Mono no aware

by The_Readers_Muse

Summary

"Bond...you need to stand me up- because I-I can't stand up…"

Notes

Disclaimer: I don't own "James Bond" or any of its characters, wishful thinking aside.

Authors Note #1: This is a OOQ fic, inspired by the following prompt: "You need to stand me up- because I can't stand up."

Warnings: canon appropriate violence, injury, drama, angst, trapped, disaster, mild flirting, eventual romance, look at these clueless idiots.

See the end of the work for more notes.

"Bond...you need to stand me up- because I- I can't stand up…"

It came out raspy and half-broken, but it was still laced with enough prim irritation that he knew it couldn't be anyone else but Q.

"Don't move," he responded, grunting as he curled his shoulder. Feeling a chunk of dry-wall slide down his back and slump to the floor in pieces. Testing himself slowly as he levered himself off the
floor. Mildly surprised to find that nothing seemed to be broken.

"Obviously," Q muttered, coughing like an after thought from somewhere in front of him. Impossible to tell exactly where in the dark.

He spat off to the side, trying to clear his mouth of grit and pulverized rubble. Feeling it rasp like loose asphalt on his tongue. Squinting into the dark until he caught the gleam of Q's glasses ahead of him.

It wasn't until his hand curled around the crackled frames, completely removed from their owner, that fear thickened in his throat. Explosions he could take. Possible terrorism. Injury. Discomfort. Ruined clothes. But Q? Caught in the middle of it?

Even the thought seared like heartburn.

"Do take your time, 007," Q remarked, sarcastic and sharp but with a clear tremor underneath that tightened something unfamiliar in his chest. "I'm sure we have the liberty of time."

"Steady on," he muttered, crawling on his belly as the caved-in ceiling moaned its displeasure. "I can't see a bloody thing."

Somewhere beyond their tomb of brick and plaster, the sound of someone screaming warbled through the dust. Filling the air with a half-dozen uncomplimentary echoes until a different voice answered. Then another. Sounding off in a distinctly military fashion that made sense considering the section of MI6 they'd been in when everything had gone tit up.

They weren't the only ones.

Thank god.

"Then you're in good company," Q answered, once the voices drifted off. "It appears I've lost my glasses. I'm afraid I'm quite useless without them. And I think my mobile is quite done for. If the shards in my pocket are anything to go by."

He grinned, feeling the tug of more than a few cuts and scrapes as he reached a pile of rubble. Appreciative even now that his Quartermaster was so well sorted. Most of the man's minions wouldn't been so graceful under pressure, of that much he was certain. He scanned the space, eyes slowly adjusting as the shadows shifted near the top of the pile.

There you are.

"Say something nice to me and maybe I'll fix that for you," he told him, careful to keep the glasses away from the worst of the rubble as he climbed. Clenching them in his teeth as the shadow shifted - coughed - and slowly took shape.

There was a pause, then-

"I'm glad you're not dead," Q replied dryly.

His eyebrow rose in spite of himself.

"Q, has anyone told you your flattery skills need a bit of work?" he murmured, more to fill the silence than anything as he clambered through broken bricks and metal rebar. Hissing when a sharp corner sliced across his knee. Causing the shadow to flinch.
"Once or twice. My last partner did happen to mention my social niceties were clinical, at best, before she took the last of her things," Q responded glibly. As if he were commenting about the weather, not injured and freely giving up more personal information in a ten-minute span than he'd offered in all the years he'd known him.

He didn't reply. He didn't have the words. But mostly because a second later his hand firmed around the man's ankle. Squeezing affirmingly as a punctured sound wheezed from Q's lips. Smelling like blood and the Earl Grey he'd been sipping as the elevator door dinged open. He'd only had a second when the blast had gone off, enough to shove Q out the doors and into the shelter of the hall. And good thing too, considering the elevator shaft was completely gone. A gaping hole with a torn tension wires and electrics he could still hear sparking.

He made an assessment of Q's condition with quick, brutal efficiency.

Head wound - probable concussion.

Broken ribs.

Possible punctured lung.

He couldn't see the Quartermaster's other leg.

It was still caught under the rubble.

Christ.

"Bond?"

"I'm here."

He forced his face back to his usual professional smirk. Buffing the dirty lens of the man's glasses best he could before slipping them on Q's face. Using the closeness to assess the man's condition.

"Where are you hurt?" he asked. Feeling his way down his lower half as Q gradually took shape. A mess of blood and premature grey-white hair plastered thick with dust.

"Do save me from your poking and prodding," Q told him, fussing with the glasses before popping his jaw. Dripping red down the curve of his chin in a pretty arc. "It's my leg."

He didn't correct him.

The less the boy panicked, the more chance he had of getting out of this.

Maybe Q even knew.

Maybe they both wanted to play pretend, just for a little while.

He handed him his mobile, turning his attention to the pile of rocks as he started shifting what he could. He needed to see if Q could be moved or if-

"No signal," Q rasped, back firming against the wall. Voice far less even this time around. "Hold on...let me check if an SMS will go through. If you can find my bag...I- I might have a signal booster."

The bag had been on Q's right shoulder. Heavy. Causing him to lean to port a fraction of a degree. He'd thought it endearing. Soaking in the man's chatter about a new Rugar he was retro-fitting for
He felt off to the side. Fingers coasting through the rubble. The natural reaction would be to grab hold of whatever was in reach. Knowing Q, it was likely he hadn't abandoned his bag, he would have clung to it even tighter.

*There!*

He dragged it into his lap, ignoring Q's fluttering hands - insistent he hand it over - and rummaged through it himself. Handing the tech over as Q made a pleased sound and got to work. Connecting wires and lighting up the gloom with the screen. It was enough to give him a place to start on the debris pinning his leg. Soon tossing chunks of it behind him as the echoes reverberated in the close space. Almost deafeningly loud.

He paused when he shifted a particular large piece, catching sight of the bloodied tan of Q's trousers. *Damn.*

"How bad?" Q gritted, feeling the change of pressure. Hands pale around the mobile.

"If you can feel it, that's a good sign," he pointed out, shucking his suit coat and folding it quickly. Meaning it as he inspected the worst of it. It was compound break with bone glinting up. But it looked clean. One fracture, maybe two. "You'll live. But you won't be happy about it for a while. I need to tie this around the wound to brace it. It's going to hurt. Do you understand?"

Q nodded tightly. Steeling himself. Tensing up in all the ways that would only make it worse in the long run. But, as the Americans would say, this wasn't his first rodeo.

He used the sharp end of a metal beam to slice through the strap of Q's bag. Grabbing the shoulder pad and handing it to him. Finding a splintered piece of plywood that would act as the brace when he tied the bandage.

"Put this between your teeth. Trust me, it's better than cracking a molar."

The corner of Q's lip tugged upwards. Disturbing a layer of dried blood and grime. Rueful and tired, but still Q.

"You know this from experience, I suppose?" the boy murmured. Like he hadn't already snooped through his files.

"Yes."

But it hadn't been in the MI6.

He waited, counting down internally. Eying the tension in the man's muscles.

"Any luck getting a signal?" he asked, aiming to distract as Q looked to the side. Typing something and squinting down his nose in an effort to see through the broken lens.

He judged the moment perfectly. Waiting for the tension to slacken in Q's muscles before-

Q's yell of pain echoed as he tied the sleeves tight around his leg. Keeping pressure on it as he fought to squirm. Pointedly not looking at his face as Q bit down on his own fist. Muffling the rest before slumping back against the wall, pale and shaking.

"Bastard," Q rasped hoarsely, hand fluttering down to rest on the broken brick. Wincing and breathing hard as he tried to get comfortable. "Thank you."
"My pleasure," he returned, tucking the extra fabric more securely around the wound. "But I wasn't joking about that signal, got anything?"

Q's nod filtered dust through the air. Wafting off his curls as he leaned forward. The screen of the mobile almost blinding as it switched back on.

"Yes. Enough for a text at least. I-"

"Moneypenny," he interrupted, knowing it was the right choice as he listened intently for any noise on the outside. Testing the theory as he tapped a bit of metal pipe against the side of the cement wall that had collapsed.

\textit{S.O.S. S.O.S. S.O.S.}

But no one answered.

Moneypenny it was.

Silence reigned as Q typed, letting go of a relieved sound when it finally went through. Carefully turning off the screen to preserve power before looking up at him. Squinting through the gloom.

"How long do you think?"

He let the question rest for a moment as he hacked up a lungful of dust. Mentally mapping out the perimeter of the hollowed space they'd been entombed in. It looked like they'd dropped a level, maybe two. Everything considered, it could have been worse.

"Till she replies or someone finds us?" he asked.

Q huffed again. Annoyed.

"Both, actually."

He chewed on a lie, but ultimately abandoned it.

"Hard to say. It depends on how well the rest of the building faired. If I'm any judge I think it was localized. Whatever happened, happened in this section of MI6."

"An attack?" Q questioned, frowning.

"Likely," he answered, stretching carefully as his entire right side ached like it was a single bloody bruise. Which meant it probably was. "Though R & D has been known to cock things up occasionally."

Q watched him stoop around – unable to straighten fully. Looking mildly amused despite the circumstances.

"Plans?"

"Always," he shot back with a smirk. Eying the way the void they were trapped in was sloped down, like they were on an incline, before- "None of them important however. And you? Dinner date, perhaps?"

Q coughed. It could have been a laugh. But he wasn't willing to bet on it. While Q held his own in their debates, he rarely expressed humor so freely. He could count on one hand the amount of times he'd heard Q laugh, and only once had it'd been because of him.
He wasn't sure why that bothered him, but it did.

"No. No plans. I prefer a quiet evening."

He believed that. But it wasn't satisfying.

"Go to dinner with me then, when this is all over," he offered. Not realizing how much he liked the idea until it was out in the open.

"No," Q returned crisply, but not without his particular brand of warmth.

"Why?" he questioned, not offended but growingly interested. Watching Q carefully from the short distance as the boy's hands played fitfully with the mobile in his lap. Looking painfully small in the wreckage.

The snort that followed was almost rude.

"Shall I read you the list," Q murmured, gently mocking. Head cocking to the side as he squinted at him. Letting the moment drag before- "I'm not letting you in."

Smart decision, really.

The only problem was- he hated it.

Wanting to destroy what it meant personally.

With his bare hands, if at all possible.

"I like a challenge," he answered casually. Like he wasn't already reviewing all their interactions in his mind's eye. Parsing what the right angle would be to approach such a thing.

But Q just shook his head. Looking at him like he was a particularly irritating puppy that'd just pissed on the floor rather than the training pad.

"You don't get it, do you?" Q mused, shoulders shuddering through a rattling cough. It tugged on his memory – reminding him of sharded throb of broken ribs. "That someone really might not be interested."

He smiled into the dark before crawling back towards him.

It was an expression Q must have seen considering the Quartermaster shook his head.

"Narcissist."

He'd certainly been called worse.

"Naturally," he bantered back. Hushing in as close as he could without upsetting the pile of debris. A muscle in his cheek ticcing upwards at the pallor of the boy's skin. Worry only ramping up when Q didn't reply right away. Eyes in danger of easing close. Like he was about to fall asleep or worse.

"...And you are interested," he added, desperate to keep him conscious as he patted Q's cheek. Fixing him with a flirtatious look that earned him a right, solid glare.

Q huffed.

"Of course," the Quartermaster admitted, like he was particularly dense. Smiling slightly as the shock
actually made it all the way to his face this time. Admittedly caught off guard. "But not in the way you think."

Something in the back of his mind screamed alarm bells. Warning him to stop. That Q was injured and he was taking advantage. But mostly because of the way something deep in the heart of him was warming to it. Murmuring, yes, this, with worrying voracity.

*When exactly had all this happened?*

"Hmmm? Why stop there," he prompted, checking the makeshift bandage with careful fingers. Not batting an eye when they came back smudged with red. "I could do with a distraction. Besides, I think we have the time."

He wiped his hands clean on his pant legs when Q wasn't looking.

For a long moment he didn't think Q was going to answer. Able to see shock setting in despite his best efforts. Hating the way Q seemed to be collapsing in on himself, slumping against the wall as his head wobbled. Heavy.

"I-...I don't want your pieces," Q murmured weakly, letting a hand curl out, palm up, before spreading his fingers. Filtering the air with inconvenient truths he wasn't ready to hear. "Fragments. That's what you give everyone else. You keep the rest. That's why it never lasts. Why you don't want it to last. Because it isn't real. It isn't a risk if it isn't all of you. And that's what I want..."

There were reasons why that much was true, and a lot of them were good ones. But for some reason he didn't voice them. Too busy being stunned into a cleaved sort of quietness that ran the risk of consuming both of them.

He thought about it as dust filtered down. Hearing something shift above them. Metallic and pitched like grating pipes. It would be easy to laugh it off, or find something to distract him. But he didn't. He fought the familiar urge to push the feelings away, and instead cautiously let them in. He told himself it was just self-preservation. That Q was out of his head, injured, concussed, maybe even bleeding internally. But the truth was, he had a feeling no amount of dust would be able to bury the words.

He wasn't sure who was more surprised when he found himself answering.

"...And if I tried?"

Q smiled at him in that way he had. Somehow managing to sound young and old all at once.

"Isn't that all it is, in the end? Trying?"

Maybe.

He wouldn't know what a healthy, normal relationship was, even if someone held a gun to his head. Let alone being in one. He chewed on the inside of his cheek. Remembering the last time he'd been here, poised between jumping in and walking away. He'd always wanted what he couldn't have. It was a lesson he thought he'd learned—twice over. And yet here he was, ready for a new scar. A new regret. A new-

The next time he looked up, Q was breathing thinly, head lolling. Hanging down like a weakening flag.

"Q? Q?! Hey, stay awake! Q!"

The moment he realized he couldn't wake him—ten minutes before the mobile lit up, with
Moneypenny texting that rescue was on its way - was one of the worst moments of his entire life.

Which was saying something, frankly. Considering he'd had a few.

But, as it turned out, he and Q did end up having dinner. After a fashion. Slurping at red jello and picking at bad sandwiches as Q recovered in hospital. Dropping in every day to bully him into eating more and goading him during physio. Becoming a permanent fixture precisely wherever Q happened to be.

It took a while, but eventually Q let him fuss over him. Allowing him to bring his tech and tea from the shop down the street. Each breath shocking, gentle and new as he got used to saying 'we' instead of 'I'. And slowly – very slowly - months after Q was back to work and slowly weaning himself off needing the cane, Q took him home. Happy to admit, as his clothes slowly took over half the closet, that in this, the Quartermaster had been proven wrong.

Giving Q everything, had been surprisingly effortless.

And while he was still waiting for the other shoe to drop, the realization that he didn't want to be anywhere else – possibly forever - was pretty damn warming.

End Notes

Reference:

- Mono no aware: "the sensitivity to ephemera". The awareness of impermanence, or transience of things.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!