers around his weapon. He probably should have called the driver back but it was his flat godamnit and his cats were in there. He slipped his key into the lock and slowly turned it before pushing the door open. He crept towards the lounge, the source of the light, and tightened his grip on the taser as…

“Rich?”

Q blinked as he realised it was his ex-boyfriend, sitting in what was his favourite spot with Turing, the traitor, sat in his lap. Rich looked up from the television screen and smiled. His expression dropped when he saw the taser.

“That depends on how much of an arsehole you’re intending to be.” Q snapped, dropping the taser back into his bag before dumping it and his coat onto the chair next to him. Q saw the way that Rich’s eyes followed his movements but he didn’t say anything. Rich was a bit of a neat-freak and would always bitch at Q for leaving his stuff lying around… which was exactly why Q had just done what he did. “What do you want Richard?”

“Just to talk. You haven’t been answering your phone.”

“Amazingly, that’s because I have no interest in talking to you.”

“Won’t you even give me chance?”

“OK.” Q retorted, his previous nervousness now being replaced with irritation. “What about three? Three chances? Chance number one. On the worst day of my life when people that I worked with and cared about were killed in the building that I was working in, you thought only about yourself. Chance number two. You then proceed to piss off and leave my cats with no food, no water and no medication, not giving a flying fuck if it induced renal failure in my darling girl and then, chance number three, you break into my fucking flat, the flat that I have paid for and you have not significantly contributed to for the past four fucking years, and sit there as big as Billy-be-damned after making me think you’d returned the only set of keys that you had and for what? Forgiveness? Fuck off!”

He went through to the kitchen and put the kettle on. He had to do something and if he stayed looking at Rich’s face he thought he might punch it. He flicked the switch and had tossed a teabag into his mug before realising that Rich was right behind him.

“Wh…?”
And then the arrogant, selfish, narcissistic twat was kissing him and damn if Q’s body didn’t react instantly. For all his faults there was no denying that Rich was a phenomenal kisser, all tongue and a little bit of teeth, just the right side of too hard and too wet. Q put his hands on Rich’s shoulders, not sure if he wanted to hold on or push him away. Rich made the decision for him, pressing him up against the worktop and gripping the back of his head. If there was one thing that Q loved it was the sensation of being restrained. Rich was only slightly taller than Q but he was bulkier and he used his weight now to keep Q still. He shifted his hips, letting Q feel his cock as it hardened. Jesus. Rich’s cock was a thing of beauty – long, thick and uncut. Q freely admitted he was a bit of a size queen and it was one of the things that had attracted him to Rich in the early days of their relationship. He wanted it now, he decided. He wanted to be stripped and held down and fucked and maybe his friend the alcohol was ruling his decision-making processes but Rich seemed like the just the man to do it to him.

“I’m sorry,” Rich started to say in between kisses. “I’m so sorry. I was a knob for running out like that. I missed you.” Q wasn’t sure that he’d missed Rich that much but he hadn’t been fucked in weeks, since long before he and Rich split up if truth be told, so he just kissed him back and then whimpered as Rich grabbed his cock through his trousers and squeezed. “I’m so glad I came here tonight, so glad I waited for you… I didn’t want to forgive you at first but I knew I’d have to if I ever wanted a chance to get you back…” Rich’s words cut through the alcohol and lust fogging Q’s brain. He pulled back to stare at Rich.

“Excuse me?”

Rich hesitated and then Q shoved him back.

“You ‘didn’t want to forgive me’? You ‘didn’t want to forgive ME’?” Q saw the realisation on Rich’s face as he realised he’d messed up. Big time. “You arrogant fucking tool! Get the fuck out of my house!”

“Oh I am one-hundred percent over caring what you meant! I could not give less of a rat’s arse! Fuck off!” As Rich backed away his eye’s narrowed.

“You pissy little cunt!”

Q didn’t see Rich’s fist until it was too late. He lashed out, catching Q in the middle of his chest and doubling him over. He wrapped his hands around his body and tried to save himself from the next blow as Rich brought his knee up, aiming for his balls. His aim was off but still managed to catch Q in his lower abdomen. He lost his balance and fell to his knees. Rich immediately grabbed his hair and started to shout.

“You can’t do this to me you prick! I get to decide when this is over! I do!” He shook Q’s head before pushing him away violently. Q fell back, smacking his head on the kitchen cabinet behind him. He curled up, stunned, waiting for the next blow. It didn’t come but Rich carried on shouting, bent over and red-faced as he raged. “You don’t fucking deserve me! I put up with your shit for almost five years! Who else is going to do that? Who’s going to put up with you fucking off for days on end? No-one, that’s who. Good luck finding someone to put up with you and your manky fucking cats!” Rich straightened up and then kicked Q, catching him at the top of his thigh. The pain lanced through him and Q cringed, unable to understand what was happening. The ten minutes since he’d arrived home had been a rollercoaster ride and he was desperate to get off. Rich grabbed his hair again and this time he deliberately slammed Q's head up against the cupboard door behind
him. “You know what? You aren’t even worth it…”

He turned and walked to the door. Q suddenly noticed Turing was there and he moaned as Rich tried to kick him too. Turing was quicker though, bolting away. There was a crash as Rich threw open the front door. He thundered down the stairs and then the front door received the same treatment. Q sat and trembled for a moment before slowly and unsteadily standing up. His stomach rolled as he tried to regain his balance, his thigh cramping up under him. With an ungainly lurch he dashed over to the sink and threw up, his chest flaring into agony with the effort. He clung to the edge of the sink as his stomach emptied. His head was still reeling. Rich had always had a temper but he’d never hit Q before. He’d never frightened him. He felt pressure on his leg and he looked down. Clarke was blinking up at him.

“Mm okay,” He slurred, “I’m okay babykit. That nasty tosser’s gone now.” He groaned as a thought suddenly occurred to him.

He staggered towards the door to the flat which was standing open. He quickly secured Clarke in the kitchen before checking all the other rooms in the flat and then painfully clambered down the stairs. The front door was open too and there was no sign of Turing. He went out into the garden and called him.

Twenty minutes later it was starting to rain and Q was getting desperate. He needed to find Turing. There were foxes in the area and it wasn’t safe for him to stay out. Q, for once in his life, didn’t know what to do. He got on well with the neighbours who lived in the flats below him and he tried knocking on their doors quietly in case they were still up but they hadn’t answered. He was too tired and too drunk and felt too perilously close to completely losing his shit. He sat down on the front doorstep and did the only other thing he could think of.

The phone was picked up on the second ring.

“Tom? Everything okay?”

“I know it’s late but I’m in trouble. Can you come and help me please Bill?”

Tanner immediately said he that could and after Q gave him his address he rang off. Q checked the time on his phone and saw it was almost one o’clock in the morning. He huddled over, wrapping his arms around himself and kept calling out to Turing as he waited. It was still drizzling half an hour later when Bill pulled up in a cab. When he saw Q he rushed to him.

“Jesus, man. What the hell happened?”

“Tom, man. What the hell happened?”

“My ex… he was waiting. He wanted us to get back together but I said something that pissed him off and he went mad and…” Q hesitated, almost scared of what Bill would think of him, “he hurt me and he let Turing out and he can’t stay out because there’s so many urban foxes and I didn’t know what to do and…”

Amazingly, Bill didn’t laugh or sneer at him like Q feared he might, instead he gently gripped Q’s elbows.

“Come on mate. Let’s get you out of the rain. Can you stand?” Q nodded numbly. “Alright then. On three. One… two… three!” Q tried to stand and probably wouldn’t have made it if it hadn’t been for Bill’s strong hands. Once upright Bill wrapped his arm around him and tried to walk him towards the front door.

“I can’t…” Q tried to protest, “I need to find Turing…”
“I’ll take care of that.” Bill said soothingly. He helped him walk him up the stairs and when they reached the flat Bill led him straight to the bedroom. He sat Q on the bed and then unbuttoned his cardigan. Q sat slumped as Bill pulled off the now damp knitwear before starting on his shirt. Q watched him as he worked. He had a kind face, far kinder than Rich’s. He winced as Bill raised his arm to unbutton his cuff. “Sorry buddy. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

Q opened his mouth, perhaps to tell him it was okay but then Bill leant forward and Q took the chance, pressing his lips up against his. Bill jumped and then pulled away, a soft smile on his face. He cupped Q’s jaw as he shook his head.

“Sorry mate, I don’t swing your way.”

Shame overwhelmed Q as he realised his error.

“Oh God. I’m so sorry Bill. I’ve just had such a shit time since I got home and…” He choked, unable to believe what a cock-up he’d made of everything. He could blame it all on being drunk but he realised it wasn’t that – it was him. He was such a twat… Bill shook his head again as he drew Q into a hug. It was firm and gentle and it just about broke Q’s heart.

“Don’t. Come on. It’s alright.”

Q clung onto Bill. It felt as though the events of the night were catching up with him and he started to tremble violently. He wondered if shock was beginning to set in. Bill hugged him, running a soothing hand over his back for a moment before pulling away to continue stripping him. When Q’s shirt came off he whistled in sympathy.

“Ooh, that looks sore. Do you need me to call you a doctor?”

Q looked down to see the dark bruise that was already forming over his sternum. He shook his head as he allowed Bill to unbutton his waistband and then draw down his zip before helping him to stand again and letting his trousers fall. He then tugged back the duvet and helped Q into bed, dressed in just his socks and pants. The moment Q was covered in the bedding his eyes began to droop but he roused himself.

“My cats… my little boy…” He insisted.

“I’ll look after them. I’ll find him. Go to sleep mate. It’ll all seem better in the morning.”

Q nodded, unable to fight his fatigue any more.

“Thank you, Bill… thank you…” He murmured.

~00Q~

Q’s alarm clock blared, what felt like thirty seconds later, and he reached out blindly to turn it off. The bruising on his chest and thigh sprang to life at the exact moment his head began to throb with his hangover. He groaned as memories of the night before flooded back and then threw back the covers in a panic. Turing. Shit. He’d been outside all night. He stumbled into the hallway and then heard a low voice. It was Tanner talking.

“Hello, sounds like your dad’s awake. See? I’m sure you both could have waited another five
minutes without starving to death. Will you… look, move your head! How am I supposed to get your breakfast into your bowl if you keep sticking your head in the way?"

Q pushed open the door to see Bill crouched down, trying to get the contents of a wet food pouch into a bowl. Clarke was indeed resolutely sticking her head in the way and next to her…

“Turing!” Q exclaimed. “You found my boy!”

He went over to him and squatted next to Bill so he could run his hand down his cat’s back. Turing arched up into his touch but carried on munching steadfastly.

“Rattled the box of dry food.” Tanner replied. “Works every time. How are you feeling this morning?”

Q stood up stiffly.

“I’ll be okay.” He said feeling a little sheepish. “Look Bill, about last night…”

“Don’t worry about it.” Bill said. “I was just glad to help.”

“I don’t know why Rich acted like that. I really annoyed him though. I probably shouldn’t have…”

Bill cut him off.

“You can stop that shit right now!” He said hotly as he stood up.

Q hesitated.

“Excuse me?”

“Blaming yourself. I don’t give a toss what you were doing. He had no right to hurt you like that!”

“I just…”

“No Tom.” Bill said more calmly. “My mum used to say things like that about my dad. ‘If only I’d had his tea cooked on time’, ‘If only I hadn’t answered him back’, ‘If only I’d taken more care’. It didn’t do her any good and it won’t help you. He was out of line and he shouldn’t have done what he did, end of.”

Q stared at Bill and was surprised to find he almost felt tearful at his friend’s words. He didn’t know what to say so he said simply;

“Thank you.”

Bill smiled.

“I’m going to put the kettle on. Put some clothes on; M will have a fit if you go to work looking like that.” Q blushed when he realised he was still only dressed in his underpants and socks.

“Sorry. And sorry again about trying to snog you last night…”

“Eh, it’s understandable,” Bill shrugged, winking at him, “I am gorgeous…”

Q laughed as he made his way to the bathroom. He had a quick shower which made him feel about a million times better. By the time he had dressed for work he felt almost normal. He came back into the kitchen to find that Bill had made them both tea and toast. Q didn’t usually eat breakfast but
he nibbled on a piece as he sat next to Bill at the kitchen table. After a few minutes of companionable silence, Q spoke.

“What happened with your mum? Was she okay?” He asked.

“Eventually.” Bill said. “After many years of not being okay.”

“What happened? I mean, if you don’t mind me asking.”

“I don’t mind. It’s not something we’re ashamed of.” Bill replied. “She told me that dad had always been a rough man but once she’d had me and my sister it got much worse. When I was a teenager and I realised what was going on I started to challenge him. He was sly though. He never hit her in front of me until the day he did…” Bill trailed off before taking a swig of his tea. “I flew at him. Used every ounce of strength in me to try to beat the hell out of him. It didn’t work. I ended up in hospital with three broken ribs and a broken arm, amongst other things. I was black and blue from head to foot. That was the last straw for mum. She tolerated being abused but she couldn’t stand by when he did the same thing to one of her kids. She called the police on him. He was convicted of Grievous Bodily Harm.”

Q was stunned. He tried to imagine the kind of man who could assault his own son so badly that he’d be convicted of GBH. He just couldn’t… Bill eventually gave him a half-smile and shrugged.

“Anyway. That’s all water under the bridge. I didn’t tell you that because I wanted sympathy. I told you because I don’t want you to go blaming yourself for anything that your ex did.”

“I just feel like… I was weak to let him do that to me.” Q said but Bill shook his head.

“That isn’t true. He took advantage of you when you were tired and pissed up. If he’d really wanted another chance to be with you he’d have tucked you up into bed and made you breakfast.”

Q smiled.

“Like you did?” He teased.

“Exactly like I did.” Bill grinned. “Now go and get ready before you start falling for my manly rugged charms again. We have a train to catch.”
Chapter 6

Q felt like the next twenty-four hours really put him through the wringer.

The man that Bond had captured, Silva, was installed in the high-security cell that Q’s staff had worked on overnight and then Q had the honour of hosting 007 in his department. It had been distracting, to say the least, having the agent’s piercing blue eyes watching him as he attempted to hack the laptop he’d given him. Maybe that was why he’d missed the cunningly disguised encrypted Bluetooth connection. All the time he’d been cracking the polymorphic engine-protected code, he’d failed to spot the device that was linking into MI6’s system and over-writing the security protocols until it was too late. His Computer Science team had tried to tell him afterwards it was as much their fault for not noticing but he wouldn’t allow them to share the blame. It was all on him.

The following hours had been terrible. Trying to guide 007 to where Silva was, hearing the news that the criminal had managed to get into M’s tribunal hearing and shoot at her, injuring Gareth Mallory in the process, and then Bond escaping with M, asking for Q’s assistance in laying a trail for Silva. He’d agreed to, of course, and had spent the next five hours coding and adjusting traffic cameras until there was a tenuous path to the place Bond had told them they were heading to – a place called Skyfall, deep in the Scottish Highlands. Q had laid the trail so that it appeared that Bond and M were moving more slowly than they actually were, giving them a good seven-hours head start.

Tanner came in with a Chinese takeaway and a four-pack of beer but Q barely ate, wondering if Bond and M would be alright. Wondering if he’d done the task of luring Silva well enough. Wondering if he was still going to have a job at the end of it all after letting Silva hack them… They waited. There were no cameras, no satellites, nothing to allow them to look in on what was happening.

And then the word came. M had been killed.

Q and Tanner couldn’t believe it. Rescue teams had been deployed but they had arrived too late. Details were sketchy but it appeared that Silva had turned up in a helicopter and proceeded to blow up the house that Bond had taken M to. M had been shot and when they’d found her Bond had been cradling her to his chest. The man had been silent, freezing cold and soaked to the skin. When the paramedics on the scene had diagnosed hypothermia and ordered his immediate evac to Medical, he hadn’t even argued.

Q had remained at his station the whole time, clearing up the mess made by Silva’s virus. He’d worked flat out, refusing to sit down even when his chest began to hurt. Tanner had caught him placing his hand over the bruised area and taking deep, painful breaths in an attempt to ease the ache a couple of times but said nothing until they had been informed that Bond had been recovered back to London. Once the crisis was over however, and Q tried to access his emails to catch up on other business before heading home, Tanner stepped in.

“Right. That’s enough of that. Doctor Conroy is waiting for you.”

“Why?” Q asked, trying to sound nonchalant.
“Because you’re obviously in pain and you need to get that looked at.”

“Oh no, I’m fine.” Q started, “It’s just a bit achy…”

“Bollocks, is it.” Bill replied. He lowered his voice. “Look, if you’re worried about telling anyone about… you know… tell her you were in a fight in town or something. I can back you up.”

“I…” Q hesitated and then slumped. “I won’t lie… I don’t feel comfortable telling anyone here the truth.”

“Then you don’t have to.” Bill said kindly. “But you do need to get it looked at.”

Q shut down his workstation and then handed over to the night shift staff. He was surprised to see that it was almost two in the morning already. As Bill and he trudged through the corridors towards Medical they talked.

“I just can’t believe that she’s gone.” Q said sadly.

“You’re telling me. This place won’t be the same without her. She recruited me out of Uni…”

“Like me with Boothroyd…” Q responded. “One by one the old guard are falling.”

“Don’t say that to Conroy.” Bill warned him. “She’s been here since Adam was a lad. She’ll think she’s next!”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.”

When they arrived at Medical, Bill left Q at the door.

“You don’t need me holding your hand,” he said quietly, “but let me know if you need me to back up a story.”

“Thanks Bill.” Q replied.

He walked into the department. It was quiet and he couldn’t see anyone in the reception area. He called out ‘hello?’ but there was no response. He wandered up the main corridor and heard voices. He headed towards them. It was only when he was nearing the open door that he realised he recognised them. It was Doctor Conroy and Bond. Unwilling to disturb them, he started to go back before he realised he could hear what they were saying.

“I just… I couldn’t save her.”

“I know.” Conroy said quietly. “But I also know you did everything that you could.”

“I don’t know how much longer I can keep doing this Susan. I’ve lost so much, so many of the people that I’ve loved… I never thought I would lose her too, not like that.”

“You were her favourite, that was clear to everyone and I’m sure she’d be the last person to berate you for taking some ‘me’ time so why don’t you take some time off? Take it easy…”

“I tried that, remember? Sun, sea, sand and shagging?”

“That doesn’t sound so bad.”

“…and then someone tried to blow her up.”
“But you killed him, didn’t you?”

“There’s always another someone, Susan.”

“You don’t have to save the whole world James...”

“Can I help you?”

Q jumped at the voice just behind him. Wondering if the voice’s owner realised he’d been snooping he decided to bluster it out. He turned to see one of the nurses, Dawkins smiling at him quizzically.

“Yes, I was looking for Doctor Conroy. I have an appointment. Well, I think I do. Bill Tanner sent me. I’m not really sure where I’m supposed to be though...”

“Ah, Q. There you are. I was about to send out the search parties. Come with me.”

Q turned back to see Doctor Conroy standing behind him in the doorway. She walked up the corridor and Q followed. He couldn’t resist a sneaky glance into the room she’d just left. It was dark save for a low bedside lamp. In the bed, huddled in blankets, 007 lay motionless. They went into the next room.

“Onto the bed please.”

Q hopped up onto the single bed and watched as she called up his medical records on a tablet.

“Now, Mr Tanner tells me he was concerned about you. Something about some bruising around your sternum?”

Q nodded and started to unzip his cardigan, suddenly feeling quite small. He kept quiet rather than try to come up with a story as to how it had happened. His fingers fumbled on his tie and his buttons but Conroy waited patiently, slowly putting on a pair of nitrile gloves as she waited for him to finish. When he finally parted his clothing, she let out a soft sound of sympathy.

“Ooh dear. That does look nasty. Okay Q, I’m going to need you to lie down.” She picked up a pillow off the chair next to the bed and laid it down so Q could lie back. Once he was comfortable, she pushed his shirt open all the way. She started to gentle press around the area, apologising gently when she made him flinch. Eventually she straightened up and took off her gloves. “I’m going to need to get a closer look at this. Can you wait here while I go and get a portable x-ray machine?”

Q nodded and relaxed as she left the room. He stared at the ceiling and tried not to worry about how he was going to explain his injuries. He wasn’t sure that allowing his ex to beat him up was a suitable excuse for an (acting) head of an MI6 department and...

“Who did this to you?” Q startled at the sound of Bond’s voice. He tried to sit up and cover himself but the movement made him gasp in pain. Bond face was stony, unreadable, as he stalked into the room. He was stripped to the waist, dressed only in a pair of sweatpants. There were bruises all over his body. He walked over to the bed and put a hand on Q’s shoulder, pushing him back onto the bed. “Don’t.” He told him. His eyes raked over Q’s exposed chest and then narrowed. “Who did this?” He repeated gruffly.

“It doesn’t matter.” Q replied. “He... it wasn’t anyone.”

James ran a finger over the edge of the bruise. Q shivered at the gentleness of his touch.

“It does matter. It matters a lot... This looks like a punch, the bruising pattern they leave is
unmistakeable… Tell me who it was.”

“I don’t need you fighting my battles for me Bond,” Q said, wondering where this was all coming from. Bond barely knew him.

“What in hell’s name are you doing in here Bond?” Conroy snapped as she came back into the room. She was dragging a piece of medical equipment and for a second, she sounded exactly like M. It made Q jump again and he guessed that her tone had the same effect on James as he immediately whipped his hand away from Q and took a step back.

“I heard our quartermaster’s voice. I wanted to see that he was alright.”

“Pretty sure that’s my job, Bond.” Conroy groused. “Come on. Back to bed with you before I have you restrained.”

“Promises, promises.” Bond quipped back with a louche grin. He glanced back at Q and the grin disappeared. “I meant what I said. If you need help, just let me know.”

They watched him leave and then Conroy turned back to Q.

“What was that all about?”

Q shook his head.

“I have absolutely no idea…” He honestly said.

~00Q~

Q didn’t know whether to kiss Tanner again or kick him in the balls for making him go to Medical.

As a result of the examination he was diagnosed with severe bruising of his sternum and was signed off work for a week. Conroy had asked how it had been caused but Q had been unwilling to say. Whether it wasn’t important or it was going on Q’s notes as being the result of a suspected assault anyway, Q wasn’t sure, but she hadn’t pressed the point and he was grateful to her for that. Barred from his department, Q had stayed at home, catching up on a few chores and a lot of reading. He’d gone online and ordered a new set of locks when he realised that he couldn’t find the keys that Rich had used to let himself in on the night of the attack. He’d taken Clarke to the vets for a check-up and finally gotten around to sweet-talking his first-floor neighbours into looking out for the cats if ever he should get stuck at work again. He also he told them he would be dropping in a copy of the building’s new front door key once the locks had been fitted. Simon and Tish Newman had moved into the flat below a few months before. They were lovely and Rich and Q had shared a few dinners with them. When they realised that Q and Rich had split up they were more than happy to help and take Q’s spare key.

Q put in an order with Sainsburys and when it arrived he treated himself by making a beef goulash from scratch. He didn’t cook very often as he usually had so little time so it was nice to spoil himself. Once it was ready (after three hours of tormenting both himself and the cats with the smell of it cooking) he settled down with a big bowl of it, a hunk of crusty bread, a glass of red wine. He put his feet up on the couch and logged into MI6’s secure server so he could carry on reading the double-oh’s personnel records.
On the face of it, 004 and 005’s records were quite similar. Both graduates of Leeds University, both adept at a number of languages, both with an aptitude for horse riding and motorcycling. That was where the similarities ended though. 004’s parents were poor, from a Somalian village, and he’d been sent to England to study courtesy of an international Christian foundation. 005 was the youngest daughter of an English lord. Q could imagine 004’s parents being extremely proud of their son’s good use of the opportunities he’d been given in education; and 005’s being mortified that their daughter hadn’t made it into one of the Oxbridge universities.

006’s personnel record, quite frankly, was hilarious. Born in Kiev to a Russian mother and English father he was expelled by his first school when he was six years old. He was expelled for the sixth (and last) time when he was seventeen amid rumours he’d knocked up his Geography teacher; a woman twenty-two years his senior. He ran away to join the circus before ending up in the Royal Navy. He’d had as many charges levied against him on his service record as he had commendations and awards. He was recruited straight from the Fleet Air Arm and onto the double-oh training programme when he was thirty.

He was an expert in bomb disposal, marksmanship, and languages. In particular he was fluent in five European languages and could pass as native in over a dozen distinct Russian dialects. He had homes in Moscow and London and seemed to have an unfortunate habit of setting fire to things. London’s Fire Service had been called to his various addresses no less than seven times over the past ten years, with two of his properties burning completely to the ground.

As far as family was concerned, his mother had passed away but his father lived in Cyprus. He had no siblings and no current next of kin – although Q saw with some wry amusement that several women has filled that role over the years although none of them for longer than a couple of months. There were several disciplinary complaints filed against him by various members of MI6’s staff, most notably by one of Doctor Conroy’s colleagues, a notoriously morose man named Hopkins, who had complained that Trevelyan had ‘waved his penis aggressively’ at him during an annual check-up.

Q took a break when he got to the end of 006’s records and went to put his now-empty dishes in the washing up bowl to soak but was still chuckling about the aggressive penis-waving five minutes later when he sat down to start on 007’s. He settled himself, upending the bottle of wine into his glass and taking a big swig as he opened up Bond’s file and scanned the title page.

Name: James Bond

Address: Flat 4, 213 Kings Road, Chelsea, London SW3

Date of Birth: 02 Mar 1968

Known family: Andrew Bond (father) (deceased), Monique Delacroix Bond (mother) (deceased)

Next of Kin: Sebastian Ronson (civil partner) (deceased)

Q paused, his wine glass halfway to his lips. He slowly put it down on the table next to him as he tried to work out what he’d just read. Sebastian Ronson? The name rang a bell but Q couldn’t quite place him. The text of his name on the document was bold though, which indicated he was (or at least had been) an MI6 employee. Q clicked on the link and brought up Ronson’s record.

Ten minutes later Q was slumped, unable to believe what he’d just read. Of course, he’d heard of
Ronson. How could he have forgotten? He was the agent who had died on the same mission that Moneypenny had apparently ‘killed’ Bond on. Q couldn’t understand it though. Bond wasn’t bisexual, was he? He came across as just about the most stereotypically heterosexual man he’d ever met. Wasn’t he? Then Q remembered what he’d heard over Bond’s radio;

What makes you think this is my first time?

Q had assumed Bond had been talking about being abused by previous captors but what if he’d been referring to having sex with a man? With his man? Q pulled up the mission file. There were a dozen documents and witness statements, along with budget reports detailing the compensation paid to various agencies for the huge amount of damage caused during the frantic chase of the man who’d taken the hard drive – and shot Ronson. At the bottom of the list of documents was a single audio file. With a feeling of dread, Q clicked on it.

Status report. It was M’s voice.

Nearing the apartment. Going silent. Bond responded.

The recording went quiet save for the muted sound of Bond’s footsteps. Q closed his eyes. He could hear him breathing, an inevitable side effect of the agent communicating via an earpiece. He could imagine the agent treading lightly, gun in hand, as he approached the apartment. There was a sudden flurry of movement, the sound of a door opening and then Bond spoke again;

Ronson's down. He needs medical evac.

Where is it? M demanded. Is it there?

Hard drive’s gone.

Are you sure?

It’s gone. Give me a minute.

They must have it. Get after them.

I’m stabilizing Ronson! Bond ground out.

We don’t have the time.

I have to stop the bleeding!

Leave him! She barked.

Q felt a lump form in his throat as he realised what he was listening to. M was trying to stop Bond from saving his partner’s life. A moment later a sliver of ice ran down his spine as he realised Bond was up and moving again. There was the sound of running and then a confusion of street sounds. Car horns honking. Engines. Shouting. Then the slam of a car door.

Have you got him? Bond asked

He's in the black Audi. Moneypenny replied. What about Ronson?

He's been hit.

We're sending an emergency evacuation squad. Tanner suddenly said.
They'll be too bloody late! Bond snapped back.

With a trembling finger Q stopped the playback and stared at his laptop’s screen. Bond’s personnel record was over-lapping Ronson’s. The two men’s faces both stared back at him. Both handsome. One blond and blue-eyed, one dark and hazel. Q tried to imagine the two of them together. Living together. Sleeping together. Sharing their lives. Jesus, what must Bond have felt when he was ordered away from Ronson? From trying to save him? And by the woman he’d told Conroy he’d loved? Without thinking too hard about what he was doing Q started to scan the web. Bond was a double-oh and as such was expressly forbidden from having any kind of presence on social media but Ronson had been a standard agent and had been under no such restrictions.

After a few minutes of searching, using Mi6’s facial recognition software to assist him, he’d found what he was looking for. A Facebook page belonging to a ‘Seb Sonny’. Not the most ingenious cover name but good enough to put off the more casual researchers. There were just eight photographs on the page. Seven of them were profile pictures and one of them… It was a close up of Ronson embracing Bond. Bond’s face was obscured but Q would have recognised him anywhere. The set of his shoulders as he wrapped his arms around Ronson and buried his face into the crook of his neck. Ronson was laughing and the caption read ‘Best Day Ever’. Q looked at the date that it had been posted online. He’d added it two days after their civil union.

Q carefully placed his laptop onto the coffee table in front of him and stood up. He walked to the window, tears prickling at his eyes as he thought about Bond. That poor bastard. Losing his partner like that. Q looked out over the London skyline and wondered where Bond was right at that moment. Was he alone? Thinking about Ronson maybe? Missing him? What was it he’d said?

*I’ve lost so much, so many of the people that I’ve loved…*

Q went back to his glass of wine and took a sip, looking down the photo of Bond again, shaking his head. He felt so sorry for him. Perhaps he should try to reach out to him. He had no idea if Bond had any friends but perhaps Q could offer him his friendship. Or more. He drained his glass, as he thought it over before going to the kitchen to get another bottle.
Chapter 7

After seven days Q was checked over by Medical and allowed to return to work. He was still sore but the clenching tightness he’d been feeling had eased off. Conroy had sternly restricted Q to six-hour days for the following fortnight which had rankled him a little but he’d grudgingly accepted her terms. The alternative was to not work at all. He felt like he’d missed a month of work as it was, with all the things that had happened while he was off.

There was a new M for a start; Gareth Mallory had formally accepted the position. Moneypenny had been offered the option of two roles – reinstatement of her field credentials or the position of the new M’s PA. To the surprise of almost everyone, she’d accepted the latter. The one person that Q wouldn’t have called ‘surprised’ was Bill. Q would have said that Bill’s reaction was closer to ‘relieved’. He’d taken a shot and asked her out on a date the day after Q was signed off work and she’d accepted. The fact that she would now spend most of her time in London had pleased Bill greatly.

“I wouldn’t want to stop her from doing anything that she wanted.” He’d told Q, “But I can’t help feeling happy that she’s going to be working here in London. I’ve never met anyone like her before.”

Q wasn’t having so much luck with his love-life or lack of. Rich was beginning to be a bit of a pain in the arse, leaving Q voicemails almost every day. They swung between being wheedling and abusive and Q wasn’t quite sure what he was trying to achieve. He was just making himself out to be even more of a prick as far as Q was concerned. Luckily Q had his work to keep himself distracted.

He’d hit the ground running on his return, finally getting around to initiating the second phase of the new Aston Martin build – something that had been suspended due to the bombing. He was also nearing the trialling of his new smart-blood invention. It had been a pet project of his (with a little help from the Biological/Chemical Division) and it was almost complete. There was the new and improved palm-encoding technology to oversee and a dozen other projects besides. He was busier than a one-legged man in an arse-kicking competition (as his dad had been fond of saying) and he loved it. Even the six-hour days weren’t too bad as he was able to work from home on his laptop every evening, going over each day’s test results.

He’d been back just over week when M came to visit him. Q had found him and Moneypenny waiting for him in his office after returning from that week’s interdivisional meeting. The man had a stony expression on his face and when he saw Q he dismissed Eve.

“Leave the room would you Miss Moneypenny?”

She’d nodded and walked out, winking at Q as she passed him. She closed the door behind herself. With a quick tap of the control panel on Q’s desk the window which overlooked the workshop below went opaque.

“Now then,” M began, sitting back and lacing his fingers over his chest. “We need to talk. Sit down.”
Q sat opposite him, feeling nervous all of a sudden. M sat forward again and opened the file on the desk. Q felt a queer sensation of déjà vu as he realised it was his personnel file.

“When I was introduced to you by the previous M, she referred to you as Q...” Q wasn’t really sure what he was supposed to say so he just nodded. “…and yet according to these records, that’s not quite accurate, is it?”

M looked up at him expectantly and for a moment Q was clueless as to what he meant but then the penny dropped.

“I’m only filling this role on a provisional basis still.” He explained. It was true, the previous M had told him he was on probation but then she’d died and he’d just carried on. He shifted, suddenly uncomfortable. Perhaps he should have made his position clearer to the new M...

“The thing is this;” M continued. “Between you and I there’s a rumour afoot of a new initiative being undertaken. One which might well disrupt the double-oh program as well as potentially stuff up the whole of MI6.”

“Sir?” Q was shocked.

“Nine-Eyes, it’s called. I don’t know a lot about it just yet but I have a suspicion that I’ll need to be vigilant. That we all will. It may well constitute the biggest threat MI6 has seen in it’s hundred-plus year history… and I can’t be seen to be weak. Can’t have any chinks in the old armour, so to speak. Certainly can’t have one of the most important roles in this organisation filled by a temporary member of staff.”

Q’s heart sank.

“Of course, Sir. I understand.” He replied, a little sadly. “Who are you going to ask to take on the role permanently?”

M stared at him for a moment as if he’d grown an extra head and then chuckled.

“Why you, of course.”

~00Q~

“Here’s to our new QM!” Eve said loudly and the dozen or so people around the table raised their glasses. Q grinned and took a sip of the champagne she’d poured for him. They were in the Golden Guinea along with all the heads of department, Tanner, R and a handful of other Q-Branch staff. She plonked herself back down and kissed his cheek before raising her glass again. “The youngest, the brightest and the cutest ever!” They all laughed that time and Q felt himself blushing.

“Shut up Moneypants.” He grinned, nudging her with his shoulder.

It had been a great evening. Word had quickly spread around his department (no doubt ably assisted by Eve) and everyone had decided to knock off early to help Q celebrate his formal acceptance of his role. Many of the staff had gone home already but the last few had remained for one final toast. He took another sip and then couldn’t quite help the yawn that escaped him.

“Keeping you up?” She asked with a wicked twinkle in her eye. “Have a late night last night, did
“No such luck,” Q said wistfully. “Just still getting over my bug.” In actual fact he’d taken some painkillers for the ache in his chest an hour before and they were beginning to kick in. The official story was that he’d been off work for a week with a chest infection and he wasn’t sure what Tanner had told her but her face immediately fell.

“Oh sweetheart,” She replied, “It never occurred to me. If you want to go you should just say…”

He smiled at her suddenly concerned face.

“I’m OK.” He said, slipping his hand into hers. “I’ve got a staff car booked for ten o’clock.” She glanced at her watch and saw that it was half-past nine.

“As long as you are OK.” She added.

He nodded and took another sip of champagne. He hadn’t drunk much but he was beginning to feel a little woozy. It really was just tiredness though. It was only the fact that he was off work the next day that had tempted him out in the first place. He sat back and listened to the people around him chatter for a few minutes, enjoying himself to be surrounded by so many fine workmates when Eve suddenly sat back with him.

“I asked him along, you know.” She said quietly. Q tilted his head as he looked at her, trying to work out what on earth she meant. “Bond.” She elaborated. “He was in with M this afternoon.”

“Why would you do that?” Q asked.

“Because he’s sweet on you.”

Q snorted derisively.

“I doubt it. I’ve barely had more than two words out of the man and when he does speak to me it’s invariably to take the piss.”

“Ah, but you take the piss back and that’s like Viagra to a double-oh.”

Q chuckled at her.

“Oh Eve, you don’t half talk some bollocks…”

They chatted for a while longer about this and that and then there was the buzz of his silent mobile ringing in his pocket. He quickly checked it and then grabbed his coat.

“Right. That’s me done. I will see all of you reprobates on Thursday. Have a good day tomorrow and please don’t take my absence as an excuse to get so bladdered tonight that you spend the whole of tomorrow with stinking hangovers. The budget will not stretch to bacon sandwiches again this month!”

They all laughed good-naturedly and said their goodbyes as he left. There was a sleek BMW waiting for him outside and a driver that he recognised, Thorpe. The man sprang into action when he saw him and opened the back door. Q climbed inside and sat down with a groan. The fresh air had done a number on him and if he’d felt a little sleepy in the pub he felt one hundred percent exhausted now. Thorpe climbed into the driver’s seat.

“Long day Sir?” He asked as he put on his seat belt, glancing up into the rear-view mirror at Q.
“Long week.” Q replied.

“It’s only Tuesday, Sir.” The man replied.

“Christ. Is it really?” Q replied, his eyes sliding shut. Thorpe chuckled as he started the engine.

Once again Q managed to sleep the whole way home. Honestly, he thought as he clambered out of the car, Thorpe must have thought he was some kind of old lush. Forever getting picked up half-cut from pubs, he smiled to himself as he waved the car off. He stumbled up the front path of the house and fished out his keys, fumbling for the one to his front door. The security light trained on the porch flicked on and Q found himself squinting. He’d just slipped the key into the lock when he heard a kerfuffle of some sort. He paused, trying to work out what he’d just heard. It sounded as if it had come from the garden next door. There was another sound, almost like grunting, and then the neighbour’s bin was knocked over.

“Bloody badgers.” Q commented. For an urban area, that part of London was rife with them and they were forever going through people’s bins. He debated nipping over to scare the thing off but decided that the beast deserved a decent meal if it could find one. With a shrug he went inside.

~00Q~

He was usually up at the crack of dawn so it was nice to not set his alarm on his days off. He could rely on being woken by the furballs demanding breakfast anyway but he always enjoyed the extra hour or so’s sleep that they graciously allowed him. That particular morning however, it was the intercom by the front door that woke him up.

“Wazz…it?” He slurred as he scrambled for his glasses, dislodging Turing in the process. He put them on and glared at the clock. It was eight o’clock. The intercom buzzed again. He scrambled out of bed and ignored his full bladder and half-hard cock as he staggered to the door. He pulled down the cunningly disguised mini-keyboard that was set into the wall and examined the small monitor above it. There were two men standing on the front porch, one of them dressed like a policeman. He quickly brought up the police database before activating the microphone.

“Hullo?” He queried.

“Mr Thomas Carter?”

“Who wants to know?”

“Metropolitan Police Sir.”

“Can you hold your IDs up to the camera please?”

Turing and Clarke started to curl around his legs as the men complied. He quickly made screenshots and searched the database. Within seconds he’d positively identified both of them.

“Thank you. Would you like to come up? I’m on the top floor.”

He pressed the door release and then folded away the keyboard before dashing to the toilet to have one of the fastest pees of his life. He had flushed and was just washing his hands when there was a knock at the door. He looked down at himself. A System of a Down t-shirt and pink and white
stripy pyjama bottoms. It would have to do. He didn’t suppose that they would turn out to be the fashion police. Smirking at his own pun, Q went to the door.

“Good morning gentlemen!” He said cheerily. “Come on in, please go through to the lounge on the right.” The men obeyed and then both sat on the sofa when Q invited them to. Q sat opposite them and tucked his feet up under himself. Turing immediately jumped up onto his lap. “Now what can I do for you?” Q asked.

“Firstly, I’d like to introduce ourselves. My name is Detective Sergeant Barton. This is Constable Marsh.” Barton pulled out a notepad and opened it. “Do you know a Mr Richard Jones?”

Q nodded, a crawling sensation of uneasiness starting between his shoulder blades.

“He’s um… he’s my ex. We broke up.”

“And how has he been since then Sir? Has he been in touch?” The man’s tone was light but Q detected a wariness underneath it that Q didn’t like one bit. He debated bullshitting the men but thought that maybe honesty was the best policy, even if it didn’t cast Richard, or himself, in the best light.

“Yes; and he’s been an utter twat. Coming in here without my permission. Texting me continually.” He paused, wondering if he should carry on, before adding: “He assaulted me.”

“Assaulted you?” Constable Marsh asked, perking up. “Did you report it?”

“No.” Q said quietly. “No-one saw him do it. My employer… I used their medical department the next day… I was signed off work for a week with a badly bruised sternum. It’s still sore now.” He looked down at Turing and stroked him between his ears. “If you want to know the truth I was embarrassed as all hell and thought that if I ignored him… didn’t make a fuss… he might go away…”

“But he didn’t go away, did he Sir?” The man started but the plainclothes man raised his hand, silencing him.

“What’s this all about?” Q asked, suddenly worried. “Where’s Rich? What’s he done?”

“We got a call from one of your neighbours around midnight last night. They had come home from a night out to find Mr Jones unconscious next to their bins. He’d been violently assaulted. A detective spoke to him when he woke up this morning and he told him that it was all your fault. Can you tell me where you last night Sir?”

“The Golden Guinea in Vauxhall,” Q answered numbly. “I was with work colleagues… I… I got a promotion you see, well, more of a permanent contract really after doing the job for ages… anyway, I left around ten. One of our company’s drivers brought me home. That time of night… not much traffic… I’d have been home around quarter to eleven maybe? I’m not sure. I slept most of the way home and then came in and went straight to bed. I went out like a light again.”

The two men glanced at each other.

“What?”

“Mr Jones has a patchy memory about what happened but other neighbours reported hearing a commotion around twenty to eleven. Did you hear anything when you came in?”

“Only the badger in next door’s bin…” Q started and then trailed off. “Oh, fuck me. That wasn’t a
badger, was it? That was Rich getting beaten up, wasn’t it?” Q covered his mouth with his hand and shook his head. He was beginning to feel sick. “How can I help? I need to help. Clear this up. Oh, bloody hell. I can’t believe that prick would accuse me!”

“We’re going to need to speak to the people that you were with last night. Your colleagues and the driver especially; it might be that he saw something that may assist us in our enquiries.”

“What? Oh yes, of course. Hold on a moment.” He popped Turing onto the floor and went to his messenger bag which was sitting on the floor where he’s dumped it. He pulled out his wallet and extracted a business card. He handed it to Barton. “Call that number and ask for William Tanner. He’ll be able to give you the details of everyone in the pub with me last night as well as the driver.”

The detective studied it for a moment before holding it up between two fingers.

“This is just a number. No company name.”

“I work for the Government. I’m afraid I can’t go into more details than that. Mr Tanner will give you all the information that you need.”

The detective nodded and tucked the card into his notebook. He stood up to go. “Well then. Thank you for your time Sir.”

“That’s it?” Q asked, surprised. “Don’t you need a formal statement or something from me?”

Barton shook his head.

“We’ll be in touch once we’ve had a chance to get a full statement from Mr Jones.” He paused and then glanced at Marsh. “In the meantime, I would ask you not to contact him. We’ll do a little digging, speak to a few of the people that you were with last night and take it from there.”

He gave Q his card and then they took their leave of him. Once Q was sure they were out of the building, he rang Tanner on his direct line.

“You do remember that it’s your day off today, don’t you?” He began, having obviously seen Q’s name on his caller ID.

“I do.” Q said. “Listen, there’s been an incident and the police are going to be getting in touch with you…”

He told Tanner the whole story and Bill agreed to speak to the other members of staff that had been present the night before. He asked Q if he thought it was something they should be concerned with.

“I hope not.” Q replied. “Rich had always had a mean streak. I mean, he’s always been a bit of a bitch, lashing out when things didn’t go his way. That was why we split up actually,” Q added remembering the voicemails Rich had left when Q hadn’t got in touch with him immediately after the bombing, “he can be so petulant. Jesus, what a mess.”

“It’ll be alright.” Tanner said grimly. “Leave it with me.”

“Thanks mate.” Q said.

They chatted for another couple of minutes and then Q rang off. He immediately dialled Rich’s friend Bernie. She picked up on the third ring.

“Tom. Are you OK?”
Q gave out a little sigh of relief. He hadn’t been sure how it would go with Bernie if he’d been honest. The three of them, him, Rich and her, had always gotten along but she’d always been more Rich’s friend than his.

“I’m OK. I wanted to see if you knew how Rich was?”

“Alright I think. They kept him in hospital overnight because he’s got a concussion but he hasn’t broken anything. What the hell happened? He was at your place, wasn’t he?”

“Apparently so.” Q said vaguely. “I got home about eleven, didn’t see or hear a thing. First thing I knew was when the police turned up this morning.”

“The police?”

Q paused and then said quietly;

“Rich thinks I had him assaulted.”

He heard Bernie sigh.

“He what? Why on earth would he think that?”

“Maybe because he beat me up last week? Perhaps he thought I wanted revenge? Well I don’t. What I want is for him to fuck off and get the hell out of my life!” The last few words came out a lot angrier than he intended and he felt a hot flush of irritation.

“He didn’t tell me any of that… And yet you still care enough to ask me how he is.” Bernie replied, sounding almost sad. “You need to stop that darling. Right now.”

Q slumped.

“I know,” he admitted. “I’m not sure how I can though. We lived together for so long. I thought he was the man I was going to spend the rest of my life with but he was so demanding… so needy…”

“That sounds like our Rich.” Bernie chuckled. “Look, try not to worry about him. I’ll keep an eye on him… let you know how he’s getting on if you like… but I won’t tell him you called. Maybe it’s better if he thinks that you’ve cut all ties.”

“Thanks Bernie. I… I just feel so screwed up by all of this.”

“I’ll bet. Listen, I’ve got to go. I promised Rich I’d be with him when he was discharged and I need to pick up a few things on the way to the hospital. I’ll speak to you later. Take care, Sweetie.”

She rung off and Q sat looking at his phone for several moments. It was still only just gone nine o’clock. How could so much have happened and it still only be nine o’clock? He looked up to see two very unimpressed cats sitting in the doorway and staring at him.

“Oh, that’s right. Breakfast.”

He went into the kitchen and duly doled out their meals and then hesitated, unsure of what to do next. Abruptly he turned around and went back to bed.

It was his day off, after all.
He had a quiet day, sleeping and lounging around with the cats followed by a restless night. He had the strangest dream about Bond. They were on a mission together running away from men with guns but instead of getting far, far away Bond kept stopping to push Q up against walls and kiss him breathless. Every time Q tried to stop him, to tell him that they needed to run faster Bond would reply *what makes you think this is my first time?* until Q was so frustrated and horny and scared that he thought he might cry.

He woke up with a start half an hour before his alarm was due to go off, with an achingly hard cock which he wanked off desolately and efficiently while trying to shake off the feeling of dread that the dream had left him with. Once he had forced himself to orgasm he’d fed his cats, showered and got ready for work.

It had been a tedious morning, full of reports, test results and analysis. He usually enjoyed that kind of work but the whole thing with Rich was weighing heavily on his mind. He decided to forego a lunchbreak, opting instead to take up Una’s offer of a sandwich from the local Tesco Metro. He started to eat it and was soon up to his eyes in a raft of emails regarding the alarmingly high failure rate of the oil-slick deployment mechanism in the new Aston. He couldn’t understand it. He thought they’d fixed the bugs weeks before...

He was distracted by his personal mobile pinging. Taking a bite of his rather boring but quite palatable smoked ham and cheese sandwich, he unlocked the screen. It was a text from Bernie. He tensed up as he read it.

*Rich is feeling better but he’s still convinced you had someone do him over. He’s talking about getting a lawyer. Just thought you should know.*

“That fucking prick!” Q muttered around his mouthful of food.

“Anyone I know?” A smooth voice asked from the doorway. Q looked up guiltily and blushed when he realised it was Bond. He tucked his phone away as the agent strolled into the room looking far better than a mere mortal had any right to in his navy-blue Tom Ford suit, his crisp white shirt and his cornflower blue tie. Which was the same colour as his eyes, Q’s brain pointed out unhelpfully.

“Anyone I can help you with?” Bond asked in a softer tone.

Q stared at him as he swallowed his sandwich. There it was again, that concern that Q had first seen in Medical. For a moment he thought about confiding in Bond but then he realised that would mean admitting to the man that he was a victim. He wasn’t sure he could bear seeing the look of disappointment on Bond’s face when he found out that Q was the weak sort of man who could be beaten up and apparently stalked by an ex-boyfriend.

“No.” He replied instead, determined to keep his dignity intact. “What can I do for you today Bond?”

It was almost as if a shutter had gone up behind Bond’s eyes. With a slight nod of his head the gentle hint of concern was instantly gone from the man’s expression and he was all agent once more.

“It’s two o’clock? I was told to report to you for my kit.”

Q shook his head, annoyed with himself for forgetting their appointment.

“Of course. My apologies. Give me a moment.”
He quickly finished the email he’d been writing and sent it. He glanced wistfully at the rest of his sandwich but decided it could wait. Bond must have noticed as a half-smile seemed to touch his lips.

“Unless you’d rather finish your sandwich first and your…” He tilted his head slightly to read the crisp packet that lay on Q’s desk, “…Pickled Onion Monster Munch. Sounds delightful.”

Q smiled and got up to got to the workbench where Bond’s kit was ready waiting for him.

“Piss off Bond. There’s nothing wrong with Pickled Onion flavoured Monster Munch. I’ve put far worse things in my body you know.” He stopped dead and felt himself blush furiously as he suddenly realised what he’d said. “I mean in my mouth!” He blurted out. “Food! I mean I’ve eaten worse things!”

“Oh really?” Bond purred.

“Oh, fucking hell.” Q laughed, feeling like all the blood in his body was now in his hot cheeks. Blowjobs. All he could bloody well think of now was blowjobs and Bond bloody well knew it. The agent was standing there with a grin on his face. It was the first time Q had seen him smile and it transformed him. He was gorgeous. And Q actually felt himself falling for the sodding man.

Oh God.

He turned away before he made a complete fool of himself and concentrated on Bond’s kit.

“Right. Here you are. Standard kit. Radio and a palm-encoded gun. Spare clip…”

He looked up and Bond was right beside him but he wasn’t looking at the kit, he was looking straight at Q.

“What kinds of things?”

“W-what?”

“What kinds of awful things do you like to eat?”

Q thought for a millisecond that his brain wasn’t going to engage and he was going to say ‘cock’ but he recovered enough to say instead:

“I don’t know. McDonalds?”

Bond shuddered theatrically.

“Urgh. No wonder you’ve got such a skinny little arse. I doubt you ever eat anything even vaguely nutritional…”

“You’ve been checking out my arse?” Q asked before his brain had a chance to intervene. He cringed inwardly but then Bond smiled.

“Always.”

Q felt his heart beating as he replied as nonchalantly as he could;

“Then perhaps you should take me out to dinner. Make sure I eat properly.”

For a second Q thought Bond was going to say yes but then he seemed to close off again, the mirth disappearing from his eyes.
“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” He said. “That would be unprofessional. For both of us.”

Q was surprised and a little embarrassed. How many times had Moneypenny insisted that James liked him? And yet he had just dismissed Q out of hand. Maybe it was just as it appeared, maybe Bond really did value their reputations, although Bond’s reputation was pretty much in the toilet and had been for years. So maybe he just valued Q’s? Or maybe it went deeper than that. James had recently lost the old M, a woman who had always had his back. Prior to that his civil partner had died and prior to that there had been that other woman, Vesper. Maybe Bond wasn’t ready for a new friendship. Whatever his reasons, Q needed to respect them so he nodded.

“Quite right. Forget I said anything.”

Q carried on going over the kit. He’d made a few modifications to the gun and the radio that he wanted Bond to understand. When he was finished he’d passed the agent the case and had wished him a safe trip to Helsinki where he had a small mission to carry out. It was only afterwards, once Bond had left and Q was back working on his emails, that he found he couldn’t stop thinking about the look that had been on Bond’s face as he’d said goodbye.

He’d hesitated for a split-second, almost as if Q was something that James wanted but couldn’t have.
Q got home before six o’clock which was some kind of record since becoming Q. He’d even stopped off for some shopping on the way and found himself some nice bits of salad and some freshwater prawns that were on offer in his local Waitrose. So much for eating unhealthily, Commander Bond, he’d thought as he used the self-service checkout.

He looped all his bags over one arm as he opened the door to his flat and did his usual one-footed manoeuvre, balancing on one leg and pushing the other through the door first to stop any furry persons from making a break for it. To his surprise, there were no attempts at freedom and he was even more surprised when he found Turing sitting in the hallway watching him come in.

“Hello little man. What are you up to?”

He dropped his bags on the kitchen floor, suddenly concerned.

“Where’s your girlfriend Al?”

He hurried into the lounge, then back into the hallway and through to the bedroom, giving out a quiet moan when he found Clarke. She was lying on the bed, on the spare pillow. Her favourite spot. She looked like she was sleeping but he instantly knew that she wasn’t. He put his hand over his mouth as he sat down beside her and reached out to stroke her cool fur. He picked up her lifeless little body and slid her across onto his lap as he started to cry.

It was inevitable really. The vet had said so many times that she could get really sick at any time, that her kidneys were on the verge of failure but he’d always assumed that she would sicken before she died. That Q would have time to prepare himself mentally. Maybe it was better, her unexpectedly dying in her sleep while he was out at work, better for both of them, but it didn’t feel that way to Q. He felt robbed. Like the last little piece of her had been stolen away from him.

He sat there with her until he realised how dark it was getting. Only then did he set her to one side. He found an old towel at the bottom of his airing cupboard and then gently wrapped her in it before placing her on the chair in the corner of his bedroom. He then changed his bedding and put it on to wash before finally making his salad. He was going to ration out the prawns over two meals but he dumped the whole lot on his plate before sitting down in front of the tv in the lounge. He put on a re-run of Top Gear and then ate his dinner with Turing. His little boy was subdued but the prospect of sharing his favourite food with his daddy was too tempting. By the end of the meal he was purring, full of prawns and happy to accept Q’s broken-hearted fuss and kisses.

The next morning Q sent word that he would be in the office late and took Clarke to the vets. They offered a cremation service and promised to take care of her remains for him. Afterwards he walked to the train station in bright sunshine. He felt so sad, despite the beautiful weather. He knew he’d only owned Clarke for a couple of years but she’d been such a sweet little soul. Poor Turing, he’d been confused and Q hated to think about him being alone all day. It was ridiculous really, but when Q’s train had arrived he hadn’t got on it. He’d turned around and left the station instead, texting R to tell him he would be working from home. It was Friday anyway so he told him he would see him after the weekend.
Once back home he’d changed into a pair of shorts and a t-shirt and settled down to work on his laptop with Turing curled up beside him.

~00Q~

By Saturday night, Q was feeling almost lonely. He’d lived with Rich for years but prior to moving him in, Q had always lived alone and he’d always loved it. He hadn’t felt lonely after Rich had moved out but he seemed to be feeling it now that Clarke was gone. He cooked himself a nice chicken chasseur and cracked open a bottle of white wine, intending to spend the night working his way through the ‘Alien’ Quadrilogy. He’d only got one film in before he started to feel restless. He debated calling Moneypenny or Tanner but their blossoming relationship seemed to be going well and he could almost guarantee that they would be out somewhere together. The majority of his other friends were also Rich’s friends and while someone might want a night out, he didn’t want to spend it talking about his ex.

It was a shame really that Bond had turned him down. It might have been nice to sit in a posh restaurant with him. Being fed good food and fine wine… Q took a swig of his wine and was surprised to see he was almost at the end of the glass and the bottle. He wondered what Bond was up to and after a brief internal debate, Q picked up his laptop.

Q branch had the details of all of the agent’s phones and Q, although he really wasn’t authorised to outside of work, he quickly called up the trace facility on Bond’s. He’d expected for him to be in Finland still and was surprised to see that he was now in Soho in the centre of London. Phone pinpointing was notoriously vague and could only be refined to about ten meters. That left a tantalising possibility because according to the trace, James was either in an Italian restaurant called Amici’s or a fetish club called The Double Two. Q stared at the screen. Back in his youth, in his clubbing days, he used to regularly frequent The Double Two. He’d spent much of his late teens and early twenties experimenting and had met a couple of nice doms in there…

Making a snap decision, Q went to his bedroom and started to root through the back of his wardrobe. Twenty minutes later he admired himself in the full-length mirror on the door. He’d found his inky black, tight jeans, his heavy boots and fine mesh, body-hugging shirt. He knew that the shirt looked opaque until the UV lights of a club hit it and made it completely see-through. He threw a black hoodie on over the top and finished off his outfit with a heavy leather belt. He paused for a moment, wondering if he was really going to go out looking the way he did when he was a twenty-year-old and decided that he was. The coincidence of James being in the vicinity of the club where Q had some of his best nights outs was just too tempting.

He went into the bathroom and found a pair of disposable contact lenses in the cabinet under the sink which he put in. Looking further back, he found his old eyeliner. He sharpened it and then smudged just a little around his eyes. He grinned. He looked years younger. He found his wallet and took out his bank card, a few bank notes and his Oyster card which he slipped into his phone cover. On a whim he went back into the bedroom and found the box of condoms in his bedside table. He slipped one into his front pocket along with a small sachet of lube. Now he was ready.

~00Q~
He got off the underground at Piccadilly Circus Station and then walked briskly to Beak Street. It had been so long since he’d dressed up for a night out and he was surprised to find that he could still attract admiring glances. Maybe it was the outfit, or the eyeliner or maybe it was because for the first time in a long time he felt good.

As he approached the club he debated slowing down to a stroll to see if he could spot Bond in the restaurant but decided against it. Checking out where he was? That was one thing but attempting to see who he was eating dinner with when he’d turned Q down that week? That was a bit too close to stalking for Q’s liking. It didn’t stop him from glancing in the window as he kept walking past and went into the club though. There was no sign of Bond that he could see but Q had searched for his phone’s location over an hour ago, he’d probably long gone. What would have happened anyway? Maybe a part of Q had fantasised that Bond would see him out of his work clothes and instantly fallen for his charms but wasn’t really likely, was it? He paid the door charge and smiled as the warm atmosphere and loud music engulfed him. Sod Bond, he thought, let’s have a little fun.

He took off his hoodie and tied it around his waist as he walked down the stairs to the subterranean bar. He paused at the side of the dancefloor and couldn’t help but grin. He hadn’t been in The Double Two for so long and yet the décor was exactly as he remembered it. He went over to the bar and leaned over it to see what they had on offer and had to smile again when he saw that they still sold Cherry Cokes. A young, very pretty bartender walked over to him and leaned over his side of the bar to shout at Q over the thudding bassline.

“What’ll it be?”

“Double vodka and Cherry Coke please.” Q responded. The bartender got his drink for him and then took the payment. As Q took his change he debated chatting the man up but he was a little skinny for Q’s taste. He wanted someone with a bit more meat on them. He took a sip of his drink and smiled his thanks. It tasted just like he remembered it. He wandered over to find a spot by the dancefloor. He wasn’t much of a dancer himself but he liked to watch.

The club was getting full now and he scanned the crowds. There wasn’t really that much talent on display. A few pretty boys in the same vein as the bartender, a couple of muscle daddies that Q might have liked to have given control to for an hour or two but no-one that really floated his boat. They all had something wrong with them. Too short, too tall, too young, too old… Q drained his drink and ordered another. He didn’t like scenes with new partners if he’d had too much to drink but as that was looking less and less likely he thought getting drunk would be a fair alternative. He might still get a quick wank or blow job in the toilets if he was lucky…

He’d almost finished his second drink when he was surprised by a hand slipping around his waist.

“What’s a pretty boy like you doing in a grotty place like this?”

Q looked up and was amazed to see Bond grinning back at him.

“Bond! Bloody hell you startled me!”

“We’re off the clock. Call me James, Thomas.”

He held out his other hand and Q saw he had two glasses balanced on his large palm. One looked like it was a double whiskey and the other…

“I’m not a fan of cherry coke myself but I suppose the vodka helps to cut through the sweetness.”

Q took the offered drink and downed the dregs of the one he already had, wondering how in the hell
Bond had known what he’d been drinking. He set the empty glass onto the table next to him and didn’t miss the that way Bond seemed to move with him, keeping his arm around Q’s back and his hand on Q’s hip possessively. He tugged on him slightly as he leant in to speak into his ear again. “I didn’t get an answer.”

“Sorry?” Q queried.

Bond took half a step closer and his next words were like a breath on Q’s neck.

“What’s a pretty boy like you doing in a grotty place like this?” He asked again.

Q shivered.

“I’m hardly a pretty boy…”

“I think you are. A very pretty boy with your eyeliner and your see-through shirt and your come-fuck-me tight jeans.”

Q felt himself blush. Something that was becoming a regular occurrence around the agent.

“Bond…”

“James.” Bond purred as he pressed his lips to the side of Q’s throat.

“Jesus…”

Bond’s mouth was soft and he mustn’t have shaved since early that morning as he had a slight scruff which rubbed up against Q’s neck deliciously. Q’s head swam as he was surrounded by the miasma of Bond’s aftershave and he moaned. James must have felt it rather than heard it as he reacted by planting his hand between Q’s shoulders and dragging him to his chest. Keeping the hand which held his glass away from Bond’s back for fear of pouring it over him, Q nuzzled him, suddenly desperate to feel the man’s lips on his own. Bond didn’t seem to want that though, intent as he was in kissing every inch of Q’s throat. Eventually he pulled away and Q shivered when he saw the raw want in his eyes.

“Drink up. We’re getting out of here.”

“We are?” Q asked, obediently taking a sip of his drink. Bond tossed back his own and then put down his glass before gently tipping the bottom of Q’s with a single finger.

“I said drink up.”

Christ, if the neck-kissing hadn’t been enough to turn Q on, the quiet insistence of James’s command went straight to his cock. He downed his drink, wrinkling his nose as the fizz crawled up the back of it. Bond took the empty glass off him and then steered him out of the club. The fresh air hit Q at the door and he instantly felt lightheaded. Whether it was from the alcohol or the fact that James Bond was almost dragging him through the streets of Soho, full of purpose, he wasn’t sure. He didn’t even know where they were going but he hoped it would be somewhere that James would start kissing him again.

They walked for about five minutes and they didn’t say a word in all that time. James strode quickly, his arm still around Q’s waist, forcing him to trot to keep up. Eventually they reached The Soho Hotel. They went inside and straight to the lifts. James pulled out a key card and swiped it before selecting the top floor. As soon as the doors slid shut Q found himself pressed up against the wall and James was back kissing his neck. This time though he grasped Q through his jeans, his big
fingers closing around Q’s cock, which was still half-hard from the club. He squeezed him almost painfully tight.

“Christ, you’re desperate for this, aren’t you?”

Q nodded, running his fingers up into the back of James’s hair. He was, he really was. He might have had idle fantasies about sex with Bond but they had been nothing like this. He never would have dreamed that it would ever actually happen. The sheer power and size of the man was making his head spin. The doors slid open and then James was dragging him by his wrist to a room. He used his key card to open the door and pushed Q through it. Q briefly wondered when James had even rented the room. Had he had another date that had gone bust or had he seen Q walk by the restaurant and…

His train of thought was broken by Bond kicking shut the door and then striding towards him. Grabbing his shoulders, he spun Q so that he faced the bed. Bond immediately dropped his hands to untie Q’s hoodie and pop the button on his jeans. Q staggered as James drew down his zip and pushed them down. James hissed as he realised that Q wasn’t wearing any underwear.

“You little tart.” He growled. He wrapped one of his arms up around Q’s chest, under his shirt, and pinched his nipple while he grabbed Q’s arse cheek with the other hand. “You came out looking for a fucking tonight, didn’t you?” Q whined as James’s fingers went between his legs and one of them pressed up against his hole. “Such a fucking tart,” he slipped a finger in dry, “such a greedy hole.” Q gasped and would have fallen when Bond pushed in another finger, had he not still had him firmly held. “Open up for me, little tart.”

Bond began to scissor his fingers, stretching Q roughly. It hurt but it was so good, Q was rock hard and his cock bobbed in time with Bond’s roughly fucking fingers. Q tried to spread his legs to give James better access but he was hamstrung by his tight jeans that had only been pushed down as far as his thighs. Bond must have realised because the next moment Q found himself on the bed on all fours and Bond had three fingers in him. He flexed his back, pushing back onto James’s hand and earned himself a sharp slap to the buttock. A thin drool of precome escaped his cock and smeared down his inner thigh.

“Fuck…”

James must have liked his reaction as he spanked him again, and again, and again, until Q’s arse cheeks were singing and stinging. Finally, he removed his fingers and crawled up onto the bed behind Q, pressing his naked cock up between Q’s cheeks.

“Condom? Lube?”

For a second Q considered telling Bond to do without. To beg him to fuck him raw and come deep inside him but the knowledge of what James did for a living and the number of the people he’d slept with stopped him. Instead he ground out;

“Front pocket.”

Bond immediately found them and a moment later Q felt his hand on the back of his neck, pressing his chest down to the bed. It immediately set up an ache in his barely-healed chest. He tried to shift, to relieve the pressure, but Bond held him fast and a moment later he was pushing his cock into him.

Jesus, but Bond was big. Q grabbed two handfulls of the bedcover and gritted his teeth, whining as he bore down trying to open up for him. He thought for one moment that he wasn’t going to manage it, that he wasn’t going to be able to take him all in but then Bond suddenly spanked him again and
Q yelped as he gained an inch. When he was most of the way in Bond grasped Q’s hips painfully tight and started to thrust, drawing back and then forcing his way in a little further each time until Q could feel his cool balls on his taint with every stroke. He shivered and realised that he must have slumped when James suddenly hauled him backwards, making Q offer up his arse to Bond’s onslaught.

“Oh God…” Q moaned.

It was rough, it was sore and Q was utterly at Bond’s mercy, tossed about and manipulated like a ragdoll. Every time he tried to shift, to take the weight off his sore chest, to straighten his aching back, he was held firm and spanked for his trouble until Q stopped fighting it. He zoned out when Bond pressed a firm hand down between his shoulder blades and sped up his pace. Endorphins rushed and Q felt tears spring to his eyes as Bond used him.

It was perfection.

Soon, far too soon, Bond began to slam into him, grunting as his orgasm approached. He suddenly pulled out and Q heard the snap of the condom being stripped off. A moment later Bond roughly grabbed Q’s hip before Q felt the splash of Bond’s come spattering over his abused arse. He collapsed onto the bed, breathing heavily as his heart seemed to hammer into the back of his lungs. Bond finished and Q felt the mattress below himself shift as the agent got up to go to the bathroom.

Q allowed himself to wallow in the afterglow of a frankly exceptional fucking. He was still hard, he hadn’t come yet, but he couldn’t bring himself to care. He giggled, not sure if it was the alcohol from earlier or aftereffects of the endorphin-rush. He buried his face in the duvet to muffle the sound. He felt fucking awesome.

After a while Q muzzily raised his head. Bond was being awfully quiet and he was taking a long time in the bathroom. He rolled over awkwardly and looked over his shoulder. His good mood evaporated when he realised that the door to the hallway was standing open. Q got up painfully and went to the bathroom, tugging up his trousers quickly to assuage the embarrassment of having been lying on the bed with his arse out, covered in come, in front of the open door. He checked the bathroom – it didn’t look as if it had been touched. He looked up and down the hallway but it was no good.

Bond had gone.
Chapter 9

The following Monday morning Q had an appointment with M at his Whitehall office and he arrived ten minutes early, hoping to have a chat with Moneypenny before he went in.

After his initial confusion and embarrassment at being fucked and abandoned by Bond had passed, he’d spent the rest of the weekend feeling furious with the man – a feeling that had not been appeased one bit by the discovery that the agent had left two twenty-pound-notes on the bed next to him. Like Q was some kind of whore who needed paying for his services. He’d tried to ring Bond but his phone had been turned off and when Q had finally gotten back home and tracked it, there was no sign of it – almost as if Bond hadn’t wanted to be found.

Moneypenny was sitting at her desk and she grinned when she saw him.

“My, aren’t we all eager beavers today?”

“Oh?”

“Bond’s beaten you to it. He just went in for a quiet word with M.”

Q felt himself tense up at the man’s name. Moneypenny immediately picked up on it and tilted her head.

“Ooh, hello. What’s up?”

He shook his head and tried to smile to cover his irritation. He wasn’t sure what it looked like to her but it felt horribly like a grimace.

“It’s nothing. It’s silly. So, what’s on the agenda today? Why does M need to see us?”

The quizzical look of concern fell from Moneypenny’s face at the shift to a more professional subject.

“Not sure…” She said slowly, “but there’s all kinds of rumours flying around about that Nine Eyes thing. I think it might be something to do with that.”

Q wasn’t surprised and he told her so.

“There was a memo the other day. Q Branch is to be audited. Some bloke called Max Denbigh is sending someone next week on behalf of an agency called the Joint Intelligence Service.”

“Never heard of it.” Moneypenny said.

“Me neither and that doesn’t exactly fill me with confidence…”

Just then Bill Tanner arrived. He nodded at them both.

“Morning Quartermaster. Sexy lady.”

Moneypenny grinned and Q groaned at the cheesiness of it all.
“Is he always this smooth?” Q asked.

“Always.” She smiled as Tanner leaned over her desk to take her hand and kiss the back of it.

The door to M’s office opened and the man himself stepped out.

“You’re all here. Good. If you would?”

They followed him in one by one.

~00Q~

Q wasn’t sure what annoyed him more, the meddling threat that the Joint Intelligence Service posed to MI6 or the fact that Bond resolutely ignored him for the entire duration of the meeting. M droned on for over an hour about the troubling emails and memo’s that the various departments had been receiving and Q dutifully took notes but by the end of it he was barely concentrating. Bond was sitting at the other end of M’s desk from him and although he commented on and questioned things that everyone else in the room said, he made no effort to discuss things with Q. He barely even glanced at him. When they finally stood up to leave, the agent was the first out of the door.

Q said his goodbyes quickly and then scurried after him. He caught up with him in the corridor and called out to him.

“Bond? Might I have a word?”

He watched the way that Bond’s back tensed up before he glanced over his shoulder, a stony look on his face. A split second later he smiled.

“Of course, Quartermaster.”

Q hesitated, sure for a moment that he wouldn’t have stopped for him but then Tanner passed him. His anger flared, realising that Bond’s smile was an act for Tanner’s benefit. Seizing the opportunity, Q opened the door to the empty meeting room next to him.

“In here please.” He said curtly. He walked in, flicking on the light and with three strides he was in the middle of the room. Bond wandered in after him, the charming smile gone. “Close the door please.” Q said.

Bond did as he was told and then Q’s barely contained rage burst out of him.

“What the fuck Bond? What the actual fuck?” The agent lent back against the door, crossing his arms as he watched Q lose his temper. “What the hell was that? Ignoring me like a fucking six-year-old in a strop after what you did on Saturday night? After treating me like some common fucking rent boy?”

“Was that not what you wanted? You were dressed like one I just thought you wanted to be treated like one.” Bond’s words were measured and calm and if Q had been less furious he might have picked up on the hint of ice running through them.

“You... I? You arsehole! You absolute fucking arsehole! You took advantage of me! You could see I was drunk! In no fit state to give consent! I could have your fucking job over this!”
Bond straightened up at that, scowling.

“Then perhaps, if I am to be hauled up in front of HR, I could tell them a little tale about my Quartermaster using government resources to track my phone, without my consent, in the hopes of… what? Why exactly did you track me down Q?”

Q hesitated, a moment of shame at being found out immediately eclipsed by the rage he was still feeling. He threw his hands up in the air.

“I don’t know!” He almost shouted before taking a calming breath. “I don’t know. I was feeling lonely… a little sad – one of my cats had just died… and I wanted… I thought we got on, I mean we do… did. Didn’t we?”

Bond stared at him, his expression softening the tiniest bit.

“I read your file.” Q continued. “I had to, I mean, it’s part of my job requirement and I saw that you’d lost your partner Ronson and I thought that…”

Whatever Q was going to say next was lost as he found himself slammed up against the wall, Bond’s forearm across the front of his throat. Q suddenly realised his mistake. Bond was a dangerous man and every inch of him screamed it as he snarled at him.

“No! How dare you? You don’t get to drag him into this! You don’t even get to say his name!”

Q was terrified. Every one of Bond’s words was punctuated by a shove of his elbow into Q’s throat. He reached up and grabbed his forearm with both hands, tugging on it so he could choke out; “James. Please.”

Bond seemed to snap out of his fury and instantly he looked aghast as if only just realising what he’d done. He stepped back, a look of horrified confusion on his face.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have…” He took another step back as Q slumped, his legs trembling. Bond hesitated, as if he was stopping himself from reaching out to help Q. “I… Oh God I’m so sorry…” He seemed at a loss for words as he suddenly bolted for the door. As he reached it, Q called out his name again and he paused, one hand on the door handle. “Please stay away from me.” Bond said in a quiet voice, looking down at his feet. “I’m no good for you.” He looked back then but before Q could say anything else he wrenched open the door and was gone.

Q stood there for several minutes, trying to work out what the hell had just happened. He thought that they’d argue, thrash it out. He never expected Bond to react like that. Like Q had hit such a sensitive nerve. He couldn’t get over the look on Bond’s face as he’d glanced up at Q before fleeing. It wasn’t the look of the measured agent that he was used to. It was anguish, pure and simple.

~00Q~

Q tried to put the incident behind him.

Bond disappeared. According to Moneypenny his impromptu meeting with M had been him asking for permission to take some of his annual leave. M had agreed and Bond duly went on holiday to
Mexico City. His absence allowed Q to relax a little and he threw himself into his work. By the end of the week the Aston Martin project was almost complete, barring a few persistent bugs, and his smart blood tracking system was ready for trials. The remains of Bond’s classic Aston was delivered to Q-Branch and as it was technically still an Mi6 vehicle Q signed the order to have it repaired. It was probably a frivolous use of the Vehicle Division’s budget but the mechanics all seemed eager to work on it and if Q was honest with himself, he did wonder if repairing it might smooth over the rift that he’d managed to cause between himself and Bond.

He went home on Friday night feeling accomplished and ready to spend his weekend relaxing and spending some time with Turing. His little boy had been clingy ever since Clarke had passed away so he’d turned down Moneypenny and Tanner’s offer of a night out on the town, deciding instead to spend the evening in front of the TV cuddling with him. They had barely settled down though, Q sprawled on the sofa with Turing purring on his chest when the doorbell went. He sighed and carefully extricated himself before wandering into the hallway and pulling down the viewscreen to see who it was. He was surprised to see Eve standing there. He pressed the button that released the door lock and then opened his flat door, waiting for her to climb the stairs. She was about halfway up when she started to grumble good naturedly.

“Jesus Tom. Would it kill you to get a ground-floor flat?”

“Stop whinging. It’s great exercise for your glutes.”

“My glutes are doing just fine, thank you very much. Not that you ever notice, you great big gayist.”

He huffed out a laugh as she staggered into his flat theatrically.

“I do so.” He replied, shutting the door. “Just because I’m not interested in your lady parts doesn’t mean I can’t appreciate a lovely bottom. And you do have such a wonderful one.”

“Creep.” She grinned, putting down the bag she had slung over her shoulder so she could take off her coat. There was a chink of glass hitting glass. “Be a love and put those in the fridge, would you?”

He picked up the bag. It was heavy.

“Bloody hell Eve. How many bottles of wine have you got in here?”

“Buy two, get one free.” She said, following him into the kitchen. “My local Tesco had them on offer and I thought to myself ‘that’s too good an opportunity to miss! Who do I know who would like to drink lots of wine with me?’”

“And you thought of me? I’m honoured.”

“Honoured that you’re the biggest pisshead that I could think of?”

Q laughed as he put the bottles of wine in the fridge. He then pulled out the half-empty bottle of white that he’d started on earlier and poured her a glass before taking it through to the lounge to top up his own. Turing had stolen his spot on the sofa so he sat down next to him as Eve sat in one of the armchairs. She kicked off her shoes and then tucked her feet up under herself before raising her glass in a toast.

“Here’s to my favourite gayist!”

“And my fabulously-arsed lady friend!”
“Not sure I’m actually a lady but whatever!” She quipped as they both drank.

They started chatting. Q had been surprised to see her and he told her as much.

“I thought you were out on the razzle with Bill tonight? Wasn’t that the plan?”

“He got called into work unexpectedly. 006 is causing ructions in Malta apparently and I said to myself I was buggered if I was letting another birthday slip by without getting to have a bit of fun.”

“It’s your birthday?”

“Was. Last Tuesday.”

“Oh no. You should have said something!”

“No… a girl doesn’t like to advertise that she’d getting older.”

“Until she needs someone to get drunk with.”

“Exactly!” She smiled, raising her glass. “It was the perfect excuse to invade your personal space and ply you with booze! Actually,” She said more slowly, some of the mirth disappearing from her eyes, “If I’m being totally honest, I was a little worried about you. You haven’t been your usual self this week.”

“Eve,” Q began softly but Moneypenny cut him off.

“I don’t need to know the details, truly I don’t. I know you think I’m an incorrigible gossip but that’s just for scuttlebutt and fun rumours, not for something like this, whatever this is. You seemed upset about something at work the other day and if you want to keep the reason to yourself, that’s fine.” She put down her wine glass. “But I just want to be here for you if I can and if you do need someone to talk to, I promise you I can keep it to myself. I won’t even tell Billy. He’s a good man but if you don’t want him knowing what’s going on… well, he won’t hear about it from me.”

Q stared at his own wine glass and for a moment he didn’t think he was going to say anything about what had happened between him and Bond. Maybe let the moment pass and cheerfully change the subject but then he remembered the way that Bond had scared him and he began to talk.

“I’ve been an idiot.” He said quietly. “Ever since taking on the role of Q… ever since splitting up with my boyfriend Rich…” He took a sip of his wine, not quite sure where to start. Eve got up from the armchair and padded over. She sat down next to him and slipped her hand into his, resting her head on his shoulder so that they couldn’t see each other’s faces. Finding it comforting not being looked at, he started to talk about the day he met James Bond…

He told her almost everything. Meeting Bond, being attracted to him. The moments they’d spent together, the confusion Q felt trying to understand how James felt about him.

“One minute he’s almost affectionate, the next he seems to… I don’t know… shut down.”

He told her about the incident with Rich and of Bond’s almost territorial response to Q getting hurt. There were some things that he left out though. The hushed conversation he overheard in Medical, the things he’d read in Bond’s personnel file. Q didn’t mind sharing his own secrets but he didn’t want to share Bond’s. He also couldn’t bring himself to tell Eve any of the finer details about the night Bond fucked him – other than to tell her that he’d treated Q like a whore.

“The thing is,” Q said, “thinking about it, I don’t blame him for that. I acted like one. I went out
looking for a good fucking and that’s exactly what I got. I’m not sure I was even thinking about him as a person. I just wanted him for sex… and I don’t know what I expected afterwards. He wasn’t exactly going to fall in love with me and whisk me out to dinner. I mean, I basically bent over for him after he bought me one drink. After I hunted him down.”

He drained his glass when he’d finished talking and then watched as Eve got up to go to the kitchen to get another bottle. She plonked herself down on the other end of the sofa and put her feet in his lap after refilling their glasses.

“You are an absolute twat.” She said solemnly as she settled back.

Q snorted out a quiet laugh and nodded.

“Yes, I am.” He agreed. “What the hell am I going to do Eve?”

“About being a twat? You’re stuck with that I’m afraid and you’re very lucky that some of us are prepared to love you anyway, but about Bond? I would apologise. Be honest with him though, you have been an idiot but from the sounds of it, so has he. Why don’t you offer to let bygones be bygones? Show him you two can have a professional working relationship. He’ll come around. I’d imagine he probably has an apology that he’d like to offer you, too. Be the bigger man; make yours first. From what I know of him, he really is a good man underneath all that gruff, kill-you-as-soon-as-look-at-you exterior and it strikes me that he really can’t stand deception, people trying to be something that they’re not. He appreciates honesty. Bit ironic really, considering the line of work he’s in.”

Q sipped from his glass and gazed at Turing who’d long given up on the prospect of cuddles with his daddy and was now sitting on the floor gnawing at one of his back paws.

“You know what?” Q said, “I think you might be right…”

~00Q~

They got bladdered. Absolutely as pissed as the proverbial small reptile. They drank all the wine and talked and talked until the early hours before staggering off to the bedroom to sleep. Eve immediately hogged Q’s side of the bed and was snoring in the most unladylike way almost before her head hit the pillow. Although they each kept to their own sides and Q ended up on the left side, not the right side, he felt comforted just by having someone else there.

The next morning, they were woken by the doorbell and Q staggered to answer it, realising he was still in his clothes from the night before. It was Billy very nearly saving their lives with MacDonald’s sausage and egg McMuffins and a pitch-black coffee for each of them. Bill was still in his work clothes, suited and booted, having pulled an all-nighter, but he readily joined them in the bedroom. Eve refused to surface at first, even when offered food, so the men sat either side of her on the bed, as she slowly and irritably woke up properly. Turing was lured by the smell of the food and came to join them too. They had all had a merry hour eating and drinking while Q and Eve compared hangovers. They decided to make the most of the relatively fine day and wander out to find somewhere that would sell them more food and possibly a hair of the dog drink or two.

Eve used the bathroom first and came out ten minutes later looking fabulous before Q headed in there for a quick shower. He was almost finished getting dressed again when there was a knock at
the door. It was Billy.

“Holy shit mate!” Q heard him say. “Come and look at this! You’re not going to believe it!”

Q followed him into the lounge, pulling his t-shirt on. Bill and Eve were watching the TV. Eve had paused the screen and she set it playing as Q sat down next to her. The BBC’s news reader Reeta Chakrabarti began speaking.

“At least twelve people died and dozens more were injured when the building in Mexico City collapsed just meters away from crowds watching the famous Day of the Dead procession. Eyewitnesses reported hearing an explosion before the building was destroyed. A police chief said in an official statement that witnesses described the building as ‘collapsing like a deck of cards’ in a matter of seconds…”

Q frowned at the images of emergency services teeming around an enormous pile of rubble.

“Why are we watching this?” He asked, feeling like he’d missed something. Eve nudged him.

“Come on smarty pants, work it out. A building suddenly, inexplicably explodes and collapses in the very city where…”

Q’s eyes widened as Eve trailed off.

“Where James Bond has just sodding well gone on holiday.” He said, trying not to laugh at the absurdity of the idea. “Oh, my sainted aunt. He didn’t, did he?”

Apparently, he did, and M was fucking livid.
By the end of the day Q, Bill and Eve had all separately received messages from M. He had requested that Q meet up with him at his Branch the next morning.

The trains into London were quiet, the usual weekday commuters absent on a Sunday, and Q would have been able to sit on his own had his neighbours from the flat downstairs not been traveling into the city on the same train. Simon and Tish were on their way to Tate Modern to look at an exhibition of Picasso’s later works, and they came over to sit with him as soon as they noticed him. Q wasn’t much of a fan of the gallery – the times he’d visited it, it had struck him as needlessly pretentious filled with questionable ‘art’ - but he listened politely as they enthused about it. Just because it wasn’t to his taste, it still made him smile to hear them so obviously looking forward to their day out. They actually invited him to join them but he declined telling them he was heading into work to do some overtime.

They walked out of Waterloo Station together, still chatting, and then parted company at the riverside. Simon and Tish were intending to walk up the South Bank towards the gallery while Q crossed over the Golden Jubilee footbridge to get to the Beta site. He supposed he could have got on the tube at Waterloo but it was a fine day and he fancied the exercise. Besides, it only took him twenty minutes to get to the small, covert entrance to the Beta site which was housed under a non-descript building next to the Palace of Westminster. Several of the other departments that had moved to the site after the explosion at Vauxhall had since relocated to the new Mi6 building that had been provided for them on the North bank of the Thames, but Q had elected to keep his department where it was. There was more space and the Weapons division had already converted some of the now-empty office space into additional firing ranges. He walked into his office at a few minutes before ten and was surprised to see that M was already there.

“Good morning Sir. I’m sorry, I didn’t think our meeting was until ten thirty…”

“It wasn’t but the PM’s been chewing my balls since before eight and I needed to escape. I don’t get any mobile phone reception down here.”

“We can soon sort that out for you Sir,” Q offered, slipping off the light anorak he was wearing and flicking on the kettle. “I just need to…”


“Oh. Right you are Sir.” Q said with a smile, catching on. “Terribly sorry about that. Cup of tea?”

He thought the man would refuse and launch straight into what he wanted to speak to Q about but then he sighed.

“Do you know what? After the morning I’ve had, a cup of tea sounds just about perfect.”

Q quickly made two cups and then grabbed the biscuit tin. He put everything on his desk and then sat down opposite M, watching as the man dumped two large spoonful’s of sugar into his mug before stirring it vigorously. He took a Jammie Dodger out of the tin when Q offered it and placed it next to his mug on the desk.
“Tanner briefed me on the police investigation you found yourself caught up in, by the way. I’ve had a word with a pal of mine at the Met. It’s all going to go away.”

Q was surprised.

“Really?”

“You had a pretty solid alibi from what I hear, and I’ll not have a member of my staff being falsely accused like that.”

“Thank you, Sir. I’m guessing you didn’t call me in today to tell me that though?”

“No, indeed. Have you seen the news over the past day? Mexico City?”

“I have Sir.” Q said. “The building collapsing? It was terrible.”

“It was Bond.”

“007?”

“The very same. At least that’s what all the initial intel is pointing towards.”

“Why would he do that?” Q asked.

“God alone knows.” M grumbled. “But he’s put us all in a bloody difficult situation. The future of the double-oh program is in doubt and he might well have just stuffed the whole thing up completely.”

“I had no idea things were so serious.”

“Well they are!” M snapped. He seemed about to carry on shouting, but he took a deep breath followed by a sip of his tea. After a moment he started to speak in a calmer voice. “I asked to meet you here today because this is one of the few places that we can be reasonably sure that we won’t be overheard. My offices at Whitehall are visited daily by any number of people. The new headquarters were built outside of the direct management of MI6 but this place has been under our constant control since the Second World War. I wanted to be as sure as I could be that what I’m about to tell you stays between us.” He put his mug down. “I’ve been reading up on the latest Q-branch innovations. The smart blood. It seems as though that’s all but ready for implementation.”

“Nearly.” Q agreed. “We’re almost ready to start human trials, I just need to finish off a couple of things first.”

“I want Bond to have it.”

“Sir?”

“I’ve read his mission reports and I’m not a fool and I realise that he’s not one to allow protocol to stand between him and doing the right thing. Personally, I think it’s a damn foolish way to conduct oneself but I have to admit, he gets results and my predecessor trusted him implicitly. I don’t know what the hell he thought he was doing down in Mexico but even if I don’t trust him as such, I trusted her opinion of him. I find it highly unlikely that he wouldn’t have a bloody good reason for doing what he’s done. Just as I know it’s highly bloody unlikely that he will actually explain himself when I ask him into a meeting with me tomorrow but I need to know what he’s up to. Would you be able to implant the smart blood into Bond tomorrow afternoon?”
Q thought fast. The smart blood itself was ready but he hadn’t yet finalised the delivery system… he needed a scanner to ensure optimum deployment… a way of holding Bond’s arm steady… after a moment’s calculation he shook his head.

“Not quite. Can we make it Tuesday morning instead?”

M nodded.

“Absolutely, I’ll send him down here at ten o’clock.” Q tried not to smirk as he watched his boss eat his biscuit and then immediately open the tin to help himself to another. “There’s something else. Something I need your assistance with. The thing I was hoping that we might be able to keep between the two of us.”

“Sir?”

“I understand that you and Bond are close.”

Q froze for a moment, wondering what the hell M meant.

“Well…”

“You helped him out during that whole sordid affair with Silva.”

“Ah well yes, but…”

“I need you to tell me when he asks you to do it again.”

“Sir?”

“Look. My balls are going to be on the line over this.” M said. “I’m going to be watched. Scrutinised. I need to be seen to do the right thing. Anything less than my immediate suspension of Bond will be questioned so I want you to keep a close eye on him. Try not to make it seem like you are though. I want both of our arses covered if this goes south.”

“I’m not sure I understand Sir.”

“There’s something going on around here. Nine Eyes is being voted on in a few days’ time. There’s new staff being introduced left, right and centre, a whole new managerial structure. Pretty soon I’m going to be surrounded by new people and I won’t have a clue who I’ll be able to trust but you’ve shown a commitment to Mi6 in the past and I’m hoping that means that I can rely on you. I need to know where Bond is twenty-four seven and I really need you to let me know the moment he does something unusual.”

“Unusual Sir?”

“Tell me if he asks you for help or equipment once he’s been suspended. Tell me if you hear about him digging into anything at all and I need to know the moment he decides to leave the sodding country again. He’s up to something, I’m sure he is.”

Q nodded.

“I’ll do my best Sir. Although I can’t guarantee that he’ll come to me for anything.”

“I think you underestimate the high regard that he holds you in.” M replied, standing up to leave. Q smiled as he watched the man reopen the biscuit tin yet again and help himself to two more Jammie Dodgers. “Do you know, I haven’t had one of these for years. Do you mind? They’re rather good.”
Slipping the biscuits into his jacket pocket, he bid Q good morning and left.

~00Q~

Q spent the majority of the afternoon and the next day on the Smart Blood’s delivery system and by nine o’clock on Monday night he was just about done. It was a little rough and ready and lacked Q’s usual finesse but he was confident that it would deploy its payload efficiently, if a little painfully. He would be ready for Bond in the morning. He was meticulously packing away his tools when Eve arrived looking harassed.

“Boy, am I glad you’re still here. Have you got a moment?”

“Always.”

They were alone in the workshop so she started to talk right away.

“I was with M this afternoon.”

“I had my turn with him this morning.”

“I realise that your conversation was private but did he by any chance ask you to spy on Bond?”

Her question was so blunt Q couldn’t stop himself from laughing.

“Fucking hell Eve, that was about as subtle as a sledgehammer to the goolies! Why was it again that you decided against being a spy out the field?”

She laughed back at him.

“I didn’t mean to. I mean… oh fuck it. Sorry, it’s been one of those days!”

“Tell me about it.” He said, shrugging. “I take it M asked you too?”

“He did and between you and me, I’m just not comfortable doing it. Bond has his faults but I’ve never known him to be wrong about something. If he was involved with that explosion then there was a bloody good reason for it and I’ll bet you any money you like that he won’t need M knowing everything that he’s up to right about now.”

Q was quiet for a moment. It sounded from the tone of her voice as if Eve was being evasive about something.

“Do you know what he’s up to?” He asked her.

Eve hesitated.

“I’ve just been at his place.” She finally admitted. “He told me.”

“Oh?”

“Look, I don’t want to give away his secrets but it’s all to do with something that the old M sent him. A video of her talking to him. He went to Mexico on her instructions and I think he might be onto something really big.”
Q whistled.

“I don’t know why I’m surprised that she had a hand in it. She was a phenomenal woman.”

“She was.” Eve agreed.

Q started to pack away the rest of his tools.

“Are you going to help Bond if you can?”

“Yes. Billy wants to as well but he’s pretty much in M’s pocket these days. M seems to think that he’s being watched and if he’s right then that means that Billy is too.”

“He can’t be seen to break the rules. I totally understand. I’m in a much better position being down here.” Q picked up a spanner and settled it back into its foam bed in the tool box. “I’ve read Bond’s file. His psych reports. His devotion to Queen and country borders on a mania…” He shook his head. “I think we have a duty to help him if we can. It’s how to do it subtly though.”

“You can hardly just hand him a boatload of equipment. M would go spare.”

“No,” Q mused, “I’m not sure what I can do for him to be honest. There is a watch though. He was supposed to be equipped with it for his next mission. I could fudge the records… make it look like I gave it to him before his mission in Finland last month…”

“A watch?” Eve queried.

“It explodes.”

“I see.” She replied. “Even so, he might need a little more than that.”

“There’s the new Aston but I can hardly just hand him the keys to it.”

“You know, you might not have to.”

“Oh?”

“I’d just make sure I showed it to him. I would imagine if he wants it you won’t have to be so obvious as to give it to him…”

~00Q~

Bond arrived punctually the next day to receive the Smart Blood. Before that though (and after he had removed a £20,000, one-of-a-kind, prototype rifle from the man) Q asked Tanner to give then a moment alone. It was the first time they’d faced each other since the incident where Bond had momentarily lost control and the man looked wary. Without giving him a chance to speak Q launched into the spiel that he’d spent most of the previous night fretting over.

“I want to apologise.” Bond looked as though he was going to reply so Q pressed ahead. “Unequivocally. Completely. What I did that night was utterly childish and to then berate you for reacting the way that you did was foolish in the extreme. I want to say how sorry I truly am. I was a complete idiot and I realise that this has more than likely irreparably damaged our relationship but I can only hope that we can continue to deal with each other in a fruitful,
professional manner and that I can prove to you that I can, in fact, conduct myself competently.”

Bond stared at him for a moment and then the faintest smile touched his lips.

“A fruitful professional manner?” He queried. “Christ Q, how long did you stay up last night coming up with that one?”

Q gaped at him for a moment. He had expected Bond to grudgingly accept his apology. Perhaps give him a bollocking for acting like a love-struck thirteen-year-old girl maybe. He didn’t expect him to stand there looking like he was trying not to laugh.

“Oh fuck off.” He groused.

Bond did smile then, the skin crinkling around his eyes momentarily before his expression softened.

“I accept your apology and I offer one of my own. I lost my temper. That was wrong of me but what you said… it dragged up memories… things I consider intensely personal…” He paused for a moment. “I don’t want you to think I’m making excuses for myself though. I acted abominably. And I meant what I said … you should stay away from me… socially. I… I don’t think I’d be any good for you to be near.”

Q nodded, relieved that James seemed willing for them to put the past behind them.

“Fair enough.” He said and then he added in a brisk tone; “Now we really must get on 007. If you’ll follow me through to our little lab... well, I call it a lab but it’s all rather ad-hoc I’m afraid…”

Q started for the door and after a moment, Bond followed.
Q implanted the smart blood as M requested and then he made a point of showing Bond the new Aston. To be honest, Q almost expected him to get a hard-on, the way he was looking at the thing… well, before he realised that the car was no longer intended for him, that was. Q chose that exact moment to give Bond the watch, who seemed singularly unimpressed with it until Q warned him about it’s extremely loud “alarm”. That seemed to mollify the agent somewhat. Q also couldn’t resist taking Bond past the old car that he’d signed off on the renovation of. There was no reason for Q to lead Bond out of the department past that particular maintenance bay, other than Q’s strangely crazy desire, despite everything that had happened, to impress the man.

He thought he’d got rid of the agent, bidding him goodbye, before he approached him again slyly, asking for Q’s help. Tanner stayed a discreet distance away but Q could see he knew very well what Bond was asking. He just hoped that Moneypenny had been right about his desire to also help Bond. Q had agreed to fudge the smart blood records and then gone to email M to inform him of the delay in the commencement of the tracking. He’d got so flustered talking to Bond he’d told him that he had two cats to feed, momentarily forgetting that dear Clarkesy had passed away. When he replayed the conversation in his head and realised what he’d done, it made him feel melancholy for the rest of the day.

By the time he was on the train and heading home, Q was knackered. He’d ended up having an unexpectedly busy day. After dealing with Bond there’d been an interdepartmental meeting, then lunch with R where they’d gone through the impending fourth quarter budgets over egg mayonnaise sandwiches and copious amounts of tea. Then he’d given ground support to 006 (who’d suddenly found himself in a firefight in Agadir) and intel to 003 (who was on her way to Toamasina in Madagascar). By the time he’d caught up with his emails and finished handing over to the nightshift it was almost ten o’clock again and Q was yawning.

He had debated staying in the office and sleeping on the sofa in the break room but he didn’t want to leave Turing on his own. There were always going to be nights where Q couldn’t avoid staying at work – it felt mean to leave his little boy on his own through simply being too lazy to go home. Besides, he never slept well when he stayed over. The train took 50 minutes and he took the time to catch up on the day’s news and play a silly brain-training game on his phone to keep himself awake. He got off the train at Twickenham and just managed to catch the Tesco Metro there before it closed, nipping around quickly to pick up some milk and something he could put in the microwave for his supper. He then walked the last fifteen minutes home.

He was just putting the key in his front door when he heard a noise on the path behind him. It was Rich. He looked terrible. There was bruising all up one side of his face and stitches in his lip. For a moment Q felt sorry for the man he’d shared so much of his recent life with but then he remembered the way he’d attacked him and he scowled.

“What the fuck do you want?”

“I want you to pay for what you had done to me you cowardly piece of shit, but until that happens I want the rest of my stuff.”

Q saw movement on the shadowy path behind Rich and took a step back in fright, clutching his
laptop bag to his chest. Oh fuck. He’d brought someone with him. Q rocked up onto the balls of his feet and his stomach seemed to plummet in dread. He wondered what would be better; trying to get into the house or simply dropping everything and running. He realised that he’d never got around to changing the locks and Rich might still have a key. Even if he got into the building there was no dead-lock on the shared outer door so Rich could follow him in. He’d have to beat him up three flights of stairs and get into his flat ahead of him and Rich was taller than Q and fitter and faster.

In the second it took for all of this to flash through his mind the other person stepped forward into the light and Q sagged with relief to see it was their mutual friend, Bernie.

“Hello Tom. Rich asked me to give him a lift over. I hope you don’t mind but I thought I’d get out of the car to see how you were doing.”

“Better.” Q said, never taking his eyes off Rich. “I’ve been signed off by the doctor but I can still feel what he did to me.” It was true, his sternum still hurt when he got out of bed in the morning or if he tried to carry anything that weighed more than a couple of kilos.

“I only shoved you because you were being such a pussy!” Rich exclaimed.

“I was drunk.” Q said. “You broke into my flat, tried to take advantage of me and then when I pushed you away and asked you to leave, you assaulted me.” Q tried to sound calm but the fact was he’d been so drunk… had he led Rich on? He couldn’t quite remember. It hadn’t felt like that at the time but maybe…

“Whatever.” Rich spat. “Give me my stuff.”

“What stuff?” Q asked. “What are you on about? I sent all your stuff over to Bernie’s.”

“My vinyl for a start! You’ve still got half my collection…”

“No…” Q said, “I gave you back yours… the rest is mine.”

“What about the Beatles albums?”

“They were my dad’s!” Q said. His parents had died in a car accident when Q was fourteen. He had precious little left of either of their possessions. “Just because you told me over and over how much you liked them doesn’t make them yours!”

“What about the retro Seiko watch? The Star Wars posters? The signed Ian McKellern photo?”

“They were all birthday presents.” Q replied. “To me. What, am I supposed to give you back everything you ever gave me now?”

“You fucking owe me.” Rich took a step forward. Bernie immediately went to grab his elbow but he shook her off. “I want what’s due to me and I’m not leaving until I get it.”

The sound of the door opening behind Q almost made him jump out of his skin. He whipped around to see his neighbour Simon standing there. He was big man, towering over all three of them, even in his socked feet. He was wearing a pair of jeans but his t-shirt was crumpled and his hair was standing up as if he’d just got out of bed.

“Hello Tom. I thought I heard you. You alright?”

Q was about to speak when Rich cut across him.
“We’re sorting some stuff out here Simon. Go back inside.”

“No,” Simon’s word was softly spoken but resolute. He straightened up imperceptibly, making himself seem even bigger. “It’s late. There’s two of you and only one of Tom and I won’t have you standing here on my doorstep disturbing the neighbours in the middle of the night. That’s me and my wife by the way. You just woke us up and she has to be up for work in five hours so I’d appreciate it if you could take this… whatever this is… the hell off my doorstep.”

Rich looked as if he was about to square up to Simon, despite the fact that the man had a good six inches and maybe thirty pounds on him, but then Bernie finally managed to grab his arm and tug on it.

“I told you this was a bad idea!” She snapped. She turned to Q. “I’m so sorry Tom. He said you were holding onto some of your stuff. He didn’t tell me what it was. We’ll be leaving now.” She pulled on Rich’s arm and he finally relented, taking a step backwards.

“This isn’t over.” He grumbled.

Simon and Q watched them go.

“You didn’t have to do that.” Q said quietly. “But thank you.”

“Yes, I did.” Simon replied. “He’s been round here a few times since you guys split up and if you don’t mind me saying, I don’t like that at all.”

“He has? When?”

“On a couple of occasions last week. I think he was going to try to come in but me and Tish catching him at it put him off.”

“Fuck it.” Q said quietly. “Look, I’ll take the day off work tomorrow. Change the lock on the front door. I’ve been meaning to do it for days…”

“There’s no need.” Simon smiled. “I’ve got this week off work. I can do it for you. Did you buy a new lock in the end?” Q nodded. “That’s settled then. Just leave it outside my door next time you pass by.”

“Thank you.” Q smiled, wondering what he’d ever done to deserve such great neighbours. “You’re a good friend.”

Simon shrugged as they turned to go in.

“It’s no bother.” He paused at the door. “Look, I don’t want to pry but you haven’t seemed yourself since Rich left and seeing that tonight… well it just seems like you’re having a hard time of it.”

Q leaned up against the wall of the porch.

“I guess I am.” He admitted. “Rich and I had a fight and he hurt me which really shook me up. Then my old cat died, work’s been hectic and then I made an absolute arse of myself with a bloke from work who I’d been developing some serious feelings for and…” He sighed. “Oh, I don’t know. If I stop and think about it, it just feels like it’s all getting a bit too much.”

“The bloke from work wasn’t interested?” Simon asked. “That’s a shame. It might be nice for you to move on from that wanker Richard.”
Q laughed.

“It would be but James… he’s is a bit of an enigma. I don’t think he’s interested in me in that way.”

“Sounds like it’s James loss, eh? Shame.” Simon commented.

“It is.” Q replied, wishing that were true. If anything, it felt like James had dodged a bullet turning down someone as screwed up as Q was.

~00Q~

The shit hit the fan the moment he arrived at work the next day.

If Q had allowed himself to think about it, he might have hoped that Bond would have taken the Aston with a little bit of stealth and subtlety, not strolling into the workshop at two in the morning and smiling at every security camera that he passed. He even left a bottle of champagne and a card that read;

“To Q. Thanks… for everything. J x”

The insufferable twat.

Of course, Q had to report it to M – the car was a prototype worth three million pounds, it wasn’t like Bond had filched a biro – but he did it through an email, hoping that the man would be too busy to read it. It was just luck that M and Tanner were traveling to Japan that day to oversee the vote on the Nine Eyes initiative. Even if M did see the email quickly, it would still buy Bond another couple of hours to do what he had to (whatever that was). He'd just sent the email when he looked up to see 009 waiting expectantly. Q smiled. He liked 009.

Alex Turner was only a couple of years older than Q and the newest of all of the double-ohs. He was a mathematical genius who came across as socially inept but he had a wonderful knack of making people feel at ease with him. He had an unthreatening air about him which seemed ironic to Q – but then Q had seen him handle a gun. And a car. Oh crap, the car.

“Ah, Turner. Now, the thing is, there’s a bit of a problem with your new DB10.”

“Problem?” The agent asked.

“As in, we don’t know where it is at the moment…”

“Oh?”

“Bond stole it.”

“Ah.”

Turner was new but Bond’s infamy had obviously already reached him as he seemed to accept Q’s words as ample explanation for the absence of his new car. Q quickly brought up Turner’s records and confirmed something that he thought he remembered reading when he went through the agent’s file.

“It says here that you hold a full motorcycle license?”
“That’s right.” Alex smiled. “I don’t have one at the moment though. My boyfriend isn’t keen on me riding one around London.”

“He sounds like a wise man.” Q commented, closing his laptop and then getting up. “Follow me.” He left the workshop and headed for the vehicles bay.

“He is.” Turner said, falling into step behind Q. “Danny, I mean. He’s not clever academically – I don’t think he’d mind me saying that... he struggles with arithmetic and history and things like that - but he’s got such a sharp mind in other ways. When it comes to reading people and knowing what’s best for them... for me.”

“Sounds like we should be recruiting him...” Q said mildly.

“Oh no.” Turner replied quickly. “He hates Mi6… there was an incident... you probably read about it in my file.”

There was something, Q recalled. When Turner worked as an analyst, Mi6 and the Americans worked together to have him taken to a research facility in California... but unbeknownst to him they’d led his partner to believe that Turner had been killed. They’d then tried to frame him for it when he started to investigate what had happened.

“I did,” Q said, “and I’m not surprised one jot that he feels the way he does.”

Turner smiled then and it transformed him. Q hadn’t realised that the young agent always looked so gloomy until he saw his smile. Danny must have been a special guy to make him smile like that and on an impulse, Q told him.

“He saved my life.” Turner said. “In so many ways. Before I even realised that it needed saving. You should meet him. You’d like him. He looks quite a lot like you actually. You could be twins.”

Q blinked at that, unsure of what to say. Luckily, he was saved by them reaching the vehicle bay they’d been heading to.

“There you are. What do you think of her?”

“She’s beautiful.” Turner admitted.

The Yamaha MT-10 was a new model but it hadn’t taken Robert Gough’s staff in the Vehicles division long (ably abetted by the Weapons division staff) to squeeze in a half-dozen or so new gadgets. Q went through them all and Turner listened attentively, asking questions when something wasn’t clear. It was a world away from trying to demonstrate things to the rest of the double-ohs, almost all of whom had an annoying habit of zoning out whenever things got technical. After an hour Turner was kitted out in a set of black leathers with a matching matt black helmet. As he slung his leg over the bike and then slowly rode it through the department to the vehicle lift that would take him up to street level, Q had to admit to himself that the man looked damn fine with his leather-encased arse nestled on the seat pad. Q chuckled to himself as soon as the thought popped into his head. Honestly. He was a nightmare. He’d got himself into enough trouble fancying a double-oh already.

He collected up the paperwork that hung on a clip at the back of the bay and signed it to confirm he’d transferred the bike to 009 and then handed it to one of the technicians.

“Can you inform Operations that 009 has the bike and let them have the tracking information for it please? Then let Gough know this bay is available for him to start the Jet-Ski project.”
“Yes Sir.”

“Jet-Ski project? That sounds a little frivolous.” A voice said from behind him.

Q turned to see a man he didn’t recognise standing there. He was dressed smartly, extremely overweight and standing a little shorter than Q. It gave Q the initial impression of a tweed beachball. The man was smiling as if he’d just made a joke but his eyes were hard and flinty. Q felt an instant shiver of dislike which he ignored in favour of smiling politely.

“I’m sorry, I don’t believe we’ve been introduced.”

“Apologies.” The man said smoothly as he put out his hand. “Jason Cartwright. I’m here for the tour.”

Damnit. Q had completely forgotten about the memo he’d received earlier in the week informing him that a member of the Joint Intelligence Service would be coming to inspect Q-Branch. Q took the man’s hand and shook it and tried to ignore the feeling of irritation at having been caught unawares.

“Q. It’s a pleasure. Follow me please.”

He went to lead Cartwright to the firing ranges which were at the far end of the Branch and a good place to start but the man didn’t move.

“So. The Jet-Ski?”

The feeling of irritation returned as Q realised that the man wouldn’t just want showing around, he actually wanted Q to justify the work they were doing there. He mentally gritted his teeth and pasted on a fake smile.

“Of course.” He began politely. “A number of the people that our agents find themselves targeting are wealthy and very often use large yachts as meeting places. It was suggested that if we could develop a silent-running Jet-Ski, or as near to silent as possible, it would assist our agents in navigating both marinas and open stretches of water and…”

Q droned on. He knew he was droning. It was a habit that R ribbed him about often enough and he usually dialled it down when he realised he was doing it. Not today though. For some reason he’d taken an instant dislike to Cartwright so he tried his best to bore the hell out of him, baffling him with technical minutiae that was as over-specific as it was dull.

Five hours later Q had to grudgingly admit that he admired Cartwright’s tolerance for bullshit. The man hadn’t seemed phased by Q’s tactics and he’d resolutely trailed after him as he’d shown him every inch of the branch. He’d even taken notes, making Q pause every so often mid-spiel so he could write down the salient points. By the time Cartwright decided that he’d seen enough Q could have happily strangled him for wasting his time. Q escorted the man out of the branch, more to make sure he was actually leaving than anything, and then went back to his workshop. He was just walking in when his mobile rang. He glanced at the caller ID – it was M. He answered;

“Yes Sir?”

"Please, tell me 007 is in London."

Oh shit...
Q headed home as fast as he could.

Bond was in fucking Austria and Q had told M that he was in Chelsea and if Q was ever at risk of losing his fucking job it was right fucking then when he told the head of the Intelligence Service a fucking lie.

Q had strolled out of his department, casually remarking that he would be working from home the next day but as soon as he’d sat down on his train he’d opened his laptop and booked himself onto the first flight to Austria the next morning. The plane was departing at six and with any luck he’d be on the road chasing down Bond by ten o’clock, local time. He booked himself a hire car that he could pick up at the airport and then rang Moneypenny to tell her his plans. She listened without interrupting and then replied;

“You need to be careful. Billy just texted me, M’s furious.” She said.

“When isn’t he? Q asked.

“But that was Bond in Rome, wasn’t it? Wrecking the car he took and making it onto half the news websites in Europe. He rang me last night. It sounded like he was in the middle of a car chase then…”

“He rang you?” He asked in a low voice, glancing at his fellow passengers on the train to make sure they weren’t being overheard.

“I stayed at Billy’s last night so I could give him a lift to the airport at stupid o’clock this morning. Bond rang me just as Billy and I were falling asleep and he heard Bill talking. He caught me on the hop. I had to lie to him - I’ll be buggered if I’ll put up with his particular brand of prying when it comes to my love life - anyway, he asked me about a chap called the Pale King, otherwise known as Mr White.”

“Wasn’t he something to do with M’s old assistant Craig Mitchell being a double agent?” Q asked.

Moneypenny paused.

“Not sure,” she said slowly, “but I know he’s neck deep in whatever Bond’s investigating.”

“Jesus. That man needs a leash. How come he always ends up neck deep in trouble?”

“He has got a leash, remember?” Eve sounded like she was smiling. “It’s you. That’s why M got you to give Bond the smart blood and keep eye on him. I don’t suppose he expected for one minute for you to actually rat on Bond but he probably hoped you might yank on his chain and make him think twice before getting himself in trouble again.”

“I hate my life.” Q said glumly.

“Enjoy Austria.” Moneypenny replied.

She hung up and Q spent the following few seconds resisting the urge to hurl his phone the full
length of the train carriage.

~00Q~

Less than twenty-four hours later Q hunkered down in the stores cupboard at Giggijoch cable-car station and wondered if there was any conceivable way that his life could get any worse.

He’d found Bond with no trouble, tracking him to the Hoffler Klinik using the smartblood app that he’d installed on his phone. Once there he’d confronted him but instead of Bond agreeing to return to London and maybe attempting to protect Q’s increasingly precarious-looking career, the stubborn bastard had asked him for yet another favour. He’d given Q a ring which was inscribed with a strange octopus design to examine and promised to meet him in his hotel room within the hour.

Q had started studying it as soon as he got into the cable car that would take him back down the mountain. He’d quickly realised that the ring had connections to several criminals that Bond had killed over the course of his double-oh career. He hadn’t had much time to process what he’d discovered though. He’d realised as he’d worked that the bald man sitting opposite him was staring at him. At the next stop a gaggle of skiers got into the car. Amongst the chattering twenty-somethings there was another middle-aged man who also seemed intent on watching Q just as closely. He’d become increasing uncomfortable so when the car had finally docked at Giggijoch, he’d bolted like a frightened rabbit to nearest hiding place he could find.

While he crouched he quickly fired off a text to Moneypenny.

- Bond was right. This is big. I might be in trouble. Think someone’s following me. I’ll ring you later. -

Turning his phone onto silent and slipping it back in his pocket, Q stood up cautiously. He’d been in there for ten minutes. Surely that was long enough. Wasn’t it? His palms started to sweat as he weighed up his options. Bond was due to be at his hotel in half an hour. Q could wait until then before he tried to leave and then make a run for it. Taking his phone out again, he dialled Bond’s number. There was a desolate beep and Q realised he didn’t have a good enough signal to make a connection. Cursing, he hung up.

He tried to think. The Pevsner was five minutes’ walk away from the station, straight up the high street. If the men were on the lookout for him, that was the way they’d expect him to walk. Maybe he could cut across the fields at the back of the row of buildings? If he kept low, the snow would be deep enough for him to lie down and hide in if they came looking. He hitched his bag up over his shoulder and tried to ignore the feeling that he might need to use the bathroom. Or to throw up. Or to pass out. Fuck, he wasn’t designed for this kind of shit. He didn’t have a clue what he was doing. He cautiously turned the handle on the door and opened it a crack. Putting his eye to it he felt a spark of hope. There was no sign of either man. As he watched, a small crowd walked by, no doubt having debarked from the latest cable car to dock. Taking a deep breath, Q stepped out of the cupboard intent on blending in with the crowd but he hadn’t gone two steps before a hand clamped down on his bicep.

“There you are, pretty boy.”

Before Q could react, he felt the sharp scratch of a hypodermic needle slide into the side of his neck. He tried to cry out but a wave of blackness overwhelmed him almost immediately and he fell to the
“Oh no!” He heard his attacker shout. “My son is sick! Somebody help him!”

Q was rolled onto his back and the last thing he saw was the two men that had been following him, leaning over him and smiling grimly.

~00Q~

The room he woke up in was beige.

Q lay for several minutes staring at the ceiling trying to work out where he was… and what had happened. He remembered being on a train… talking to Moneypenny… but that was ages ago, wasn’t it? He shook his head but that didn’t help. It started to swim and he felt nauseous. Even closing his eyes didn’t seem to help.

The spinning sensation abated and he opened his eyes again. He wasn’t wearing his glasses but he could see well enough to take in his surroundings. He was lying in a single bed, covered in a single white sheet. He seemed to be wearing a plain white t-shirt and cotton pyjama bottoms. There was a table beside the bed on which stood a glass of water. His stomach cramped and then settled into a dull ache as he pushed himself up onto one elbow and, picking it up, drank it greedily. It was cool as if it had not long been put in the warm room with him. His glasses lay beside the coaster the glass had sat on. He put the empty glass back down and put them on.

There was a picture window all down the wall to his right. There was a black construction that looked like a grid outside it. At first glance Q thought it was prison bars but then he noticed the landscape beyond the gaggle of buildings in the foreground. It was arid and the sun was shining down mercilessly. The ‘bars’ were blades, designed to keep the worst of the heat away from the windows. It quite ingenious really. His attention shifted to the buildings themselves. There were a series of small guard-houses, fuel stores and what looked like a pretty powerful satellite transmitter and receiver. Someone with the right technology would be able to hack into almost anything with that.

That didn’t help Q at all though. Where in God’s name was he?

The door opposite the windows opened and a woman dressed like a nurse walked in pushing a trolley. She was quickly followed by a smallish, neat-looking man in a dark grey, high-collared jacket, black shirt and pale slacks… who was followed in turn by the most beautiful white, long-haired cat. As Q watched the cat slinked over to the window, sniffing cautiously and throwing Q distrustful glances.

“Forgive Pampuria,” the man said in a soft German (or was it Austrian?) accent, “she is a little suspicious of interlopers in her territory. She sees every inch of the compound as belonging to her, and so she should; she is our little princess.”

Q was so confused he didn’t question it when the woman walked over to him and took a blood-pressure cuff off the trolley. He allowed her to take his hand and slid the cuff up to his bicep, wrapping it around him tightly. She put a stethoscope in her ears and pressed the bell against the inside of his elbow before squeezing the bulb rapidly to inflate the cuff.

“Monika has been brought in to attend to you. You had a most unfortunate reaction to the sedative
that was given to you that has resulted in you requiring medical assistance. I can only apologise and
assure you that it was never my intention that you were harmed.”

“Sedative?” Q asked.

“I asked my associates to invite you here. To use the sedative as a means to ease your flight – I
understand you are not a fan of flying, especially long-haul – unfortunately they took this as
permission to attack you, giving you far too large a dose. Rest assured that they have been
reprimanded most severely.”

“I don’t understand.” Q said as the nurse jotted down his blood pressure on a clipboard and removed
the cuff. As he watched she picked up a syringe and screwed a hypodermic needle onto it. Q felt a
surge of unease as she pushed the needle into the cap of a small bottle and pulled on the plunger,
filling it.

“And I’m not surprised,” The man said with a friendly smile. “The sedative-hypnotic medicine you
were given should have been administered in several, much smaller doses. Monika has a mild
diuretic for you. Hopefully we can counter the effects by flushing the remains of the sedative from
your system and soon have you feeling much better.”

Q knew very little about the effects of various drugs but what the man said seemed plausible. He
didn’t resist therefore when the nurse went to tie a piece of rubber tubing around his arm. After a
moment she located a point on his inner arm and injected the solution into it smoothly.

“There!” The man said with an even wider smile when she was finished. “You will need additional
doses administered every three to four hours until we can be sure that the sedative is out of your
system. Failure to do this will, I’m afraid, result in your feeling quite unwell. If Monika has quite
finished, follow me if you please and I will explain why you are here.”

Q stood up and a wave of dizziness swamped over him. He paused for a moment and then the
dizziness and stomach cramps were replaced by a warm feeling of contentment. The shakiness and
nausea he’d felt since waking had gone and he wondered why he’d ever worried. The man seemed
nice so Q followed him out of the room.

He found himself in a long corridor and Q followed the man down it. After a couple of metres, the
concrete walls gave way to glass and Q smiled at the sunshine outside. The floor, which had felt
cool under his bare feet rapidly started to warm up. The man started speaking again and Q trotted to
catch up with him.

“I have read your file. M16 thinks very highly of you. To be promoted at such an early age to the
role of quartermaster, and so unexpectedly! You must be an extremely resourceful young man!”

Q frowned a little.

“You read my file?” He asked.

The man turned around and laughed.

“Oh, come now! You seemed surprised! I am a man of considerable means Mr Carter! I have
access to all the information that I desire! And all the people.”

“People?”

“Of course. Why do you think you are here? I have a need for you.”
“You do?”

They reached the end of the hallway and stepped outside. They began to follow the concrete path to the building opposite them. Even though the sun was low in the sky, the ground was uncomfortably hot under Q’s bare feet. As if reading his mind, the man said quietly;

“Unfortunately, Mr Carter, I have no shoes to offer you and even though the desert temperature drops to well below freezing at night, the desert sand burns by the early morning. You would do well to remember that should you consider leaving.”

They quickly reached the other building but instead of going straight inside the man paused, his hand on the door. He turned to Q.

“Do you understand?” He asked, all his smiles and friendliness gone.

“Yes.” Q said, feeling suddenly uneasy despite the residual buzz of whatever it was the nurse had given him.

“Good! Excellent!” The man said, the instantly smile back on his face.

They walked into the building and Q relaxed as he felt the soothing coolness of the floor once more. The room he found himself in was teeming with activity. Forty or more technicians sat at computer terminals working away. Rows of coding, analytical programs and what looked like CCTV footage filled their screens. The man approached one of the supervisors.

“Are they there yet?”

“They are currently going through customs at Tangier Ibn Battuta Airport Sir. We expect them at L’Américain within the hour or so.”

“Excellent! Then my guest and I have time for dinner first! Let me know when they find the hidden room.”

The man led Q through to another room that had a large dining room table in it. There were two chairs, one at each end and his host indicated that Q should sit in the first one, his back to the door they’d just come in through. He’d barely settled when the other door to the side of them opened and a butler came in with a loaded tray. He put it on a small sideboard and then brought a small pot and ladle to the table before serving a clear soup into the bowl in front of Q. It smelt wonderful.

“Viennese Beef Soup.” The man said as his own portion was served. “My father used to make it. He was generally a terrible cook but this was one of the few things that he excelled at.”

Q hadn’t thought he was hungry but the soup smelt and tasted so good he ate it ravenously. It was followed by a bowl of what looked like a fried mess of potatoes, bacon and onion. Once his hunger had abated and Q was eating slower he asked;

“Who are you?”

The man smiled.

“Good. That is the correct question,”

“I’m sorry?”

“All too often people begin with the question ‘why am I here?’ which is so tedious when I always
make sure that I inform you of that at the earliest possible juncture. You are here because I wish it and my name is Ernst Stavro Blofeld.”

Q put down his cutlery.

“I’m sorry, I’ve never heard of you.”

“That’s as it should be.” The man replied. “I would wager you have heard of any number of my associates though. Raoul Silva, Dominic Greene, Le Chiffre… the list goes on.”

“Mr White?” Q suggested.

“As you say.”

The butler returned and took away their plates before returning with a small cream-filled cake for dessert. Blofeld tucked into his straight away but Q hesitated, feeling suddenly wary again.

“Come now. Do you think I would poison you after making all that effort to get you here? I want us to be friends Thomas.”

Q shrugged. He supposed not so he started to eat again.

“What do you want me to do?” he asked.

“I’m sorry?” Blofeld seemed so engrossed in eating it was as if he hadn’t expected another question from Q.

“You said you had a need for me. To do what?”

“You are doing most of it by simply being here. Location, location, location. Ever important in your case.”

“It is?”

“Oh yes. And the other thing, it’s such a small thing. I will need you to make a decision for me; when the time is right.”

“A decision?”

“A simple choice. Eeny meeny miny moe. That’s how simple choices are made, no?”

It was so ludicrous to hear those words coming out of the man that Q couldn’t help but smile. He took another bite of his pudding.

They finished their dinner in silence and then Blofeld led Q out to a paved area where they could sit and watch the sun set. They both settled down on recliners. Blofeld drank brandy but Q was offered tea which he accepted. The nurse, Monika, appeared again and took Q’s blood pressure again before giving him another, slightly larger dose of the diuretic, after which he lolled for a while on the recliner. He felt the blood pounding in his ears as floated, more relaxed than he could ever remember…

~00Q~
Q was woken by a rough hand grabbing him and shaking him violently. The sun had set and it was freezing cold out on the patio. Blofeld was gone and one of his men, dressed all in black, stood over Q.

“Mr Blofeld would like to see you.”

Before Q could get his bearings, he was dragged to his feet. The diuretic – or whatever it was – must have worn off because the dizziness, nausea and stomach cramps were back full-force. He stumbled, falling to his knees and was rewarded by the man slapping him across the face. Q tasted blood as his bottom lip split. He was immediately dragged back onto his feet.

“Now!” The man spat.

There were two other men with them and they flanked them as Q was dragged through the dining hall and back to the control room. Blofeld was standing halfway down the long room watching one of his technician’s screens. When he saw Q he smiled, as charming and affable as ever.

“There you are! I was afraid you might have chosen not to join us.”

The guard finally let go of Q who stood trembling.

“Have a look here and tell me what you see.”

Q looked at the screen Blofeld was indicating and he felt a sudden lurch of dread in the pit of his stomach. There was a man, standing and talking to a young woman with blond hair. The view of them was grainy and blurred at the corners with a light green cross intersecting it. It was Bond and the view was through the camera feed of a high-powered thermal scope. He felt a surge of nausea and shook his head. He didn’t want to say it. He couldn’t. Blofeld was watching him closely and when it became clear that Q wasn’t going to speak, he chuckled.

“Aaw,” He mocked, “does the great quartermaster not recognise one of his own designs? What you are looking at is the video-feed from a QBS-HD 640 5-50x thermal scope, mounted on a modified Zastava M12 Black Spear sniper rifle which is currently being held by my associate Mr Hinx. Mr Hinx?” He said in a slightly louder voice. “Commander Bond, if you please?”

Q watched in horror as the view shifted until the crosshairs homed in on Bond’s head.

“Remember I told you that I would be asking you to make a choice? Well, this is it. Only one of those people will be leaving that hotel room alive. On the right you see Dr Madeleine Swann, a doctor of psychiatry, quite a brilliant young woman by all accounts and quite innocent of any wrongdoing. On the left is your James Bond. Murderer, thief, rapist, some might say…”

Q felt another wave of nausea as his stomach cramped. Blofeld seemed to know so much. Surely, he couldn’t know about the argument that he’d had with Bond though, could he? The one where Q accused him of taking advantage of Q when he was drunk? He fought the urge to puke.

“No.” He said quietly.

“What was that?” Blofeld laughed. “Did you just refuse me?”

“I won’t do it. I won’t choose.”

Blofeld sighed dramatically.

“Such a shame. Mr Hinx, our guest has refused to decide so we get to play a game! *Eeeny meeny*
*miny moe, catch a tiger by his toe...*” Q watched in horror as the scope started to shift between Bond and the young woman in time with Blofeld’s mocking, sing-song voice. He felt rising dread as Blofeld neared the end of the rhyme, as he realised how it would end. No. Oh God, no please *no.*

*“Eeny meeny miny moe, out... you... GO!”*

The scope landed on Bond’s head and Q heard Mr Hinx mutter;

“Target acquired.”

“*NO!!*” Q screamed.

“You heard the man.” Blofeld said quietly.

The view juddered as the gun was fired.
Q lay on the floor of his room. They’d dragged him back there after murdering Doctor Swann and
given him another dose of the drug. It must have been a big one as he floated for the longest time
before coming back to himself stiff and cold on the cool marble. He opened his eyes to see a pair of
green eyes staring back at him. He swallowed painfully and tried to smile at the fluffy white cat.

“Hello beautiful.” He croaked.

Pampuria blinked slowly as if agreeing yes, she was beautiful. Q reached out and she cautiously
sniffed his fingers. He thought she might back away but she deigned to let him tickle her between
the ears. She suddenly pulled away to lick one of her back legs vigorously before standing up and
stretching. Q smiled and watched her sit back down.

He was fucked. He was so totally fucked. He reached out again to touch her pristine white fur and
she allowed him to, tucking her legs in under herself and settling down comfortably to enjoy the
fuss. It was easier to concentrate on how warm and soft she was than to think about everything that
had happened. That was going to happen. He was hooked on something, he recognised that now
and he was miles from anywhere, in the hands of a master criminal. And Q had killed the doctor.
He had killed her just as surely as if he had pulled the trigger himself. It was all his fault. When he’d
screamed out the scope had shifted and he’d watched them kill her. And then Blofeld had laughed
like it was all a game.

Some game.

“I need to get out of here.” He told Pampuria quietly. “Even if it kills me, I need to get out of here.”
He closed his eyes, his fingers still buried in her fur. If Blofeld was prepared to use drugs, there was
nothing to stop him from moving onto Sodium Pentothal or some other truth-inducing concoction.
All of the security protocols that Q had access to would have been changed the moment he was
reported missing but he still knew things that Blofeld could use.

With a determined effort Q pushed himself up onto his hands and knees and then onto his feet. He
had a half-formed plan that he would just leave, start walking. If he managed to find a town or a
road he could maybe get some help, possibly contact Mi6. If not… well, at least he would be out of
Blofeld’s clutches. He staggered to the door and quietly turned the handle, and found himself face-
to-face with the man himself and several of the guards.

“Mr Carter!” Blofeld said brightly. “Going somewhere?”

Q hesitated, briefly hoping that the nurse might have been with him, ready to give Q another shot,
before his shoulders dropped as he realised the futility of his situation.

“I suppose not.” He said dejectedly.

“Good. We have a visitor!”

Blofeld strode off up the corridor and, before he could react, two of the men grabbed Q and dragged
him after him. He stumbled as he tried to keep up, tripping over his own feet, wincing as his bare
toes scraped over the concrete path. Once through the operations room they took him off to the left
to a new room. This room was pristine white and almost empty except for a couple of server stacks, a lone computer terminal and what looked like a dentist’s chair on which…

“James!” Q cried, distraught at seeing Bond’s prone figure, trying to break away from his captors at the sight of him. Q failed to free himself and instead was deposited unceremoniously onto a white-leather swivel chair where he perched, desperately watching Bond for any sign of consciousness. Pampuria had followed them into the room and she immediately made a bee-line for Bond, flopping down next to his chair as if she wanted to keep an eye on proceedings. Blofeld chuckled as he sat down beside him, next to the computer.

“I see the reports were correct. You two really do have feelings for each other, don’t you? Not to worry, your one-time lover will soon wake up.”

“What reports?” Q asked. “What do you mean?”

“There were any number… cameras in Mi6, the CCTV on the streets of London, the agent dragging his whore to their assignation; the irony of your friendly neighbour commiserating with you over your unrequited love when we knew full well your love was positively reciprocated… it was all so obvious to us. Just why do you think I had you brought here? You are leverage Mr Carter. A little extra way of controlling the man who loves you.”

“James doesn’t love me.” Q said but mind whirled. He couldn’t, could he? All their interactions, all the times they’d met, James had pushed him away, turned him down… but there had been moments… glimpses of affection. Seconds where Q had seen something - was it desire? - in the man’s face. And his own feelings. He’d wanted James so badly. Still wanted him, he supposed. Loved him? Maybe… He shook his head. “No, you’re wrong.”

“Am I?” Blofeld asked. “Love is just one of the things that bring people together. Take torture as another example… out of horror, beauty. Torture is easy, on a superficial level. A man can watch himself being disembowelled and derive great horror from the experience, but it's still going on at a distance. It isn't taking place where he is. As you know all too well, my dear Mr Carter, a man lives inside his head.” Q listened to Blofeld but his eyes were on James. He felt a surge of relief as he saw him begin to move, flexing his wrists and ankles as he realised he was tied to the chair and tested the restraints.

“That's where the seat of his soul is. Now, James and I were both present recently when a man was deprived of his eyes and the most astonishing thing happened… Didn't you notice? He wasn't there anymore. He'd gone even though he was still alive. So in this brief moment between life and death, there was nobody inside his skull. Most odd.”

“So, James.” He said, turning his attention to the restrained man as he rolled his chair over to the computer terminal, tapping a foot switch and beginning to type. The arms of the chair suddenly moved down, dragging James’s wrists behind him. “I’m going to penetrate to where you are. To the inside of your head. Now, the first probe will play with your sight, your hearing and your balance, just with the subtlest of manipulations.”

“Well, get on with it then. Nothing can be as painful as listening to you talk.” James replied coolly.

“All right. Let’s begin.”

An armature, controlled by the computer moved into position and a micro drill started to whir. As Q watched in horror it moved forward, plunging into the side of James’s head, just in front of his right ear. Q’s hands found each other and he began to twist them in his lap as James started to scream. It felt like it went on for hours but it was probably no more than a couple of seconds before the drill
retracted and James slumped, panting.

“Why are you doing this?” Q asked.

“You probably know that James here lost his parents when he was young,” Blofeld said, “But did you know that it was my father who helped him through this difficult time? Over the course of two winters he taught him to ski, and climb, and hunt. He soothed the wounds of the poor little blue-eyed orphan.” Q heard James huff at this. “Asked me to treat him as a brother. My little brother. They formed quite an attachment.”

“So, you killed him.” James said.

“Yes, I did.” Blofeld turned to Q, rolled his chair over to him and placed a gentle hand on his back. “You know what happens when a cuckoo hatches inside another bird's nest?”

“Yes. It forces the other eggs out.” Q said.

“Yes. Well, this cuckoo made me realize my father's life had to end. In a way, he's responsible for the path I took. So, thank you. Cuckoo.” Blofeld sang the last word.

“Do you know any other birdcalls, Franz?” James sneered. Blofeld seemed to ignore James’s jibe and went back to the computer, inputting a new set of commands. Pampuria seemed to take the momentary lull in proceedings as an excuse to take advantage of James’s open lap. She jumped up and trampled him for a moment as if intending to get comfortable. James looked down at her.

“Hello, pussy.” He muttered.

Blofeld went over to James and picked up Pampuria, kissing her head before depositing her on the floor. She looked quite affronted at the turn of events and took two steps before sitting down, pointedly turning her back on the men. Blofeld, meanwhile, leant over James.

“Franz Oberhauser died twenty years ago, James.” He said. “In an avalanche, alongside his father. The man you are talking to now, the man inside your head, is Ernst Stavro Blofeld.

“Catchy name.” James commented, and really, if Q had ever wanted to kiss the man before, he did now watching the man’s sheer bare-faced cheek in the face of almost certain death. Blofeld meant to kill him, Q was sure, and yet James was still snarking back at him.

“My mother's bloodline.” Blofeld continued, apparently unconcerned. He studied James’s face. “If the needle finds the correct spot in the fusiform gyrus, you'll recognize no one. Of course, the faces of your lovers are interchangeable, aren't they, James? You won't know who he is. Just another passing face on your way to the grave.” Blofeld turned back to Q. “He dies not knowing who you are. Mi6’s young genius. The only one who could have understood him. Shame.”

He went back to the computer and typed something. The drill started again and moved into position. As it sank into the base of James’s skull on the left side Q screwed his eyes up, unable to watch again. It didn’t stop him from hearing James’s cries of agony as he was penetrated. When James fell silent and the drill stopped Q opened his eyes and was on his feet in seconds. Not caring what Blofeld’s men might do to him, he ran to James’s side. The agent looked up at him, his expression was soft and affectionate, like all his layers had been stripped away.

“Hello gorgeous.” James murmured.

“Do those blue eyes still recognize you?” Blofeld asked.
“I'd recognize you anywhere.” James said softly. Q smiled but it felt false. He was so scared. “The watch.”

Q’s eyes widened as he realised what James meant. He thought quickly. He needed an excuse to reach down to James’s wrist so he leant over and kissed him, sliding his hand down James’s arm and taking back the watch he’d given him. He lingered for the briefest of moments as he felt James push up into the kiss the barest fraction.


“One minute.” Q repeated, glancing at the watch to see the countdown had already begun.

“Did he say something? Blofeld asked as Q slowly started to walk back.

“Tempus fugit.” James responded quietly.

“What?” Blofeld asked.

“Tempus fugit.” He said, no louder.

“I can’t hear you, James.”

James glanced over at Q and then said loudly;

“I said, doesn't time fly?”

The watch ticked down and at two seconds Q threw it. It skittered across the floor and Blofeld looked down at it in mild interest.

The explosion was colossal, knocking Q clean off his feet. He was stunned for a moment, tasting blood and ozone. His glasses were lost and all he could see was the prone figure of James on the chair. He took a step towards him but then a bullet whizzed past him. One of the guards was shooting at him so he turned and ran instead. His eyes were streaming but it was only when he cleared the room, running out of the side door, that he realised that he was crying. The sun was high in the sky and the ground was hot but Q paid no attention to that; there were men with guns behind him and he had just killed James Bond.

It was more luck then any judgement on Q’s part that got him out of the compound. He hunkered down a couple of times as he spotted guards running towards him but they were all more interested in the burning building behind him than the lone man stumbling towards the gate. Q moved on determinedly, trying to ignore the burning sensation in the soles of his feet and the sun beating down on him. He was still just dressed in the white t-shirt and light trousers that he’d woken up in and they offered him very little protection. There was also the matter of the drug they’d been giving him. It had been several hours since his last dose and the discomfort in his stomach had turned into a stabbing pain through his guts. He walked on though, determined that Blofeld and his men wouldn’t capture him again.

There was a track of sorts outside the main gate and he started to follow it. There was all kinds of explosions and pops like guns firing behind him but he but he walked on doggedly. He didn’t care. He was a killer. He’d killed that doctor and he’d killed James and he was going to Hell so why not walk there? He stumbled again, a sharp rock cutting into the sole of his foot but he paid it no mind. He had to get away. He had to keep walking. He’d killed the doctor and he’d killed James and he’d killed Blofeld - although there was no great loss there, the bastard deserved it – but then it occurred to him that he’d killed Pampuria too and a wretched sob escaped him. He was going to Hell and he was walking there.
His head swam and his vision blurred and he must have been hallucinating because he thought he heard a helicopter. He certainly wasn’t seeing straight because he balefully realised that he was no longer following a road. The rocky tire tracks had given way to soft sand which might have been easier for his bare feet if it were not as furnace hot as the road had been. He whimpered with every step but plodded on resolutely.

The doctor.

James.

Blofeld.

Pampuria.

All dead and he couldn’t even remember the doctor’s name. He was going to Hell and he couldn’t even remember the name of the woman whose slaughter sent him there. He could remember the cat’s name but not the doctor’s and he was going to Hell for it.

He tripped and fell, stunned for a moment by the heavy landing. He debated giving up but then remembered he that he was supposed to be going to Hell so he crawled for a moment before painfully clambering back up onto his feet and staggering on.

He was going to Hell and he was walking there.

He lost track of time.

He lost track of the number of times he fell.

He lost track of the number of times he got back up again.

He kept track of the times he’d killed.

Four times.

ThedoctorJamesBlofeldPampuria

His head swam as he thought about his comfortable home a million miles away and he thought about his office and the boring commute and -

ThedoctorJamesBlofeldPampuria

- Turing and Moneypenny and Tanner and all of the things that he would miss and he thought about –

ThedoctorJamesBlofeldPampuria

- how he’d taken it all for granted and how he should have told James how he’d really felt about him and he sobbed as he realised how desperately -

ThedoctorJamesBlofeldPampuria

- he wanted it all back the way it was.

He fell again and closed his eyes, ready to give up, but then he heard the whump-whump-whump of an approaching helicopter and fear shot through him. No. He wouldn’t let them capture him. Pushing himself up again, he stumbled on. The sound of the helicopter got louder and louder until
the sand around him was whipped up into a frenzy as it came down to land. Q tried to run but only succeeded in falling again and he moaned. He tried to get up onto his feet again but his strength finally failed him. Instead he managed to get up onto his knees and started to crawl, shivering with terror despite the sun burning down on him.

“Q! Q!” A man’s voice called out to him. It almost sounded like James but that was impossible because James was dead (and the doctor and Blofeld and pretty Pampuria). He kept crawling until hands grabbed him, stopping him. “Q please, it’s me.” Q was turned over gently and held to the man’s chest and he sobbed because the man even smelt like James, he wore the same aftershave, and it was all so unfair and heart-breaking because James was dead and Q had killed him. A water bottle was pressed to his lips but Q was beyond drinking. He was just too tired and he heard the man begging, pleading with him to oh darling please just take a sip, but the darkness was coming and he let it take him as the man who couldn’t possibly be James Bond cradled him in his arms.
Chapter 14

The room he woke up in was white. He lay on his back in bed trying to work out where he was. He’d been in a desert, he’d been dying, he was sure of it but now he was here, wherever ‘here’ was. He briefly wondered if he was dead but dismissed the idea. He’d imagine that the great beyond would involve less… medical equipment. He was on a drip and his arms were wrapped in gauze. He tried to sit up but his limbs felt heavy. It was the drip he was on, he was sure of it. They’d recaptured him and they were drugging him again and he needed to get away.

He tore the needle out of the back of his hand and threw back the covers. He was wearing a backless hospital robe and he could see now that his feet were bandaged too. Swinging his legs out of the bed he tried to stand but his legs buckled under him and pain came back with a vengeance as he slumped against the side of the bed. His stomach was in agony and his head swam and it felt like he was standing on razor blades but with a determined effort he pushed his weakened legs straight until he was upright. There were several long windows and a pair of patio doors that were open to the blackness outside. He staggered towards them. There was a small patio and then three steps down onto a manicured lawn. He stumbled down them, realising for the first time that it was pouring with rain. It was also freezing cold and he immediately started shivering.

He taken no more than a dozen steps before there was a shout behind him. He lurched, trying to move faster and then he fell. A moment later, gentle hands were turning him over, triggering an almost overwhelming sensation of déjà vu. He looked up and gasped.

“You really must stop running away from me darling. You’ll give me a complex.” James said with a smile.

Q reached out with a trembling hand, stroking the side of James’s face. James turned his head, nuzzling into his touch.

“You. You died.” Q said, his chest tightening with all the emotions that were threatening to spill over.

“No. You saved me, remember?”

Q shook his head, not remembering that at all. He remembered James dying and it was still so real, so visceral, that he suddenly found himself struggling to breathe. And then James was stroking Q’s face, pushing his now-wet hair off his forehead and leaning over him to keep the rain out of his upturned eyes and he was so gentle and his face was filled with so much concern for him that Q’s breath suddenly came back as a sob and then he was crying and James was kissing his forehead gently.

“Shh. You’re okay. You’re okay…”

“I thought I’d killed you. I killed that doctor. I killed Pampuria…”

“No. You didn’t kill anyone. You did exactly what I asked you to do. You helped me to escape, and you didn’t kill Madeleine, Blofeld did that, it was all Blofeld.”
“But I…”

“No,” James said bluntly. “It wasn’t you. It was all him and I promise you I will make him pay… but darling, who was Pampuria?”

Q head lolled. He was beginning to feel disassociated, fuzzy.

“She was soft… so soft…”

“Do you mean the cat?” James said, sounding amused. Q shook his head. It wasn’t funny, she’d been a sweet thing and Q had killed her. He sobbed again and James must have realised because his smile fled and he kissed Q’s forehead again. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be unkind.”

There was movement behind James and Q cringed, fear gripping him suddenly. James looked up.

“I wondered where you’d got to.” The woman said.

She knelt down next to them and Q realised that he knew her.

“Doc…tor C-conroy?” He asked tremulously.

The head of Mi6’s medical department smiled at him.

“I thought I’d lost my patient for a moment there.” She said kindly. “Where were you off to?”

Q shook his head, suddenly perilously close to panic. James stroked his face again.

“It’s okay. Calm down.”

“It was too hot.” Q said desperately, not quite knowing what he was trying to say. “I was burning. Going to Hell. Walking. I killed everyone and I was going the Hell and it was so hot.” He tried the thrash but James calmly reached behind him and untied the back of Q’s robe, drawing it down to his waist. He then tenderly placed his cool hand on Q’s naked chest.

“But you’re cold now, aren’t you? You can feel the rain; how cold that is?” James moved back so that the rain fell on Q fully. Q heard him mutter do what you need to Susan but Q didn’t pay any attention because he was shivering and he finally realised that he was cold and it was glorious. A hypodermic slid into his arm and Q almost panicked again but James was there reassuring him and soothing him and he was so blissfully cool that when he started to fall asleep he almost felt safe.

~00Q~

Bright sunlight woke him.

He lay peacefully for a few moments feeling comfortable and warm before trying to open his eyes. There was movement beside him and Doctor Conroy leaned into view.

“There you are Quartermaster. How are you feeling today?”

Q got the feeling that she’d asked him that question before but he had very little memory of it. He shrugged and tried to sit up.
“Easy there. You’ve been unconscious for some time now. Give yourself time to re-orientate yourself.” She pressed her hand onto his shoulder, making him lie still before she stood up and took something off the little cabinet beside him – it was a pair of glasses, identical to his own but pristine and new. She unfolded them and slipped them onto his face. “We had these made up for you. Yours were lost. The frames might need a little adjustment so let me know if they’re not comfortable.”

As she busied herself checking the monitors next to him, he looked around. He was in the same room that he vaguely remembered from before with long windows and tall doors out onto the patio, beyond them he saw the impeccably maintained gardens. The room itself was practical. A rail was affixed to the ceiling on which hung long curtains, no doubt to give the bed privacy when they were drawn. The bed itself was a standard hospital design and the mattress under him inflated and deflated gently on a rolling cycle, no doubt to prevent him from getting sores from lying there. There was a blood-pressure cuff on his left arm, and on his right side an oxygen monitor clipped to his forefinger and a PICC line going into the inside of his elbow. He appeared to be dressed in a hospital gown and if he wasn’t mistaken, under the covers there was a catheter on his cock.

“Where am I?” He asked. “How long have I been here?”

Conroy sat back down into the chair by the bed.

“This is the Balbianello Clinic. We’re on the shore of Lake Como.”

“Italy?”

She nodded.

“On paper it’s a sanitorium open to anyone rich enough to afford it, in reality it’s used exclusively by Mi6 and its allies to rehabilitate injured field staff. You were brought straight here from Morocco after Bond found you.”

“Is he alright?” Q asked worriedly. “I think… I dreamt he was dead…”

“He’s fine. He stayed for half a day but then he was recalled back to the field.” She smiled. “He was worried sick about you though. I think you gave him quite a fright… Anyway, you came here eight days ago and I was called in to work as your personal physician. Bond reported that he thought you’d been drugged. As I spent several years specialising in opioid addiction with an emphasis on safe withdrawal techniques, they felt I was best suited to care for you.”

“They… they kept… injecting me with something…” Q said slowly, struggling to remember.

“I carried out a series of blood tests in the first twenty-four hours that you were here. I was able to identify several narcotics but there was traces of something that defied categorisation. Your withdrawal symptoms were extreme though and as far as I can tell, the unknown agent contributed significantly to this. Your body was reacting as if you’d gone cold turkey after years of drug abuse not, what we calculated to be, a little over thirty-six hours.”

“He wanted me dependent on the drugs.”

“Yes.” She said. “I don’t suppose for a moment that you experienced much of a ‘buzz’ whenever the drugs were administered, but the withdrawal symptoms would have presented after just one or two doses.”

Q frowned.
“He said it was for my own good…” He said, vaguely recalling meeting the man, “… said someone had given me something they shouldn’t… he was helping.”

“He was killing you.” She said softly. “Two, maybe three more days, and your internal organs would have been irreparably damaged. As it was, the withdrawals were causing you extreme pain, confusion, mild hysteria. I took the decision to have you sedated so I could deal with the side-effects without you suffering unduly. I had you in an induced coma for five days before slowly reducing the sedative. You’ve had several periods of brief lucidity over the past few days but I think you may finally be over the worst of it.”

“Have we spoken like this before?” Q asked, desperate to remember.

“We’ve spoken. You’ve shouted at me. Cried. Told me you loved me. It’s been quite entertaining.”

She smiled and took his hand, squeezing it lightly.

“And none of it goes any further than this room.”

He smiled back, relieved beyond measure. He was about thank her when his eyes started to droop. He was just so tired. Conroy leant over him again and took his new glasses back off his face, returning them to the top of the cabinet. She stroked his hair back off his brow (James did that too, his subconscious suddenly reminded him) and tugged his bedclothes up before smoothing them flat.

“Go back to sleep Tom. I’ll be here when you wake up.”

Q nodded and whined. He didn’t want to, he wanted to get up, be better, forget any of this ever happened, but his body had other plans and he quickly drifted back off to sleep.

~00Q~

Gradually, over the next week, Q began to recover. The medical equipment he’d been hooked up to was gradually removed and he was able to spend longer spells sitting up, at first in bed and then in a wheelchair. Conroy and he started to share mealtimes, sitting outside whenever the weather was fine enough and she confessed that looking after Q had been one of her more pleasurable assignments. Q could see why. The clinic was on a spur of land overlooking the lake and the scenery was beautiful.

On the third day after he first woke up properly, Q was visited by Mi6’s resident psychiatrist, Doctor Hall. The two men spent several hours talking quietly. Doctor Hall explained that M would want Q debriefed and he had been sent to assess Q’s mental state.

“Are you experiencing any nightmares? Flashbacks?” He’d asked.

“Yes. Almost constantly.” Q had admitted.

“And how does that make you feel?”

Q had shrugged.

“It’s normal, isn’t it? It would be a bit odd, I mean, I’d have to be some kind of psychopath not to be feeling the way I do…”
Doctor Hall had smiled.

“In the woolly art of psychiatry, there’s no such thing as a right answer but that was as close to a right answer as I’ve ever heard. It is normal for you to go over what happened. It’s normal for you to try to process what had happened, either consciously or unconsciously. Give yourself time.”

He’d left after giving Q his number and told him to ring him any time if he needed to talk. He said he would schedule a series of regular appointments for when Q was back in London.

The following day, M visited.

~00Q~

4. The skydiver who first started in 1985 is either Kelly or the skydiver who wears the violet suit...

Q was sitting on a recliner in the middle of the lawn outside his room. He had a book of logic puzzles that Doctor Conroy had found for him open on his lap but his pen had been hovering for the last five minutes. He must have read that clue a dozen times. He was so tired; he debated buzzing for a porter to come and help him back to his bed but then he remembered that he’d promised Susan that he’d try to stop spending so much time asleep. He needed to move, stay alert. The physiotherapists were due to start working with him in a couple of days and they’d have a hard time doing that if he spent the whole time sleeping.

He sighed and laid down his pen so he could pick up the glass of juice from the little table next to him. As he drank he heard a noise and he turned to see M striding towards him, closely followed by Bill Tanner and a couple of porters. He put down the glass and tugged his robe around himself. He’d been promoted from wearing hospital robes but the bog-standard pyjamas they’d given him were nothing to write home about. M must have noticed.

“No need to fuss, please don’t concern yourself on my account.”

One of the porters put down two chairs and the other moved Q’s glass so he could place a tea tray on the table. They then both left. M acted as ‘mother’ and poured out three cups of tea. Q took his and set it down on top of the puzzle book in his lap.

“So, Q. How are you feeling?” M asked.

Q pondered the question and wondered if he should lie. M seemed genuinely interested though so he decided honesty was probably the best policy.


“I would imagine not.” M said kindly. “You’ll excuse my visiting unannounced but Tanner and I were passing…”

“More or less.” Bill said. “We had a summit to attend in Milan…”

“…and I wanted to make sure that everything was progressing well for you,” M cut in again, “and to
give you some good news.”

“News, Sir?”

“Blofeld has been captured.”

A tension that Q hadn’t realised he was carrying suddenly released. He trembled as he asked;

“When? How?”

“Bond caught up with him in London two days ago. He’s currently being held in a high-security facility.”

“Thank God.” Q breathed.

“Look, I’ve read Doctor Conroy’s reports and I’ve been in your situation before so I’ll understand if you’re not quite ready to talk to us about what happened…”

M trailed off and Q nodded, understanding. M had been captured and tortured himself by the IRA.

“I’m still struggling with nightmares,” he admitted, “and I’m not eating well. I keep thinking I should have tried harder to find a way to hack into Blofeld’s computer network and…”

“With all due respect Q, you’re not a trained field agent and you had been severely compromised by the drugs you’d been given. Had you crumbled the first time Blofeld put pressure on you I wouldn’t have blamed you.” M said. "As it was you managed to escape and considering the way that they had mis-treated you, that was an extremely courageous act.”

“How can you be so forgiving?” Q said, feeling ashamed. “I shouldn’t have been there in the first place. If I hadn’t been so stupid to go and meet up with Bond…”

“When I asked you to keep an eye on Bond for me, I confess I didn’t expect you to go running after him. I should have anticipated that and I can only apologise for my oversight. However,” he said pointedly when he saw Q open his mouth to speak, “Bond has thoroughly reported the exact sequence of events that led you to fly to Austria. He has taken full responsibility for both his and your actions and when everything is said and done, I have to say that I understand why you did what you did.”

Q felt the back of his eyes prickle and looked down, unwilling to cry in front of the head of MI6.

“Your job now is to recover.” The man continued quietly. "Get your strength back and hopefully get back to work. Your department is running smoothly but I am given to understand that your staff all miss you.”

Q smiled.

“Now, Doctors Hall and Conroy have passed on something of what happened to you but I’d rather like to hear the story first-hand if I may.”

Bill pulled out a small Dictaphone and put it on Q’s lap alongside his tea cup.

“I can’t remember it all.” Q said timidly. “There are gaps in my memory but I’ll try my best…”

M nodded, encouraging him.

“I found Bond with no problem at the Hoffler Klinik in Austria,” Q began, “but I ran into a couple of
Blofeld’s men on my way back down the mountain…”

He talked for almost an hour, relating everything that he could remember. On occasion he faltered, his voice breaking, but Bill and M said very little, both of them unwilling to interrupt him. There were still blank patches - Q still couldn’t remember what happened to him after the explosion – but he was able to recall fair amount of detail regarding what the technicians had been monitoring. When he finally finished M, who had been leaning over and listening intently, sat up straight.

“Thank you. You’ve been most helpful. I know this can’t have been easy.”

“No,” Q admitted, “but it was quite cathartic. Thank you for letting me tell you what happened. I feel better for it, I think.”

“The doctors tell me that you might be well enough to go home in as little as a week. I shall wait for your word on when you feel ready to return to your role.” M said as he and Tanner stood up to leave. “If there’s nothing else, we’ll leave you in peace.”

“There is one little thing.” Q replied. “I wonder if I might borrow Tanner for a minute? I’m getting a little bit cold here and would like some help getting back to my room.”

Bill and M exchanged a glance, almost as if they’d expected Q to ask something like this.

“Of course,” M said, “I’ll wait in the car. Five minutes please, Tanner.”

M walked away and Bill waited while Q pulled back the thin blanket that had been over his legs. Bill put out his hand and Q took it gratefully as he slowly stood up. Once he was upright Bill slipped his arm around Q’s waist.

“Thank you,” said Q as they started to slowly move, “I’m still a bit shaky... but how are you? How’s Eve?”

“We’re fine.” Bill said. "We’ve been worried about you though. Poor Eve was inconsolable when she realised you’d gone missing.” He was quiet for a few steps. “Look, there’s something I think you should know. Your neighbours, the ones from the flat directly beneath you, have disappeared.”

“Simon and Tish? What do you mean? Why?” Q was confused.

“We weren’t sure at first. Eve went to your flat with a maintenance crew to break in so she could feed Turing. While they were there she noticed the door to their flat was standing open. It was empty. Completely stripped bare, like they’d never been there.”

“I wonder if they were working for him?” Q said quietly.

“That was our exact thought so we did a little digging. When they first moved in below you, Personnel ran a background check on them. On the face of it, it all came back fine. Since they disappeared I had your team look into them. It was all fake. Every record about them. They simply never existed.”

“But,” Q started uncomfortably, “how could Blofeld have known to watch me for all that time? They moved in before I became Q for fuck’s sake!”

They reached Q’s bed and Bill carefully helped him to sit down on it. He looked angry.

“We’re working on the theory that he was watching all of us.” Bill said grimly. “Every senior member of staff, every manager, anyone with access to sensitive information. It’s caused quite a
scramble if truth be known. One of my neighbours has just been arrested. Similar forensic background checks have shown she wasn’t who I thought she was. She… we had a bit of a thing a couple of months ago… but something felt off. I’d catch her out with a strange look on her face… like her smile disappeared the moment my back was turned. I knew something was wrong… I thought she disapproved of my working long hours… that was why I broke it off.”

“Jesus, Bill.” Q said softly. “Blofeld… he mentioned something that I’d told Simon…” It was the comment about James, but Q wasn’t going to tell Bill that, “I thought he’d had my home under surveillance… we were standing on the front step when we had the conversation. I wondered if that was why Rich was beaten up? Did Blofeld always intend to take me? Did he think Rich was a threat to his plans?”

They were both quiet for a moment, considering Q’s words, and then Bill smiled.

“There is one bright side though.”

“Oh?”

“You’re getting new neighbours.”

“Have they been vetted by Mi6?” Q asked.

“Oh yes. They’re me and Eve.”

Q was speechless for a moment but then he burst out laughing.

“You’re joking! You’re moving in together?”

“M wanted to move you but I pointed out that firstly, you own your flat, and secondly, it would make more sense to make the property a staff building.”

Q nodded. Staff buildings were set up when more than one employee lived in the same property. Mi6 purchased the freehold which enabled them to install whatever security measures they wished.

“What about the ground floor flat?” Q asked. “There’s a teacher renting it at the moment, isn’t there?” Q didn’t really know the man but he’d seen him from time to time.

“He’s a lecturer at the London School of Economics. Funny thing, he’s about to be left a rather lovely flat in the Barbican by an elderly relative he didn’t even know existed. We’re hoping he’ll be out by the end of next month. After that, Mi6 will find another employee to move in.”

“The Barbican, eh? How fortunate… he be close enough to walk to work.”

“What are the odds, eh?” Bill grinned. His face then fell into a more sombre expression as his took and gently squeezed Q’s hand. “Everything will be okay you know.”

“I know.” Q said with a shrug. “It’s just… I know.”

Bill glanced at his watch.

“I’d better go. I’ve been almost ten minutes. His highness will be champing at the bit by now waiting for me.” He stood up and patted Q’s shoulder. “See you soon mate.”

Q watched him leave with a faint smile on his face. It would be okay. His little boy Turing was being looked after, Bill and Eve were going to be his neighbours, it was all going to be okay.
It had to be.

~00Q~

It was another two weeks before Q found himself on a flight back to London.

Physically, he’d healed well. His kidneys had struggled to work in the first few days, Susan had told him, but subsequent scans had given him the all-clear. There was almost no sign of permanent damage. Q supposed he should feel lucky but the nightmares had persisted, bringing down his mood as he felt exhausted most of the time. Most of them entailed Q crawling through burning heat. He didn’t understand them but he’d been told that Bond had found him in the desert, several miles from the base so he wondered if they were in fact memories trying to bleed through. Eventually he’d given in and phoned Doctor Hall who’d been more than happy to listen and help Q to work through what they might mean.

He flew back with Susan and he was grateful for her presence. She had gone over and above what she had been employed to do, showing him a real, gentle affection as he had struggled to recover. She’d confessed to Q that he reminded her very much of one of her sons. His own mother was a rather cold, academic woman so it had been the first time he had experienced the kind of no-nonsense care that he’d imagined only a loving mother could give. When they parted at the Arrivals gate at Heathrow she’d told him to call her if he needed anything. Anything.

And then Eve and Bill had been there to pick him up and he tried not to cry, he really did, but then Eve hugged him and he realised that he was finally safe and he was surrounded people who cared about him and he held onto her for the longest time, weeping quietly. Eventually he calmed down and Eve held his hand while Bill slipped his arm around him and carried his bag as they slowly made their way to the car. Q was surprised to see his usual driver, Thorpe, at the wheel. Bill sat in the front seat next to him and Q sat in the back, leaning up against Eve and within minutes he was dozing.

He awoke to Eve gently shaking him.

“Come on Sleeping Beauty. We’re home.”

Q roused himself and stiffly clambered out of the car. He raised his eyebrows at the removal van parked outside.

“You’re moving in today?”

“The lads seemed to know what they were doing so we left them to it. I guess Eve and I will be spending the evening unpacking.” Bill grinned.

Q felt a warm glow at the thought of his friends being so nearby. Bill helped him again and he slowly made his way indoors.

“Oh, by the way. You have a gift.” Eve said as they walked up the first flight of stairs.

“A gift?”

“Mmm. It was from Bond. It arrived last week. He got it in Morocco for you.”
“Really? Is it a joke?” Q paused, mostly because he was knackered from the stairs but partially because his mind was doing overtime. “Whatever possessed him?”

“James says if you don’t like it, I can have it.” Eve added. Q felt Bill sigh at that.

“Eve…” He said waringly.

“Oh, come on, you want it just as much as I do, you old poop.”

Bill chuckled as they started climbing the stairs again.

“Yes, but I don’t think that mentioning it is going to make Q’s loving it any less likely.”

They reached the top of the stairs and Eve unlocked Q’s front door. He could see that a new lock had been fitted. She put her hand down to floor level before opening it and Q wondered how many times Turing had tried to Houdini his way out past her. He followed her into the little hall and Bill closed the door behind them.

“If I know them, they’ll be in here.” Eve said, walking through into Q’s bedroom.

“They?” Q queried, following her. He stopped dead and his mouth hung open a little when he saw his bed. Curled up in the middle, like ying and yang was the grey tabby fur of Turing intertwined with the pure white, long haired fluff of…

“Pampuria?”

The white pussycat raised her head and blinked at him sleepily. Tears pricked at Q’s eyes as he shakily walked to the bed and sat on the side of it. He reached out with a trembling hand and she sniffed his fingers delicately before allowing him to stroke between her ears, much as she had in Blofeld’s compound.

“But how?”

“James lost track of Blofeld for a while so he volunteered to assist the team that was going through his base in Morocco.” Eve said. “He said he found her scavenging and decided to rescue her. He asked me if I knew of anyone who might like her and I remembered that one of your cats had died…”

Turing had woken up now and was sniffing Q suspiciously.

“They seem to get on alright. She can be a bit of a diva and bullies Turing on occasion but Turing really doesn’t seem to mind. It’s like he adores her.”

“Got yourself a new girlfriend eh, Mr T?” Q murmured as Turing obviously decided that, strange smell or not, his daddy was back. He climbed into Q’s lap for more fuss. Q stroked their fur, marvelling at the warm feeling of ‘home’ that it gave him.

Later that evening, after eating dinner with Eve and Bill, Q sat in the lounge alone (well, not entirely alone, Turing was curled up on his lap and Pampuria had decided that Q was interesting enough to warrant her sitting across from him on the armchair). He was watching some nonsense on the TV wondering if anything would ever really feel like things were back to normal. He had his new neighbours downstairs who’d made their apologies when they realised they really should start unpacking if they were going to find their duvet before bedtime. There was a new laptop and a mobile phone on the kitchen counter, courtesy of Mi6, to replace the items that had been lost when he was taken. Similarly, there was a new winter coat in the closet. He had a new cat and somehow,
He felt new. Different.

He wondered how different he really was.
Chapter 15

Q sat at his workbench staring through his Mantis magnifier. He’d been trying to fit a micro-receiver into a bullet casing for a few days now and he’d finally managed to get a working prototype the right size. He watched carefully as he gingerly slid the tiny electronics into it.

“Got you, you bastard.” He muttered.

“You really should stop swearing at your designs Sir. People are starting to talk.”

He looked up to see R coming into the workshop with Q’s Scrabble mug in his hand.

“When did you take my mug?” He asked as the man set it down beside him.

“About five minutes ago. You were too busy staring into that thing and mumbling something about cocksuckers to notice.”

“Well this little cocksucker is a beauty,” Q grinned, holding up the casing, “tracer bullet. I told you I’d manage it.”

R raised his eyebrow and whistled as Q handed it to him.

“Well, that’s me down a fiver. I bet Una you wouldn’t get it done before Friday.”

“Oh, ye of little faith.” Q commented dryly, picking up his tea. “Anyway, don’t get too excited. It’s not completely done until I can shoot someone with it without destroying it.”

“Someone?”

“Probably one of the ballistic gel dummies down on the range as long as no one pisses me off between now and tomorrow morning.”

“I could suggest a couple of the idiots in Finance if you like.”

Q laughed. Finance were forever scrutinising their budgets and he knew that it annoyed R no end. He glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to six.

“Are you going home soon?”

“No. I’ll put in another hour and then head off with the rest of the reprobates.”

“Pub night?”

“It’s Wednesday. It’s practically the law.” R commented.

Q chuckled again and turned back to the magnifier.

“Are you coming tonight?” R added after a pause.

Q felt himself tense up but he kept the smile on his face.
“I’ll give it a miss thanks.”

R sighed.

“Tom…”

It had been three months since Q had returned to London, two months since he returned to work and during that time he hadn’t met up with anyone socially. Bill and Eve popped up to see him for an evening occasionally but he hadn’t set foot in a pub or club since… well, since.

“I’m tired, okay Ben?” He lied. “I just want to have an early night.”

“We just want you to come out and have some fun with us.” R said gently. “You’re working too hard. You know you are. And that’s fine, it is, but you need to relax too.”

“I do relax.” Q retorted. He was almost pouting.

“Alright,” R said, putting his hands up, “but I feel duty-bound to warn you, Moneypenny asked me if you were coming out earlier. When I tell her that you turned me down she’ll be on the warpath.”

“I can handle her.” Q said.

“Somehow, I doubt that.” R retorted. “Alright, on your head be it.”

Q took a sip of his tea as R left the room. He watched him go before going back to concentrating on the casing. After a couple of minutes he clenched his teeth. He couldn’t quite manage to throw off the feeling of discomfort that R’s invitation had caused him. It was stupid. He’d looked forward to coming back to work, slipping back into the role seamlessly. Taking back the reins of his responsibilities like he’d never been away. He was still seeing Doctor Hall regularly, that was true, but he was determined in his ambition to be normal again. There were certain things though, like the idea of being in a noisy social situation that put him on edge. It was stupid, he knew it was stupid. Nothing was going to happen, except him maybe having a good time, but R may as well have asked Q to stick his head into a shark’s mouth – the whole thing struck Q as uncomfortable, pointless, and easily avoided.

R must have immediately betrayed Q after leaving his office by texting their divine Miss M his response because within ten minutes she was sauntering in.

“Quartermaster.”

“Moneypants.”

“Sooo,” she started, leaning over his workbench and resting her elbows on it, “a little birdy tells me you’re not coming out to play tonight.”

“The little birdy was correct.” Q replied, not taking his eyes off his work. He sighed as the light on his magnifier suddenly turned off. He looked up to see her grinning at him, her finger still on the switch.

“Don’t be boring.”

“I’m not being boring. I just happen to feel a bit tired and would rather…”

“Not good enough.” She interrupted. “I happen to know that you have time off owing. It just so happens that M found out and is insisting that you take the next four days off. Therefore, you can
have a lie-in tomorrow, therefore you can come out with me and Bill and your team members and we can all have a few drinks and a few laughs tonight.”

“’M found out’ or ‘you told M’?”

“Potato, potato.” She smiled.

“Look Eve, you know I don’t drink anymore. Not since…”

“I know but you do eat and me and Bill are heading over there now for a bite.” He went to speak again but she cut him off. “Please Q. Come out with us!”

Q sighed. He knew he wasn’t going to win any argument with Eve and maybe if he went early he could make his apologies early and avoid the pub when it got really busy later on… He put down the bullet he’d been trying to work on.

“Alright. I’ll come…” Eve gave a little squeal of excitement, “… but just for a bit.” He emphasised. “I really am tired.”

She nodded.

“Absolutely! Come on then. Grab your things.”

Q did as he was told and slipped on his anorak before carefully stowing his laptop in his satchel. She looped her arm through his as they walked to the door.

“We’re going to have so much fun!” She grinned.

Q just rolled his eyes.

~00Q~

The Golden Guinea was just how Q remembered it. Slightly shabby, slightly rundown but warm and cosy. Q ordered the curry of the day (a passable beef madras) and a lemonade. Bill and Eve both had the fish and chips and a pint of ale. They chatted about work (as far as they were able to in a public place) and then went on to their favourite topic – who was going to take over the ground floor flat in their building. The economics lecturer had indeed moved into his ‘inheritance’ in the Barbican and the flat had stood empty for over a month before Bill spotted decorators working on it.

“The odd thing is, I had a snoop around HR who advertised it as available but I can’t see any record of whose taken it.” He said.

“Maybe there was no interest.” Q pondered. “Maybe they’re fixing it up to make it more attractive.”

Bill shook his head.

“I wouldn’t have thought so. It’s a pretty desirable location…”

“Maybe they’re going to use it as a safehouse?” Q suggested.

“Why would they do that when there are Mi6 employees living in such close proximity to it? No, it doesn’t make sense…”
“Perhaps Mi6 want to use it as temporary accommodation. Maybe for the next time Trevelyans burns down his flat?” Eve said.

“God save us from having that man living under our roof.” Q muttered. “If he moves in I shall want danger money.”

They all laughed at that and were still chuckling when R and a gaggle of other staff from Q’s department came into the pub.

By nine-thirty Q was beginning to think about leaving. It had been nice, he gave Moneypenny credit for that, but the pub was beginning to fill up and people were beginning to get tiddly and the volume was creeping up and he was starting to feel uncomfortable. Eve noticed and she tucked herself into his side.

“Alright?”

“Almost time to go.” He said quietly, wondering if he should down the pint of lemonade someone had just bought him or just walk out without drinking it. “It’s getting a bit loud…”

“Just give it another couple of minutes.” She said, squeezing his knee. “The night might just get interesting yet.”

He wondered what she meant but ten minutes later, when she nudged him and then nodded towards the door he realised. Standing by the door was Bond. Shit. Q’s heart sank. He hadn’t seen the agent since the clinic. Bond had been in his department several times and Q had made himself scarce every single time. He’d been off his face last time they spoke and Q had no wish to discover what an arse he’d made of himself.

James looked good though. Holy fuck, he looked better than good. He was dressed casually in a pair of dark blue jeans and a white t-shirt, topped off with a dark brown suede jacket. He looked tanned, healthy and so fucking ripped it looked like a gym had just given birth to him. Q realised he was staring when he felt Eve gently press on the underside of his chin with her finger, closing his mouth.

“Don’t drool Quartermaster. It’s unseemly.” She whispered directly into his ear.

“What? No, I didn’t… as if…” He retorted, only too aware that he was finding it difficult to string a sentence together, that Bond was coming straight over to them, and that Eve was laughing her arse off. “God, I hate you.” He finally hissed.

“No, you don’t.” She replied out of the side of her mouth as she grinned up at James. “Hello sailor. You took your time.”

“Well, doesn’t this look cozy?” Bond asked with a smile on his face. His eyes scanned across the group of people crowded around the three tables they’d put together. Maybe it was Q’s imagination, but his gaze seemed to linger on him a beat longer than anyone else. “Anyone need a top-up?”

A few people said yes and Bond duly went to the bar. Rather than watch his impeccable arse as he walked the whole way there, Q turned to Eve.

“You bloody knew he was coming, didn’t you?”

“Of course I did! That’s why I was so insistent that you come along tonight. Do you know how difficult it is to pin down a double-oh when they’re off mission?”
“And why in the hell would you do that Eve?”

“Oh, you silly boys. Because you like each other. Because he was the man who saved you and you haven’t so much as spoken to each other since you got back!”

“I’ve been busy. We both have…”

“He’s been to your office for various reasons six times since you returned to work. Doesn’t that strike you as an abnormally high number? Are you telling me you’ve not once been there to kit him out?”

“I have better things to do than…”

“Poppycock!” She exclaimed. “I want you to talk to him. You’ve not been the same since you got back and I think there’s a few things that you and he need to work through. Right now, in fact…”

Q looked up in surprise as she suddenly stood up and walked around the table to sit next Bill who was deep in conversation with R. He looked around in panic as he realised that her moving meant that the only vacant seat was the one she’d left next to Q and Bond was on his way back from the bar. He looked down at his drink, hoping desperately that he wasn’t blushing as Bond sat down next to him, his thigh pressing up against the side of Q’s leg. Q shuffled, trying to give him more room.

“Bit of a tight squeeze.” Bond commented.

Q nodded and cleared his throat.

“I wouldn’t have expected to see you here, Bond.”

“We’re off the clock. Call me James.”

“Okay,” Q said and then fell silent. It was all very well Eve telling him to speak to the man but how could he start a conversation with ‘so James, thanks for saving me after I was stupid enough to go running into the Sahara fucking desert’ or maybe he could try ‘hey James, remember that time when I threw that exploding watch into the middle of the room you were in and…’.

“Penny for them?” James said softly, under the surrounding noise of the pub.

“What?” Q asked, startled.

“I said, a penny for them, your thoughts.” James said.

“You don’t want to hear my thoughts.” Q muttered. He picked up his lemonade and took a long swallow.

“I think I do.” James said quietly.

“Well now is hardly the time or the place, is it?” Q responded hotly, suddenly feeling more than a little pissed off that he’d been put into the situation by Eve. He stood up, grabbing his bag and coat and shoved past James before almost running out of the pub. He yanked his coat on and started to march down the road. There was a taxi rank by Vauxhall Bridge. He’d get a cab and go home and forget this whole fucking night ever happened.

“Q? Q?”

Q shook his head and a coil of fear rose up through him as a barely remembered memory threatened to surface. No. He couldn’t do this. He heard footsteps running behind him and he cringed.
“Q? Thomas? Please! I’m sorry.” Maybe it was the shock at hearing the great 007 actually apologising for something that stopped Q from fighting back when James finally grabbed his coat sleeve and tugged on it. “Thomas, please wait a moment. Please talk to me.”

“What do you want from me?!” Q almost screamed at him. “What do you want James? What have we got that we can possibly talk about that isn’t going to make me remember and hurt me again?” He started to tremble as the adrenaline rushed through his body. A part of him realised that he was being unreasonable, a part of him knew logically that none of this was James’s fault but a bigger part of him was overwhelmed with stress and frustration and the knowledge that trying to help James had hurt him and changed him and he didn’t like this frightened mess he had become.

“I want to help. To make it better.”

Q hung his head, ashamed that now he could add crying to his list of how to embarrass himself in front of a double-oh agent. James didn’t seem phased though. In fact, James chose that exact moment to wrap his arms around Q and hold him tight. Q was stunned for a moment before every ounce of his being seemed to simultaneously decide ‘fuck it’ and he leaned into the embrace, feeling defeated in a way. James seemed to curl in over him.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so bad at this.” James murmured. Q closed his eyes as he felt James kiss the top of his head. “I wanted to talk to you… I tried to see you at work. I didn’t know if it was deliberate on your part or exceptionally bad timing on my part but I kept missing you and the longer it went on, the more difficult I found it. It was Moneypenny who suggested we meet in the pub. She thought that being surrounded by people who care for you might make you more comfortable… we didn’t know it would overwhelm you. I’m so, so sorry.”

James’s hand smoothed up his back and into his hair. He started to scratch Q’s head, massaging and lightly tugging on his hair and it was all so unfair that James should instinctively know the one thing guaranteed to turn Q to jelly. His tears slowly stopped until he felt hollow. James didn’t move though. He stayed where he was, gently soothing him. Eventually Q pushed back and James let him go. When Q saw his face, it was filled with concern.

“I need to go.” Q said quietly. “I shouldn’t have come.”

He might have expected James to argue, but instead he asked;

“How are you getting home?”

“I was going to get a cab.” Q said, indicating down the road to the taxi rank.

“I’m parked just around the corner. Let me take you home.”

“James…”

“Have you any idea what M would do to me if he found out I’d let you get into a cab? He looks mild mannered enough but he’d got an evil streak a mile wide. Please Tom. Let me do this.”

Q shrugged, realising that he probably wasn’t going to win the fight and James smiled. It was a little sad but it made him look handsome, nevertheless. James took two steps and with a sigh Q started to follow him.

The journey home was quiet. Q felt exhausted but he didn’t sleep. Instead he sat in silence, watching James’s hand as he regularly changed gears. He’d slipped on a pair of driving gloves and Q supposed the sight of the man’s hands wrapped in black leather might have excited him once. Now he just watched, realising for the first time how broken he really was. James didn’t try to press
him to talk and for that he was grateful. He just sat and waited for James to get him home.

When they pulled at Q’s house, Q immediately got out of the car to walk up the little path to the front door. He wasn’t surprised when James followed him.

“Tom…”

Q turned on his doorstep, his keys in his hand.

“I’m not inviting you in James. I’m not going to have this conversation now. You can’t spring this kind of shit on me.”

James nodded. His foot was resting on the bottom step of the two that led to the little open porch but he made no effort to go any further.

“I have… had feelings for you. Maybe that’s why I helped you. Why I…” Q hesitated, unwilling to put into words what he’d been through. He paused. “I need to deal with that and I think that talking to you will help so you’re going to take me out to dinner.”

“I am?” James asked with a soft smile on his face.

“Yes. You’re going to take me somewhere nice but not too nice. Somewhere that I can wear jeans and a nice shirt – not one of your up-their-own-arse restaurants where anything less than a tuxedo earns you a flogging – and we are going to have a meal and chat about stupid things and I am going to relax before I can even think about telling you any of the shit that is whirling through my head right now.”

“Anything else?” James asking looking more amused than he probably should.

“Yes. You’re going to pick me up at seven tomorrow evening.”
Chapter 16

Eve tried to get in touch after she got home but after Q refused to open his door or answer his phone she sent him a text which simply read;

- I’m sorry I fucked up.

He’d nodded at that and an hour later, after much debating, he replied with;

- Give me some space and let me deal with this. I’ll be okay. I’ll see you soon.

He hoped that would stop Eve from trying to intercept him when he left the flat to go out with James the following evening. The next morning, he spent a couple of hours cleaning the flat and, in the afternoon, he went for a walk. Strawberry Hill House was only a mile away so he headed there, his sketchpad and pencils in his bag. He spent a peaceful couple of hours sketching the house before treating himself to a pot of tea and a slice of cake in the little café.

At five he went back home to get ready. He had a shower, fed the cats and then spent longer than was strictly necessary choosing what he was going to wear. In the end he plumped for a pair of black Levi’s and a dark red shirt which was slim-fitting. He had a black, double-breasted pea coat which he pulled out of the wardrobe which he planned to take in case it got cold later on. He dried his hair with a towel and then teased it into shape with his fingers. It was getting long and in need of a trim but it would do. After he’d dressed he examined himself in the mirror on the back of his wardrobe door. He didn’t think he looked too bad, all things considered. Not that it mattered. It wasn’t really a date.

At seven precisely the doorbell rang and Q quickly checked the door camera to confirm it was Bond. It was and, trying to ignore his feelings of nervousness, he slipped his keys and phone into his coat pocket and quickly went down the stairs. He opened the front door to find James leaning up against the side of the porch. He’d been looking out over the scruffy little front garden but at the sound of the door opening he turned. Q expected him to speak but for a moment he didn’t look capable. He straightened up, his mouth hanging open a little.

“Good evening Bond. On time I see.”

“Of… of course.” James said, almost as if he was trying to collect himself. Then, as if he couldn’t help himself, he added; “You look gorgeous.”

Q smiled and felt himself blush. Goddamn James Bond and his habit of inducing that reaction in Q.

“Yes, well. That’s as may be but this isn’t a date. There are things we need to discuss.”

“Of course not, Quartermaster. Quite right.” James replied, smiling back. “If you would? Your chariot awaits.” He gestured to his car which was sitting by the curb.

Bond drove him to the Victoria Embankment and then it was just a short walk to Temple Pier. Q smiled when he realised where they were going. The Yacht London was a 1920’s luxury steam yacht that had been converted to a bar and restaurant. They were greeted on the gangplank by the maître d’ who seemed to know James very well. They were led to the top deck. It was deserted and
a single table with two chairs had been set up in the middle.

“You have got to be shitting me…” Q said.

James grinned at him, looking far too pleased with himself, as he pulled out one of the chairs and encouraged him to sit. He sat down opposite him and picked up the wine menu.

“Any preference?” He asked.

“I haven’t drunk alcohol since I was taken.”

James hesitated for a second and then smoothly handed the menu to the maître d’.

“We’ll have a bottle of sparkling water and a side dish with assorted citrus quarters please.”

“Certainly Sir.” The waiter left and Q looked around himself.

There was a blue canopy over the deck designed to protect them from the worst of the weather and they were rocking slightly with the motion of the waves beneath them. There was a small deserted bar at one end and a lounge-style seating area at the other. Q realised that they were sitting in the middle of a dancefloor. From the lower floors Q could hear the hubbub of other diners.

“How the hell do you do it Bond?”

“What?”

“Hire the entire top floor of a central London restaurant with less than twenty-four hours’ notice?”

“It’s not what you know… Gustav owed me a favour.” Bond said with a wink.

“You’re ridiculous. You do realise that, don’t you? You could have just taken me to a Wetherspoons for a cheap curry…”

The man returned with their water and then took a food order. Q passed on a starter and requested the oven baked hake and James went for the lamb. Once they were alone again James poured out two glasses of sparkling water. Into each one he lightly crushed lemon and lime wedges, running them over the edges of the glasses before dropping them in. He passed one of them to Q who sipped on it lightly.

“That’s lovely.”

James raised his glass.

“To lovely things.” He toasted, holding his glass out.

“Still not a date.” Q commented as he chinked his glass up against James’s.

James chuckled and put down his glass, gazing at Q.

“That doesn’t matter. Thank you for letting me do this.”

“This?”

“Spoiling you. Apologising to you. What I did last night… It was unforgiveable.”

“No,” Q said tiredly, “It wasn’t. It was me. I freaked out. I’ve been trying to get a handle on all of
“I don’t think you’re any less of a man for not asking…”

“With all due respect, I’m pretty sure that what you think has very little to do with this.”

James nodded.

“I understand… there are things… that I should have told you a long time ago… I hurt you rather than tell you the truth… I was scared.”

Q frowned.

“What are you talking about?”

James looked as if he was about to answer when the maître d’ chose that exact moment to came back with two plates. They started to eat in silence. Q’s meal was very good and he told James as much. In return James told him he knew the chef very well and they began to chat about their favourite restaurants in London. It was as if they both understood that the subjects that they’d touched on couldn’t be discussed over food. When they finished they ordered desert, both opting for a rather rich chocolate cake served with a home-made clotted-cream vanilla ice-cream.

By the time James suggested moving to the sofas to have coffee Q was as full as a tick. He couldn’t remember the last time he ate such a big meal. He was sure he waddled over to the seating area to settle down. A band had started playing on the deck below and he listened to the light jazz contentedly as he watched the lights over the Thames. When the coffee came James poured them a cup each and added cream and sugar to it.

“The food is good here but the coffee is far too dark and bitter to drink black. I prefer a lighter roast.”

Q rarely drank coffee but he took a sip and didn’t think it was too foul. He relaxed, watching the traffic up and down the river and enjoying the gentle rock of the boat they were on. After a moment he asked;

“What did you mean when you said you’d wished you’d told me the truth about how you felt?”

James seemed to stare into the coffee cup in his lap.

“I want to tell you… I do. I’m just not sure how…”

“Why don’t you start from the beginning?” Q suggested.

“God. I suppose the beginning would be when I first started with Mi6.” James said with a chuckle. Seeing Q looking at him expectantly he carried on; “I joined the Navy straight out of school and intended to stay there. I tried out for and got into the Special Boat Service when I was in my mid-twenties. I loved it. I worked all over the world and would have stayed there had I not been recruited by Mi6 when I was thirty-two.”

“You left the Navy.”
"Technically, no, on paper they are still my employers which is how I attained the rank of Commander, but M6 were looking to add people to the double-oh programme and I apparently fit the bill."

“I can’t imagine why.” Q commented dryly.

A quirk of a smile touched James’s lips.

“Anyway, you don’t just become a double-oh overnight, you have to have been a standard agent for a minimum of two years so I did my basic training and I passed the tests and I was cleared for active duty. On my very first mission I met Sebastian.”

“Ronson?” Q asked.

James nodded and he looked away for a moment as if the very act of remembering was painful. He paused for a moment and then sniffed before continuing.

“We were sent to Prague, three of us. Myself, Ronson and Alec Trevelyen. It was a low-key job. All of us crammed into a one-bedroomed flat running twenty-four-hour surveillance on an apartment in the building opposite. Because we didn’t want to raise suspicions by having three grown men coming in and out of a tiny flat, we drew straws. Alec won so he got to be the face of the apartment, coming and going, making friends with the neighbours, doing our shopping. Me and Sebastian were stuck in that fucking flat for three months solid.”

“And you fell in love?” Q asked quietly.

“No. Not at first. We certainly got on though. We ran rotating shifts. Eight hours each a day manning the equipment, eight hours sleeping and eight hours doing whatever. Reading, working out, talking. Me and Sebastian started keeping each other company whenever Alec was out. Talking mainly so we didn’t distract whichever one of us was supposed to be working. We hit it off so well. We finally got the intel that we wanted and returned to London. After being cooped up for so long it was inevitable that the three of us would go out on the mother of all benders. Alec slopped off early to hook up with an ex-girlfriend and me and Seb… We ended up at his place, fucking like rabbits.”

Q snorted with laughter and he immediately slapped his hand over his mouth. James was trying to tell him something serious, it wasn’t really the time to cackle. James just smiled at him though.

“We got into a routine. Every time we were both in London. We’d meet up, go to dinner, have a few drinks and then fuck. Over time the dinners and the drinks went out the window and we went straight to the fucking. Whole weekends, sometimes. We were friends with benefits. Fuck buddies. Using each other to blow off steam.”

“What happened?” Q asked. “I mean, something must have. You ended up together…”

James finished his coffee and put down the cup. He suddenly looked ten years older.

“Vesper Lynd.” He said finally.

“She was the treasury agent.” Q said. “The one that was being blackmailed.”

“I loved her.” James said. “Or I thought I did. I wanted to give it all up for her. I’d only been a double-oh for five minutes and I was ready to jack it all in.”

“What did Sebastian say?”
James leaned forward and wiped a hand over his face.

“He was happy for me. Can you believe that? He could tell I was happy and he was happy for me. He gave me his blessing… told me well done… he offered to be my best man.” James shook his head. “When it all went to shit and I eventually went back to London, he met me at the airport. He took care of me and I realised what he meant to me. He’d been there all that time, loving me, and I’d been too blind to see it. He took me home with him and I stayed there.” He coughed and Q put his own cup down so he could lay a comforting hand on his knee. James looked at it for a moment and then he placed his own hand over it.

“We had a civil ceremony six months later.”

Q felt his eyes prick with tears as he watched James struggle to contain his emotions. He let go of Q’s hand and balled his own into fists.

“We were supposed to marry.” He said finally. “We could see that the law was going to be passed and we wanted to make that final commitment but we didn’t get a chance. Seb was killed before we could.”

“And M made you leave him while he was dying.” Q said. James glanced over at him. “I heard the mission recordings. Read the transcripts.”

“What you have to understand about that is…” James said sadly, “… we’d agreed. Between us. If one of us was injured, killed, we wouldn’t let our relationship affect our mission. Seb had been fatally wounded, I could see that. Seb knew that. Me staying with him for another couple of minutes… comforting him… it wouldn’t have saved him and it might have been the difference between catching the fucker that did it and letting him get away…”

“So you left him.”

“Yes.” James said simply. “And it broke my fucking heart.” He covered his face with his hands before rubbing his eyes with his palms. “That was the day that Eve shot me. I woke up three days later in a hospital and I realised that Mi6 must have thought me dead. With Sebastian dead I thought I had nothing to go back to. I’d lost the man I loved, the woman I thought I loved… I got out of the hospital, went straight into a bar, got drunk and stayed that way.”

“Why are you telling me all this James?”

“Because I want you to understand the kind of man I was the day that we met in The National Gallery. I thought I was done but when Vauxhall was attacked I came back again. M needed me and I thought maybe it was where I was supposed to be…” He shook his head. “I was broken. Barely able to function. Failed all my tests, I found out afterwards. That bitch should never have put me back in the field…” He laughed, humourless and bitter. “And then I met you.” He said looking up at Q, so affectionately. “And you were perfect.”

Q blinked, taken aback. Of all the things he might have expected to hear, it wasn’t that.

“Talk about bad timing.” James said, shaking his head. “Every time I saw you it was like a knife twisting in me. I’d lost so much and within a couple of weeks I’d lost her too. The woman who was my mentor. Yet every time I saw you my heart ached because I wanted you so badly.”

“Why didn’t you say something?” Q asked.

“Because I was poison!” James almost shouted the words as he leapt to his feet. “Every person I’d ever really loved was dead and I thought that if I let myself love you then you’d die. I tried to
dissuade you. I was even cruel, treating you the way I did that night in Soho but every time you came back and you were loyal and forgiving and devoted to me, helping me when it could have meant your career…”

He stopped, struggling with his emotions as a tear slid down his cheek.

“And then he took you anyway.” He said, looking if his heart was breaking. “Despite me trying to push you away from me he took you and he mistreated you and he would have killed you if you hadn’t been so brave and I realised that I’d thrown it all away. All those days that we might have had together had I been brave enough to tell you how I really felt.” He dropped to his knees by the sofa and put his hands out to Q. “I should have supported you while you recovered but I was still scared I wouldn’t be able to hide how I felt about you. I’m a fucking coward and I made things worse for you with my cowardice. I’m not asking for forgiveness but please… can you maybe understand why I did what I did?”

Q moved forward until he was sitting on the edge of his chair. He reached out and took James’s hands, running his thumbs over the back of them.

“I can’t judge you for feeling the way you did but none of this was ever your fault you know.” Q said quietly. “Maybe it feels that way but it wasn’t. It was Blofeld, every step of the way. Vesper, Sebastian, the old M, what he did to me… it was all him.” James had been watching their hands but he looked up at that.

“I told you something very similar when you first woke up at the clinic.”

“I don’t remember.” Q said. “There’s a lot that I don’t remember. Will you tell me what happened after the watch exploded?”

Instead of speaking James leaned forward and softly kissed Q on the lips. Q froze for a moment. He’d made so many mistakes, he was wary of opening himself up to James. But then James kissed him again, so sweetly, nuzzling his nose up against Q’s and Q kissed him back, running his fingers through the soft bristles of James’s hair. It had been so long since Q had been kissed like that. He wasn’t sure Rich ever had. It was like James poured his soul into it. He was open, vulnerable, soft. The antithesis of the hard agent Q thought he knew. They broke it off and Q said quietly;

“Tell me how you saved me, please?”

James sat next to him again and, holding his hand again, he told him what had happened. His arrival at Blofeld’s base, the man’s taunting of him as he outlined how he had killed everyone that James had ever loved and of how he now had someone captive. James had been furious and tried to attack him but was knocked out, only to wake up in the white room, tied to the chair.

“I knew he’d hurt you.” James said quietly. “But I couldn’t give Franz the satisfaction of knowing how I felt about you so I tried to play it cool. I knew I had the watch. I just had to wait for you to come to me.”

“What if I hadn’t?” Q asked in a small voice. “Or what if I hadn’t been there at all James?”

“Then when he came over to talk to me? I would have blown us both to hell.”

James had been momentarily stunned by the explosion and when he regained consciousness both Blofeld and Q had gone. The chair he was on had been damaged and he managed to release himself. He got out just in time to see Blofeld escape in a helicopter. James was still being shot at so he fought his way out, blowing up half the base, before finding another helicopter. He used it to
search for Q. There was only one entrance to the compound so he made an educated guess as to which way Q had gone. Even so, it took James over an hour to spot Q stumbling through the desert.

“You were delirious when I found you. In so much pain.” James said hoarsely. “I thought I was losing you, I really did.”

James used the helicopter’s radio to contact the British Embassy in Morocco and through them, MI6. By the time he landed at Zagora’s airport there was a private jet waiting with a medical team on board, ready to take them on to Italy.

James stayed at the clinic for less than a day.

“You woke up just before I left. You were hysterical. Babbling about hell and burning and the people you thought you’d killed. You were crying over the pussycat, thinking you’d killed her too. I felt like such a shit. I saw her, you see, as I was taking off, so I knew she’d survived the blast but I didn’t know how much longer she’d last on her own out there…”

“Oh my God,” Q said softly, “You went all the way back for her…”

“Officially I went back to see if I could find out where Blofeld had escaped to but yes, I went back for her. For you. I knew you’d want her safe.”

Q kissed him again then. He couldn’t help it. Here was a man maintaining a cool façade of professionalism while travelling hundreds of miles to save a cat for a man he secretly admired. He was ridiculous and Q suspected he might have started falling in love with him a little bit right then.

“How did you manage to catch her?”

“Tinned tuna.” James replied. “Turns out, she loves it.”

That made Q laugh. The thought of the great James Bond hunting down a magnificent white pussycat like Pampuria armed only with a tin of tuna just tickled him. James grinned back at him.

Q was starting to get chilly so he slipped on his coat and James suggested they walk down the river’s edge for a spell before going back to the car. Q agreed and he slipped his hand into James’s again as they left the yacht and set off strolling.

“What now?” Q asked. “Where does all of this leave us?”

James was quiet for a moment before he replied.

“You know how I feel about you but if you decide I’m not what you want I’ll understand. I treated you badly and I’m not expecting forgiveness. I just wanted to be honest. You deserved that much at least. This is all in your hands. If you want this to be the end of anything between us I’ll understand. I’ll leave you alone but I’d like us to be friends if you…”

Q cut him off with a kiss.

“Or you could come home with me and spend the night.”

James slid his arms around him.

“You’d like that?”

Q gazed up at him and felt a thrill at the soft expression on James’s face. He looked so happy. So hopeful.
“I would.”
James drove them back to Q’s. It was a quiet journey, not like the previous evening’s which had felt fraught and dangerous, but relaxed and calm. Q was alternatively feeling excited and nervous and occasionally downright terrified at the idea of letting James into his life. Every time he felt a little too overwhelmed he would glance at James and smile. The man had an unerring knack of feeling Q’s look, despite apparently concentrating on the road ahead, and then glancing over to smile back. When they eventually arrived and James parked the car, he reached over to touch Q’s wrist before he could get out.

“I can say goodnight here, if you like. It doesn’t have to be tonight. I don’t want to rush you.”

Q leaned over and kissed him, pushing his tongue into his mouth. James groaned and ran his fingers up into Q’s hair, responding with a barely-restrained passion. Thinking he’d got his point across rather well, Q grinned and climbed out of the car. He walked up the path and got to the front door ahead of James. He’d barely got his key in the door when he found himself pinned up against the wall of the little porch and James was kissing him again. Q let him, melting into the hard press of James’s body as he pushed his hips in. Dear God, he was hard and Q felt a spark of need in the base of his belly flare into an inferno as he pushed back, his own cock stiffening against James’s thigh.

“Inside…” He managed to get out finally, when James had moved on to kissing his throat, “Need to… get inside.”

James stepped back and Q grabbed his hand. Pushing open the front door and he all but dragged him up the stairs. He heard James chuckle but he didn’t care. He wanted to be naked. He wanted James to strip him naked. Suck his cock. Spank him. Anything. He didn’t care as long as he got a damn good fucking. They got to his front door and barrelled into the flat. Q grabbed James’s lapels and shoved him towards the bedroom.

“Two minutes.” He said.

He ran into the kitchen where the cats were both waiting. Q unceremoniously dumped out two packets of wet food into their bowls, stroked both of their backs as they settled to eat and then washed his hands. Running his damp fingers through his hair he took a calming breath and went to the bedroom. James was sitting on the side of the bed waiting for him.

“Sorry. Had to do that or they’d be interrupting every five minutes.”

“I’m not sharing you with anyone.” James said softly as Q walked over to him. Q stood between his spread thighs and watched as James slowly started to unbutton his shirt for him. When the opening was low enough James parted it and softly placed kisses on Q’s chest while he unbuttoned the rest. Q had unbuttoned his cuffs by the time his shirt parted and James smoothed his hands up over his shoulders, pushing it off him and letting it fall to the floor. “I dreamt about this… so many times.” James raised himself up so he could kiss Q’s nipples, stroking his hands up Q’s back. It was all so gentle…

It didn’t feel right.

Wondering if Q’s sudden uneasiness was due to James treating him like china, he dropped down,
climbing onto James’s lap, straddling him as he claimed his mouth. James groaned, like he had in the car and Q decided that he wanted more of that reaction. He wanted them to fuck. He bit James’s lip and James growled as if he suddenly realised exactly what it was that Q wanted. He threw him back onto the bed and Q kicked off his shoes as James unbuttoned his jeans and dragged them off him. Q panted as James stripped off his own shirt and laid down over him. He started kissing Q again, running a questing hand down over his chest, over his ribs, over his abdomen to grope at him through his underpants and…

“NO!” Q shrieked and shoved at James, pushing him off him. Q leapt up off the bed like he’d been burned. It was wrong, all wrong. It hadn’t felt good, it had felt like James was suffocating him. Abusing him. James sat up.


“No. It’s fine.” Q cringed as he realised how stupid he sounded. “It’s not you. Oh fuck. I’m so sorry.”

Q ran for the bathroom and slammed the door shut behind him. He bolted it and sank to the floor. What the fuck was wrong with him? He head was pounding and his heart felt like it was bursting out of his chest and he thought he might be sick. He crawled over to the toilet and knelt in front of it, just in case. Oh God. How could he have been so stupid? James gave him all that shit about being in love with him but he didn’t know him. He was a mess. He had been before he’d been kidnapped and now… He trembled and fought the tears which threatened to fall.

After a few minutes he started to calm down. He spotted his pyjamas which he’d tossed onto the floor that morning. Getting up, feeling painfully stiff, he went over to them and put them on. He would go to bed. Get some sleep. There was no way James would have stayed after he made such an arse of himself so he cleaned his teeth and resolved to apologise to him first thing in the morning. He couldn’t believe he’d stuffed everything up so badly. He finished up and slowly wandered back through to the bedroom.

To his amazement James was still there. He’d found Q’s System of a Down t-shirt. Q wore it to sleep in because it was so loose on him but it fitted James perfectly. He was sitting up on the left side of the bed. Turing was laid over his ankles and Pampuria was curled up on his chest. He was cradling her, scratching her ears for her rather vigorously. If her purring was anything to go by, she was enjoying it very much.

“I think she likes me,” James said, “she must remember the tuna.”

“I thought you’d gone.” Q said in a small voice.

“I wouldn’t desert you after that.” James said gently. Q felt his emotions try to get away from him again and he pressed the back of his hand to his mouth. “Hey… come on.” James placed Pampuria on the bed and got out, walking around it to wrap Q in a hug. “It’s okay. It really is.”

“I just don’t understand,” Q whispered, “he didn’t… I mean… no-one touched me it’s not like I was abused.”

“Oh sweetheart. Of course, you were. He kidnapped you. Drugged you. He would have killed you and that kind of thing changes a man.” He kissed the side of Q’s face. “I had a feeling that tonight might have been too soon…”

“So why did you stay?” Q asked, looking up at him. James smiled and wiped a stray tear off Q’s cheek with his thumb.
“Because you asked me to. Do still want me to stay tonight? I can sleep on the couch if you want.”

Q shifted, feeling uncomfortable again and seriously, when did he ever get so antsy?

“I’d like you to stay. Will you sleep next to me though please? I’m sorry I don’t know if I can… if we can…”

James kissed him softly.

“There’s no pressure. Whatever you want. I don’t want you to think I’m just here for sex.”

“What if… what if we do try again and I change my mind again?”

“Then you change it. I’m a big boy. I’m sure I’ll live. There’s always masturbation.”

Q planted his forehead on James’s chest and groaned.

“You’re a bloody nightmare.”

“I’m well aware of that.”

They parted and James waited for Q to get back into bed. It was only a slight hesitation but Q realised that James was waiting to see what side of the bed Q wanted. Q settled down on the right so James walked around the bed and got in on the other side again. Pampuria had set up camp in the middle of the duvet but when Q laid down she went to him and immediately demanded that he snuggle with her.

“Would you look at that?” James muttered. “Looks like she has forgotten the bloody tuna…”

Q smiled but it felt thin. He suddenly felt exhausted.

“Do you mind if we keep the light on?” He asked.

“Not at all.” James smiled at him.

Q closed his eyes and willed himself to relax. Just as he was beginning to drift off he opened his eyes to see James asleep, one arm curled around Turing. He looked so peaceful. Q felt a warmth inside him when it occurred to him that James had stayed simply because he cared.

~00Q~

Q woke up slowly. He was blissfully warm and a lot of that warmth was coming from the chest he was currently resting his head on. He was lying on his right side which was confusing him. Hadn’t James been on the other side of the bed when he fell asleep? He flexed the fingers on his left hand and realised there was even more firm chest under it. Now he was a little more alert he realised James had his arms around him and his fingers were toying lightly with the hem of his pyjamas where they’d rucked up over his ribs.

“Good morning.”

Q felt James’s words rumble through his chest and he smiled, snuggling down.
“Morning.”

He raised his head a little.

“Why are you over here? I thought you were on the other side of the bed?”

“I was,” James admitted, “and I was doing my very best to be a gentleman and keep my distance but as soon as you fell asleep it was like sharing a bed with an amorous octopus…”

“Hey…”

“… and I kept moving back to give you space until my arse was hanging over the edge of the mattress and I decided to cut my losses and get out and get in this side. Ten minutes. I swear it took you just ten minutes to find me and plaster yourself up me again. I gave up at that point. Subconscious you wanted cuddles with me and I was apparently powerless to refuse.”

Q chuckled.

“I’m sorry.”

“No need to apologise.” James said affectionately. “Despite everything, I can’t remember the last time I slept so well.” He was looking down at Q so Q craned his neck to kiss him. James gave a little sound of contentment as he kissed him back. It was blissful, a slow toe-curling snog that set Q’s nerves on fire. In the middle of it all Q felt James smooth down his pyjama shirt and place his hand over it, restoring the barrier between their naked skin. That small act of consideration, of tenderness, was heady and Q felt a surge of affection for James. He also felt himself begin to harden. James shifted slightly, curling over Q to deepen their kiss and Q whimpered. He hesitated, wondering if he was about to do the right thing…

“Tom?”

“Please.” Q begged. “Just like this…” He kissed James again and reached under the covers to take James’s hand from where it rested on his ribs and slid it down into his pyjamas. James found his erection and grasped it lightly.

“Oh darling…”

Q kept a hold on James’s wrist and began to rock his hips, pushing up into his fist. He buried his face into James’s neck and shuddered. James seemed to realise that it was all Q wanted. He didn’t want to be exposed or watched, he just wanted pleasure. James moved again until he could kiss Q’s temple, breathing into his hair as he started to stroke him. He shivered, sparks of pleasure consuming him. He still had his hand over James’s as he brought him closer and close to orgasm, feeling the twist of his wrist on every stroke.

“I’m going to come.” He whispered, suddenly so hot he was sweating. James sped up his hand and Q scrambled to shove down the duvet and drag his pyjama top up over his chest, kicking out as he almost… James slowed his stroking right at the point of orgasm and Q jerked. “Oh no oh please James please now please please…” James chuckled and took pity on him and with three firm, twisting strokes over the sensitive head of Q’s cock, he was coming, wailing and jerking as his come spattered up over his chest. James stroked him through it and kissed him again. When Q finally came down from his high, James cupped his balls as he pushed up on one elbow to look at him.

“You are so beautiful.”

Q laughed, running a hand through his hair. Now he’d come it was like something inside of him had
loosened. James was admiring his almost-naked body and he was okay with it. He really was. As he watched, James leaned over him and kissed his exposed chest.

“Let me get you cleaned up.”

He rolled out of bed and Q heard him go to the bathroom. He started talking and Q guessed he’d been intercepted by one or both of the cats. A moment later he headed to the kitchen, no doubt to give them their breakfast. When he went back to the bathroom Q made a sudden decision and stripped off his pyjamas so that when James came back into the room he was lying on the bed naked, waiting for him. James’s face was a picture when he walked in and saw him. He had a towel and a damp washcloth in his hands which fell to his sides as he stood open-mouthed.

“Thomas…”

He seemed paralysed for a second before walking to the bed and sitting down beside Q. He was still just dressed in Q’s t-shirt and his underpants and Q could plainly see the effect his nudity was having on him. James started to wipe him down with the cloth. It was warm and felt heavenly. As he worked Q reached out and lightly gripped him through his clothing. He faltered.

“Tom… Oh.”

“Will you make love to me now?” Q asked.

“If you change your mind, will you judge me for having a wank?” James countered.

Q burst out laughing.

“Not if you understand that still might be a possibility…”

James threw the cloth and the towel on the floor and then rested on one hand on the bed, leaning over Q.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this when you have your perfect, delicate hand on my cock, but we don’t have to…” Q gave him a firm stroke and laughed at the way his eyes rolled up into his head. “Oh, you little minx. I’m trying to be a gentleman here…”

“Well stop it.” Q said playfully.
Chapter 18

James sat up and stripped off his t-shirt. His muscles bunched and jumped as he stood up. As Q watched he slowly peeled off his underpants. Jesus, but he was big. Q knew he was, he’d been on the receiving end of it before after all but seeing it like that, fully erect in the morning sunlight, was a sight to behold. James knelt on the side of the bed and traced his thumb over Q’s hip.

“We do this slowly.” He said, still looking over Q’s body in awe. “If I do anything that you don’t like tell me. Stop me if you need me to… Everything we do is going to be for you darling. I don’t want you feeling pressured into doing anything that you think I might want.” Q nodded, starting to feel a little nervous again. James smiled at him. “I just feel like the luckiest man in the world that you want me like this.” He stroked his fingers up over Q’s body to gently caress his cheek. “Do you have lube? Condoms?” Q nodded again and pointed toward to the top drawer of the bedside cabinet. James opened it and found what he wanted. He put them on the bed beside them and settled down, lying halfway down the bed. He watched Q’s face intently as he kissed his stomach. Q flinched when James’s breath tickled him so James used his hand to steady his hip so he could do it again with a little more pressure. He hadn’t shaved so every kiss was accompanied by a light scratch of scruff which sent delicious shivers coursing through Q’s body. Despite having come not ten minutes earlier he felt his cock try to harden again. He felt himself relax as James slowly kissed every inch of his belly. By the time James licked over the head of his cock he was fully hard again. It twitched and James smiled up at Q.

“Is this okay?” Q nodded, his mouth dry as James gripped him lightly before giving him a firmer lick. “I love your taste.” He said before taking Q fully into his mouth. Q moaned and curled over on his side so he could wrap his hands around James’s head.

“Oh God. Oh yes, just like that…”

His hip twitched and James held him steady before taking him down to the root. Q whimpered at the sensation of James’s throat spasming around the tip before he pulled back to suck him again. James slipped one of his hands between Q’s thighs and Q instinctively parted his legs to enable James to rub the tip of one finger over his arse, all the while his tongue did the same wicked things to Q’s cock.

Q panted when James moved away from him and returned a moment later, finger slick with cool lube. The finger circled his arse for a moment and then slipped inside. Q moaned, opening his legs further and rested his foot on James’s hip to help keep them that way. He reached down and gripped his own arse cheek, opening himself further. He’d been so nervous, so scared of freaking out again but now James was touching him, there was no fear only desire and pleasure. Q’s hips spasmed and he almost came when James probed deeper and found his prostate. James pulled back, letting Q’s cock fall from his mouth.

“Oh, now sweetheart,” James murmured against Q’s belly, “Don’t come yet. Please don’t come yet…”
Q trembled at the cool air on his cock after James’s warm mouth. James withdrew his finger for a
moment and then it returned, newly slicked, with another. Q stretched out and bore down on the
new intrusion making it easy for James to slip them inside. His legs fell open as he rolled onto his
back and stretched out, panting at the delicious sensation of James fucking him with his fingers.
Every second or third stroke James would twist his fingers, rubbing firmly over his prostate and
sending shivers of delight up through him. Q’s cock started to drool and as he watched James leant
over lick at the wet spot on Q’s belly.

“Please James, I want your cock inside me, please.”

“So impatient.” James laughed. “You’ll have it in good time. I want to make sure I’m not going to
hurt you first…”

Q wanted to beg, tell James it wouldn’t be the first time he’d just shoved the bloody thing in there,
but then the two fingers became three and he almost forgot how to speak. Jesus suffering fuck, the
man was talented; stretching, massaging opening Q until he was boneless with pleasure. Eventually,
when Q had thought he couldn’t take any more a dozen times over, James knelt up. He withdrew
his fingers and picked up a condom. He rolled it on and slicked himself with yet more lube before
grabbing Q’s right leg, bringing it over so Q was lying on his side again. Shuffling forward on his
knees, James grabbed his cock and touched the tip of it up against Q’s loosened hole.

“Ready?”

Q nodded and whined, making James chuckle. Q was about to give James a snarky retort but then
he shifted his hips and pushed inside. Q willed himself to relax as he was cleaved open. He started
to pant but unlike the first time, all those months ago in The Soho Hotel, it was from the pure
pleasure of being stretched. There was no pain only an exquisite sense of fullness. Once James had
firmly lodged the head he lifted up Q’s leg and hooked his knee over his elbow. It shifted Q’s
hips just enough for James’s cock to press directly onto his prostate.

“Nnnnggghhh!”

Words were beyond Q and he’d never before heard himself utter the guttural sound that came out of
him as James began to fuck him. He shivered, clutching at his pillow as James tightened his grip and
pushed into him, over and over, harder and harder until his hips were making Q’s buttocks tremble
with every slap of their bodies meeting. James pressed his hand low on Q’s belly and he wondered
if James could feel the movement his cock inside him. He shivered as the thought seemed to increase
his arousal; bringing him closer and closer to orgasm. His limbs started to flail as he tried to push
back, tried to get more of the wonderful jolts of pleasure. James chuckled and repositioned himself,
lying down and spooning up behind Q. He slid one hand under him and around his chest to press
him into James’s body, with the other he gently cupped Q’s jaw, turning his head so they could kiss
messily in time with his thrusting hips.

That was it. Game over. If there was one thing Q adored it was being restrained. With Rich it had
always come with a measure of pain but with James… he could feel the man’s power and desire
without him Q hurting at all. He jerked and James tightened his grip as Q started to come, his cock
spewing over his belly and the sheets below him. James swore and his hips jerked.

“Oh, you little shit!” He panted, dropping his head to kiss the back of Q’s shoulder. His hips started
a slow grind. “You bastard…” He huffed out a quiet laugh.

Q looked over his shoulder in surprise.

“Problems, Commander?”
“You got me.” James replied, still laughing. “I thought I was going great and then you came and you dragged me with you, you monkey.” Q eyes widened as he realised what he meant. His coming had sent James over the edge into his own orgasm. He felt a surge of affection for James as he realised how in tune their lovemaking had been. How many times had Rich wanked off over Q after a boring, uncomfortable fuck? He hated that he was thinking about his ex while lying in James’s arms but the comparison between them was like night and day. He reached up and wound his fingers up into James’s hair, dragging him onto another kiss, allowing himself to wallow in his affection, banishing all thoughts of the man. After a long moment spent snogging, James slipped out of him and quickly dealt with the condom before settling again, drawing Q into an embrace. “I assure you, I usually last much longer.”

Q smiled.

“I’m not sure I could have coped with much more…”

“Are you okay? Did I hurt you?”

“You almost gave me an aneurysm. I’m sure orgasms that intense should be illegal…”

“I couldn’t believe it.” James said as Q turned over so he could wriggle down into his arms. “Do you know how rare it is to have a lover come like that the first time?”

Q smiled at James’s mistake. It wasn’t their first time. Their first time had been in a hotel room in Soho but that was all in the past. Done. Q had been a different person back then. He realised that now. James reached down, running his thumb through one of the splashes of come on his hip and bringing it to his mouth. He sighed.

“Fuck. How do you taste so good?”

“A diet of tea and Pickled Onion Monster Munch.” Q joked.

James laughed and kissed him.

“Is that a hint? Okay, I propose you get your perfectly formed, sexy little arse into the bathroom to get cleaned up while I make you a cup of tea. I’m not feeding you those awful snack things though. I shall want to kiss you again at some point today.”

“You really do know a way to a man’s heart, don’t you?”

“I certainly hope so.”

Giving him one final kiss James rolled out of bed and Q managed to get his glasses on before he left the room. Jesus. Talk about perfectly formed arses… He climbed out himself and staggered to the bathroom. His legs felt like jelly, his arse was aching and he was pretty sure he had half a bottle’s worth of lube sliding down his thighs. After a moment’s debate, he decided to jump into the shower.

He’d was just finishing up when he heard his doorbell ringing madly. He sluiced off the last few suds and then twisted off the faucet and grabbed a towel as he heard the front door to the flat open followed by James’s footsteps thundering down the stairs.

“What the…?” Q muttered, wrapping the towel around his waist as he put his glasses on. Stepping out into the hallway he saw that the door monitor screen had been opened and…

“Oh fuck!”
It was Rich on the screen. He started ringing the doorbell again as Q started running down the stairs after James. He heard the front door to the building open.

“Can I help you?” He heard James say, his voice as cool as ice.

“Where the fuck is he?”

“To whom are you referring?”

“That little cunt Tom! Tell him to get his arse out here and… urk!”

Q heard a scrabbling noise and a moment later he rounded the last landing and descended the last seven stairs to see James pinning Rich to the wall of the little porch. Q didn’t know whether to laugh or be horrified. James was still naked, stark bollock naked, and he had his ex suspended six inches off the ground by a hand twisted in his collar. Even so, he was still taller than him as he loomed over him, coolly observing him like a scientist about to dissect a frog.

“I’m not sure I appreciate you calling my friend a cunt.”

Rich noticed Q and, obviously not realising the danger he was in, started mouthing off at him.

“You! You bastard! You owe me! Get this fucking idiot off me and… urk!”

Q wasn’t quite sure what James just did but it certainly got Rich’s attention. He goggled at James until he allowed him to breathe again.

“I don’t like your tone.” He said quietly, an icy streak of malice in his voice. “I’m not sure I like you either. Do you know, Mr Jones, of 37 Robinson Road, Tooting, what happens to people who I don’t like? They tend to learn very quickly not to come near either me or the people I care about.” He twisted his grip and leaned in, snarling; “And I happen to care about Thomas very much.”

Rich kicked out and tried to struggle but James held him firm.

“You… can’t… threaten… me…” He choked out.


James lifted him up then and threw him off the porch. Rich stumbled and fell into the hedge that ran up the side of the pathway. He jumped up, his face beetroot red.

“This isn’t over!” He shouted defiantly. James immediately stalked down the steps straight for him, making him trip over his own feet and promptly fall into the hedge again.

“If you had any sense you’d fuck off now.” James said pleasantly.

He stood in the middle of the path with his hands on his hips, like he was Superman or something, until Rich left. He then turned back to Q.

“Seriously. What did you ever see in that guy?”

Q shrugged.

“He’s got a big cock?”

James grinned and paused as he came into the hallway to place a soft kiss on the side of Q’s neck.
“Why Quartermaster, you have a type!”

Q slapped his bare bum.

“Get inside before you catch your death.” He grumbled. “I can’t believe you just stood out in the garden naked.”

“The human body is a wonderful thing.” James quipped as he started to climb the stairs. “One should never be ashamed of it.”

They got to the second level to see that Eve had opened her front door.

“What the actual hell?” She sputtered as she saw the state of them. “James!”

“Miss Moneypenny.” James responded, as cool as a cucumber as he carried on walking. Q grinned at her and darted over to kiss her cheek as he passed.

“All is forgiven Eve. You were right. Me and James had a really good chat last night. Thanks. I’ll tell you all about it later” Q added, not pausing as he followed James up the next flight of stairs. “So anyway,” he said to James, “it’s all very well being proud of one’s body but could you please avoid being so proud of it in the front garden in future?”

“If you wish. I only went down naked because I didn’t want to miss the chance to warn the odious little berk off you again.”

Q stopped.

“What do you mean again?”

James grinned at him.

“Let’s just say, it might have been better for all concerned if he’d just stayed in the bin I dumped him in the first time.”

~00Q~

Q walked down the road enjoying the warm summer air. He’d managed to finish at a decent time and James was home off mission. He’d told Q he had plans for them later.

They’d been together for several months and it was going very well. Better than either of them could have hoped for if truth be known. There had been a few hitches and problems (Q finding out that James had caught Rich lying in wait for Q that night and beaten the hell out of him for one) but they had fallen into a routine that was surprisingly comfortable and easy for both of them. Q had continued his recovery slowly and steadily and James had a large part in that. He’d been a revelation if Q was honest with himself, more affectionate, loyal and appreciative of Q than he might ever have imagined.

They were so good together.

He arrived at his front gate and was surprised to hear the whirr of an electric hedge-trimmer. He was even more surprised to see James in his front garden using it. There were six large bags of garden waste by the bins, assorted tools strewn about. The little section of lawn had been cleared of leaves
and the four ornamental flower beds which had been snarled and overgrown had been tidied and dug over. James was stripped to the waist and filthy in a scruffy old pair of jeans and combat boots. Over his shoulder Q could see the door to the house was open and, beyond that, the door to the downstairs flat stood ajar.

“James? What are you doing?”

James noticed him and shut off the hedge-trimmer.

“Well, I thought that if I could get this hedge under control I could dig out the little strip of flower bed by the path and maybe plant some spring bulbs so when the rest of the garden is looking gloomy it’ll brighten up…”

“No, you berk,” Q said with a smile, “This isn’t my garden you know. It didn’t come with my flat so technically it’s Mi6’s responsibility. They own the building.”

“That’s not strictly true.” James said. “The garden is the responsibility of the tenant of the ground floor flat and as I’ve just moved in…” He trailed off, a grin which indicated he was feeling very proud of himself plastered across his face.

“I’m sorry? What? You live in Chelsea…”

James put down the hedge-trimmer and walked up to Q to kiss him.

“Not anymore.” James said. “This place was available and I can be in London for such a short time between missions I didn’t want to waste time travelling back and forth to see you.”

“But,” Q started, feeling a little uneasy, “what if it doesn’t work out between us? What if we break up and you’re living here and…”

“Do you want to break up with me?” James asked, slipping his hands around Q’s waist.

“No, but…”

“You have my word,” James said, “if it ever came to that… I’d leave. Move out. I wouldn’t want to put you through anything like the things that twat Rich did. You deserve so much more than that.”

Q gazed up at James. His man whose thoughts, even when faced with the possibility of losing Q, immediately went to protecting him. Without thinking he said;

“I love you.”

James had been looking a little worried but at Q’s words his face broke into the sunniest smile and Q wondered why it had taken him so long to tell James that. James kissed Q, drawing him in tight, before hugging him and burying his face into the side of Q’s neck.

“I love you too darling.”

They stood there for a moment and then Q asked;

“So, what are we doing tonight?”

James pulled back.

“My housewarming party!” He announced.
Q grinned.

“An actual housewarming party or us ‘christening’ every surface in your new flat?” Q waggled his eyebrows.

For a moment James actually looked disappointed, as if the thought of shagging Q in every imaginable way all evening hadn’t occurred to him but then he smiled.

“Well we have people coming over so sadly it will have to actually be a housewarming party tonight.” James said. His smile became a grin as he reached down and grabbed Q’s buttocks, massaging them lightly. “Although… now you mention it, I do happen to have a rather nice Chesterfield sofa that has a lovely wide padded back that is just wonderful for being bent over.”

He kissed Q again, and Q moaned as his mouth was breached by James’s hard, probing tongue.

“Have we got enough time?” He asked, suddenly breathless with desire.

“All the time in the world.” James said softly before taking Q’s hand and leading him inside.

~fin~

Chapter End Notes

If you’re still here, thank you so much for reading. I feel almost sad to be posting this as I’ve been working on this fic in one way or another for almost two years and I can’t believe it’s finally over!

I’m continually blown away by the comments and kudos it’s received and it’s meant so much to me. Thank you for making all the long hours spent writing worthwhile. xx

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