Obsession and Other Forms of Primal Therapy
by Sheila Snow

Summary

Everyone has a weakness. Everyone has some sort of obsession. Unfortunately for James Bond, Raoul Silva is rather well versed in both.

Notes

This is canon divergent after that scene in Skyfall. Relatively dark times ahead, folks.

Further warning that this is unbeta'ed, since I no longer have an active beta reader. My Muse awoke after a four-year dry spell and insisted I write this. Go figure. I blame it on the fact that I finally got around to watching the Craig Bond movies and was so amazed that they actually gave the man some weaknesses as well as strengths.

UPDATE 8/19/18: This series now has a song mix, and it's bloody awesome! Many, many thanks to Vampalaurels for the mix (as well as the much appreciated assistance with my Spanish dialogue, lol!) Check it out here and leave the mixer some love.
Chapter 1

Everyone should have an obsession.

Let the psychiatrists and their boring mumbo-jumbo tell you obsession was a bad thing, but Raoul Silva knew better. Having an obsession prevented your life from becoming unbearably dull. It forced you to take chances, to take risks, to take what you wanted no matter what the odds. While you had an obsession, you were never able to fall into the deadly, merciless traps of boredom and ennui. There was absolutely nothing superfluous about an obsession, and the more dangerous the obsession, the more Raoul loved it — the more he cradled it close to his chest like a precious thing.

And there was never a more dangerous obsession than the man tied to the chair in front of him.

Raoul was a very patient man, but it had taken almost too long for him to twist events to his purposes. Entirely too long, but then James Bond was a surprisingly slippery character, as dearest M would say.

Nevertheless, Raoul was sure this prize would be worth the wait.

As they discussed M, and later Bond’s dismal MI6 test scores, Raoul was reluctantly impressed by the agent’s relative composure. Oh, everyone had tells, if you knew where to look for them. And after spending so much time intimately studying Bond’s tells, Raoul definitely knew where to look for them.

However, Raoul found himself having to viciously control his own reactions -- his own tells. He didn’t want the initial volley in their game to be over too soon, and he almost wished he’d proceeded with his initial plan to have this meeting videotaped, just so he could savor Bond’s reactions afterwards.

But alas, something digitized was something that could be potentially stolen, as Raoul knew very well from his own line of work, and he was far too possessive to share this with anyone else. Besides, there would be plenty of other opportunities to watch this particular obsession unravel.

As for now, he could barely contain his own enthusiasm. Would Bond take the bait? Would he reply as Raoul suspected he would? Would he fall into the trap like a good little rat?

He purposely didn’t look up as he continued his sensual exploration of Bond’s chest and face, saying, “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.” There — the slightest tensing of muscles beneath his roving fingers. “How you’re trying to remember your training now. What’s the regulation to cover this?” Raoul paused, the anticipation building almost unbearably while he waited for Bond’s response. “Well, first time for everything. Yes?”

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

Yes!

Raoul found he couldn’t contain his delighted response and had to spin away from Bond to regain his composure. His little rat was so perfect. So utterly, completely perfect. They were going to make such a wonderful team, once Raoul had melded him — once he had changed his nature forever.

However, this next exchange could be delicate, and again, Raoul found he didn’t want to share it
with anyone else. He pointed a finger at the guards standing against the back wall and said brightly, “Go, go, you’re not needed here anymore.” When they seemed to hesitate, he narrowed his eyes and thrust his chin toward the door. “I said, ‘go’, you pesky things. I’m sure you know what happens when I am sufficiently displeased.”

The guards departed then in suitable haste, and Raoul turned his focus back to Bond in time to see one of his minuscule tells. Merely the slightest expansion of his nostrils, just enough to inform Raoul of an attempt to regulate breathing. Good. Good. Bond suspected there was something coming he would not like, but he had no idea what that might be. This was getting better and better.

He sat down in the chair facing Bond and once again placed his hands on the other man’s thighs. He smiled. “Now, where were we? Oh, yes, you were implying that this would not be your first time, but we both know you’re bluffing, don’t we?” Raoul cocked his head and smiled again, “Well, at least, you think you’re bluffing, which makes it even more delicious now, doesn’t it?”

A slight narrowing of the eyes and another subtle expansion of the nostrils, and Bond said sharply, “What are you talking about? You were a field agent. You know there is very little chance the job won’t force you into . . . situations such as this.”

Raoul pulled back in mock indignity and said, “Really, James, I am wounded, horribly so. I must insist that I am, in fact, a one-of-a-kind ‘situation’ as you say, but that’s neither here, nor there.” He waved a hand negligently and then leaned in close to Bond’s face. “I have been watching your career closely. Very, very closely. You really don’t think the gas explosion was the first time I’ve hacked into MI6, do you?”

Noting the ever so slight widening of Bond’s eyes, Raoul smiled again. “Tsk, tsk, you did, didn’t you? I am crushed you think so little of my capabilities, really, I am.”

“It’s not your capabilities I’m doubting. It’s your motivation.”

Raoul laughed. “My, you really do think so little of your own worth, don’t you? Mummy really has been bad to treat you so poorly.”

“This has nothing to do with M,” Bond replied, glaring.

“I agree, this has nothing to do with her. This is about me,” Raoul repeated, leaning over closer, “and you,” he continued, touching his lips lightly to Bond’s temple, “and the fact that you are patently lying about your previous experience.”

Bond breathed in sharply between his teeth and pulled his head back. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Raoul grasped the upturned chin in his hand and forced Bond’s head back so his eyes were once more on a level with his. “I think I do. You see, I haven’t merely hacked into MI6 to decrypt the hard drive, or even to trigger that explosion. I’ve been following your career almost from the moment you became a field agent.” Another slow, fond smile. “You should be flattered -- I very rarely devote such time and energy to one individual, even when I am being paid to do so.”

“You’ve been paid to watch me?” Bond sounded confused, and something else that Raoul couldn’t quite place.

“Oh, heavens, no!” Raoul released Bond’s chin and sat back in his chair, clasping his fingers together and resting his chin on top of them. What an unexpected, fascinating response that was, but unfortunately it was a mystery he would have to contemplate at a later time.
Giving no warning, Raoul moved forward abruptly in his chair, invading Bond’s personal space. To give the man credit, he made no indication of discomfiture other than a slight increase in his breathing, and that reaction could simply be attributed to a ‘fight or flight’ response and the fact that he could do neither at the moment, rather than any form of true anxiety. Tsk. Bond really had an appalling degree of self control, which could be a horrendous weakness as well as a strength.

A fact his little rat was going to discover very soon.

He cupped Bond’s cheek in his right hand. “I have devoted an insane amount of my time to watching you. I’ve followed all your mission transmissions with MI6. I’ve maintained surveillance on your flat. I’ve delved far deeper into your past than even MI6. I’ve tracked you on CCTV, traffic cameras, and on satellites.” He laughed. “The American NSA is still trying to determine why they’ve lost contact with one of their key surveillance satellites. That one is my favorite, you see, because it’s not locked into a geosynchronous orbit. I can direct it to the locations, and people, I wish to monitor. Disabling the self-destruct mechanism was a little tricky, I do admit, but I managed. All it requires is sufficient motivation.” He lowered his voice. “And you, dear James, are very motivating indeed.”

Bond jerked his head to the side to dislodge Raoul’s palm, and Raoul allowed it. This time.

“Seems like a massive waste of time and resources for no gain,” Bond said.

Raising an eyebrow, Raoul said, “Who says I have nothing to gain? Always so mission-oriented you are, James, never seeing the big picture. If I were not so fond of you, I would be horribly disappointed.”

Bond smiled tightly. “Sorry to be such a disappointment to you.”

Raoul examined his face carefully, cocking his head to one side. “No, no, you’re not. Not yet. But you will be.”

Sighing, Bond said, “I was wondering when we’d get around to the actual threats. I was beginning to get a little bored, to tell you the truth.”

Raoul laughed. He laughed until he was forced to wipe tears from his eyes. “Oh, James,” he said once he’d gotten his breath back, “you are such a treasure, but I’m afraid we’ve gotten a little sidetracked from our conversation.”

“I wasn’t aware it was a conversation. It sounded more like an exposition on a madman’s obsession, if you ask me.”

Always the sharp one, his little rat, and not one to mince words. So be it. “Ah, so you do see, James. Very good.” Raoul leaned forward again and stared hard into Bond’s eyes. “Franz Kafka once said, ‘Don’t bend; don’t water it down; don’t try to make it logical; don’t edit your own soul according to the fashion. Rather, follow your most intense obsessions mercilessly,’ and I do believe I’ve abided by that maxim to the utmost of my abilities.”

“Again, I fail to see the point. I’m an agent of MI6, as you once were. If you can’t deal with an obnoxious amount of surveillance on your daily activities, you don’t survive long in this business.”

“So, you don’t mind the intrusiveness then?”

Snorting, Bond replied, “If I need to, I just go off the grid. I’ve done it before.”

Raoul breathed in deeply and let it out slowly. At last. “Like you did in Fethiye?” He raised a
questioning eyebrow.

Bond didn’t reply immediately, and Raoul could tell from his expression that he sensed a trap about to be sprung. Very discerning little rat.

“Yes,” Bond bit out finally.

Raoul shook his head. “Really, James. Just because MI6 had lost track of you, why would you think I had?”

Bond narrowed his eyes again, but he still couldn’t tell where the trap was -- couldn’t see the baited barrel beneath his feet.

Leaning over to pick a piece of lint off Bond’s sleeve, Raoul continued, “You know, you really should be more careful where you obtain your black market painkillers. They are not always exactly . . .” He met Bond’s eyes and said distinctly, “pure.”

Still no response, but as Raoul reached out to brush his fingers on Bond’s neck, he felt the other man’s pulse increase.

“With the wrong additives, they can cause blackouts, memory loss, all sorts of unexpected consequences.”

After years of working with the delicate innards of computers, Raoul had very sensitive fingertips, sensitive enough to register the unsteady breath that Bond pulled in.

“What?” Raoul asked innocently. “Did you think your lack of memories during those long nights on the beach were all due to excessive amounts of drugs and alcohol? You’ve allowed yourself to become drunk before, so we both know how rigidly you control yourself, even during those occasional bouts of overindulgence. More importantly, you are normally far more careful about your surroundings when you do. And really, James.” He shuddered theatrically. “That hovel you were staying in was beyond horrid.”

He reached up slowly to cup Bond’s cheek again with his right hand. It was now or never. It was time to see if his intuition regarding Bond’s true weakness was correct, or if he would have to kill this lovely man after all and send the pieces back to M.

Locking his gaze with Bond’s, he said distinctly, “Not even fit for two rats, especially when one of them was completely oblivious half the time.”

Bond gasped audibly this time and tried to shove himself and the chair backwards. Perhaps he thought he could break the chair and get his arms free, but Raoul figured it was more likely simple desperation. The rat saw the trap now, but Raoul would not allow him to avoid falling into it.

Raoul grabbed Bond’s arms and then climbed onto his lap, using his own body weight to forestall his captive’s futile attempt at freeing himself. He pulled Bond’s chin up forcibly with both hands, and said, “There, there. It’s all right. I’m not going to hurt you, James. I’ve never hurt you, but I have found your weakness, haven’t I? And it has absolutely nothing to do with those worthless tests that MI6 insisted on.”

Bond’s eyes were wide and his breathing had increased to near panic levels, but his eyes still darted to the side as he sought escape from what had now become a completely untenable situation to him. Always a survivor, or attempting to be. How utterly adorable.

“You’re not homophobic, James, because even MI6 would never recruit a double-oh agent with
that kind of handicap. As you said, what are the odds you would never have to seduce someone of your own sex to accomplish a mission?” Raoul tightened his grip on Bond’s chin as he tried again to break free. “But you’ve never had to resort to that, have you? Isn’t that . . . odd?”

Bond stilled, his eyes locking onto Raoul’s, and this time there was a question there, even if he still said nothing aloud.

“Yes, you understand, don’t you? Clever rat. I cleared the way for you, James, because I had guessed your weakness long before you probably even realized it yourself. So easy. Point and click.” He smiled depreciatingly. “Call it personal experience, if you must, but it’s not the sex you have an aversion to with male lovers, it’s the lack of control.”

“Get off me,” Bond said, the words clipped so tightly they were almost inaudible.

Raoul shook his head and said, “The psychologists were only partly right, you know. ‘Pathological rejection of authority based on unresolved childhood trauma.’ Phhtt. It’s not the authority you have issues with, it’s the lack of control that authority implies.”

“You’re full of shit.”

“Am I? Well, let’s test the theory, shall we?” Raoul shifted his weight on Bond’s lap, leaned in close to his ear, and murmured, “We spent a great deal of time together in Fethiye, James, even if you do not remember. I undressed you while you were completely unconscious from the drugs. I touched you, and I caressed you, and I learned every single nuance of your helpless body — what you enjoyed, what you were indifferent to, and what you responded to every . . . single . . . time. You were such a sensual creature, James, when your mind was not so rigidly in control of your body, so responsive. So incredibly responsive.”

Bond fought again to break free, but he had no leverage, and there was absolutely nowhere he could go. “You’re lying,” he hissed. “I would have known.”

“James, James, you must learn that I will never lie to you. Not like all the others who’ve broken your heart.” Raoul looked skyward, then back to Bond, nodding slightly as if coming to a difficult decision. “All right then, let me prove it to you. If this were actually the first time we’ve spent ‘quality time’ together, how would I know your reaction to this?”

Raoul raised his left hand to clasp Bond’s neck just inside his hairline, tightening his fingers ever so slightly, and when Bond almost involuntarily lowered his head, Raoul bent down and nipped him very gently in the same place.

Bond’s resultant strangled gasp was the only proof either one of them needed to hear. When Raoul lifted Bond’s chin, he was gratified to see that the man’s eyes had dilated so far that only the thinnest rim of that amazing blue was visible.

There were no more barriers now. The vulnerability in those haunted eyes was almost literally breathtaking.

“There, mi ratita.” Raoul smiled down at him. “That wasn’t so hard now, was it?”

1 This is obviously, "My little rat." ; )
Chapter 2

Raoul busied himself with some unavoidable work on his primary computer while he allowed Bond to pull himself back together. Well, as much as the man could while still tied securely to a chair, that is. It was imperative he allow Bond time to regain his emotional equilibrium between their ‘sessions’, since Raoul had absolutely no desire to break the man. Such crude methods were simply not his style.

No, he intended to bend Bond to his will. By the time he was finished, Bond would be Raoul’s alone and would remain with him willingly without restraint. What’s more, the man would probably never even know the exact moment this paradigm shift in his world view had occurred.

All this would take time, however, and patience — both of which Raoul had in abundance. He had waited more than ten years to exact his revenge on M and the rest of MI6, after all.

Glancing over at Bond, Raoul noted his captive had evidently abandoned the notion of attempted escape for the moment, but Raoul knew this was a temporary development. Men like James Bond did not give up after a shock, even a major one such as this. He had survived them before and came back. Many times. That was an integral part of his appeal.

In truth, Raoul would have been massively disappointed if Bond had given up, although he knew that would be highly unlikely in an agent of his caliber. All in all, Raoul was well pleased with their interactions so far, and he hadn’t felt this contented with his lot in life since — well, since before that fiasco in Hong Kong.

He sent out the last (untraceable) command to one of his operatives in Istanbul. Done and done. He completed the final strokes on the keyboard with a grand flourish and sat back in his chair, well contented. He did so love when a plan came together.

Turning his chair to face Bond, he saw that the man was silently staring at him, his eyes once again narrowed into determined slits. Hmm. Perhaps a little too determined — and desperate — to risk allowing a gun in the man’s hands as he had originally planned. Dismal range scores aside, a desperate man was capable of astonishing things, as Raoul could attest to personally. He considered this briefly, pursing his lips together, and then moved back to his keyboard, sending a series of instructions to his minions.

He knew his men were more than capable of following those simple instructions. He had hand-picked each one of them and certainly paid them enough. But then, if you paid peanuts, you got monkeys, and Raoul was very conscious of treading the fine line of hiring subordinates who were intelligent, but not so intelligent as to be overly ambitious. He sighed. Sometimes the drudgery of running a major corporation was so tedious.

Raoul finished and then smiled at Bond. “I imagine your knees are killing you by now, hmm?”

This chapter is a little shorter than the first, but I’ll make up for it in chapter 3. Promise.
No reply, but then Raoul hadn’t actually expected one.

“Well, you were never exactly the chatty sort, but then I suspect that might change at some point.” He smiled again. “We shall see.”

Raoul knew he had a few minutes to kill, so he rose and circled Bond’s chair slowly, randomly reaching out to straighten a collar, tug on a sleeve, or brush away dust that had blatantly dared to attach itself to that lovely suit. He made sure to choose locations on Bond’s body that he knew were particularly sensitive to touch, but he was very careful not to make any of his gestures overly obtrusive. It was difficult to restrain himself, but Raoul intended to abide by his original plan of allowing Bond time to decompress. The next hour or so would be extraordinarily hard on the poor man, and he had no intention of making the whole distasteful situation any more stressful than he needed to, on either of their parts.

A few more minutes passed before the door finally opened. Santiago entered the room, along with seven of his men, and he approached within a meter of Raoul before stopping and coming to attention.

Raoul raised an eyebrow questioningly, and the man nodded firmly. Santiago was also a man of few words, which Raoul appreciated, at least on the part of his employees. He was ex-military and typically extremely efficient, but he had apparently been a bit sloppy while executing his most recent task. Raoul sighed. Sometimes it was so hard to get good help.

Narrowing his eyes, Raoul frowned and tapped significantly on the side of his own neck, then pointed a finger at Santiago’s.

It took the man a moment to get the message, but then he silently pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the substantial blood smear off the side of his neck.

“Next time,” Raoul said, “I trust you could stand just a bit further away before pulling the trigger. She may be thin, but she isn’t that hard a target to hit. Hmmph. At least I know who to contact should I ever feel the need to eliminate the broad side of a barn.”

Oh, how he was going to miss Patrice and his special skill set, but then a potential replacement for his pet assassin was definitely in the works. Speaking of which, he glanced over at Bond, who was currently gifting him with a particularly vitriolic glare. Ah.

He had nearly forgotten about Bond’s overdeveloped protective instincts. If looks could kill . . .

“Severine had fulfilled her purpose, James — well purposes actually -- and she was no longer useful to me. Superfluous. Pffft.” He mimed a gunshot to the head. “However, I must admit she did an outstanding job of delivering you into my hands.” He sighed. “It was almost enough to make me spare her life, but I fear she would have been a complication in our relationship, James. A distraction, so to speak, knowing your particular fondness for the fairer sex.”

“You’re insane,” Bond said.

“That is probably what MI6’s pet psychiatrists would diagnose,” Raoul said brightly, “but I’m not planning on engaging one of those redundant, addle-brained vultures to actually confirm it.” He walked behind Bond and untied his hands. “Come. I have something to show you,” he said, walking toward the elevator and pointedly not checking to see if Bond were following him. The man truly had no other option with so many armed guards at his back; however, it was important that Bond knew his captor wasn’t afraid to present his (relatively) unprotected back, particularly at this stage in their relationship.
One should begin as one expected to finish, after all.

The trip to Raoul’s suite, which encompassed almost the entirety of the top floor, was made in relative silence. Bond was attempting to retreat back into his stoic shell, and Raoul allowed it at this point. It was always a game of give and take when it came to manipulating someone to your purposes, but Raoul was comfortably on schedule with his programme at this point.

Killing M could wait, and it might be even more pleasurable to abstain until the woman was forcibly ‘retired’ before killing her. Sometimes, multiple smaller blows were more satisfying than a grand, flamboyant gesture. The loss of her favorite agent -- again — followed by dismissal followed by death. Sounded like an excellent plan of attack to him.

Raoul led the way into the sitting room of what would become Bond’s rooms, and the guards filed in afterwards, fanning out into a half-circle. Raoul made an expansive gesture with one arm. “This is where you’ll reside during your stay with us.”

“Not exactly the Savoy,” Bond said dryly, looking around slowly.

*Marking the exits, like a good little spy*, Raoul noted fondly. *Or what he believes are the exits.* “Oh, I don’t know,” Raoul said aloud, eyeing the expensive furniture and elegant handwoven rugs. “I think it has definite points over your abode in Fethiye, don’t you think?”

Bond turned his head to glare at him, attempting to stare him down, but Raoul only laughed. “This is not my home.”

“Well, since MI6 sold both your flat in London and your ancestral home in Scotland, I would think you’d be a little more appreciative of my thoughtfulness. I’m crushed, James.”

Bond inclined his head slightly. “Of course. Where are my manners? Thank you,” he said sarcastically.

Raoul bowed extravagantly. “You’re most welcome, my little rat. Now, before I show you the remainder of your rooms, would you be so kind as to hand over the faux radio in your left trouser pocket, please?”

Oh, Bond was good. Very good, indeed. The look of muted surprise on his face was so brief that it could very easily have been missed, if one were not looking for it, that is.

“What do you mean?” Bond asked, almost without giving anything away. Almost.

Rolling his eyes, Raoul made an annoyed clicking noise with his tongue, then nodded his head sharply at his second-in-command. Santiago walked over to Bond, reached into his pocket, and retrieved the small device Bond had secreted there. Santiago then tossed it to Raoul before wisely stepping back out of Bond’s reach.

Raoul caught the device in his right hand, holding it up for Bond to see. “Oh, my. Did you think this was yours, James?” he said, eyes wide in feigned surprise. “I did try to warn you about gadgets from that pesky Q-branch. But then, *this* one is actually mine,” he said proudly. “I’m afraid I had Severine swap them out while you two were, hmm . . . dallying aboard the *Chimera* before it left dock.”

Bond said nothing, but he looked from the tiny radio to Raoul and back again.
Anticipating Bond’s next question, Raoul added, “I’m afraid the radio that the upstart Q gave you is on its way to Istanbul at the moment.” He watched as Bond straightened minutely. “The transmitter will be activated briefly in the wilds of Turkey, after which it will disappear. A survey of the CCTV in Macau International and Ataturk airports will show you, or at least someone who looks quite astoundingly like you, thanks to the best plastic surgery money can buy. Then ‘you’ will disappear off the face of the earth. Again. Never to be seen . . . again.”

Raoul smiled at Bond’s stony glare. “And then they lived happily ever after,” he added brightly, making finger quotes in the air.

Bond’s cheek twitched slightly, but he still remained mute.

“Oh,” Raoul said, his lips pouting slightly. “You’re not pleased, James.” His voice hardened as he strode over to Bond, again invading close into his personal space, and said, “No one is coming for you. No one will rescue you. They will think you’ve disobeyed them, and then they will abandon you.” He felt his head jerk slightly upwards in remembered anger. “Abandonment is something MI6 and M are very, very good at.”

He looked Bond square in the eyes. “Welcome to the club, James. We could only wish it were a tad more exclusive.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Things finally start to get physical.

Oh, heavens, not like *that*. Do get your minds out of the gutter, folks.

Bond smiled. “You’re a fool if you think MI6 would believe such a contrived scenario.”

“Am I?” Raoul asked. “Dearest M has already confided in Tanner about your failed tests. She didn’t need to voice her concerns about your readiness — that much was a given.”

“She trusts me."

“Does she, James? I believe the exact words were, ‘Take the bloody shot.’ I fail to perceive the implicit trust there. Do you? Oh, I’m sure she gave you the stirring and patriotic ‘needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few’ speech. She’s extremely fond of that particular concept, but I don’t know why she even bothers. It’s not as if anyone who risks death out here in the *real* world of the shadows would fall for such a thing.”

He paused, but Bond said nothing.

“Oh, you poor clueless thing. You did, didn’t you? James, James, what am I to do with you? She doesn’t trust you. She *likes* you. There’s a difference. And because of that, she made the colossal mistake of allowing that affection to interfere with her better judgement. She knew you would fade to nothing if you weren’t allowed to continue field work, but she also knew her own time at MI6 was running out.”

Bond’s eyes narrowed.

“Oh, you weren’t aware of that, James?” Raoul smiled. “She’s being ‘retired’. GCMG with full honors. You should be proud. Unfortunately, she knew her intended replacement shares neither her affection nor her former confidence in your abilities. She had to get you back into the field now, even though she knew you weren’t ready.”

Raoul paused, insuring he had Bond’s complete attention. “She will be disappointed when you don’t return, James, but I can assure you, she will *not* be surprised.”

“I guess we’ll have to wait and see,” Bond said.

“Stubborn, stubborn, always so stubborn. Yes, ‘time will tell,’ as that trite saying goes.” Sighing, Raoul moved to lean against the dividing wall between the sitting room and bedroom and rested his head against the smooth plaster. “While we wait, there is one further bit of unpleasantness we need to dispense with, then I can allow these fine gentleman to return to the jobs they are paid so well to do.”

“Killing innocent women?”

Raoul rolled his eyes. “Well, she was hardly *innocent*, but yes. There is always some such
wearisome work to do.” He inhaled deeply. “If you would be so kind as to strip, James.”

He watched as Bond tensed, then immediately relaxed his posture, feigning nonchalance. Oh, he was such a lovely thing.

Bond said, “I’d end up catching my death. This place is drafty as hell.”

“Well, I’m sure we can find something to do to keep you warm, but in any case, I’m afraid I really must insist.”

Raoul watched as Bond surreptitiously gauged the distance, and his chances, with the guards, but they were well trained and kept a precise distance between each other and their captive in order to forestall just such an attempt.

“Come, come, James. It is hardly as bad as that. I promise your virtue is safe, for the moment at least. I simply intend to give you free access to these rooms, and we both know how capable you are of stashing otherwise harmless, everyday objects on your person, much to the later detriment of your unsuspecting quarry.” He laughed. “Really, James. Damascus.” He raised an inquiring eyebrow. “Hair spray and a cigarette lighter?”

“It was effective.”

“Oh, I agree. And while I don’t intend to give you access to either of those oh-so-dangerous objects, I hesitate to trust your ingenuity . . . and desperation . . . with my own person.” He inclined his head and made a fluttering, ‘on with it’ gesture with one hand.

Bond still hesitated, eyes narrowed.

“James, that is a lovely suit you’re wearing, and I would surely hate to see it, or you, damaged in any way. My guards are extremely good at what they do, but they have absolutely no fashion sense whatsoever. I mean, just look at them.” Raoul shuddered. “You would truly not appreciate their assistance in the process, I’m afraid.”

Assuming a put upon expression, Bond proceeded to do as Raoul had requested. He stripped quickly and efficiently, carefully folding, then placing each item on the sideboard along one wall. When he had removed both suit coat and shirt, he toed off his shoes, lining them up precisely before unbuttoning his trousers. After he had placed the folded trousers with his other clothes, Bond turned and raised a questioning, ironic eyebrow at Raoul.

“Everything, I’m afraid. Don’t be shy. Socks and pants also.”

When Bond was completely naked, he stood straight and raised his chin defiantly. Oh, he was trying to appear unconcerned about the whole affair, but again, Raoul was very familiar with his tells. Bond was definitely uncomfortable, but not with this blatant display of his body. Even with his recent descent into substance abuse and ennui, he had nothing to be ashamed about in regard to his actual physical appearance, and he was well aware of that. Furthermore, from his past surveillance Raoul knew that while Bond was not an exhibitionist, he was normally much more at home in his own skin.

No, Bond was simply unsure of Raoul’s immediate plans, and he was never comfortable when he couldn’t anticipate an opponent’s next move. Raoul so far had managed to keep him off balance, thereby eroding Bond’s usual easy confidence in difficult situations.

This was both a good thing and a bad thing. Good, in that Raoul had managed to already put him off his game, but a bad thing in that he would certainly not respond well to what was coming next.
Well, nothing to help for it.

Raoul nodded to his men, who descended upon Bond en masse and attempted to wrestle him to the floor.

Attempted, because as Raoul had anticipated, Bond did not respond well. He did not respond well at all.

Raoul backed further against the wall, sighing, as Bond punched and kicked his way through eight otherwise vaguely competent mercenaries. Of course, his men were hampered by Raoul’s previous instructions not to cause Bond any permanent damage, but still the agent was a very impressive sight. He fought like a cornered animal, and while he simply didn’t have the room to effectively outfight or outmaneuver so many opponents, he was obviously determined to cause as much damage as possible before he was subdued.

When they had finally managed to pin Bond to the floor through sheer mass of body weight, Raoul was down three men, at least two of them permanently.

Approaching the still furiously struggling Bond, Raoul crossed his arms and tapped two fingers on his forearm while he waited for the not entirely healed agent to admit defeat. Bond’s right shoulder was obviously severely weakened, and Raoul suspected this was the only reason he had as many remaining functional guards as he did. A dangerous man indeed. But then, Raoul wouldn’t have him any other way.

Raoul continued to wait patiently for Bond to exhaust himself, and he did eventually relent, gasping for breath. Their gazes locked. Bond’s fury and adrenaline rush had managed to curtail his previous unease, but that would change shortly.

“If we are quite finished with all the senseless violence?” Raoul asked sarcastically.

“I thought you said my virtue was safe,” Bond spat out viciously.

Raoul sighed, looking upward in exasperation. “James, I have told you this before: I. Will. Not. Lie. To. You.” He gestured angrily to Santiago, who left to fetch the accouterments for the next phase of Raoul’s plans. “This unpleasantness was necessary because I knew you would not readily agree to what I had in mind for you. It is, however, quite unavoidable.”

Hearing the door open behind him, Raoul ordered, “Spread his legs.”

This only caused an additional spate of struggling, as well as a broken nose for another one of Raoul’s men, before they once again managed to restrain Bond.

Santiago handed over the device he had brought with him, and Raoul crouched down next to Bond. “This is another of my designs. I have had it manufactured expressly for you, and it is made to your exact measurements.” He smiled. “I even tested it for proper fit while we were in Fethiye, so I know there will be no issues in that regard.”

He turned the shining, ring-shaped piece of black metal in his hands and brought it down closer for Bond to see. “It contains a long range tracker, a vital signs monitor, as well as a miniaturized power supply and high voltage capacitor that is capable of delivering a substantial electric shock.”

Bond eyed the device like it was a snake about to bite him, an observation which Raoul had to admit wasn’t too far from the truth.

“I had originally planned on choosing the traditional location for a collar and fastening it around
your neck, but I decided against that for two reasons. The first is that when I eventually brought you out in public, I didn’t want such an obvious indicator of my possession visible for others to see. The second, and more important reason, is that you really are quite sensitive around your neck, and I had no desire to impede my access to it.”

Bond glared at him, breathing hard, and Raoul merely shrugged.

“Placing it around your wrist would only result in you breaking bones in an attempt to remove it, once you are desperate enough, so I’ve settled on your right ankle instead. The anatomy of the ankle joint makes it much harder to break enough bones to remove the device, and even if you did manage, you would obviously be unable to move well enough afterwards to take advantage of the fact.”

Raoul’s technical crew entered with the rest of the equipment needed to attach the collar, and Bond watched with wary eyes as the heavy duty welder was carried in last.

“What, you thought I would resort to something as easily removable as a clasp?” Raoul asked. “Shame on you. This is meant to be permanent, James, and I intend to have it installed with just that fact in mind.”

As the machinist readied his materials and lowered his welding mask into place, Bond attempted once more to break free.

Raoul sighed. This procedure would be both time-consuming and delicate, as they needed to heat the metal to a high enough temperature to weld it together without damaging either the electronic components within, or Bond himself. It involved a complicated array of heat sinks, shunts, and metal fiber shielding for Bond’s skin, any of which could be dislodged by Bond’s incessant struggling.

He did abhor resulting to violent methods, but it was either that or have his prize irreparably damaged.

Walking around to Bond’s head, and out of his direct line of sight, Raoul motioned to his guards, who all obediently released their grips on Bond. Before the agent could make any movement off the floor, Raoul fired a standard police-issue taser into Bond’s upper abdomen. He activated it for longer than the usual 15-second maximum, long enough to ensure that Bond would be more than merely temporarily incapacitated, especially given the lingering effects of his recent injuries.

After approximately 45 seconds, he turned off the taser and examined Bond carefully. He watched as the muscles that weren’t temporarily paralyzed twitched randomly, indicating that Bond should be pliant enough now to resume the delicate work. He left the probes attached, however, more as a deterrent than any real consideration of requiring the taser’s use again. Now that he had the man temporarily incapacitated, he had a far less violent method of assuring that he remained that way.

Raoul placed the taser safely out of harm’s way, then sat cross-legged on the floor, drawing Bond’s still twitching body up until his head was resting in his lap. He placed one hand over Bond’s forehead, tilting his head back slightly, and then cupped his exposed neck with the other hand, being careful to apply only the lightest of pressure. He knew from their time in Fethiye that this would often have a calming effect on Bond, and he hoped that this, in conjunction with the lingering results of the taser, would keep him subdued for the necessary length of time. Just to be safe, he motioned to the guards, who again resumed their restraining holds.

Another nod of his head, and the machinist began his delicate task.
After ten minutes or so, he noted that Bond was beginning to regain some muscle control, at least to the point where his eyelids were not twitching quite as violently. Tightening his grip on Bond’s throat ever so slightly, Raoul bent down and whispered, “I would suggest you remain still, James. The process of attaching the collar is past the point where your struggles would dislodge it. At this point, you would only risk inflicting injury to yourself.”

He felt Bond attempt to swallow, and Raoul helpfully stroked his throat, both aiding in the process and reminding him of his current vulnerability.

“You will be fine, James, and soon, soon we can dispense with all these others.” He smiled brightly. “If you haven’t already come to this realization, I really don’t like to share.”

After only a few more minutes, the machinist raised his welding mask and said, “The job’s done, sir.” Raoul looked over questioningly at Santiago, who was seated in a chair with a small laptop. After running the standard diagnostics Raoul had previously programmed for the GPS and vital sign monitoring devices, Santiago nodded. Good. If the more delicate electronics of the tracker and the monitor were functioning properly, Raoul didn’t feel the need to test the deterrent shock components of the device. Bond had been through enough this morning. Besides, he was certain that the stubborn, determined agent would give him more than ample occasions to test that portion of the collar, more’s the pity.

As the machinist and his crew packed up their equipment and departed, Raoul signaled his men to release Bond, which they did, backing away warily. Raoul smiled. It was good that they occasionally encountered someone who was dangerous enough to keep them on their toes. Complacent guards were completely ineffective guards.

Under Santiago’s further orders, the remaining guards removed Bond’s previous dead and injured victims until finally only he, Bond, and Santiago remained in the room.

Raoul released his hold on Bond’s forehead and neck, smoothing down a sweaty lock of hair. With a sigh, he pulled himself out from under Bond, gently placing his head on the floor before rising to his own feet. He removed the taser probes and handed the gun to Santiago.

The state of Bond’s scrambled nervous system would make him too uncoordinated to walk, so Raoul motioned for Santiago to grasp Bond’s legs while he lifted his upper torso. Together, they carried Bond through the door to the bedroom and placed him on the overlarge bed that occupied most of the room.

“You may go,” Raoul said, once they had finished.

Santiago paused, eyeing Bond warily. “Do you wish me to restrain him first, sir?”

“Restrain him? Why on earth would I do something like that? I do believe the whole purpose of this,” he said angrily, pointing to the black collar around Bond’s ankle, “was to eliminate the necessity of such barbarity.”

Santiago still looked doubtful. “Sir, forgive me, but he is a dangerous man, and you have tasked me with securing your safety...”

Raoul held up a hand to interrupt him, then took a moment to curb his anger before speaking. The man was, after all, only looking after Raoul’s interests. “Luis, I appreciate your concern, and I understand you feel the occasional need to challenge my wishes in order to fulfill your duties. However,” he continued, his eyes narrowing, “I am a dangerous man as well. While this one,” he
said, indicating Bond, “will eventually comprehend that fact, you should already be aware of it.”

“Yes, sir.” The reply was gratifying immediate. Santiago inclined his head briefly, then left the suite without another word.

*Alone at last.*

When Raoul perched on top of the bed next to Bond, the man opened his eyes, watching him warily through still intermittently twitching eyelids. Raoul smiled down at him and received only a muted glare in return. Raoul patted his arm and said, “You know, my grandmother once told me that if I insisted on glaring like that, my face would permanently deform into that position. So, I stopped doing it.” He considered that statement briefly, tilting his head, then amended it. “Well... mostly. But one should always listen to one’s *abuela.*”

Bond’s expression became one of disdain, and Raoul frowned.

“Yes, I know. Your *abuela* would have said nothing of that sort, because she wanted nothing to do with *you,* either before or after your parents died. Sad. Very sad.”

Bond pointedly rolled his head away from Raoul, obviously still not trusting his ability to speak properly, but making his contempt very clear nonetheless.

Raoul shook his head sadly, then rose to enter the adjacent bathroom. He re-entered the bedroom with a washcloth and a basin of warm water, which he laid on the nightstand next to the bed. Wetting the washcloth, he grasped Bond’s chin with one hand and turned him back to face him.

Eyes narrowing, Bond immediately attempted to wrest his head free, but this time Raoul didn’t allow the evasion. Bond was still not fully recovered from the taser’s extended use, and it didn’t take long before Raoul won their minor battle of wills.

“James, when will you learn that I am merely acting in your best interests?” He stared down into Bond’s eyes. “After your little scuffle with my men, I only wish to insure there are no injuries I need to attend to. I can hardly make that determination with you covered in several layers of sweat and grime.”

No reply at all, but Raoul only smiled. He was beginning to grow quite fond of that vicious glare, and he thought he might even miss it once they’d gotten past this rebellious stage. Of course, they both knew Raoul’s last statement was a slight exaggeration, but he did truly wish to verify that Bond wasn’t severely injured.

With no further physical objection on Bond’s part, Raoul proceeded to bathe the agent, carefully lifting each arm and cleaning with slow, even strokes. He examined each minor cut and bruise with close attention, but he encountered nothing that should require medical attention. He *had* told his men to be mindful of that. He then worked his way down Bond’s torso, being especially heedful of the still tender areas where the taser probes had attached themselves.

Humming softly under his breath, he purposefully bypassed Bond’s genitals, exacting the same care in bathing each of his legs. He spent extra time around Bond’s right ankle, examining the area above and below the collar. He could find nothing more than a slight redness, hardly more than a minor sunburn, but he would keep an eye on the area nonetheless. One could never be too careful.

When he had finished with Bond’s front, he climbed further onto the bed so that he could turn him over.

As he started the maneuver, Bond suddenly turned to strike him with his left hand, but the
movement was weak and still uncoordinated. Raoul blocked the blow easily, then flipped Bond over and caught his right arm, bending it at the elbow and pressing the limb upward viciously.

Gasping, Bond tried to roll his upper torso to reduce the strain on his injured shoulder, but Raoul placed a knee on his lower back and held him immobile. He inched the arm slowly upwards until Bond finally relented, stilling completely but shuddering helplessly from the intense pain. Raoul held him in that position for a couple minutes more, reinforcing his point, before he finally released his hold.

Bond groaned when his limb was placed gently onto the bed, but he remained obligingly immobile.

Raoul retrieved the washcloth and resumed his task as if nothing had happened. Bond was an intelligent man, and he knew better than to resume his disobedience at this point. However, the dear thing thought he was merely waiting for a better opportunity — say, after he had recovered his muscle control perhaps.

Bond would discover soon enough there would be no such future opportunity, but a lesson was learned more thoroughly if it was actually experienced, rather than merely explained.

And much more satisfying for Raoul, besides.

When he had finished Bond’s back, he wrung out the washcloth again and began to clean Bond’s buttocks. He didn’t hurry. By the time he had finished, Bond was almost trembling with frustrated anger, but he made no overt attempts to evade Raoul’s touch. Partly as a reward, and partly because he simply couldn’t resist, Raoul pressed his lips gently to the special spot just above Bond’s cleft and stroked his tongue in a small circle, just once.

Bond gasped and jerked, but then stilled just as quickly.

Raoul merely smiled. Not giving him time to recover, he turned Bond over again, and this time found the man breathing rapidly though his teeth and pointedly looking anywhere but at Raoul. Bond’s peripheral nerves were still too incapacitated for him to respond physically to that modest touch, but Raoul could tell he was effected nonetheless.

Again humming softly, Raoul started on Bond’s genitals, cleaning them thoroughly but performing the task as clinically as possible with no overtly sexual undertones. He had promised Bond his virtue was safe for the moment, after all, and he did try to keep his promises. As he reached down to bathe Bond’s testicles, he tapped gently on Bond’s inner thigh, and said merely, “Open please, James.”

Bond’s eyes met his, and he was granted yet another patented Bond glare, but he eventually complied, averting his eyes again.

Raoul breathed in sharply. He had known his poor little rat had been previously tortured, of course, but it was quite another thing to see the residual scars in such detail. “I will have to send yet another bonus to the specialists I hired to take care of you afterwards, James. I am frankly surprised you can still perform at all after such trauma.”

Bond’s eyes closed tightly, then reopened, but he made no reply.

Finishing his ministrations, Raoul took the washcloth and basin back into the bathroom before returning to look down at Bond. “I suggest you rest for a few hours, James, and then I shall have dinner brought to you.” He bent over the agent, bracketing his head with his hands. “Oh, and by the way, should you feel well enough to wander about, please do not attempt to leave this suite of
rooms. You will receive a warning from the collar should you venture too far, and if you ignore that, it will deliver a much stronger shock.” He pursed his lips. “I strongly suggest you not tempt fate by ignoring the warning, James. I would so much hate to watch you suffer.”

Bond wet his lips in an obvious attempt to speak, and Raoul leaned down closer to hear.

“Fucker,” Bond said, surprisingly distinct.

Smiling fondly, Raoul merely looked down at him and replied, “Perhaps later, James. I did promise to be good.” He raised a teasing eyebrow, “For now.”
Surprisingly enough, Bond actually took Raoul’s advice and slept for nearly four hours. Raoul worked on a few boring, income-generating projects during that time, keeping a tab open on his computer that displayed Bond’s monitored vital signs. When the program notified him of an increase in Bond’s heart rate and blood pressure, Raoul closed down his computer, stretched, and went to fetch the promised food for his guest.

When he entered the suite, Bond was just emerging from the bathroom, a towel wrapped around his hips.

Raoul placed the covered tray on the nightstand and turned to face Bond. He wagged a reproving finger, and said, “Naughty, naughty, James. If you plan on flaunting my rules, I’ll remove the towels and force you to drip dry after you bathe. You’ve already complained about the drafts, so I would hate for you to catch your death after all.”

Narrowing his eyes, Bond removed the towel and purposefully presented his back to Raoul before returning the towel to the bathroom.

He knew Bond was merely emphasizing his own unconcern about displaying his unprotected back, but Raoul didn’t mind at all. The man had such a delightful arse that Raoul would be an absolute fool to complain. And Raoul was nobody’s fool.

Bond returned, stopping a few feet in front of Raoul and crossing his arms. “May I ask when you plan on allowing me clothes again?” he said.

Excellent! Raoul nearly bounced on his toes with delight. Not ‘When do I get my clothes back?’ but ‘When will you allow me my clothes?’ Bond was already developing the proper mind set, and he didn’t even realize it. Precious, precious thing.

“‘When?’” Raoul repeated aloud. “If you must ask, I’m not inclined to ever allow them, at least in the privacy of our own home.”

Bond bristled at that, but more likely at the ‘our own home’ aspect than anything else.

Raoul motioned to a painting hanging on the far wall, but he kept his focus distinctly on Bond’s face as he said, “Do you see that Rembrandt? Yes, it is authentic and an original. I spent a great deal of time, effort, money and outright manipulation to obtain that particular painting.” He locked his gaze with Bond’s. “‘Why on earth would I bring home such an exquisite work of art and then throw some cheap cloth on top of it? Can you tell me that? Hmmm?’”

Bond lowered his eyes briefly, then returned his gaze to Raoul’s, but not quite meeting his eyes.

Ahh. How very interesting. “James, you can’t possibly be so unaccustomed to receiving compliments, but my comment has made you uncomfortable for some reason. Now, I have to wonder, why is that?”

That brought a fire to his eyes. “I’m being held prisoner by a megalomaniac. Of course, I’m bloody uncomfortable.”

Raoul snorted. “By definition, a megalomaniac is someone who is delusional about their omniscience. Doesn’t apply to me, I’m afraid.” He tapped the display on his watch.

“Unfortunately, we have a more important issue than the state of my mental health, or lack
thereof.” He looked up at Bond. “Your heart rate and blood pressure have both suddenly elevated. Now, I didn’t design your collar to function as a polygraph, but I can only assume, from what I’m seeing here, that you are lying to me. That pains me, James, it truly does.”

No reply from Bond, but again, Raoul didn’t expect one. He knew when pushed past his comfort zone, Bond would typically close in upon himself. An emotional suit of armour, so to speak. Hmm. This would definitely require some further research, because this little quirk could only originate from something much further in Bond’s past. Something that Raoul himself must be triggering.

“Well, I’d hoped we’d gotten past the blatant dishonesty stage, but I won’t push you for now. I wouldn’t want your food to get cold while we argue about emotional and mental states.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Wrong answer. Are you forgetting your training again?” Raoul sighed, then mimed perching a pair of glasses on his nose as he cited, “‘When at all possible, the captured agent should never refuse food, the denial of which may result in a weakened physical condition not conducive to attempted escape, as well as a distinct decrease in the agent’s ability to resist further attempts at eliciting confidential material.’” He ‘removed’ the fake glasses and said, “Well, James, they haven’t changed the manual while I’ve been away, have they?”

Bond’s nostrils flared. “Word for goddamn word.”

“Good!” Raoul said, clapping his hands together. “Now that we’ve gotten that little misapprehension cleared up, let’s eat like civilized people, shall we?” Raoul picked up the tray and walked into the sitting room, placing the tray on a small table in front of a leather Chesterfield sofa. After Bond had reluctantly sat down, Raoul removed the cover. With a slight bow, he said, “Dinner is served, as they say.”

Bond looked at the food, then up at Raoul. “It’s funny, but when I dine with ‘civilized’ people, I rarely do so stark naked.”

“T...
Raoul put on a hurt expression. “And invade your privacy? Dear James, there are no cameras, or microphones, or any other type of monitoring device in this suite other than the one currently gracing your right ankle.” He placed his right hand on his chest. “Promise. Cross my heart and hope to die.”

“That can be arranged.”

“Always so saucy. I like that about you. Now come, James, finish your stew.”

When Bond had finished, Raoul picked up the tray and set it in the hallway outside the suite to be disposed of later. He then sat down on the sofa immediately adjacent to Bond, clasping his hands together on one knee, and said brightly, “Now, what shall we talk about?”

“Why am I here?”

“Oh, Mr. Bond, I thought we’d already covered that.” He openly leered at Bond’s current state of undress.

“You can’t possibly intend to keep me here just to . . .” Bond cut himself off abruptly.


“This doesn’t make any sense.”

Bond sounded frustrated and confused, which Raoul found very intriguing indeed. He narrowed his eyes and said distinctly, “Why do you consider yourself so undesirable?”

“I don’t,” Bond snapped.

“Yet you cannot seem to comprehend why you are here. Or believe it, at least.”

“No, you want something else. Not just that, not me . . .” He cut himself off again, and rose to stalk to the far side of the sitting room, away from Raoul’s proximity, obviously rattled and attempting to hide it.

Raoul steepled his fingers and rested his chin upon them. “You’re hiding something. Something significant.”

Bond turned and glared at him. “What? You just claimed to be omniscient — don’t you already know? Or are you a megalomaniac after all?”

Smiling, Raoul said, “Hmmm. That sounded suspiciously like a challenge, James.”

Bond appeared to consider that, and said, “No it wasn’t a challenge, because you’re completely out of your mind in the first place. I’m not hiding anything.”

“Oh, I think you are. You’re very good at concealing your emotional issues, aren’t you? You’ve had so much practice at it. You know they’re a weakness, and you bury them so deep inside that they only emerge during times of extreme stress. Like now.”

Bond snorted derisively. “You’re hardly enough to stress me.”

Raoul held up his wrist and pointed to his watch. “This tells me you’re lying . . . again.”

Bond merely stared at him, his breathing now visibly altered.
Time to push a little, I do believe, and see what breaks.

Raoul stood up and walked over to Bond, stopping directly in front of him and leaning forward into his personal space. Bond was not an overly tall man, although he ordinarily minimized his lack of height through sheer force of personality. However, Raoul had a few centimeters on him, even without the added elevation of Raoul’s shoes, and Bond was forced to lift his chin to look him in the eyes.

“This,” Raoul said, tapping his watch, “tells me your pulse is so fast, I’m surprised I can’t see your heart beating in your chest.”

“Get away from me.”

“And if I don’t?” Raoul challenged, placing a hand on Bond’s bare hip.

As he had predicted, Bond finally snapped, bringing both fists together then upward against Raoul’s chin, snapping his head back.

The agent was no slouch with regard to his combat abilities, as Raoul had observed previously, but since he had been expecting this, Raoul allowed his head to roll with the blow, backing quickly out of Bond’s immediate reach.

Then he activated the shock collar.

Bond went down so hard it appeared as if someone had taken his legs out from under him. He writhed on the floor, eyes wide, but soundless, until Raoul eventually deactivated the collar.

Raoul crouched next to a groaning Bond. “I believe I do stress you, James. I stress you far more than any opponent you’ve encountered previously.” He shook his head sadly. “I truly don’t enjoy causing you physical discomfort. However, I will not let you harm me, or yourself for that matter, and the collar is intended to make certain of that.”

He rose and walked away, but turned as he neared the door and said, “Oh, you will never find the manual activator for the shock collar, so don’t bother trying. And no,” he said, smiling, “it is not the watch, so I’ll save you the effort of attempting to wrest it from me. I’ve grown quite attached to this watch, actually.”

Bond was already struggling to rise, but his body was simply not cooperating with him.

“I’ll leave you to recover and to think on your sins,” Raoul said. “Then we’ll chat again.”

If there’s anyone still reading this, bonus points to the person who can guess the location of the manual activator. ; )
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Just to be clear, the author *likes* Moneypenny. Anyone who nearly kills a double-oh agent, and then has no qualms about working again with the same nearly killed agent (in a dangerous environment where, you know, *accidents* happen), obviously possesses an admirable degree of chutzpah.

Raoul Silva, however, does not like Moneypenny. I'm beginning to regret telling (almost) this entire story from Silva's POV, because occupying his head space for an extended length of time can be . . . disconcerting.

Just saying.

The next morning, Raoul booted up his computer to find that someone had been nibbling at his breadcrumbs. Moneypenny must have finally alerted her superiors at MI6 about the missing 007.

He was tempted, oh so tempted, to eliminate that meddlesome bitch himself. The sheer incompetence! She'd very nearly ruined years of careful observation and planning, all with one botched shot. To be fair though, if she *hadn't* wounded Bond, the agent wouldn't have disappeared off the grid and Raoul would be without some very pleasant memories of Calis Beach.

Regardless, he had to leave her alive and unharmed. It must appear as if Bond had disappeared of his own free will, and killing her would only alert MI6 of something nefarious afoot. It was a shame, really, but sometimes one had to make sacrifices in life.

Now it was time to make sure those sacrifices wouldn't be in vain — that M and her cronies had indeed fallen for his false trail. However, when Raoul accessed his back door through MI6's firewall, he found that someone had evidently been very busy. His back door appeared perfectly normal at first glance, but being obsessively careful, Raoul initiated his verification program to detect tampering with his machine code. He was right to be cautious. Not only had MI6 detected his back door, but they'd woven a logic bomb into it that would alert them of unauthorized access to their network and then hack the IP address that had attempted the intrusion.

Clever. This could only be the new Q's work. His predecessor was an engineering genius but hopeless when it came to cyber-warfare. His team had displayed a corresponding lack of cyber abilities, simply because that Q wouldn't have tolerated a subordinate who surpassed him in any area.

However, Raoul would have to be careful with this *new* Q. He was not as proficient as Raoul — not yet, regardless of his invention of the failsafe protocols some years back. He lacked experience, and more importantly, he lacked the ruthlessness that opened *all* doors, no matter how tightly barred, to Raoul.

Humming, Raoul backtracked carefully and then accessed his secondary back door, which was infinitely more subtle and difficult to detect. This time when he ran his verification program, it validated the code as being untouched and therefore undetected. He had assumed that once Q located the primary back door, he would look no further, and Raoul had been correct. Again.
Sometimes, this was almost too easy.

Interestingly, he found that whoever was following his breadcrumbs -- and he assumed it was Q -- had obviously not completely fallen for the simulated trail he had laid. At least, he had been running facial recognition and electronic detection programs in an expanded area in both Macau and Turkey. He would find nothing, of course, since he had no way of tracing the real Bond here, and the fake Bond was now at the bottom of the Mediterranean in a myriad of tiny pieces, no doubt making the marine life there exceedingly happy.

Just to be safe, Raoul inserted a Trojan into the existing code that would notify him should Q get too close to discovering either his network or his home base, and then he exited the system.

He spent some time researching Bond’s childhood from the time his parents died, but he couldn’t locate anything traumatic enough to raise any red flags. There was the usual spate of foster homes and a young Bond who openly flaunted the attempted authority of his caretakers, but nothing to cause the extreme reaction he was seeing in the agent. In fact, there was no evidence of abuse or trauma at all other than the usual sprains, strains and occasional broken bones of a very physical, active young man.

Well, he would have to dig deeper at a later time. According to his monitor, Bond had already woken, and he didn’t want to allow the agent time to get into more trouble before the next phase of their interaction.

Raoul entered the suite to hear the shower running. He set up the equipment he would need for this morning’s session, making sure everything was plugged in and functioning properly, and then walked into the bathroom. He didn’t bother to announce his presence, of course.

Bond was just stepping out of the shower when he saw Raoul. He froze momentarily, scowling, then finished toweling himself dry. “You know, civilized people would knock before entering.”

“I would have, but there appears to be no door upon which to knock. I’m not exactly sure how that happened.” Raoul sighed. “I guess this means I’ll have to fire the interior decorators. So sorry.”

“I’m sure you are.” Bond walked over to the mirror, peering at his reflection, then combing his ridiculously short hair. “I’m surprised you allowed me a mirror. The shards can be very dangerous in the right hands.”

“Shatterproof glass.” Raoul stepped up close behind Bond, looking over his shoulder. “Unbreakable, even by you.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

Raoul winked at him. “You shouldn’t be. Not at this point.”

Bond rubbed at the stubble on his chin. “I suppose a razor is out of the question then?”

Shuddering dramatically, Raoul said, “Allow you the use of one those dangerous straight razors you’re so fond of? I really don’t think so.”

“I would settle for a safety razor at this point.” He locked gazes with Raoul via the mirror. “I’m desperate,” he added sarcastically.

“You ought to be. Why you felt the need to grow that ridiculous beard you were sporting in Fethiye, I’ll never know.” Raoul shuddered again. “You wouldn’t believe how many times I had to tell myself that I couldn’t just shave it off while you were unconscious.” He paused, mulling this
over. “Apparently, I have the patience of a saint.”

“Hardly the term that springs immediately to my mind.”

Raoul laughed. “You obviously don’t know me well enough yet.”

“Do I have a choice?”

Raoul paused as if to consider the question, then said, “Well, no, actually.”

Bond sighed. “Then you’ll just have to learn to live with the beard, if I’m not allowed to shave it off.”

“Oh, I didn’t say that, James. The beard definitely must go.”

Bond turned to face him, but Raoul was standing too close, so Bond perched himself on the counter and looked up at him. “I assume that means you plan on shaving it off then?”

The expression on his face was probably meant to be challenging, the adorable thing.

Smiling, Raoul said, “Well, you did allow that clumsy bimbo with the less-than-stellar marksmanship skills to do it, but I actually had something else in mind.”

Bond froze, obviously puzzled.

Raoul did love throwing the agent off his stride. His little rat was so endearing when he wore that particular expression.

Moving to one side, Raoul carefully washed and dried his hands. “Come,” he said, motioning toward the bedroom. “I have everything set up for us already.”

Bond followed reluctantly, then froze again at seeing the equipment setting on the nightstand. “You can’t be fucking serious,” he said.

Raoul pouted, crossing his arms. “I am always serious, James.” He motioned toward the bed. “Come now, lie down. I’ve been practicing on Severine, you know — well, when she was still alive, that is — and I’ve actually become quite proficient at this.”

Bond stayed where he was, still eyeing the equipment with disbelief.

“James, James, it’s only an electrolysis device. It is not going to bite you. I’ll have you know the procedure is completely painless when performed correctly.”

“You’re out of your mind if you think I’ll allow you to . . .”

Raoul activated the warning function on Bond’s collar.

Bond twitched, nostrils flaring. He must have been testing the limits of where the collar would allow him to go, since he was apparently quite familiar with the sharp sting that it generated in this mode.

“Come now, James. You didn’t think I was offering you a choice in the matter, did you?”

Bond grit his teeth together so hard that Raoul was fearful of damage to the enamel. “No, of course not.”
“Well, actually, you do. You have two choices. We can either do this procedure with you conscious and cooperative . . . or unconscious and drooling.” Raoul shrugged. “I must admit I’m not overly fond of drool, but the decision is yours nonetheless.”

Bond stood for a few more moments, then finally moved to the bed, swinging his legs up and lying on his back. He scowled up at Raoul.

Raoul said, “Tsk, tsk, James. You remember what we discussed about your face freezing like that.” Grabbing a small bottle of disinfectant, he poured some on a sterile cloth and proceeded to cleanse Bond’s chin, cheeks and neck thoroughly. “I’m really supposed to do this while wearing gloves, but I’ve never been terribly fond of the texture of latex. How about you? Hmm?”

“Necessary evil,” Bond grated out.

Raoul grasped Bond’s chin, turning it slightly to be more accessible. “Well, not anymore, at least not in that context. You’ll be happy to know your days of love and latex are gone for good, James. I’m clean, you’re clean, and I don’t plan on sharing you with others.”

Picking up the electrolysis probe and tweezers, Raoul spent the next hour or two methodically working his way through all the unwanted hairs on Bond’s face and neck, stopping only to reposition Bond for optimal placement of the probe. Even though it wasn’t exactly sterile procedure, he couldn’t resist occasionally stroking an errant finger in the sensitive areas behind Bond’s ears and neck while he did so. No point in making this any more tedious than it had to be.

Bond was breathing harder by the time he’d finished, but Raoul merely smiled down at him benignly. He replaced the tools into the electrolysis kit, then applied the moisturizing lotion to Bond’s skin as a final step. “It will take a few more sessions before we remove all the remaining growing hairs, but soon you’ll never have to worry about shaving, or that nasty beard, ever again. I do so love the permanent solution to a problem.”

Stroking the tips of his fingers across the now smooth skin of Bond’s neck, he slowly moved his hand down to Bond’s chest, adding, “Then, perhaps we can move on to other areas of your lovely body? Hmm?” He brushed lightly against a nipple.

Plainly at the limits of his patience, Bond grabbed Raoul’s wrist and tried to shove him away.

Raoul immediately activated the warning function of the collar again, but with a higher voltage this time, feeling the sting himself through Bond’s grip on his hand. While Bond was distracted, he broke the grip on his wrist and then grabbed Bond’s neck in a tight hold, just shy of completely shutting off his airway. “I have been very patient, James, but we are now beyond the point where I will allow you to evade my touch.” He tightened his grip, then eased it slightly. “From this point on, no one will touch you without my permission, so if you ever want affection from another human being again, I’d advise you to allow me inside that stubborn shell of yours. Really, James, you’re acting like a child.”

Bond flinched. He actually flinched.

Raoul felt his eyes widen. It obviously wasn’t the physical confrontation that had disconcerted Bond — he was too experienced and too stubborn to be affected by something so positively trivial. This was something else.

No, the something else — what Bond had been hiding.

Raoul saw the fear that Bond was desperately trying to mask. He must know Raoul had guessed.
And he had guessed. Raoul knew where to look now. He knew when to look.

He had been an absolute idiot. Bond's session with the psychiatrist. *The word association.*

‘Skyfall.’

‘Done.’

Raoul hadn’t been looking far enough in the past.

Skyfall. It all came back to *Skyfall.*
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Yes, we finally get to the porn in this chapter, and it definitely earns the “non-con” tag for this fic. So, this is your last chance to jump off the express train to Hell before it plummets into the figurative crevasse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bond missed breakfast because of their extended session that morning, but Raoul knew the agent wouldn’t even consider eating until he’d had time to regain his equilibrium.

Raoul also knew he could have handled the whole situation better, but he’d been a little off balance himself after unknowingly triggering that trauma from Bond’s past. But then, if Bond were totally predictable, he wouldn’t be so utterly fascinating to Raoul. It was part of the reason he was so hopelessly obsessed with the man in the first place.

He used this time to confirm his previous suspicions regarding Bond’s early childhood, but it didn’t take him long to uncover the truth — a truth that turned out to be even worse than he had expected. No wonder the man’s issues had issues, and he now felt genuinely sorry for his poor little rat.

Raoul had already been an adult when he’d been so thoroughly betrayed. He couldn’t imagine what it must have been like for a child Bond’s age.

M had either missed this fact when she had recruited him, or even worse, had known about it and used that damage to Bond’s psyche to her own benefit, knowing exactly what buttons to push to better manipulate him. Raoul suspected it was the latter, given how relatively easy it had been for him to uncover the true facts. This gave Raoul yet another reason to wish the bitch dead, and to suffer long and hard before he allowed that death.

He fiercely protected what was his, and Bond belonged to him now.

However, an hour later when Raoul brought in the tray with Bond’s food, the agent resolutely refused to even turn and look at him.

Raoul sighed. “I’ll just place this on the table, and you can eat it when you’re ready, James.”

No answer.

Right, then. Raoul assumed he would receive either a punch to the jaw or the silent treatment, and it was evidently to be the latter. It was obviously still too soon, and Raoul knew he’d gain nothing from pushing further at the moment. “Please do eat before it gets cold. I promise it has not been drugged or altered in any way.”

Still no reply.

Raoul turned to leave, but added, “I will never, ever lie to you, James. Not like all the others. This I swear.”
Two hours later, Raoul was discussing the next week’s schedule with Santiago when the alarm on Bond’s monitor went off.

Raoul sighed, but he wasn’t at all surprised. He’d been expecting this, actually long before now.

Santiago raised an inquiring eyebrow at him, but Raoul said, “No, I’ll take care of it. He won’t tolerate others in his proximity at the moment.” He smiled ruefully. “Actually, he isn’t tolerating me in his proximity at the moment, but I hope that will change some day soon.”

Santiago looked at him doubtfully. “I hope you’re correct, sir, but I would still advise you to be careful.”

Tapping a finger on the side of his head, Raoul said, “I am always careful, Luis.” He raised an eyebrow coquettishly. “I never take unnecessary chances. You know that.”

Santiago gave him one of his rare smiles. “As you say, sir.”

*************************************************

As expected, Raoul found Bond lying unconscious just outside the threshold of his suite. He knelt to check the man’s pulse, but it seemed strong and steady. He peered into the sitting room and noted the remnants of Bond’s meal, so at least he had eaten before making his foolish attempt at escape.

Trust the dear man to follow the manual’s guidelines exactly.

Sighing, he grabbed Bond’s left arm and pulled the unconscious man into a fireman’s carry over his shoulder. He staggered as he rose to his feet, saying aloud, “I really am getting too old for this, James. If you put my back out, I swear I’ll never forgive you.”

However, he did manage to get Bond onto the bed without serious damage to either one of them. Raoul looked down at him, trying to decide on the best course of action. He knew he had to punish Bond for his attempted escape. He had told the agent when they’d first applied the collar that he would regret ignoring the warning pulse, and he would have to follow through on that promise. Bond required stability at this point in his training, which meant maintaining consistency with rewards and punishments.

Unfortunately, Raoul was finding the thought of actually administering that punishment surprisingly difficult to contemplate. He could kill a man — or a woman — without a second thought, but he was second-guessing the necessity of punishing Bond for a blatant transgression. He wondered if he actually was as mentally unbalanced as Bond implied, but then, he hadn’t expected to find someone who was even more emotionally scarred than himself. Bond’s pain resonated almost too closely with his own, so could he distance himself far enough from that undeniable fact?

The answer had to be ‘yes.’ He dare not allow his sympathy to translate into leniency. He simply couldn’t afford to do so. Not now. Not when he was so close to tipping the agent over the edge . . . and into his arms. There was entirely too much at stake.

Raoul dimmed the lights in the suite to almost total darkness. While in Fethiye, he had been careful to approach Bond only at night, and he had rarely felt the need to employ artificial lighting while spending time with him. It felt almost magical that way, to utilize only the light from an obliging moon to illuminate the hard planes of Bond’s naked body.

More importantly, ever since his own ‘incident’, Raoul had welcomed the cloaking intimacy of
darkness. Not all imperfections were emotional, or mental. And now that he had Bond here, all to himself, Raoul felt no desire to alter that particular form of solace, for either one of them.

He sat on the bed, leaning back against the headboard. He then pulled Bond between his spread legs and simply rested his chin on the top of his head for awhile, closing his eyes and absorbing the mingled scents of the citrus and sage shampoo he had provided and the tormented sweat of a man he had just been responsible for electrocuting into unconsciousness.

He remembered their sojourn in Fethiye, the breaking waves against the beach a ceaseless backdrop to the soothing sound of Bond’s measured breathing while so deeply unconscious. Those nights had seemed both timeless and far too fleeting. Raoul had never known peace like that, but now that he’d had the opportunity to experience the unquenchable fire that was a conscious James Bond, he dreamt of a time when he could openly provide the affection he knew Bond craved but would never acknowledge while awake, or while actively defending that adamantine emotional shield he’d constructed.

Could Raoul not wish for more -- for a time when they could listen to the sound of the breaking waves together?

Pfft. Maudlin. He was getting entirely too maudlin. Even if all his plans came to fruition and Bond learned to trust Raoul — and Raoul alone — Bond would never willingly give himself that completely to someone again. He’d been betrayed so often that keeping his emotional distance had morphed from excessive caution to an actual survival instinct.

Well, there was no help for it. He would provide the pleasure that was in actuality a punishment -- a punishment Bond would consider an unforgivable transgression when again fully conscious.

Raoul shook his head sadly. Now, at least, Raoul knew exactly why Bond feared that lack of control over his body, and more importantly, the lack of control over his personal destiny. Unfortunately, that knowledge made this a form of punishment for both of them now.

Caught in his own rat trap — how pathetic was that?

Still, it was comforting to have Bond in his arms again, even as an unaware partner. And he could pretend, at least for a little while, that someday Bond might come to him willingly and without coercion.

Moving Bond’s head slightly to one side, Raoul kissed him softly behind one ear, allowing that fantasy to continue while he had uninhibited access to the object of his desire. He stroked the other side of Bond’s neck lightly with just his fingertips. He then traced a line with his lips to an earlobe, nuzzling it lightly, knowing Bond was particularly responsive there.

While he continued to kiss and lick the soft skin of Bond’s neck, he allowed his left hand to move down to Bond’s chest, rubbing in gentle circles around his nipple and occasionally grazing it lightly. Bond was significantly more sensitive than most men here, and Raoul knew he preferred a light touch to rough or painful.

Raoul maintained his gentle caresses, never increasing the intensity or speed, until he felt the subtle change in Bond’s breathing that alerted him of his arousal. He was so endearingly sensitive to the lightest of touches that Raoul wondered if he would be this responsive while awake, and with that iron control of his in full force.

Severine had told him that while Bond had been gentle with her, he had definitely focused more on her pleasure than allowing her to actively participate in his own. In other words, he had to be the
one in control of their lovemaking. This hadn’t surprised Raoul, as his previous research into Bond’s lovers had uncovered much the same information.

Who knew how he’d react to the touch of another man — someone who was perhaps not inclined to be so passive?

If Raoul had his way, of course, there would be no other men, and he had become quite accustomed to having his way.

He began to nip lightly at the now smooth skin of Bond’s neck, while his right hand began slow, gentle circles on the skin of Bond’s abdomen. He maintained the identical size and speed of the teasing circles with this hand as he did with the left hand that was still brushing intermittently against a now hardened nipple.

Bond shifted slightly in his arms, moaning softly.

Raoul immediately hardened at that sound. Bond made the most intriguing noises while he was unconscious and unable to respond physically to the arousing touches. It was as if his body used the vocalizations to relieve some of the tension he was helpless to release otherwise.

He began to rub directly on Bond’s nipple, pinching it gently and then releasing it completely, in a manner he knew had always inflamed the man. Nothing had changed in their short time apart. Even while unconscious, Bond attempted to arch his chest into the caress, chasing the fingers that were dancing on and off the hardened nub in a frustratingly uneven rhythm. Raoul restrained him each time with the arm draped around his chest, adoring the effect he was having on the now visibly trembling man.

Bond’s penis had lengthened until it lay flat against his abdomen, but Raoul was careful to only allow his stroking fingers to approach but not touch the twitching organ. He had no desire to end this too soon. Raoul widened the motions of his roving right hand, brushing lightly on the tender skin of Bond’s hip and the junction between his body and thigh where he knew Bond was so sensitive to be almost ticklish.

Raoul continued to nip and lick at Bond’s neck, and the agent’s chin was raised enough that Raoul felt the soft, open-mouthed breaths against his cheek, interspersed with the occasional, even softer moan.

He wished he could take one of Bond’s nipples into his mouth, but the angle was awkward and he was loathe to move at this point. Bond was unconscious from the electric shock this time, and not profoundly drugged, so he was even more responsive than Raoul remembered, squirming almost incessantly in an attempt to find the friction his body craved and was being denied. Even fully clothed, the sensation felt wonderful to Raoul, and he resolved to leave that other undeniable pleasure for a different time.

With one last tweak of an erect nipple, Raoul moved this hand down to Bond’s other hip and thigh, and then to his abdomen as well. He ensured that both hands were moving at slightly different speeds and in varied locations, preventing Bond’s body from anticipating where the next caress would come from.

And always, always avoiding even the slightest touch against Bond’s now leaking penis.

Bond was panting in short, sharp breaths through his open mouth as his arousal increased, his lips occasionally brushing against Raoul’s cheek. It felt almost like a kiss, and Raoul turned his head further into Bond’s, licking across the exposed knob of Bond’s larynx as this motion forced Bond’s
head to tilt further back.

Raoul allowed a fingertip to brush ever so briefly against Bond’s penis, causing him to jerk and gasp when the touch was not immediately repeated.

Moving his mouth from Bond’s neck to his ear, Raoul whispered, “So eager, mi ratita, so very eager for my touch.”

Bond shuddered from head to toe.

Raoul knew this was likely caused by the sensation of displaced air in his sensitive ear, and not the words themselves, but it inflamed him further nonetheless.

Increasing the speed and the intensity of his roving hands, Raoul occasionally brushed very carefully against Bond’s testicles, until Bond was moaning almost constantly and his body was covered in a thin sheen of sweat from his frustrated exertions.

Raoul now interspersed his other caresses with purposely light brushes against his penis, knowing from past experience that Bond would come almost immediately in this state if Raoul were to accidentally grasp him too firmly, or stroke him fully, even once.

He did, however, use one fingertip to rub tiny circles on the tip, maddeningly slowly, spreading the leaking fluid and causing another strangled gasp from Bond. When Raoul stopped the caress, Bond groaned, his hips rising in a futile endeavor to recapture the sensation. Lips parted, he moved his head slightly from side to side, the helpless maneuver emphasizing his increasing desperation.

Refusing to allow either motion, Raoul restrained his hips and then sucked hard on a particularly tender spot on his neck, knowing he was marking the man and not caring in the least. He wasn’t forced to hide the proof of his affection, not anymore.

He was about to take pity on Bond, knowing that soon the intense arousal would transmute to pain, when he felt the agent freeze completely, inhaling a long, shuddering breath.

Raoul had never encountered this before, of course, but he knew immediately what it portended.

Bond had regained consciousness.

And like every field agent worth his salt, he came to full consciousness abruptly and reacting to the perceived threat in as physical a method as possible.

*Maldita sea*. How Raoul hated the jumping and fighting.

Chapter End Notes

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1 This means simply, “damn it.” Spanish, like English, has many more explicit swear words, but for some reason, I get the impression that Raoul would lean toward the milder curses.

Note: It’s been a long time since I’ve written a sex scene, and even longer since I’ve written something this explicitly nonconsensual. Hopefully, I haven’t bored everyone to tears. : )
Next up: Putting Bond through the emotional wringer. I’ve always felt that Bond’s reaction to Skyfall seemed way out of proportion — for example, walking out of a mandatory psychiatric evaluation required to return to active field duty and then seeming so damn pleased that his childhood home burned completely to the ground. What could have happened there that made Bond despise it so much?

And no, my take on the situation is probably not what you’re thinking -- but then, I have an admittedly devious and twisted mind.
Not long after Raoul’s ‘incident’ with the Chinese, he had indeed undergone a misguided trial of psychiatric treatment, mainly because he had been experiencing some minor difficulties controlling his unhappiness regarding M’s grievous betrayal. Let no one say he hadn’t tried. After weeks of interminable sessions that had accomplished absolutely nothing, the therapist had lectured Raoul on his tendency toward obsessive behavior and then suggested he undergo Primal Therapy.

Oh, really.

That had been the exact moment when Raoul decided all psychiatrists must be themselves insane, because he had absolutely no intention of reliving, even if only emotionally, the intense trauma he had already undergone. Once was more than enough, thank you very much.

Raoul had actually pondered administering the same regimen of torture and mutilation to the therapist, and then ask if he still felt this particular treatment was a viable option, but in the end, it had simply been too much work. In fact, he hadn’t even killed the man, although it had been a close thing. He had been nearly old enough to be Raoul’s grandfather, after all, and one must always respect one’s elders.

To a certain extent.

In any case, no one would ever convince Raoul that his obsession regarding James Bond was a bad thing. It may have its ups and downs, but the eventual outcome was going to be spectacular.

This particular situation, however, was fast deteriorating into one of the ‘downs’.

Even before Bond had regained full consciousness, he thrust an elbow hard into Raoul’s stomach, twisted his torso, and then somehow catapulted himself to the far end of the bed. Luckily, he hadn’t had a clear shot at Raoul’s diaphragm or he might have managed to immobilize him long enough to make another foolhardy attempt at escape. This would have completely negated the effects of the punishment he had just endured, and Raoul couldn’t allow that to happen.

Bent over and gasping from the blow, Raoul was mildly surprised when Bond didn’t immediately follow through with another direct attack against him. By nature and training, Bond was hardly a timid or indecisive man. Not by any stretch of the imagination.

However, when Raoul finally caught his breath enough to determine Bond’s status, he nearly lost it again, but for an entirely different reason.

Bond was crouched on the bed, breathing hard, yet frozen in place like some ancient Greek statue brought to momentary life. His body was glistening with sweat, his muscles tense and tight from adrenaline, his penis still erect, and his pupils blown completely wide and dark with arousal. Even the dim light couldn’t entirely obscure such a magnificent sight. It wouldn’t dare.

This was what Primal Therapy should be advocating, because Raoul had never seen anything so perfectly pure and fundamental and real in his entire life. It was as if someone had taken the essence of all that was beauty and strength in Man and boiled it down into one glorious entity.

Madre de Dios. As if Raoul hadn’t been captivated by Bond before.
Yes, all psychiatrists were definitely insane if they expected Raoul to continue living without this.

Bond’s eyes were focused solely on Raoul’s face. His nostrils were flaring with his increased respiration, but still he remained frozen in place, mute. The expression on his face, however, appeared to be one of confusion . . . and pain?

“James?” Raoul asked softly, being careful not to make any physical movement, sudden or otherwise, that might be interpreted by Bond as a threat. A primal state for 007 would be a quintessentially dangerous one indeed.

“You lied,” Bond said, almost inaudibly.

Confused himself now, Raoul said, “No, I didn’t, James. I informed you of the punishment you’d receive if you ignored the collar’s warning.”

“No.” Bond shook his head, then his glance darted to the doorway to the sitting room before returning to Raoul. “You told me you wouldn’t drug the food.”

Ah. The shocks, both physical and mental, must have affected his short term memory to some extent. Not surprising, given the strength of the collar’s punishment at that setting and Bond’s apprehension regarding Raoul’s particular form of punishment. “No, James,” he said, keeping his voice level. “I did not drug the food — I promised you I wouldn’t. You were simply rendered unconscious by your collar. You don’t remember attempting to leave the suite?”

Bond appeared to ponder that, one hand moving almost unconsciously to his right ankle and rubbing the smooth metal encircling it. Eventually, he lowered his eyes, nodding once. His shoulders slumped ever so slightly in what might have indicated relief, if you were looking closely enough.

And Raoul was looking very closely indeed.

“That bothered you, that I might have lied, didn’t it?” Raoul asked.

Bond didn’t look up, but Raoul could derive from his words and posture that he remained dazed and confused, his emotional shields temporarily weakened. His chin still lowered almost to his chest, Bond murmured, “They lie, and then they leave.”

Raoul closed his eyes, sighing deeply. Yes. So we have made progress, after all.

“Leave you? Like Mathis, and Vesper and . . . your parents?”

Bond’s head snapped up at that, his eyes still vaguely unfocused, even through his quite visible rage. “They abandoned me,” he hissed.

Careful, Raoul.

Raoul held Bond’s furious gaze, trying to project his sincerity. “It’s all right, James, I understand. But it was difficult for you, wasn’t it, after your parents died?” He cocked his head to one side. “You appeared to be withdrawn, almost catatonic, and the government sent you to a therapist, didn’t they?”

No reply from Bond.

“You told the therapists those exact words you just told me, but they didn’t realize what you were actually saying, did they, James? They told you that a child often feels abandoned when their
caregivers die. That it was normal, and that you’d just have to move on with your life,” Raoul leaned forward slowly, attempting to sharpen Bond’s focus on him.

The agent froze again, tracking the movement warily.

“But they didn’t understand, did they?” Raoul continued, relentlessly. “They didn’t delve any deeper than the ‘standard abandonment issue’ — they didn’t ask you exactly what you meant. They didn’t even care enough to ask.”

Bond’s arousal had completely disappeared, but he was still breathing hard, almost hyperventilating. His eyes darted around the room, now plainly uncomfortable with Raoul’s line of questioning, and just as obviously searching for a way out of yet another unremitting assault on his emotional stability.

Raoul paused, considering the wisdom of continuing further, but regardless of Raoul’s lack of faith in the tenets of Primal Therapy, he knew Bond had to speak about this. He had to acknowledge the betrayal of his parents, or he would never be able to transfer that betrayed trust to Raoul.

Once Bond comprehended this — that Raoul was the only one who understood, the only one who cared enough to unearth all of Bond’s pain, the only one whom Bond could rely upon for solace from that pain — well, then perhaps they could both conquer their tortured pasts, together.

Raoul said levelly, but with as much authority as he could project, “James, look at me.”

Bond’s gaze moved reluctantly to his face, his eyes still clouded and glazed, but the anger had utterly vanished and the unvoiced plea on his face was impossible to miss.

Raoul couldn’t allow that tormented expression to sway him. This would hurt both of them, again, but it was absolutely necessary. “What did you find at Skyfall, James?”

The effect was almost immediate. Bond went from immobile to full flight almost instantly, but again, Raoul had been expecting this. He activated the collar briefly, just enough to drop Bond in his tracks and give Raoul time to position himself between Bond and the door.

He couldn’t allow Bond to run from this . . . or him. Not now.

Bond attempted to stagger to his feet, but with the day’s accumulated trauma, he couldn’t quite get his muscles coordinated enough to do so. He got as far as his knees, panting, eyes wide.

“You found something at Skyfall, James. Most likely the day your parents died.”

Bond refused to answer.

Raoul shook his head from side to side sadly. He hated having to do this — hated having to take his poor little rat apart, bit by bit. “You were never quite good enough for them, were you, James? No matter how hard you tried, how hard you worked, you could never please them enough, could you?”

“Stop,” Bond said, his head lowered. “Please.”

Raoul kept his voice firm and level. “You have to say it, James. You have to admit that betrayal to yourself. It’s the only way to ease the pain. Believe me, I know.”

“No.”
“When you lost Vesper and then Mathis, it hurt, but not nearly as badly. You almost expected it by then. However, they loved you, each in their own way, and your parents . . .”

Bond looked up at Raoul then, his face nearly frantic, like he needed Raoul to believe him. “No! They didn’t love me. They abandoned me.”

“Ah, your parents, you mean. But the therapists told you it was common for a child to feel that way. They assumed you simply weren’t accepting the fact of your parents’ deaths, and as a consequence, they gave you only lectures and platitudes. But you were always a pragmatic child. You believed — and you still do — in truth and candor, in black and white.”

Knowing that Bond was still temporarily incapacitated, Raoul took the opportunity to circle around him and quietly remove the top bedcover. He then knelt down next to Bond, keeping only a minimal distance between them. “You believed what you saw that day. You had to, since it was printed so absolutely clear in black and white.” He leaned closer. “What did you find at Skyfall, James?”

Bond was trembling now, trying and failing to maintain control. He looked at Raoul almost desperately.

“You found something. Probably in your father’s study, where you were expressly forbidden to go.” Raoul lowered his voice, “You can tell me, James. You can trust me. I’ll believe you.”

Drawing in a long, shuddering breath, Bond whispered, “They were giving me up. They were giving me away. To someone else, someone I didn’t even know. They didn’t want me -- they didn’t love me.” Bond’s voice broke on that last sentence, and it became painfully obvious how much he was struggling to keep his emotions in check. His gaze fell, and he gripped his thighs so tightly his fingers were leaving imprints on his skin.

“You were not a child given to fanciful flights of imagination. It had to be something you could hold in your hand, something tangible, something you had no choice but to believe in.” Raoul asked again, “James, what did you find at Skyfall?”

Bond closed his eyes tightly, gasping, and when he opened them again he searched Raoul’s face for something he obviously didn’t expect to find. But he was a survivor, and he was a fighter, and he found the strength from somewhere within, or maybe even without, to finally whisper, “Adoption papers.” His voice was strangled from suppressed pain. “I found the adoption papers.”

Raoul breathed out a long sigh. Finally.

“Of course, you did. And from that moment on, your life changed forever.” Raoul gently wrapped the bedcover around Bond’s shoulders. “Come, James, take this. You’re going into shock.”

Bond shuddered as the blanket settled around his shoulders, but his eyes reflected something like amazement, and his expression was as open as Raoul had ever seen it. Without the emotional barriers Bond habitually kept in place, Raoul felt as if he could see straight into his soul.

“You believe me?” Bond asked incredulously.

“I told you I would, corazón mío,” and I do.” Taking a substantial risk, Raoul tugged gently on the ends of the fabric to slowly draw Bond closer to him.

Still shivering from the compounded shocks, Bond seemed to almost gravitate toward the extra warmth of Raoul’s body, and miracle of miracles, he allowed Raoul to hold him, at least through
the insulating layer of blanket.

Raoul was careful to keep his grip as nonsexual as possible, holding Bond tightly but keeping his hands still and nonthreatening.

Bond was still shaking, almost shaking himself apart, but he was not crying. Such an iron will he possessed, to stay so strong after suffering so much. In fact, Raoul would be greatly surprised if he had cried openly since he was a child.

Since the day he’d discovered his parents, whom he loved so desperately, were discarding him like yesterday's trash.

Chapter End Notes

1 - literally, "Mother of God". I figure a sight like that would cause anyone to find religion.

2 - "my heart"

If anyone is interested, this is what I spend a lot of time listening to while writing this. It's the aptly named "Shaken, Not Stirred" by Two Steps From Hell. With the minor chord of the strings intertwined with the Spanish guitar, I consider it to be the perfect accompaniment for this pairing in general, and this fic in particular.
When Raoul next entered the suite, he was preoccupied with another matter entirely and wasn’t paying close enough attention to his surroundings. A rank amateur’s mistake, and he kicked himself mentally for it. You absolutely, positively could not make a mistake around James Bond, because he would ensure you paid dearly for it.

And he did. Bond attacked him immediately as he came through the door, wrapping a forearm around his neck, kneeling him in a kidney, then spinning him around and slamming him hard against the wall. He quickly immobilized both of Raoul’s hands in his.

Raoul winced, thankful he’d at least had the presence of mind to tilt his head forward or he’d be seeing stars by now. So much for the progress they’d made yesterday. One step forward, two steps back.

But then, Raoul knew this process wouldn’t be easy, nor run as smoothly as he would have liked. Bond’s capacity for rebounding after emotional turmoil was almost legendary, and he obviously hadn’t bowed completely to Raoul’s will yet.

Bond’s enraged face leaned in close to his. 
Very obviously not.

“Where is the manual activator for this bloody collar?” Bond snarled.

Raoul sighed dramatically. “And if I told you, you would do what exactly?”

Bond kneed him in the stomach, pulled him forward, then threw him into the wall again. Hard.

“You’re a smart man. I think you’ll figure it out,” he said.

Raoul didn’t attempt to struggle, but then, he had no intention of doing so. Bond needed to vent his aggressive tendencies from time to time. It wasn’t healthy for him to repress them, but he would discover soon enough how patently unwise it was to vent them on Raoul.

Rule number 37 in the breaking and training of recalcitrant field agents — it was more effective to allow Bond to think he had regained control, only to demonstrate most emphatically that he’d never possessed it in the first place. Very soon, he would learn it was pointless to keep trying.

And then Bond would belong completely to him.

“James,” Raoul said patiently. “Even if you gained access to the manual activator, you wouldn’t be able to disable the automatic function of the collar that prohibits your movement past this doorway. That simply cannot be altered by the activator itself. It’s a hardwired function.”

“I’ll cross that bridge when I get to it,” Bond growled.

Raoul sighed. “James, James, sometimes, thinking on your feet is not amenable to your continued health and well being.” Raoul allowed his frustration to leak into his voice. “Every time you attempt to cross this threshold, the automatic subroutine will increase the strength and duration of the electric charge. You will not merely be rendered unconscious next time, dear heart, you will
suffer intensely before the device allows that oblivion.” He paused, making sure he had Bond’s complete attention. “The third attempt would most likely kill you.”

Bond leaned into him closer and said, “I don’t expect to need a third attempt.”

Enough was enough, Raoul decided. He had indulged Bond quite sufficiently for one day. Or any day, for that matter.

Raoul straightened to his full height against the wall, emphasizing the difference in their relative sizes, and then looked down at Bond, trapping his gaze with his. Raoul’s expression and posture radiated intense displeasure and disapproval, and it wasn’t long before he saw the slightest glimmer of doubt cloud Bond’s furiously intent expression.

Good. The training had accomplished that much — Bond was definitely uneasy about the prospect of disappointing Raoul, even if he wasn’t consciously aware of that fact yet.

However, his grip on Raoul’s hands only tightened, so the lesson regarding punishment for disobedience would have to be repeated.

And this time, his poor little rat would find the punishment particularly severe.

“James,” Raoul said silkily, tugging playfully at his trapped wrists. “What makes you think I need my hands to use the activator?”

Bond’s eyes had just enough time to widen in dismay before Raoul activated the collar.

As Bond dropped to the floor, Raoul twisted his hands free, shoving Bond away from him in the process. Unfortunately, the additional momentum caused Bond to strike his head on the sideboard as he fell, but Raoul couldn’t back down now. Bond had to learn that a physical attack on him would not be tolerated.

Bond writhed on the floor, gasping with the unremitting agony.

Raoul watched, as dispassionately as he could, for a full two minutes. When Bond caught his eyes in desperation and soundlessly mouthed, “Please,” Raoul finally terminated the punishment.

Rolling onto his side and curling into a fetal position, Bond lay heaving for breath, his body trembling with the aftershocks.

Raoul exited the suite long enough to acquire some first aid supplies, then knelt down next to Bond. The agent had rolled onto the side of his possible head injury, so Raoul gripped his shoulder to turn him over onto his back.

When Bond resisted his gentle pressure, Raoul applied enough force to complete the maneuver, then straddled Bond’s torso to hold him firmly in place. He knew this wasn’t absolutely necessary - experience had taught him that the agent would be relatively helpless so soon after the collar’s punishment cycle, particularly after his prolonged exposure this time.

Bond obviously knew this as well, because when he looked up at Raoul, his eyes were wide and distressed as he struggled futilely against Raoul’s hold.

Raoul allowed this for a few moments, then said soothingly, “Easy, James. I simply need to check your head injury. Nothing more will happen to you.” Raoul stroked his thumbs in small circles where he restrained Bond’s shoulders, attempting to calm him. He paused, then said softly, “I will not harm you. Do you understand, corazón mío?”
Bond continued to stare at him, his respiration shallow and fast, but he finally nodded ever so slightly and relaxed into Raoul’s hold.

Raoul smiled down at him broadly, immensely pleased with his display of trust and obedience. When Bond relaxed even further in response to that tacit indication of approval, Raoul knew they hadn’t regressed completely from yesterday’s progress. At the very least, it was a substantial improvement over Bond’s typical behavior in this type of situation.

He was learning. His little rat was definitely learning.

Raoul couldn’t be more proud if he’d invented the man himself.

After he tended to Bond’s injury, however, they still faced the minor detail of insuring that Bond’s attack on him was never repeated. And Raoul just happened to know an excellent deterrent for that.

But, first things first. Still straddling Bond’s torso, Raoul gently moved Bond’s head to one side so he could see the injury. It was a small cut and very shallow, but it was bleeding profusely as head wounds tended to do. Raoul wiped away the worst of the blood, applied antiseptic, then held a piece of gauze over the cut, keeping a gentle pressure on it to stop the bleeding.

“If I have to put a plaster on this, it’ll mean shaving off some of your hair,” Raoul shook his head. “Tsk. I really hope that won’t be necessary, because you clearly don’t have enough to spare.”

Raoul placed two fingers of his other hand on Bond’s carotid to check his pulse, and he didn’t miss Bond’s nervous swallowing in response to that gentle touch on his neck.

“I’ve never been fond of this ridiculously short hairstyle of yours, so I was planning on letting it grow out.” Still maintaining the gentle pressure on the head wound, Raoul used his other hand to turn Bond back to face him. “What do you think, James? Longer hair has its advantages, you know.” He paused, tossing his head and smiling broadly. “It might even conceal the external evidence of some sort of . . . implanted device, hmm?”

He saw the slow realization dawn on Bond’s face.

Raoul tapped two fingers on the side of his head. “Perhaps even the microchip used to activate your collar?”

Bond remained mute, but Raoul could see the question on his face.

“I don’t know why you’re surprised, James. I am quite the electronics genius, if I must say so myself.” He paused. “In fact, I do say so myself, quite often actually.” Raoul smiled. “Regardless, it’s really not that difficult. The technology already exists to translate a quadriplegic’s brain waves into commands, bypassing the damaged spinal cord to directly access and control the muscles of the limbs. However, instead of controlling muscles, I’ve adapted this device to translate brain waves into simple commands the collar will recognize. I only had to add a wireless transceiver that matched the collar’s frequency — and voila! — totally hands free access with instantaneous control.” He waved a hand negligently. “Pfft. Simplicity itself.”

Bond’s eyes narrowed, but then he dropped his gaze, evidently considering all the permutations of Raoul’s revelation.

“Oh, don’t worry, James. I can’t accidentally activate the collar. It’s not like the old adage of ‘try not to think about a pink hippopotamus.’ I’ve built in programming safeguards to prevent that. I’ve already promised you that I wouldn’t harm you unnecessarily.” He paused significantly. “If you behave, that is.”
Raoul tilted Bond’s chin up with his free hand, holding him in place.

“However, if you’re harboring the idea of physically tampering with the implanted device, say, by employing a sharp, pointy object of some sort, I really wouldn’t if I were you. The circuitry includes a dead man’s switch, and you don’t want to trigger *that* without first knowing what it activates.”

Raoul didn’t wait for an answer, as he knew he wouldn’t receive one. He slowly removed the gauze pad. Thankfully, the bleeding had already stopped, and the wound was definitely much too small to worry about stitches. He checked Bond’s pupils, but they both appeared to be equal in size and reactive. “Do you have a headache, James?” Raoul asked.

Bond started to shake his head, then froze, obviously thinking better of his instinctual negative response. “Somewhat,” he finally admitted. “It’s not bad.”

“Good,” Raoul said, and if the ‘good’ was more for Bond’s last minute honest reply than the actual content of his statement, well, that was his little secret.

“With your history, you should have a better feel for gauging a potential concussion than me, but if something changes, I expect you to let me know, hmm?”

Bond paused, evidently debating the wisdom of refusing to answer, but he eventually said, “Yes.”

“I have a name, you know,” Raoul said.

Bond looked at him sharply.

“You never call me by my name.” Raoul cocked an eyebrow. “It’s enough to give a man a complex, because names are a powerful thing. The ancients believed that knowing the name of something gave you power over it, but you never use mine. I wonder why?” He smiled down at Bond. “It’s not because you subconsciously don’t *want* to have power over me, is it?”

“But I *do* call you by name,” Bond snapped. “Just not out loud. Doesn’t ‘asshole’ count?”

Raoul was surprised into laughter. He never wanted Bond to lose his refreshing impertinence, but he couldn’t let him get away with the disrespect entirely. “There’s still the matter of your punishment for attacking me.”

Bond went very, very still. “What do you call that extended shock-fest?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Raoul looked upward, then back down at Bond. “‘Preliminary’, perhaps?”

Bond dropped his gaze, licking his lips in an unconscious gesture of unease.

Raoul felt himself flush with heat. *Damn, but the man was sexy without even trying -- or even wanting to.*

Grasping Bond’s chin with both hands, he held him firmly in place with his fingers while he allowed his thumbs to stroke against Bond’s neck.

It was almost a Pavlovian response now, how Bond’s eyes immediately dilated with this particular touch. It was a heady feeling indeed to know how easily he could affect the agent with so little effort.

“Don’t worry, I won’t burden you with anything too intrusive this time.” Raoul leaned down to
hover over Bond’s face, allowing more of his body weight to settle against Bond’s torso, effectively bringing the entire lengths of their bodies together. “I think one kiss should do it. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Bond’s expression hardened in almost instinctual denial.

Raoul lowered his voice in warning, “Or else, we could explore . . . other options.” He shifted slightly against Bond’s groin, letting him feel Raoul’s hardness through the thin barrier of his trousers. “Well, which shall it be, James? The choice, as always, is yours. However, if you do allow this kiss, you know better than to bite me, hmm?”

He could tell Bond was attempting to maintain a determined front, but the slow, steady assault on the tender skin of his neck and Raoul’s implied threat about other options were too much to overcome. Bond’s lips parted slightly, and Raoul didn’t give him any further opportunity to object. He simply descending further until their lips barely touched, utilizing only the faintest of pressure. He knew Bond expected him to savage his mouth, but Raoul would have none of that. He teased, and tasted, and probed until Bond almost unconsciously opened his mouth further to allow Raoul access.

Denying Bond’s expected attempt to take charge, Raoul plundered the man’s mouth so thoroughly that he left no place unexplored. He found Bond to be particularly sensitive at the roof of his mouth, and he licked mercilessly there until he heard Bond’s soft moan. He dueled briefly with Bond’s tongue, not allowing him egress into Raoul’s mouth, but insuring he kept complete and utter control of the kiss. He licked and he stroked, imposing a maddeningly slow pace, until he finally felt a corresponding hardness against his own.

Raoul lifted his mouth, staring down at the dilated eyes and almost dazed expression on Bond’s face. Raoul thrust his hips once, sliding their lengths together, and Bond responded with a grunt, closing his eyes at the sensation.

He slowly lifted himself from Bond’s body, deliberately sliding against him one last time. “Oops,” Raoul said. “I promised I wouldn’t do that, didn’t I?”

Raoul leaned down to steal one last fleeting kiss from Bond, pleased when the man didn’t object. But then, Raoul really was a fabulous kisser. “Sorry, James, I know I said only one, but I must admit to having a slight oral fixation.” Raoul glanced down the length of Bond’s body, noting he was still painfully erect.

Among other things.

Holding out a hand, Raoul said, “Come, James. I think you’ve had enough for one day, and I’m quite sure you’d rather not lie on the floor indefinitely. Especially in that condition.”

Bond gave him a half-hearted glare, but surprisingly, he accepted the proffered hand without complaint. Raoul discovered the reason why when he had to practically lift Bond bodily due to the agent’s still uncooperative muscles. Once Bond was on his feet, Raoul tentatively wrapped an arm around his waist, and when he wasn’t immediately punched for his presumption, proceeded to guide Bond -- or ‘haul’ might be the more appropriate term -- onto the bed.

Once Bond was flat on his back, Raoul turned his chin to check the head wound one more time. Pleased that the journey from the sitting room hadn’t restarted the bleeding, Raoul took the opportunity to brush the skin of Bond’s chin and cheeks with the back of his fingers. “Well, James. Looks like we’re due for another session to remove more residual, pesky hairs.”
Bond’s eyes narrowed, but he wisely didn’t object to Raoul’s plan.

“I’ll see you in a few hours.” He smiled down at Bond. “By the way, you’re forbidden to take care of that” — he indicated Bond’s erection — “on your own. I’d be more than pleased to watch you bring yourself to completion someday, but you are not permitted to come unless in my presence. I will know, James, if you try.”

“So much for my privacy and your lack of monitoring devices.”

Raoul heaved a heavy sigh. “James, for the last time, I did not lie to you. The rooms are not monitored, but you are.” He traced his fingers from Bond’s thigh to his right ankle. “From past experience, I know exactly what your pulse and blood pressure look like just before you orgasm.” He smiled in fond remembrance. “It’s a very distinctive pattern.”

“Bastard,” James muttered.

“Well, I see your choice of names for me has now broadened to two, but we both know only one of us merits that particular epithet.”

Bond’s expression froze as he once again attempted to hide behind his emotional barriers, and Raoul patted his thigh fondly. “I’ll leave you to think on a more appropriate form of address for our next visit, hmm?”

Chapter End Notes

And yes, the technology that Raoul mentions actually does exist to some extent, but hopefully no one else has come up with this particular application. ; )

I wasn’t entirely happy with this chapter, but it’s late, and it’s been an especially horrid week.

If for any reason you don’t wish to leave a public comment (or cannot easily do so because of a lack of an AO3 account), please feel free to drop me an e-mail, which is listed in my AO3 profile. Comments and concrit are treasured.
Chapter 9

The next several days were surprisingly uneventful, and Bond was being almost suspiciously well behaved. He would answer when spoken to, reluctantly, but he still refused to call Raoul by name.

Raoul didn’t call him on it. Yet. They had time.

They had just finished their last electrolysis session on Bond’s face when Raoul decided it was time to stir things up a little. “There,” Raoul said, patting Bond’s cheek. “You’ll never have to worry about a beard or that horribly dangerous straight razor ever again.”

“Your continued concern for my well-being is touching.”

Raoul smiled down at him. “Now, James, I can either take that as the sarcastic jibe you intend it to sound like, or I can wonder if this isn’t your very subtle method of fishing for information.” He winked. “I think it’s the latter, and I’m willing to bet that you’re not even aware you’re doing it.”

Bond froze, his expression giving nothing away. “What do you mean?”

“Let me spell it out for you. You’re wondering if I really do care for you. At times, you’ve even wondered how much I care for you. Most importantly, you’re wondering if it’s possible to trust me.”

“I’d be a bloody fool to trust you,” Bond said emphatically.

“Would you?” Raoul cocked an eyebrow at him. “Someone once said, ‘The greatest lesson in life is to know that even fools are right sometimes.’”

“Let me guess — your grandmother again?”


That startled an amused snort out of Bond.

Raoul decided he enjoyed Bond’s subdued mirth substantially more than his usual glare. “Now, pay attention, James. This is important. Does that mean you’re not a fool, in which case you can trust me, or that you are a fool, but perhaps this is one of those times you might not be right?”

Bond closed his eyes, plainly exasperated. “It means that, oftentimes, you make my head spin.”

“Oooh,” Raoul said, cupping Bond’s cheek with one hand. “I’ll definitely settle for that.”

Bond’s eyes snapped open. “That wasn’t an invitation.”

“Hmm? Do I need one?” Raoul kept his hand right where it was.

Gritting his teeth, Bond said, “Apparently not.”

Raoul beamed down at him. “Correct answer.” He rubbed a small circle on Bond’s cheek with his thumb, then trailed his hand down the agent’s neck onto his chest. “Now that we’ve finished with the beard, we can consider removing the hair from other places.”
“No,” Bond said, almost reflexively.

“No?” Raoul repeated, a reproachful tone in his voice. “I think we’ve already gone over the inappropriateness of that term with regard to you and me, James.”

Bond glared up at him.

*Well, that was nice while it lasted.*

However, he had no intention of allowing Bond to get his way with this. Not only did Raoul truly enjoy the smooth, silky texture of the skin left by the electrolysis procedure, he also felt these sessions were helpful for another reason. They required lengthy, repeated periods of close proximity and contact, and Bond had perceptibly improved with regard to his tolerance of Raoul’s touch over time.

In fact, during one session, Bond had very nearly fallen asleep during the process, which had pleased Raoul to no end. When they had first started, he would never have trusted Raoul enough to allow such a potentially dangerous lapse in his situational awareness.

Well, in any case, cajoling Bond into submission was fast becoming one of Raoul’s favorite pastimes.

“Really, you can be so stubborn.” Raoul slowly circled his hand on Bond’s chest, deliberately avoiding his nipples. “You have so little hair on your chest to start with that it would take absolutely no time at all.” He maintained the light caresses to Bond’s chest for a few minutes, twirling his finger through the faint tufts of hair. “Think how much better this would feel without all that nasty hair in the way.” Raoul finally nudged gently against a nipple, giving it a quick pinch, then lowered his mouth to suck lightly on it before releasing it almost immediately.

Bond closed his eyes again, evidently bowing to the inevitable. “If I agree, I expect this to be the last of it.”

Raoul was delighted. “Why, James, are you actually attempting to *bargain* with me?”

If Bond had resorted to bargaining, he’d at least subconsciously come to the realization that his previous methods of resistance were no longer useful to him. In other words, he was beginning to finally accept the fact of his permanent captivity. Not that he would admit it out loud, or even to himself yet, but he had definitely started down the slippery slope.

Bringing both hands into play now, Raoul gently kneaded Bond’s nipples. He leaned down to whisper into Bond’s ear, “But, James, there is a *slight* hitch to that plan. Whatever could you *possibly* possess that might act as a bargaining chip, hmm?” Still hovering over Bond’s face, Raoul moved one hand down to slowly caress the man’s lower abdomen, making his final destination abundantly clear.

Bond drew in a shaky breath, obviously attempting to ignore Raoul’s increasingly explicit ministrations. However, his irregular breathing proved he was only partially successful at controlling his arousal. He licked his lips, turning his head to one side, as far from Raoul as he was permitted to get. “Apparently nothing that you don’t already own,” he said bitterly.

Raoul released his own breath in a sigh. “And that, *corazón mío*, is more than sufficient payment indeed.” He immediately ceased his sensual assault.

Bond whipped his head back, looking up at Raoul, clearly confused.
Gently grasping Bond’s chin, Raoul answered the unspoken question. “Sometimes, the most valuable bargaining chip isn’t anything physical at all. Sometimes, it’s as simple as acknowledging the fact that you belong to me now.” Raoul stroked his chin soothingly. “We’ll remove the chest hair, and I’ll leave the rest of your magnificent body alone, much to my everlasting chagrin and regret.” Raoul lowered his mouth to Bond’s, kissing him gently. “Is that deal to your satisfaction, James?”

Reward and punishment, give and take, never allowing Bond to feel solid ground beneath him. Eventually, he hoped Bond would turn to the only person who could provide that stability — a stability he’d been sorely lacking his entire life.

When Bond didn’t immediately reply, a slightly bewildered expression still on his face, Raoul simply couldn’t resist. He kissed Bond again, delving deeply into the man’s mouth. He didn’t linger long, hoping to inflame not provoke. But as he lifted his mouth, he turned Bond’s head slightly and sucked gently below his right ear, enjoying the resultant gasp that ensued.

As Raoul continued the suction, hard enough that it would inevitably leave a mark, Bond muttered a protest despite his obvious physical enjoyment of the proceedings.

Raoul lifted his mouth to whisper, “‘No’, again, James? I’m hurt. You can’t possibly be ashamed that anyone seeing this will know you belong to me?” He ghosted a finger over the mark he’d made, watching Bond shiver. “I thought the collar would have already made that abundantly clear, but for you, this proof of ownership is far more personal. It’s one of the few things you believe you can control, isn’t it, what happens to your body?”

When Bond didn’t answer, Raoul said, “If you prefer, there are other things I can do with my mouth, you know.” He moved down the length of Bond’s body, and without further warning, took his cock into his mouth.

Bond gasped in surprise, his hips bucking once.

Raoul merely held him down and swallowed him completely, pushing Bond’s significant length further down his throat.

As it turns out, there were some advantages to the extensive damage done by the cyanide. Namely, his nerves had been so damaged that Raoul had absolutely no gag reflex whatsoever.

He held Bond there, unmoving, and when he eventually looked up, the man was frantically gripping the top covering of the bed, obviously struggling not to respond to Raoul’s actions -- or inaction, in this particular case.

_Nice try, mi ratita._ Amused, Raoul hummed softly and continuously around his mouthful of Bond.

Bond groaned, his hips again attempting to rise and force friction on the place he needed it most.

Raoul allowed him to slip free, trapping Bond’s hips with his hands. “Do you want me to stop, James?” he asked innocently.

Wide-eyed and panting, Bond looked at him, obviously still struggling against his intense arousal. But he was a strong-willed, stubborn man, and he nodded once, albeit tenuously.

Raoul smiled. “Unfortunately, I must insist on a _verbal_ response, James,” he said, before swallowing Bond again and sucking hard several times.

“Aaah,” Bond gasped, hands again clutching a stranglehold on the bedcover.
Raoul released him, and while waiting for Bond’s reply, he helpfully began removing the pre-come from Bond’s cock, using repeated tiny, barely perceptible licks to the tip. He then gripped Bond’s length, moving his hand very slowly from root to tip, as he said, “Now, James — using those sultry vocal cords of yours this time — do you wish me to stop?”

Breathing like he’d just run a marathon, Bond blinked twice, apparently finding it difficult to focus on Raoul, but he finally managed a strangled, “Yes?” in a voice quite plainly tinged with some degree of doubt.

Raoul laughed, releasing him immediately and shaking his head at Bond’s stubborn tenacity. The man was trembling constantly, he was so aroused, but he still refused to submit. Raoul could tell by the desperation in his eyes that he was sorely tempted, however. Oh, how he was tempted.

“James,” Raoul finally said, fondly, “you are without a doubt the most adorable creature on this planet. I would ask that you never change, but at this rate, I’m too afraid your frustrated libido would kill you.”

Giving Bond’s bare hip a final affectionate pat, Raoul braced a hand on the bed to get up.

Bond grabbed Raoul’s hand before he could move. “Wait. You’re really stopping?”

Raoul looked down at his trapped wrist, somewhat pleased that Bond had initiated the contact between them, for whatever the reason. He smiled. “Why,” he said, leering openly at him, “have you changed your mind, James?”

Staring up at him intently, Bond said, “Yes. No.” Shaking his head in clearly visible frustration, he added, “I don’t understand. You mean, you will actually stop if I ask?”

Pulling his trapped hand up to his mouth, Raoul gently kissed Bond’s fingers where they grasped his wrist, and said, “Haven’t I just done so? As long as you are not being punished for misbehavior, your body still belongs to you.” He kissed the fingers again. “I only ask that I borrow it, from time to time, with your permission, of course.”

Raoul freed his hand easily from Bond’s stunned grip and stood up. “Hasta mañana, pequeño.” ¹

Raoul left the suite, humming quietly to himself, more than satisfied with the practically pole-axed expression on Bond’s face.

Chapter End Notes

¹ “Until tomorrow, little one.”
Over the next week, Raoul was careful not to make any overt sexual advances to Bond. Oh, he still touched him, almost constantly when they were together, but he kept their interactions either clinical or merely affectionate, not wanting Bond to lose the level of tolerance to Raoul’s proximity he had gained so far.

Raoul also continued the planned electrolysis sessions on Bond’s chest, which the man permitted without even an ounce of protest. When Bond committed to something, he never reneged on his word -- a character trait that Raoul fully intended to exploit to his own ends. Raoul knew that when (he wasn’t even considering ‘if’) Bond finally committed to Raoul, it would be forever.

In the meantime, he didn’t want Bond to get too bored. ‘Idle hands are the devil’s workshop’, as the saying goes, so Raoul had provided him with a diverse selection of books and magazines. However, Bond was not the type of individual who was inclined to sit around quietly and read. Instead, Raoul would oftentimes enter the suite to find him doing a series of calisthenics, a regimen which Raoul heartily approved of. He certainly didn’t want the man to get soft, and watching a naked Bond doing lunges was well worth the price of admission just in itself.

One evening, during their last electrolysis session, Raoul looked up from his work to find Bond had fallen completely asleep. Raoul smiled. Not that he didn’t appreciate the end result, but perhaps his little rat was exercising a bit too hard if his fatigue had caused him to drop his guard this thoroughly.

Raoul quietly put away the equipment, then merely sat and watched the sleeping Bond for a few minutes. He was almost a different person while asleep or unconscious, displaying a vulnerability that he would never abide while conscious. It had the effect of activating Raoul’s previously latent protective instincts in a most unsettling manner.

He reached out to touch Bond’s cheek, and the agent predictably awoke with a start, immediately grasping Raoul’s hand before he was even fully aware. When Bond’s eyes had focused enough to identify Raoul, however, he released his wrist, dropping his aggressive mien almost instantly.

“Sorry,” Bond mumbled, eyes not meeting Raoul’s, obviously expecting to be punished for his presumption.

Raoul, however, couldn’t have been more pleased. He considered it significant progress that Bond had promptly relaxed his overdeveloped self-protective instincts the moment he’d recognized Raoul.

“My fault,” Raoul said, sitting back. “I know better than to wake you like that.” He smiled. “Just couldn’t resist, I’m afraid.”

“It’s my curse,” Bond said bitterly, “that I’m so bloody irresistible.”

Raoul raised an eyebrow at the blatant self deprecation. “Someday, James, I’ll make you see how true a statement that actually is.”

“What, that I am cursed?”
Shaking his head, Raoul said, “No, that you are irresistible, no matter what your previous life’s experiences have taught you.”

Bond snorted. “Not going there.”

“No, I suppose you won’t. M has taught you too well, at the last.” He let his anger at the bitch flare. “She taught you not to trust anyone, and she was so damn proud of herself when you’d finally ‘learned your lesson.’”

“I’ve never trusted anyone.”

“That’s a lie, James, and you know it. You have trusted someone, many times, but you keep getting your heart broken when you do.”

Bond turned his head away, closing up. “If you don’t mind, I’m rather tired.”

Raoul sighed. “I’ve noticed. Your eyes are almost constantly bloodshot. Aren’t you sleeping well, James?”

Bond glared up at him. “And if I said no, I’m sure you’d be happy to supply me with the appropriate drugs to help me ‘sleep.’”

“James, I thought we were past this. I will not drug you like that again, but I reserve the right to look after your continued health, and I won’t allow your aversion to medication to interfere with that.”

Bond shook his head firmly. “I just need to get out -- into the sunlight. I’m about to go stir crazy locked in here.” Bond’s eyes narrowed. “But I feel perfectly fine, so I do not need to be drugged into oblivion.”

Raoul crossed his arms, considering. Bond was backsliding dangerously into almost willful disobedience. Raoul was tempted to force a sedative into him, regardless of his antipathy to the idea, but Raoul had to admit this was treading dangerously close to breaking his previous promise not to drug him. Quite the dilemma, but perhaps it would be worthwhile to see what a compromise would accomplish.

He reached down to cup Bond’s cheeks in his hands. “All right, James, I’ll abide by your wishes. This time.”

Bond’s expression immediately cleared into something resembling relief . . . and gratefulness?

Raoul tested that theory by lowering his mouth to Bond’s. He was immediately granted access, and Bond participated equally and apparently wholeheartedly in the kiss.

Sitting back, slightly bemused, Raoul said, “Very nice, James. Very nice, indeed. However, I do expect to see an improvement in your sleeping habits or we’ll have to consider other options, hmm?”

Bond lowered his eyes. “Don’t worry. I won’t need the drugs. I can absolutely guarantee I’ll be better . . . soon.”

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Wide awake after that somewhat odd session with Bond, Raoul decided to check up on affairs at MI6. He was mildly surprised to find that someone — and again, it could only be Q — was not only
still actively looking for Bond, but he’d actually widened the search into most of Europe and southwestern Asia.

What’s more, he’d developed a truly fascinating algorithm that was systematically logging into the servers of all the major banks, accessing the new account information, and then using that algorithm to scan the security camera records with the time stamps of those new accounts, tying it all into the facial recognition software. He obviously assumed that Bond was merely off the grid, rather than dead. Knowing Bond would need to access funds at some point if he remained off the grid, this tactic was bound to pay off at some point.

An ambitious project, to say the least, but that type of truly extensive search algorithm must be nearly debilitating MI6’s servers, if not completely overwhelming them.

Hmm. Raoul dug a little deeper, knowing there was no way that M would allow such a drain on MI6’s resources for one man. Even if that man was 007.

When, after nearly two hours of digging, he finally discovered how Q was accomplishing it, Raoul actually sat back in his chair, reluctantly impressed. To enable his search algorithms, Q had hacked into the servers of multiple organizations, “borrowing” time on their supercomputers and tying the whole ersatz network into his personal workstation. Not only had he accessed the supercomputers of major educational and scientific institutions, but he’d also hacked into the secure servers of the U.S. Department of Defense as well as Langley, of all places.

Raoul whistled softly. He might have to take back his comment about Q not being ruthless enough — this kind of operation definitely took cojones.1 He was also more than mildly surprised that Q would make such an effort for Bond -- a man he’d only just met. Perhaps, Raoul wondered, he was not the only one with an obsession?

Definitely food for thought. He made a mental note to keep a very close eye on this Q indeed. Regardless, he would likely have to sabotage Q’s search efforts if he ever did hope to get Bond into public view again, since Raoul doubted the bank account project was the only avenue Q was pursuing.

Raoul was very familiar with Bond’s psyche, and he therefore intended to go no further with altering Bond’s appearance than eliminating his option to wear a beard. Bond’s sense of self was one of his cornerstones. He was not enamored of either disguises or deceit, somewhat surprising given his choice of profession, but Raoul would not require it of him.

In truth, he had no desire to change Bond’s appearance either, purely from his own personal preference. The man was perfect just as he was, and Raoul considered it almost sacrilegious to alter those features in any way.

He truly hadn’t expected anyone at MI6 to make such a diligent effort at locating Bond. While it was intellectually stimulating to have such a worthy opponent, he would definitely deal with Q if he endangered Raoul’s plans, permanently if necessary. Raoul was too enamored of Bond to take half measures.

Raoul logged off his computer and was preparing to turn in for the night when the alarm on Bond’s monitor went off. Swearing, he contacted Luis on the intercom, obviously waking the man from a sound sleep, and told him to meet him in Bond’s suite. This shouldn’t be happening so far into Bond’s training, and he had a feeling that something had just gone horribly wrong.

Luis was directly behind him as he made his way down the corridor to Bond’s suite, but they both came to an abrupt halt when they didn’t see Bond lying outside the threshold as they’d expected.
given the nature of the alarm.

Perhaps he had fallen back across the doorway before the full shock hit him?

Raoul motioned for Luis to stay back, and he entered the suite alone, this time very alert for the possibility of another ambush. However, Bond was not in the sitting room, nor, for that matter, was he anywhere else in the suite.

“Sir?” Luis called from the hallway.

“Go to my rooms and get the laptop with the GPS. Hurry. Bond isn’t here.”

There was a moment of shocked silence, but then Luis replied, “Yes, sir.”

Feeling vaguely foolish, Raoul looked quickly under the bed, but there was no sign of Bond. He was preparing to get back to his feet when he noticed that the dust under the bed had been disturbed at some point, and recently, so he pulled himself further underneath to investigate.

Swearing again at what he saw, colorfully and in more than one language, Raoul pulled himself out from under the bed just as Luis came into the room, already having activated the GPS locator.

“I don’t understand, sir. The GPS says he should be right here. I’ve got a strong signal.”

Raoul was furious with himself. No wonder the man had looked so exhausted. “Declination, Luis,” Raoul said sharply, striding toward the bathroom.

“Sir?”

“The GPS only pinpoints latitude and longitude, not declination.” He opened the door to the oversized bathroom vanity, shaking his head in amazement. “He’s directly beneath us. My clever, industrious little rat has been tunneling. Probably since the first night he was incarcerated here, given the ‘tools’ he had to work with.”

He’d just finished that observation when the screaming started.

Raoul was already running for the door, not even attempting to squeeze himself into the tiny space Bond had escaped through. “Go fetch the doctor, Luis. I have a feeling we’ll be needing his services.”

Nodding, Luis ran toward the elevator. Not wanting to wait for that ancient device, and knowing the collar’s range limited Bond to only one floor, Raoul took the stairs. He burst through the emergency exit and pelted down the corridor, counting doors as he went. He needn’t have bothered, because Bond’s piercing scream made it easy to locate the correct room.

When Raoul entered, he found Bond lying on the floor, covered in plaster dust and striped with cuts and lacerations from the close quarters of his descent, coiled tightly into a fetal position. The collar in this mode was particular vicious, activating for a length of time, then giving the victim a slight interlude to anticipate what was coming, before activating again for steadily increasing periods of time and ever rising voltages.

Bond had just a few moments of respite as Raoul entered, long enough to look pleadingly up at him, before the collar had him convulsing again, screaming in agony.

He couldn’t shut it off. Raoul couldn’t shut the damn thing off, not once the cycle had started.

Raoul wanted to scream himself. He couldn’t touch him, couldn’t hold him, could only pace back
and forth as Bond screamed his throat raw, again and again. He was furious with himself for programming it that way to begin with, furious with Bond for disobeying and activating it, but more than anything, he was absolutely, positively terrified. Bond’s intestinal fortitude was his weakness now — the cycle would only terminate when he finally slipped into unconsciousness, and this man had turned perseverance against adversity into an art form. The man simply didn’t know how to stop trying.

The cycle paused, and Bond looked up at him again, confused hurt now glistening in his eyes, before the collar activated once more. He could barely utter a sound anymore, his throat was so ravaged, but his torment was painfully apparent.

Madre de Dios. Raoul couldn’t bear to watch him suffer like this, but he couldn’t look away either, could only suffer along with him until the cycle automatically ended.

“Come on, James,” he muttered to himself. “Let yourself go. Stop struggling, stop fighting, for just this once in your life.” He clasped his hands together in something like prayer. “Por favor, corazón mío, por favor.”

As if he had heard the whispered words, Bond’s body at last went lax as he slipped into unconsciousness, and Raoul immediately crashed down to his knees, turning Bond over onto his back.

Bond wasn’t unconscious. His eyes were wide open, and he wasn’t breathing.

Almost panicked now, Raoul searched for a pulse and couldn’t find one. Struggling to calm his own anxious breathing, Raoul made sure Bond’s airway was clear and immediately started CPR, counting aloud in Spanish in his distraught state.

Every time he stopped the chest compressions to give Bond air, he prayed he’d feel a breath on his cheek, but nothing. Always nothing. Back to compressions, “Uno, dos, tres . . .” The thirty compressions took too long. Entirely too long. He needed to feel if Bond had revived, if he’d come back to him. The fourth time he felt for breath and found none, a single drop of moisture struck Bond’s cheek, but Raoul ignored it. Sentiment would help no one now, least of all James. “Uno, dos, tres . . .”

It must have been less than five minutes, but it felt like hours, when Raoul finally heard the sound of running feet. Luis and Dr. Almeida ran into the room, the doctor immediately gauging the situation and preparing an AED for use. Evidently Luis had informed him of what he was likely to find, and the doctor had therefore brought the appropriate equipment with him.

If Bond survived this, Raoul made a mental note to give his second-in-command a hefty raise.

Swiftly attaching the electrodes to Bond’s chest, the doctor prepared a syringe and injected him while he waited for the device to charge. Keeping one eye on the gauge as he confirmed the continued lack of a pulse with two fingers on Bond’s carotid, he called out, “Clear,” no doubt by sheer force of habit, before removing his fingers and activating the defibrillator.

Bond’s body jerked, and he immediately gasped in a deep, shuddering breath. He blinked once, then his eyes closed as he slipped into what was hopefully now mere unconsciousness.

Raoul sank down heavily unto his haunches, struggling to steady his own breathing. The doctor checked Bond’s pulse again, seeming to take an eternity, before he finally nodded succinctly to Raoul.
Sighing deeply, Raoul shook his head. That had been too close. Entirely too close.

There was no hope for it now. He’d have to move up his timetable before Bond actually managed to kill himself first.

Chapter End Notes

1 - Testicles, or balls, in the common vernacular
2 - "Please, my heart, please."

Note: To those of you who have left kudos, and especially to those wonderful souls who have taken the time to comment, I thank you profusely. It means more than I can say.
Raoul checked the blindfold and the knots on Bond’s restraints one more time, then waited for the mild sedative he’d been given by the doctor to wear off.

He had checked and double-checked with Diego to make sure Bond had suffered no permanent damage from the collar. He had been so insistent that the doctor had, in exasperation, threatened to bring in a colleague for a second opinion, knowing quite well Raoul’s antipathy toward outsiders.

Alas, this was the price Raoul paid for acquiring competent people to assist him. He and the good Doctor Almeida had known each other for more than a decade, so the man was intimately familiar with Raoul’s foibles as well as the most efficient methods for maneuvering around them, much to Raoul’s annoyance. It was a good thing he was such a capable physician and that Raoul liked the man so much, because he could be positively infuriating at times.

And Raoul typically did not play well with infuriating people.

However, he had been told that Bond’s vitals were fine, his ECG’s (several of them, at Raoul’s insistence) had been fine, so Raoul would have to assume the agent was fit enough to undergo his latest round of behavioral correction. This was something Raoul himself was not looking forward to, given its nature, but there was no way he could let Bond’s abysmal conduct go unpunished.

More importantly, he knew Bond wouldn’t respect him if he did.

Bond finally stirred, groaning, and it was a testament to the amount of trauma he’d endured that it took him significantly longer than usual to register his immobilized status. Raoul had him lying at the end of the bed with both legs dangling over the edge and spread apart, his feet tied firmly to the frame. His hands were secured behind his back, and there was a broad strap across his chest, immobilizing his upper body. However, it wasn’t until Bond realized that he couldn’t see that he began to struggle frantically against his restraints.

Raoul remained silent, letting him fully appreciate his helplessness for a few minutes, but when it became apparent he was likely to harm himself with his efforts, Raoul knew he’d waited long enough. He quickly released the chest strap, slipping onto the bed behind Bond and pulling him up against his chest. He then grasped the top of Bond’s head and pulled it back to rest against his shoulder, holding him firmly.

With his wrists tied behind him and his head tilted backward sharply, Bond’s back was bowed and his throat exposed. Combined with his inability to see, this should have made him feel profoundly vulnerable, yet Bond ceased his struggling almost immediately and allowed Raoul to hold him, although he continued to breathe harshly through an open mouth.

Once Bond’s breathing had calmed somewhat, Raoul said quietly, “It’s okay, James. Your vision is fine. You’re just wearing a blindfold.” He stroked his hair back from the soft cloth. “But you already knew who it was, even without the ability to see or hear me, didn’t you?”

Bond tried to nod, but his head was still held firmly in Raoul’s grasp, so he said merely, “Yes,” his voice harsh and raspy from the collar’s earlier punishment.

Raoul brought his other hand up to stroke Bond’s throat, almost unconsciously attempting to
soothe the hurt. “I admit to being somewhat curious. Even though I’ve been your only visitor before, you’ve been trained extremely well to never make assumptions. So how, exactly, did you know it was me, hmm?” He continued the gentle stroking as he spoke.

Swallowing involuntarily with the continued manipulation of his extended throat, Bond tried to turn away, but Raoul wouldn’t allow it.

“Answer me, James,” Raoul said firmly, a hint of warning in his voice.

Bond swallowed again, and this time Raoul knew it was a stalling tactic. “I know how your body feels against mine,” Bond said, very reluctantly. He paused, evidently hoping this was enough to satisfy Raoul, but he ought to know better by now.

Raoul lowered his mouth close to Bond’s ear, whispering, “Elaborate, please.”

Bond started at Raoul’s unexpected proximity, plainly discomfited by the fact that he couldn’t anticipate Raoul’s actions as he’d been able to previously. There was more than one reason Raoul had employed the blindfold at this point.

“I’m waiting, James,” Raoul said sweetly.

Bond licked his lips. “No one . . . no one else has ever held me like that.” He paused, but then finished in a rush, “Like you do.”

Raoul pulled back, smiling widely, knowing his precious little rat couldn’t see it. “And more importantly, when you did come to that realization, you relaxed immediately,” he said. “I’m speechless, absolutely speechless. James, dear heart, could this possibly mean you feel safe with me?”

“No,” Bond said quickly. “I just know what you’re likely to do . . . or not do, that’s all.” His voice, although still harsh, had risen ever so slightly, so Raoul knew he was definitely ill at ease with this conversation.

“Tsk, tsk, semantics, James. Let me rephrase the question then — does this knowledge of what I’m ‘likely to do’ allow you to feel safe with me?” Raoul pressed the issue, not allowing Bond to evade either emotionally or physically. “You were completely and utterly helpless just now, but you went from what amounts to full blown panic, for you, to practically melting against me. That’s rather significant, don’t you think?” He tightened his grip around Bond’s chest. “Now, think hard on this, James, because I’ll know if you attempt to lie to me.” He lowered his head, enunciating slowly in Bond’s ear, “Do you feel safe with me?”

A long pause, then Bond said, “Yes,” in an almost defeated tone of voice.

“Even knowing that I still have to punish you?”

Bond tensed, then sagged against him, saying softly, “I had to try. If I hadn’t tried, I’d never know if . . .”

“You’d never know if there wasn’t one more tactic, one more evasion, one more avenue you might have pursued that could have yielded a different outcome.” Raoul caressed his forehead soothingly. “I know, James, I know. Pride and duty are very strong motivators, but sometimes you have to give in to the inevitable. Sometimes, there simply isn’t a way out.” He leaned down and kissed Bond’s forehead. “And sometimes, you may not want to find a way out, hmm?”

“No,” Bond said sharply. “Never that.”
“‘Never’ is such a harsh, unforgiving word, and we already live in a world that can be so exceptionally unpleasant.” Raoul sighed. “And speaking of unpleasant, there is still the matter of your punishment. What ever shall I do with you, hmm?”

Bond was silent for a few moments. “You’ve never hesitated on the type of punishment before.” A pause. “Unless you’ve gotten bored with me.”

“Ah, ah, you’re fishing again, James.” Raoul reached down to tweak a nipple, visibly startling Bond, as his continued lack of sight kept him one step behind his tormenter. Raoul continued to work the nipple, watching Bond’s face carefully as he did so. “Do you have any idea how terrified I was, when I couldn’t find you?”

“I assumed you’d merely be angry.” His breath hitched as Raoul continued his manipulation. “Very angry.”

“Well, that too,” Raoul admitted, licking Bond’s ear until he squirmed slightly against him. “But mostly, I was terrified.” He released Bond’s forehead and tilted his chin enough to kiss him passionately, tonguing the roof of his mouth until Bond moaned.

He released Bond’s mouth but continued with tiny kisses against his lips, before saying, “Your heart stopped, you know.”

Bond stiffened slightly. “You don’t mean that literally.”

“Oh, I mean that very literally indeed. CPR, epinephrine . . . bossy, egotistical doctor waving around defibrillator leads like windmills, the whole nine yards.” Raoul grasped Bond’s chin and pressed it hard. “You nearly died with that ill-advised stunt of yours, mi ratita.”

Bond swallowed. “You’re already punishing me for it.”

“Actually, no, I don’t believe that I am.” Raoul reached down to caress Bond’s abdomen, noting that the man was already half hard, rather surprising considering his condition a mere twelve hours ago. However, procreation was Nature’s ultimate survival tool, and human beings were inherently hard-wired for that biologic imperative, just like any other species.

Too bad this particular specimen would never be allowed the opportunity to procreate. Not if Raoul had any say in the matter, which he most assuredly did.

Raoul pulled Bond’s head back to rest against his shoulder once more. “You’ve become too comfortable with this. You feel too . . . safe with me, so I’ve concluded this will never work as a punishment for you again,” Raoul said, stroking a particularly sensitive spot on his throat. “Unfortunately, this also means I’ll have to try something different now.” Raoul freed a hand long enough to motion with one finger, knowing Bond would be unable to see the gesture, then resumed his stroking of Bond’s neck and throat.

Therefore, when the man Raoul had just summoned placed both hands on Bond’s spread thighs, Bond reacted with a startled gasp and another futile attempt at freeing himself.

“What?” Bond said, clearly confused.

Raoul held his head firmly, not allowing Bond any movement whatsoever.

“This man,” Raoul said, motioning again for Alvarez to continue, “is somewhat of an expert at fellatio, I’m told.” He kissed Bond’s forehead. “Not that I’ve tried him myself, you understand, but his reputation is solid enough that I’ve tasked him with administering your punishment today,
James.”

Raoul watched, as clinically as he could, while Alvarez took Bond’s cock into his hands, kissing him lightly along his length. Raoul was definitely not pleased with this necessity. He still found it extremely difficult to allow another man to even approach his little rat, much less lay hands on him, but this particular situation called for extreme measures.

“No,” Bond muttered, struggling again to free himself.

Raoul began licking at an ear, attempting to distract him, and himself for that matter, from what was going on between Bond’s legs. Bond was strung tight as a drum, fighting against the restraints and Raoul as much as he could, obviously profoundly unsettled.

“This bothers you a great deal,” Raoul whispered, watching Bond’s cock disappear between Alvarez’s full lips. “That there is another man, someone you don’t know, someone you don’t trust, who is taking control from you.” Raoul used his free hand to rub Bond’s nipple, knowing he couldn’t let Bond’s discomfort with the proceedings interfere with his arousal. However, he was forced to admit, slightly jealously, that Alvarez was apparently very good at this indeed if Bond’s rapidly firming erection was any indication.

Raoul nibbled lightly on Bond’s neck. “You can’t escape him, you can’t fight him, but your body is betraying you regardless.” He licked a broad stripe down Bond’s neck. “You can’t even see him, which makes this situation even more appalling to you. In fact, how do you know there aren’t more of my men here, waiting quietly, observing how helpless you are, and watching you fall to pieces in this young man’s mouth?”

“No,” Bond said again, then gasped as Alvarez began to suck him in long, even pulls.

Raoul snaked a hand down Bond’s abdomen, brushing against Bond’s length when Alvarez didn’t have him completely encircled with his mouth, feeling Bond quiver with his arousal.

He whispered in Bond’s ear again, “That’s not the word I need to hear, James.”

Bond moaned, still struggling. “Please,” he finally said. Even with that talented mouth wrapped around him, Bond seemed to react more strongly to Raoul’s intermittent touches, and Raoul increased the frequency of them accordingly.

“Still not the right word, James,” Raoul said with a chuckle, reaching down occasionally to stroke lightly against Bond’s testicles when he had access.

“Please,” Bond said again, obviously not comprehending. Not surprising, given his decidedly incoherent state. “Only you. I only want you to . . .” He groaned as Raoul bit him on the side of his neck, savagely marking him. “Please, Raoul . . .”

Sighing deeply, Raoul signaled Alvarez off Bond, pleased they hadn’t had to take this charade too far. He turned Bond’s face toward his, kissing him passionately, while Alvarez quietly left the suite. “Now, that is the word I needed to hear. Congratulations, James, I knew you’d eventually remember my name, given the proper motivation.”

Bond was turning his head to one side, however, straining to hear what he couldn’t confirm with his eyes.

Taking pity on him, Raoul said, “He’s gone. No one else is here. It’s just you and me now, James.” He grasped his chin again. “Your punishment is now over, and the choice is yours.” He kissed Bond again, feeling the release of tension in Bond’s frame and in the laxity of his mouth. “Do you
want me to continue?” he added, lightly grasping Bond’s cock in his hand and stroking once.

Bond groaned. “Just you?” he asked again, obviously still unsettled over recent events.

“Just me,” Raoul repeated. “I promise.”

He could see Bond debating with himself, but it seemed his body’s needs were going to win out this time. “Yes,” Bond said. And when Raoul made no move to continue, added, “Yes, Raoul,” with just a hint of exasperation, but without having to be prompted this time.

Raoul chuckled again, delighted, and then he began, slowly at first, to drive Bond completely out of his mind.

He teased him, and stroked him, and nibbled at his neck until Bond was glistening with sweat and breathing in harsh gasps. He brought him to the brink several times, just so he could gentle him back down and do it all over again. Still wary of straining Bond’s heart, Raoul finally decided to let the man come, but there was something he absolutely needed to do first. Bringing him again to the ragged edge, Raoul abruptly removed his hand from Bond’s cock.

“No,” Bond gasped, “I’m so damn close.” He tried again, “Please, Raoul.” He strained upward. “You promised.”

“Patience, pequeño,” Raoul said. “I simply need to remove the blindfold first.”

He did so, watching as Bond’s widely dilated eyes blinked several times in the low light.

“Given our previous circumstances, I’ve never had the chance to see those magnificent eyes of yours when you come,” Raoul explained, stroking a cheek. “Do you think you can keep them open for me, when you do, hmm?”

“I’d dance on the Tube naked, if you’d just bloody well get on with it,” Bond said breathlessly, heaving upward against his restraints once more.

Laughing, Raoul said. “Be careful, James, I might take you up on that someday.”

He lowered his face close to Bond’s, gazing at him like the precious thing he was, as he stroked him first slowly, then faster. He kept him on the edge for just a while longer, enjoying the pleading, enraptured expression on Bond’s face. It had the effect of bringing Raoul’s fierce possessiveness to the forefront, so he left him there, breathless, straining for that little something extra he needed to take him over.

Raoul studied Bond’s features closely, fascinated. “You’ve always been the one in control before, so no one has ever done this to you. No one has ever refused to allow you to come.” Bond moaned, the sound itself a plea, and a confirmation. “But you’ve always craved this, letting someone else take control, haven’t you?” Raoul growled softly under his breath. “How you’re adoring this — the dependency, the sensations it makes you feel, the pleasure in seemingly endless waves. You need to come so badly, but you don’t want it to end.”

Moving one hand to Bond’s right hip, Raoul gripped him there lightly. “Your body will remember this, however, because I’m imprinting you. And one day, when we’re both out in public, I will touch your hip, just like this, and you will get instantly and helplessly hard, because your body will associate this touch with the time you fell completely and utterly apart under my hands.”

Raoul maintained his light grip on Bond’s hip, but began circling his thumb lightly over the soft skin beneath his hip bone. He then gradually increased the speed and grip on Bond’s cock, leaning
down to whisper in Bond’s ear, “You may come now, *pequeño.*”

Bond’s eyes widened even further at that, and his breathing suddenly increased, then hitched, then expelled in a loud groan as he was finally allowed to climax beneath Raoul’s hand. His eyes slipped closed briefly, but they opened almost immediately again, obediently, and Raoul was amazed to see how the color of those lovely, dilated eyes seemed to deepen even further as he came.

Raoul kissed him through the aftershocks, thinking that he was undoubtedly the luckiest man alive.

Chapter End Notes

Hmm. Don't know if it's because I'm so tired or what, but this chapter refused to write itself. I'm posting it anyway because it's about to drive me stark, raving mad. I'm hoping someone will let know if I go too far off base, because this is a pivotal chapter.
Raoul left the bedroom long enough to fetch a damp cloth. When he returned, he found a heavy-lidded Bond watching him as he walked back toward the bed. He stopped halfway there, smiling, as he noted exactly where Bond’s gaze was directed.

Bond quickly raised his eyes when he realized he’d been caught.

Raoul laughed. "Tsk, tsk, James. I thought you had better manners than that." He slipped onto the bed next to Bond. "Or weren't you aware it's impolite to stare at another man's crotch?" He wiped down Bond's abdomen and genitals with the cloth, taking his time. "It is considered rather intimate, you know."

Bond looked at him incredulously. "And what do you call what we just did?"

"Hmm, good question. Foreplay, perhaps?" Raoul tossed the cloth in the general direction of the bathroom and leaned in closer to Bond. "You can't possibly be ready to go again so soon, can you?" Raoul pouted. "If so, I obviously didn't do a thorough enough job."

Bond narrowed his eyes. "Now who's fishing?"

Raoul laughed again. "Guilty as charged." He leaned down to kiss Bond, and when he lifted his head, he saw that Bond was once again attempting to surreptitiously gauge the state of Raoul's arousal. "See anything you like?" he asked silkily, arching an eyebrow.

Bond flushed a charming shade of pink. "You've never . . ." He averted his gaze. "I'm assuming you'll want your turn at some point."

Grasping Bond's chin so that he could meet his eyes again, Raoul said, "I would never have believed you so insecure regarding sex with another man that you can't even say the word. The real question is — are you worried that I will try to fuck you, or are you worried that I don't want to fuck you at all?"

"Don't be absurd."

"I never am."

Bond glared. "The answer should be bloody obvious."

"Should be?"

Bond looked genuinely flustered now. "You can stop twisting my words at any time."
"Yes, I will — when you start knowing your own mind when you say them in the first place."

Bond heaved against his restraints. "If I were so enamored of you, why would you have to tie me down?"

Beginning to lose his patience, Raoul gave Bond just the barest twinge of the warning mode of the collar, and Bond sucked in a breath, gasping, the collar's recent agony still very fresh in his mind.

"Why, indeed?" Raoul said harshly, leaning over Bond. "I gave you free run of this suite, unfettered, unmonitored, and you returned my courtesy by nearly getting yourself killed in that harebrained escape attempt. Until recently, James, I wasn't aware that I needed to tie you down."

Bond's eyes widened slightly. "You're not . . . you're not planning on keeping me like this?"

Still angry, Raoul moved his hand from where it rested on Bond's thigh and slid it down behind his testicles, rubbing lightly in a circular motion over his perineum. "It would make access to you a great deal easier, wouldn't it? So I could have my wicked way with you?"

Seeing Bond tense, Raoul sighed, sitting back to rest his hands on his own thighs. He shook his head sadly. "Well, I can't say that I'm surprised. It's painfully clear what you expect of me. However, to answer your earlier question, pequeño, the reason I haven't 'taken my turn' is a very simple one."

He brushed a hand through Bond's lengthening hair, stroking it gently. "You're not ready for that yet, and I absolutely refuse to rush you."

Bond said nothing, but his body eventually relaxed, and Raoul swore he could feel Bond lean slightly into his touch. Then again, he was probably merely imagining it.

Where there was life, however, there was hope. "Someday, when you can trust me enough, we'll consider other options, hmm? Until that time, you can consider your dubious virtue safe with me. Do you understand?"

Bond replied, "Yes." Then, after a deep breath, he finished, "Raoul."

"Good. At least you've retained some of what we learned today. However, now we must deal with yet another issue of trust. If I release you, I want your word that you will make no more attempts at escape."

Bond looked up at him. "I'm not sure I can do that."

"Well, at least you're being honest with me. You do get points for that, you know." Raoul cupped the side of Bond's neck. "Are you so eager to endure the collar's punishment again, James?"

Bond exhaled sharply, glancing away. "No." He paused. "I thought I knew what pain was. I thought nothing could ever be worse than what Le Chiffre. . ." He looked up at Raoul, eyes fierce. "It was like being shot, only you're standing in front of a thousand people each successively firing bullets at you in an endless, agonizing stream, and it never stops."

Raoul leaned down to kiss Bond's forehead again. "Dear heart, I couldn't stop it. Not once the cycle had initiated, no matter how badly I wanted to."

"And did you? Want to?"

So softly spoken, those words, yet Raoul felt himself crumble beneath their weight. He cupped Bond's face, leaning close, capturing his gaze and willing him to feel the sincerity in his words. "Of course I did. With all my heart, with everything I am — that's how much I wanted your
suffering to end.”

Bond held his gaze for a few moments, as if mesmerized, but he eventually lowered his eyes. “It doesn’t matter. I can’t allow you to keep me here against my will.”

“Then the answer is simple, corazón mío. Stay with me, willingly.”

Bond looked visibly frustrated. “I can’t.”

“No,” Raoul said. “I don’t believe that’s true. You most certainly can, but you’re afraid to, and that’s just your infernal trust issues interfering with your better judgement again.”

No reply from Bond. Raoul sighed, knowing that this argument would get him nowhere. Bond simply wasn’t ready to trust him yet, so he had to try a different tack. “You do realize that if you went through another cycle of the collar’s punishment, it would likely kill you, and there would be nothing that I or my exceedingly efficient physician could do to save you?”

Bond shuddered, almost imperceptibly, but he remained stubbornly silent.

"James, the only other option is that I leave you tied and have someone see to your needs periodically." He caressed the bite mark he’d left on Bond’s neck during their earlier encounter, feeling him flinch. "Of course, I won't be able to guarantee that it will be me. I do have other obligations, and I am a very busy man." He leaned down and placed both hands very pointedly on Bond’s spread thighs. "I hope that won't be a problem for you?"

Bond flinched from his touch, obviously making the connection to his previous encounter with Alvarez, as Raoul had intended.

"You wouldn’t do that,” Bond said firmly. “You don't want other men that close to me.”

His little rat was certainly perceptive, but he had also resorted to the last ditch effort of a bluff, which Raoul fully intended to call him on.

Raoul stroked up and down Bond's thighs, as he'd done on their first encounter together. "I wouldn't advise playing poker with me, James. I hold all the cards, and I do know your tells." He bent down and kissed the junction of each thigh and hip. "I will admit to not liking the necessity of other men caring for you, but if it comes between that and you attempting to kill yourself again, I think you know very well which avenue I'd choose."

Bond’s nostrils flared slightly, and Raoul knew he'd won.

"Promise me, James, and I will release you."

Bond closed his eyes. "I give you my word."

"Yes?” Raoul prompted. He tapped Bond’s cheek. "Open your eyes, please, and tell me that again."

Eyes open, but narrowed, Bond said, "I give you my word that I won't attempt to escape this suite."

Smiling, Raoul said, 'I'm quite aware that you're hedging there, pequeño, but I will let it slide for now. We'll plan on renegotiating our deal when it comes time to leave this lovely abode, yes?"

“‘Lovely’ is not the word I’d use for this dreadful excuse for a building,” Bond said. “I shouldn’t have been able to move between floors like I did. There is no solid concrete base and very little reinforcing steel. The adjacent flooring around the pipes has no structural support at all and is
completely open except for the flimsy ceiling tiles on the lower floor. I’m surprised this gigantic fire trap is still standing, actually.”

Raoul snorted. “Oh, my. That is probably the longest speech I’ve ever heard you make, and you do so only to denigrate my choice in housing.” He tilted his head to one side. “I did offer to fire the interior decorators, but I’m afraid the damage is already done. Come now, James. You can’t expect that the administrators responsible for building a town immediately next to an inherently unstable chemical factory would care whether they adhere to nonexistent building codes, do you?”

“No, I don’t. What I don’t understand is why you’re choosing to live here in the first place.” He jerked his chin to indicate the surrounding room. “You purchase a great deal of expensive furniture and artwork and then place them in a building that ought to be condemned.” He shook his head. “It doesn’t make sense.”

Raoul crossed his arms, smiling.

“Well, at least I know you approve of my furnishing choices.”

“Of course, I do. You can’t make the proper tools to escape a locked room with cheap furniture.”

Raoul laughed at the indignant expression on Bond’s face. “Oh, do tell, James. I was wondering what you needed the bed springs for. They obviously aren’t strong enough to tunnel with.”

Bond seemed somewhat distracted, but he answered Raoul nonetheless, surprisingly. “It’s an expensive mattress with individual pocketed coil springs -- you don’t need tools to remove them. The springs are high quality metal that are still thin enough to use as a makeshift screwdriver to remove the corner braces in the nightstands. Those are strong enough to use as pry bars, given enough time and perseverance.” He shook his head as if to clear it. “Next time you plan on holding someone against their will, buy cheaper furniture.”

Smiling, Raoul said, “I’ll keep that in mind, although I can’t say I have plans on kidnapping anyone else in the near future.” He peered at Bond’s face closely, noting that he appeared somewhat flushed. “Are you all right, James?”

“I’m talking too damn much,” Bond said under his breath, then looked up at Raoul. “You drugged me with something again, didn’t you?”

Raoul could tell he was attempting to look outraged, but his eyes didn’t appear to be focusing properly.

Concerned now, Raoul began to unfasten Bond’s restraints. “No, I didn’t. The doctor, however, insisted on a mild sedative until he was sure you weren’t developing complications from the electric shock. It was nothing like the drugs I gave you in Fethiye, I assure you.” He finished with the restraints and stopped Bond as he tried to stand up. “He told me there were no residual effects.”

Bond shook his head again, like a dog trying to shake off water. “It’s not the shock,” he said, pushing Raoul away. “I have . . . peculiar reactions to some sedatives, idiosyncratic, once my body starts metabolizing the drug.”

Raoul frowned. “It’s not in your medical records.”

“You think I’m stupid enough to allow something like that to remain in my bloody medical file?”

Stopping Bond again from attempting to stand, Raoul said sharply, “I think it is stupid to delete records of dangerous side effects in the event you need to be treated for them.”
“They’re not *dangerous* reactions, they just make me . . . vulnerable.” With that, Bond pushed his way to his feet, but then almost immediately started to collapse.

Swearing, Raoul grabbed him before he could fall, turning him in his arms so they were face to face.

Bond was swaying, his eyes now almost completely unfocused. “Damn,” he said, slurring his words slightly. “I was hoping it was something else.”

Raoul shook his shoulders to get his attention. “James. Listen to me. What *exactly* are your symptoms?”

“Loquaciousness, blurred vision, dizziness. Much worse when I go from sitting to standing.”

“So, what?” Raoul shot back, “You decided to stand up just to see if you’d fall right back down again?”

“Fastest way to find out for sure.”

“Oh, for the love of . . .”

Bond’s knees buckled, and Raoul grabbed him around the waist to hold him upright.

“James, now that we have determined that yes, you are indeed having a reaction to Dr. Almeida’s sedative, why don’t you lie back down for awhile, hmm?”

“No,” Bond said, swaying again and leaning into Raoul’s body for support. “Need a shower.”

“You need . . .” Raoul looked upward, hoping for inspiration from above. Bond took the opportunity to rest his forehead against Raoul’s neck.

Somewhat startled by Bond’s action, Raoul jumped slightly before bringing one hand up to hesitantly grip the back of Bond’s neck, then rested his chin on the top of Bond’s head with a sigh. “Dear heart,” he murmured, “you can’t even stand on your own. How do you think you’ll be able to take a shower?”

Bond’s shoulders shrugged slightly.

“How about I bathe you with a cloth, and then you take a shower when you’ve recovered?”

“No,” Bond said firmly, barely moving his lips from Raoul’s neck as he spoke. “Feel dirty.”

Raoul froze, at first thinking Bond was referring to their lovemaking earlier, but Bond had acquiesced to that, and he hadn’t seemed to regret it afterwards. He snorted. And he certainly wasn’t flinching from Raoul at the moment, given how he was currently draped all over him.

Then, he made the belated connection.

“Ah, I see. You really *don’t* like someone touching you like that without your permission, do you?” He had evidently underestimated Bond’s response to the type of punishment he’d chosen. Another amateur mistake, since he knew full well how Bond had reacted to him during their first few encounters. He shouldn’t have expected Bond to react any differently now, especially considering how Raoul had been slowly wearing away at his emotional barriers.

*Reap what you sow, Raoul.*
He sighed. “All right, James. But you’ll have to agree to my conditions. Diego will have my head if I have to call him back to treat you for a concussion.”

There was a slight pause, then he felt James nod an affirmative against his neck.

Smiling, Raoul stroked the back of Bond’s head, not certain he knew what to do with a tractable James Bond. It was a rather frightening experience, to tell the truth.

“How can you walk at all, James?”

Bond slowly straightened, then turned in Raoul’s arms. “Yes,” he said, taking a tentative step and nearly falling again.

Raoul tightened his grip around Bond’s waist, pulling him back and holding him upright.

“Just not very well,” Bond admitted softly.

Raoul shook his head, laughing. “How about this? You wait for me, and we’ll try walking together, hmm?”

Bond looked up at him, eyes still unfocused. “I guess we could try that.”

Raoul smiled down at him. “So glad you approve, pequeño.”

Bond was like a young puppy whose eyes had just opened, still trying to figure out what to do with the big, wide world and his uncooperative legs. Bond called it being vulnerable, but Raoul was thinking more along the lines of ‘adorable.’ At least he now understood why Bond was so set against taking anything to help him sleep.

They did eventually make it to the bathroom, although Bond was as wobbly as a newborn colt. Even like this, however, Bond was a determined, stubborn man, and he steadfastly refused any suggestion of altering their eventual destination. Some things never changed with Bond, even while suffering adverse side effects from medication.

Raoul propped Bond up against the wall long enough to start the water in the shower and remove his jacket. The way Bond was sliding slowly down the wall, he knew he wouldn’t have time to remove his shoes.

It didn’t matter, however, because he didn’t trust his willpower enough to get completely naked in a shower with Bond in this condition. Raoul was a strong man, but he did have his limits.

At least it was a shower cubicle only, and not a bathtub, or else Raoul doubted he’d have been able to maneuver the unsteady Bond under the water. The dizziness was evidently bad enough that Bond kept his eyes closed most of the time, and it wasn’t until he felt the water on his back and Raoul had reached behind them to close the shower door that Bond opened his eyes again.

“You still have your clothes on,” Bond said.

Raoul chuckled. “Very good, James. At least your powers of observation haven’t suffered.”

Bond looked at him, the puzzlement plain on his face.

“I’m not the one who needed to get clean, so I didn’t need to take my clothes off,” Raoul explained. “I think we should just leave it at that.”

And not mention the fact this is the only way I can leave your promised virtue intact.
Bond nodded, still swaying, and Raoul sighed again. He’d forgotten to pick up a washcloth, so he cupped one of Bond’s cheeks with a hand, making sure he had his attention. “James, I want you to hold onto me, or brace yourself against the shower wall, and I’ll take care of washing you. But I have to do this with my bare hands — are you okay with that?”

Bond cocked his head slightly, as if to hear him better. “Why wouldn’t I be?” he asked.

Raoul raised an eyebrow in surprise. He certainly hadn’t expected that response. It was difficult to conceive of a more intimate situation than this, short of outright sex, but Bond hadn’t even stopped to consider his response.

“All right,” Raoul said slowly, slightly unnerved. Deciding to start on Bond’s front first, he gently turned Bond around and placed his hands against the shower wall. He squeezed his hands slightly, indicating to Bond he should keep them there. Raoul then reached for the soap, lathering his hands while he braced Bond with his lower body, very glad for the protective layer of his trousers as he pressed firmly into the man’s backside. This was going to be bloody torture for him, even so.

He slowly washed Bond, stopping intermittently to re-lather his hands, and Bond obediently remained still, seemingly nonplussed by the feel of Raoul’s hands on his body. Raoul spent extra time on Bond’s genital area, knowing this was where Bond would be most focused on the concept of ‘feeling dirty.’ Bond didn’t get aroused by Raoul’s touch, but given his current condition, he wouldn’t have expected him to. However, neither did he flinch or appear the least bit uncomfortable with Raoul’s ministrations.

Neeing to wash Bond’s other side, Raoul gripped his wrists, pulling him away from his position against the wall and turning him in his arms. He was mildly disconcerted when Bond once again leaned fully into him without prompting, resting his head on Raoul’s shoulder this time.

“Are you doing all right, James?” Raoul asked, wrapping his hands around Bond’s lower back.

He heard a murmured “Hm,” but when Raoul didn’t move, Bond replied with a slightly more audible, “Yes, Raoul.”

“You’re comfortable then?” Raoul prompted, curious.

A nod against his shoulder. “Would be more comfortable if you didn’t have clothes on. Clammy,” Bond clarified.

Raoul chuckled. “Sorry, but you’ll just have to suffer, I’m afraid.”

He reached for the soap again, starting on Bond’s shoulders and working his way down. It was a little dicey when he had to bend down to wash Bond’s legs, but the agent managed to stay upright long enough for Raoul to stand again. When he finished, Bond was swaying a little more than previously, so Raoul held him for awhile, absentmindedly running his still soapy hands over Bond’s arse, enjoying the feel of the firm backside against his fingers.

When he realized what he was doing, however, he forced his hands to still, not wanting to make Bond uncomfortable with his unsolicited attentions.

Raoul was therefore thoroughly surprised when he felt Bond nudge against his hip, complaining, “Don’t stop.”

“James? Are you sure?”

Another insistent nudge from Bond’s hip. “Yes, Raoul. It feels good. Your touch . . . always feels
good."

More than slightly shocked, Raoul didn’t reply immediately.

Making a disgruntled noise, Bond attempted to burrow even closer against him. Obviously still displeased with Raoul’s wet clothing, he pulled back slightly, then reached up with a fumbling hand and attempted to unbutton Raoul’s shirt.

Raoul gripped Bond’s hand, pulling it back behind him. “No, James. I’m afraid this part is non-negotiable.”

“Skin would be nicer,” Bond argued.

“And you’d honestly feel comfortable being naked with me?”

Again the confusion in those deep blue eyes. “Why not? Feel safe with you.”

Sucking in a surprised breath, Raoul kicked himself for again missing the obvious. No wonder Bond didn’t want this documented in a medical file. He bent over to whisper in Bond’s ear, “James, you were trying to misdirect me again earlier, weren’t you? It’s not that this sedative makes you talk too much — that’s just an indicator. What it really does is lower your inhibitions, doesn’t it?”

He felt Bond stiffen against his shoulder, but then he nodded. A pause. “Are you angry with me?” Bond asked.

“Why do you think I’m angry, James?”

“Cause you stopped rubbing my arse.”

Raoul laughed. He laughed until he had tears running from his eyes, but he did at least have the presence of mind to resume stroking Bond’s backside while he did so. He wouldn’t want to disappoint the man, after all.

What a wonderful present this was! It was like Christmas and his birthday rolled all into one, and the damnedest thing was, he couldn’t allow himself to take advantage of it. He’d never had a problem with morals or scruples before, so it was just his bloody luck that they’d both kicked in at this point.

But he had hope now. Thanks to a simple sedative, he was now absolutely certain that behind the prickly facade and emotional barriers, Bond wasn’t as inured against Raoul’s charms as he had claimed.

Raoul hummed lightly to himself, pressing Bond a little tighter against him. Just because he didn’t plan on taking advantage, didn’t mean that he couldn’t enjoy the feel of a sated, contented Bond molding his body against his. Willingly.

He never claimed to be a saint, after all.

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Dr. Diego Almeida was walking to his quarters after a long day of research when he came across his host in the corridor.

“Ah, there you are!” the man said brightly, jogging down the corridor to grip both Diego’s
shoulders with his hands. “I take back anything derogatory I may have ever said about you, because you are an absolute genius.” He then kissed Diego on both cheeks, in the French fashion, and headed back down the corridor, singing some ridiculous tune at the top of his lungs.

Shaking his head, Diego continued on to his room. He’d grown accustomed to most of his host’s eccentricities, but he doubted he’d ever know why on this particular occasion the man had greeted him so effusively . . . while soaking wet.

Chapter End Notes

I intended this to be a slow build relationship, but I just realized I’ve already reached 31,000 words, and I’m still not there. I’m assuming someone will let me know if I’m going too slow, hmm?
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Couldn't resist one more chapter of Fluffy! Bond, before we go back to our regularly scheduled angst fest.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raoul ducked into his rooms long enough to put on some dry clothes and then hurried back to Bond’s suite. He’d finally managed to get the man to lie down before he left, but he didn’t trust leaving him alone for any length of time while he was still “under the influence.”

He probably should have asked Diego to examine him, but he was surprisingly reluctant to share Bond with anyone while he was in this condition. Evidently, nothing screamed, “Mine!” louder in Raoul’s psyche than an affectionate, clingy James Bond.

However, when Raoul strode back into the suite, Bond was no longer on the bed.

Feeling his pulse immediately skyrocket, Raoul hurried to the far side of the bed and nearly tripped over Bond, who was seated on the floor cross-legged with his head bowed, both hands gripping his knees so tightly Raoul could see indentations in his skin.

Raoul immediately knelt down. When he lifted Bond’s chin with one hand, he noted that his eyes were still completely unfocused, and he didn’t seem to be tracking Raoul’s presence at all. Not wanting to startle him, he moved his hand to caress Bond’s cheek, a touch he knew the man was accustomed to receiving from him, and said very quietly, “James, what are you doing out of bed?”

Bond lifted his head at the sound of Raoul’s voice, but his body still radiated tension in waves. He pressed his face into Raoul’s hand tentatively, as if seeking reassurance. “You weren’t here anymore,” he said softly, lowering his eyes. “I was only trying to find you.” He paused. “I knew you’d be angry when I fell.”

“James, dear heart, I’m not in the least bit angry with you.” He looked Bond over quickly, but he didn’t see any obvious injuries, certainly nothing to account for his conspicuously distraught body language. “Did you injure yourself, pequeño?”

Raoul felt Bond shake his head slightly against his hand.

“James, aloud please. Are you hurting anywhere?”

“No, Raoul.”

Raoul breathed a sigh of relief, but he was still concerned that the drug might be masking something, or more likely that this particular Bond, who seemed so determined to keep his approval, might be less than completely truthful with him. He therefore ran his hands over Bond’s entire body, slowly, using pressure in an attempt to elicit an involuntary reaction to any possible tender spots. However, given the agent’s notably high pain tolerance, this was probably wishful thinking on Raoul’s part, even without the drug.

Bond seemed increasingly uneasy with Raoul’s lengthy examination. “I didn’t hurt myself, Raoul,”
he said quietly.

“You’ll have to bear with me, James. You may not even realize you’ve been injured.” He tapped Bond’s left hand, which he still had wrapped tightly around his knee. “May I have this, please?”

It appeared to take some effort for Bond to release his hand, and when Raoul stroked over the palm, checking for broken bones, Bond winced.

“James, does this hurt you?” Raoul asked sharply, concerned.

Bond appeared distressed. “It’s just a cramp. I didn’t break anything.” His eyes were wide, pleading. “I’m sorry I fell. I won’t do it again. I promise.”

“Shhh, James, it’s okay. You don’t have to apologize. I just need to make sure you’re not injured.”

“I’ll be fine now. You came back.”

“Of course I did,” Raoul said, stroking both sides of Bond’s hand with his. “I told you before I left that I’d be back shortly.”

Bond squeezed his eyes shut, and he was visibly trembling. “I know. That’s what my father said.”

Raoul’s heart plummeted in his chest. Madre de Dios. He’d managed to stumble straight into yet another landmine. No wonder Bond seemed ready to shatter into a million pieces.

However, regardless of Bond’s brittle emotional state, another piece of the puzzle had just slotted into place for Raoul. “Right before your parents died, you were trying everything you could to get their attention, weren’t you?” He gently stroked Bond’s hand, attempting to ease the cramp, and the sting of his next words. “Even injuring yourself.”

Bond tensed and made a halfhearted attempt to pull his hand away.

Raoul felt a little guilty for questioning him in this condition, but this was likely his only opportunity to get an honest response from the man.

“Answer me, James,” he said firmly, refusing to release his hand.

Bond slumped. “Not on purpose,” he said, obviously choosing his words as cautiously as the drug would allow. “I just . . . wasn’t as careful as I could have been.”

“Hmm. My guess is they didn’t react well when you’d injured yourself?”

Bond shook his head, then evidently remembering Raoul’s requirement to reply verbally, he said, “More trouble than I was worth.”

Shocked, Raoul said, “James, is that an actual quote?”

Bond nodded, not even attempting to answer that question aloud. He ducked his head almost to his chest.

Closing his eyes tightly, Raoul struggled to get his own emotions under control. It was a shame Bond’s parents were already dead, because Raoul would have dearly loved to kill them himself, now that he knew the true extent of the damage they’d wrought.

However, he couldn’t allow any of that misplaced anger to color his voice or actions now, since Bond was clearly expecting Raoul to react as negatively as his parents had.
Raoul leaned closer to Bond, cupping both sides of his face with his hands. He kissed him lightly on the forehead, forcing his voice under tight control before he spoke. “James, I know you don’t trust me, but I will tell you this anyway. I will never leave you. I will never abandon you. I’ve told you before there is nothing superfluous in my life; therefore, when I commit to something, it is forever.” He kissed Bond softly on the lips. “As long as there is breath in my body, corazón mío, I will be right here. With you. This, I swear.”

Bond’s breath hitched, and then he threw himself forward so violently that he pushed Raoul completely over onto his back. Raoul let out a startled, “Oof,” even before Bond’s full weight landed squarely on top of him. Any passing thought that the agent was attacking him immediately disappeared as he wrapped himself around Raoul, seemingly intent on burrowing beneath his skin.

Once he’d recovered enough, Raoul chuckled, wrapping his arms around Bond’s shoulders and stroking lightly. “You do an amazing impression of a limpet, dear heart.”

Bond tensed slightly. “Is that a bad thing?”

Raoul snorted. “Not normally, but you’re not exactly a lightweight.” He paused, hoping Bond would take the hint to move off him. “That means you’re squashing me, James.”

No reply.

Raoul sighed. “Dear heart, do you think I could move you just a bit so I can breathe?”

“Comfortable.”

“I’m sure you are, pequeño, but I’d like us both to be comfortable. May I move you, for just a little while?”

“Must you?” Bond finally asked, and the disappointment in his voice broke Raoul’s heart anew. He sighed. He didn’t want to force Bond given his fragile condition at this point, but he was finding it increasingly difficult to take a full breath.

Perhaps a little distraction?

“James, didn’t you tell me in the shower that skin was nicer?”

“Yes, but you stopped me.”

“If I move you for just a few moments, I can take off my shirt, and then you’ll have skin. Would you like that?”

A pause. “Only your shirt?”

Raoul barely stifled a laugh. He hoped his resolve would hold out when he was actually skin to skin with this delightful creature. “Yes, I’m afraid so. That’s the deal, pequeño, take it or leave it.”

“You’re not making me move so you can leave?”

Raoul swallowed hard against the lump in his throat. “Oh, dear heart. It’s not a trick, I promise.”

“Okay.” The voice was still soft and unsure, but the limpet reluctantly detached himself from Raoul and rolled to one side. He managed to get himself to a seated position, but he kept in close contact with Raoul’s body the entire time.

Raoul didn’t risk getting to his feet, knowing it was likely to upset Bond even more. Sucking in a
grateful full breath at last, he sat up and removed his shirt, although awkwardly, given that Bond was still firmly plastered to his side. He then pushed himself backward with his heels until his shoulders were resting against the bed frame. He patted the floor next to him.

Bond crawled the short distance to the spot indicated, but he didn’t stop there. He climbed onto Raoul’s lap, seating himself with deliberate care, before turning his upper body to once more wrap himself firmly around Raoul’s torso.

Raoul was finding it hard to breathe again, but for an entirely different reason this time. He hadn’t expected the implicit trust in Bond’s actions or the feel of his naked skin against his to effect him quite so vehemently, but it was a very heady feeling indeed. Shutting his eyes tightly, Raoul attempted to keep his traitorous body under control, but it was almost a lost cause when Bond wriggled in an apparent attempt to get more of his skin in contact with Raoul’s.

¡Jesús, María y José! 1

There were limits to even Raoul’s self-restraint, and this was rapidly approaching those boundaries. The feel of Bond’s smooth, now completely hairless chest against his own was nothing short of amazing, and he had to resist the temptation to do some discrete wriggling himself with that lovely arse now perched firmly against his groin.

Not yet, Raoul. He’s not ready yet, even if he were in any condition to consent.

Taking several deep, calming breaths, Raoul placed one hand on Bond’s neck and stroked up and down his back with the other in a calming fashion, feeling how tense he remained. “It’s all right, dear heart, you can stay like this for a while. I won’t ask you to move again.”

With those words, the tension gradually eased from Bond’s muscles. Repositioning his face to a more comfortable position against Raoul’s neck, he sighed contentedly. He then went completely and utterly boneless in Raoul’s arms.

Sound asleep.

Sighing, he kissed the top of Bond’s head. “You are making this extremely difficult for me, mi ratita,” he whispered. “You’re such an absolute treasure when you’re not fighting me quite so damn hard.”

Raoul pondered keeping him like this, pliable and affectionate, but he knew he’d never follow through with such a thing. Even if he hadn’t promised Bond not to drug him against his will, it was Bond’s fiery temperament and cantankerousness that made him Raoul’s true complement. They were definitely two sides of a coin, and as pleasant as this malleable Bond was, Raoul knew he would eventually miss the challenge of matching swords with the volatile, dangerous 007.

No, he would relax and enjoy this closeness while he could, because he knew that when Bond came back to himself, he would be exceedingly displeased with life in general, and Raoul in particular.

He was so not looking forward to that.

Sighing, he settled Bond closer against him, stroking his back in soothing circles, and if he found himself singing a long-forgotten lullaby softly under his breath, well, no one else need ever know.
This is, of course, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph." Self-explanatory, I hope, but I like to think of it as Bond forcing Raoul to find religion again.

Hopefully, I haven't overdone the cuteness in the last two chapters, but rest assured, Bond will return to his typical behavior from here out. Well, mostly . . .
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

I feel forced to apologize for the extended amount of porn in this fic. I've never written so many sex scenes in my life. It's a good thing these two can't actually procreate, because there would be literally dozens of little Bond-Silvas running around. Just what is it with these two, anyway?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raoul awoke with stiff joints and an ever stiffer neck, knowing he was getting entirely too old to be sleeping on the floor. Bond was nowhere to be seen, but he could hear him pacing furiously back and forth in the sitting room.

Sighing, Raoul reached for his shirt and put it on, knowing he needed as much armour as possible when he confronted Bond.

The agent turned to face him as soon as he entered the room, but he was still swaying ever so slightly. Not completely over the effects of the drug then, at least not physically.

“I should have killed you while you slept,” Bond spat furiously. “I have no idea why I didn’t kill you.”

Raoul didn’t feel the need to mention the dead man’s switch. They both knew that if Bond had really felt obliged to kill him, at least as far as his ‘pathetic love of country’ was concerned, he would have done so, regardless of the consequences to himself.

No, something else had stopped Bond. Something else entirely.

Interesting.

Raoul kept his distance and his posture non-confrontational, but he doubted either tactic would help matters given the anger radiating off Bond in waves. “Perhaps I’m merely growing on you, hmm?”

“Like cancer.”

”Better than nothing, I suppose.”

Bond strode over to him, stopping inches away, attempting to intimidate even given his shorter stature and still unsteady stance. When in doubt, threaten. When in distress, threaten.

You just had to love the man.

“ You have no idea how badly I want to wipe that complacent smirk off your face,” Bond said.

Raoul sighed. Always the jumping and fighting. Well, perhaps it was time for both of them to vent a little steam, especially while Bond was still feeling at least some ill effects from the drug. While Raoul knew himself to be an above-average fighter, he was definitely out of practice, and he doubted he’d be able to win a purely physical confrontation with Bond at full capacity. He looked
down at the still furiously glaring man. “What’s stopping you?”

“You know damn well what’s stopping me.”

Tapping the side of his head, Raoul said, “Grace period, James. You have five minutes in which I promise not to activate the collar, whatever the circumstances. This doesn’t apply if you attempt to leave the suite, of course.”

Bond simply stared at him, obviously caught off guard by Raoul’s proposal.

“Tick, tock, James.”

Instead of attempting to take a swing at him as he’d expected, Bond simply charged into him like a bull, knocking them both to the floor. Rolling away, Raoul got to his feet just as Bond came after him again from a crouch, attempting to knock his legs out from under him. Dancing backwards, Raoul blocked the maneuver, following through with a quick punch to Bond’s injured right shoulder.

That obviously hurt, as Bond grunted, twisting his right side away from Raoul’s reach, but his follow-through kick with his left leg was consequently less than effective. Raoul blocked it easily, and continued with his own series of punches and kicks, gradually forcing Bond backward into the bedroom. Not surprisingly, given Bond’s skill, he wasn’t able to block all of the man’s counterattacks, and Raoul knew he’d end up with his own collection of bumps and bruises when all was said and done.

However, Bond was still slightly uncoordinated, his timing still impacted by the aftereffects of the drug, and Raoul didn’t want to injure him accidentally if he failed to block a punch that Raoul expected him to block.

Damn, but he was getting downright chivalrous in his old age. What a positively frightening thought.

When he judged they were close enough to the bed, Raoul faked a stumble. As Bond darted in closer to take advantage of the apparent misstep, Raoul spun on his heel, elbowed him in the midriff and hooked one of Bond’s ankles with his own, spinning him around and knocking him off balance. He pushed them both onto the bed as they fell, twisting Bond’s right arm behind him and pinning him face first into the bed.

Bond immediately froze, knowing from past experience that Raoul wouldn’t hesitate to twist the injured shoulder into an agonizing position if he continued to resist the hold.

Raoul grinned, feeling Bond’s immense frustration through the tension in his muscles. “Time’s up!” he said brightly. “All better now? I’m sure that less than stellar exhibition of fighting technique did wonders to improve your general outlook on life. I know it did for me.”

He wasn’t sure what language Bond spat back at him, but he guessed the content wasn’t complimentary.

“Such language, James. You’re making me regret allowing you to come off the sedative. You’re a lot more pleasant without all the teeth and claws.”

Bond turned his head to glare up at him. “You had no right to do what you did.”

Suddenly inexplicably furious, Raoul straddled Bond’s lower back and used his free hand to pull Bond’s head back by his hair. “No right to do what, James? No right to hold you when you clung to
me so desperately? No right to leave you unmolested when you attempted to undress me?" He lowered his head to speak directly in Bond’s ear. “Which is it? Because if you’ll kindly remember, thanks to your insistence in keeping essential information to yourself, we didn’t know the effects of that particular sedative until we gave it to you!”

He waited for a reply, but Bond seemed frozen in place, his eyes glazing over. “Raoul,” he gasped. “Hurts.”

Raoul abruptly released Bond’s hair and relieved the pressure on his arm. He hadn’t even realized he’d twisted Bond’s arm so high he’d very nearly dislocated the shoulder. He moved to the side of the bed and attempted to replace the arm as carefully as he could onto the bed, but Bond groaned, rolling onto his left side and curling around the injured limb in an attempt to relieve the agony of the badly strained ligaments and muscles.

Heartsick, Raoul said, “Oh, James, the things you make me do.”

He left Bond alone long enough to pick up some supplies, and when he re-entered the suite, the man was still curled on his side in a near fetal position.

Sighing, Raoul climbed onto the bed behind Bond and warmed some massage oil in his hands. When he tentatively placed his hand on Bond’s shoulder, the man flinched but didn’t attempt to move away from him.

Carefully rubbing the oil into Bond’s shoulder, he kept his touch as gentle as he could, attempting to relay his mortification at accidentally injuring him via his hands. The agent was by nature a tactile person, and he would be more inclined to believe an apology delivered by physical means rather than verbally. Throughout his tumultuous life, he’d had ample reason to mistrust the potential hollowness of mere words.

Bond remained silent, but his pain seemed to be lessening substantially with Raoul's assistance. Raoul was very much relieved, as he hadn’t been looking forward to the invective he’d receive from Diego if Bond had actually required medical intervention. Not to mention the fact that Raoul had honestly not intended to cause the man permanent damage. He said, very softly, “I’m sorry, pequeño, I didn’t intend to hurt you.”

Surprisingly, Bond’s residual anger seemed to have waned along with his pain. “You actually mean that,” he finally said, a hint of grudging acceptance conveyed in the words.

“Oh course I do. I keep telling you I won't lie to you, but you simply refuse to believe me.”

Bond sighed, appearing to relax totally under Raoul's skilled hands. He rolled onto his front, resting his head on his left forearm, tacitly allowing Raoul full access to his back. “You make me so crazy,” he said. "Every time I believe I have you figured out, you do or say something I wasn't expecting. I don’t know what to bloody think anymore.”

Raoul continued massaging Bond’s shoulder and arm, pondering how to respond to that. “Then perhaps you shouldn’t think at all, eh? Perhaps you should trust in what your instincts are trying to tell you --- in what your body is trying to tell you.” He reapplied the oil to his hands and started lower on Bond’s back, feeling the tension disappear from his muscles as he progressed. “Two hours ago, James, there was absolutely no ambiguity in your response to me.”

“That wasn’t me. That was the drug,” Bond said tightly.

“Was it really?” He leaned down to nip gently at the junction of Bond’s neck and uninjured
shoulder, making him gasp. “Then why is it, when you’re distracted by something else, you relax completely and submit to me without protest?”

Bond froze, then turned his head to look up at Raoul. “I don’t know,” he said.

Raising an eyebrow at him, Raoul continued his massage, enjoying the feel of Bond’s skin and firm muscles beneath his hands. “Oh, I think you do, pequeño, I think you do. And someday, hmm? Someday you might even dare to admit it to yourself.”

Resting his cheek back onto the arm, Bond said, "There's nothing to admit to. Besides, I can't allow myself to fall for you."

Momentarily shocked, Raoul paused in his efforts, feeling a small thrill go through him. He didn't immediately respond to Bond's words but resumed his massage, gradually lowering his hands until he was kneading the man's buttocks. He then slowly decreased the pressure, turning the massage into a blatant caress and sensitizing the delicate skin there.

Bond's respiration increased, and he shifted his lower body uncomfortably.

"Raoul?"

Raoul smiled, leaning over to whisper in Bond's ear, "Interesting choice of words, corazón mío.” He continued his teasing strokes of Bond's buttocks, delighting in the shiver he felt go through his frame. "But I think it's too late. I'm afraid you've already fallen for me."

"No."

"No?" Raoul glided one hand down to Bond's perineum, stroking in a slow glide from the soft skin of his testicles to the even softer skin between his cheeks.

Bond shuddered.

"Are you sure about that?" Raoul asked. "Perhaps you'd care to turn over so I could see for myself how uninterested you are?"

Not bothering to reply aloud, Bond buried his head further into the crook of his arm and shook his head.

Of course, Raoul didn't need to see the visible evidence. As Raoul continued his merciless teasing, Bond's hips were moving ever so slightly against the mattress. Besides, he had become very well acquainted with the pleasant, musky scent of an aroused Bond.

"Turn over now, please. I want to see you."

Bond again shook his head.

"I don't want to force you, James. I'd only risk injuring your shoulder again.” Raoul kissed the sensitive spot just above his cleft, then parted his buttocks with his hands, making his intent crystal clear. "Unless you want me to continue as I am, hmm?"

"Sometimes, I really hate you."

"You want to hate me."

"I do."
Raoul smiled. "Now there are two words I’d love to hear in a slightly different context."

Bond froze, tensing. "Be serious."

"I am. Oh, I most definitely am." Raoul leaned over and nipped Bond in the back of the neck. "Do as I ask. Now, James."

Shoulders slumping in defeat, Bond slowly turned over but refused to look at Raoul when he did.

As he'd expected, Bond was gloriously, magnificently hard, and Raoul simply admired the view for a few moments.

"It doesn't mean anything," Bond said, still refusing to look him in the eye.

"I think it means a great deal."

Bond finally looked up at him, glaring. "Only that your touch can make my body respond to you. Congratulations. You’d make a stunningly good courtesan. It means nothing else."

"And you believe your body to be so completely separate from the rest of you? That your wishes and expectations have nothing to do with it at all?"

Bond didn't reply.

"Let's try an experiment then, shall we?" He tapped Bond on one knee. "I want you to raise your knees and spread your legs."

Bond looked distinctly uncomfortable. "Like hell."

Sighing, Raoul said, "I don't believe I have to remind you of the consequences of your continual compliance issues, do I?"

Slowly, reluctantly, Bond obeyed, bringing his heels almost to his buttocks.

"Good, good," Raoul said. "Now spread your knees a little further apart, please."

Bond paused, once again internally debating whether he could safely refuse or not, but he evidently came to the correct answer, because he slowly widened the distance between his knees.

Raoul grabbed one of the pillows and moved over until he was kneeling between Bond's spread knees. "Raise your arse for me, James."

Bond's eyes widened slightly. "No," he responded almost reflexively.

"James," Raoul said patiently, "I won't ask you again."

Closing his eyes, Bond eventually complied, and Raoul placed the pillow under his low back and buttocks, being careful not to touch Bond at all.

When he was finished, Raoul merely sat back with both hands on his thighs and waited for Bond to reopen his eyes.

He didn't have to wait long. When Raoul made no further moves, Bond opened his eyes, saying, "What are you . . . ?"

"What am I doing? Is that what you were about to ask me?" Raoul cocked his head slightly. "I am
doing absolutely nothing. In fact, I have barely touched you at all since you turned over. Yet here you are, in the most incredibly vulnerable position a man could possibly be placed in, and you are still so aroused you are positively leaking." He paused, waiting for that to sink in. "So, how much of this is only my touch, and how much is actually your true inner desires you refuse to acknowledge, hmm?"

"You're a fool if you think I want you to rape me."

"I would be. If that's what you actually expected me to do, but you don't. Not anymore. The truth is that you want me, but you can't force yourself to trust me enough to ask for it. In fact, you're almost to the point where you do want me to take you 'against your will', because then you wouldn't have to admit your true desires to yourself." Raoul shook his head sadly. "I never imagined you to be a coward, James."

"You're wrong. Completely, utterly wrong."

"Hmm. I guess you're entitled to your opinion, as misguided as it is." He sat back on his heels. "Touch yourself, James."

"What?"

"You heard me. I just told you that I'm not going to touch you, so I'm afraid you'll have to actively participate for a change." He smiled. "Besides, I've been looking forward to this for quite some time."

"I'm not here to put on a show for you."

"That's intriguing. What do you believe you are here for then?"

"Stop it. Stop twisting my words." Bond was again visibly flustered. "If you knew me as well as you claimed, you'd realize I'm not exactly an exhibitionist."

"Ah. But you're not in public here. It's just you . . . and me." He made a point of slowly perusing Bond's body. "James, if the concept were really that abhorrent to you, this wouldn't still be so achingly hard."

Bond still hesitated.

"James, dear heart. Show me what you like to do to yourself." Raoul leaned forward and lowered his voice, saying, "You already know I like to watch you come. I'll enjoy it even more knowing you've done that to yourself. For me. Only for me."

"Christ, Raoul."

Raoul poured some of the oil into his hand, warming it. "I've always believed I knew your body and its responses very well, but it is possible, although not likely, that I may have missed something you like." He poured the handful of warmed oil over Bond's cock, then leaned down between his legs. "I promise to pay very close attention, and you already know I'm a quick learner."

Bond stared up at him, the doubt still plain on his face. "I don't know why I'm even considering this."

"Well, for one thing, you're not going to come if you don't." Raoul quirked an eyebrow at him. "Really, James, it's not all that difficult. I'm sure you still remember how."
“These last few weeks, I’ve been trying hard to forget a lot of things.”

“And yet I refuse to let you, bad person that I am. However, you’re not the only stubborn man in this room.” Raoul let his expression darken. “Stop stalling, James. We both know you can do this. We both know you want to do this.”

“I’m glad you’re so sure. I can’t tell the difference anymore.”

“Hmm?”

“Between what I want and what you want.”

“Oh, pequeño, you worry entirely too much. It’ll all work out in the end. You’ll see.” Raoul took Bond’s hand and guided it to where he wanted it to go. “Touch yourself for me. Pretty please?”

Bond closed his eyes, sighing, but he did finally grasp his cock, spreading the oil along its length. He started stroking himself, tentatively at first, but then faster as he settled into the familiarity of the process.

Raoul said, “Very good, James, but I’m afraid I have to ask you to open your eyes. I wouldn’t want you imagining one of your many ex-girlfriends while you’re here with me.”

Opening his eyes to barely a slit, Bond responded, “That’s not going to happen. I’ve already tried it. You’re like some bloody force of nature — whenever you’re in my proximity, you become absolutely impossible to ignore.”

“Why, thank you, James.”

“Damn it, it wasn’t intended as a compliment!”

Raoul chuckled, keeping his gaze fixed on the movement of Bond’s hand. “Alas, I’m forced to accept whatever meager crumbs you deem fit to throw my way.”

Bond’s breathing had subtly increased. “You don’t need encouragement. Your ego is big enough as it is.”

“That’s not the only thing about me that’s big.”

Bond snorted. “I wouldn’t know.”

“Would you like to?”

Throwing his head back in exasperation, Bond said, “Must you always talk so much during sex?”

“Yes, because you respond to the sound of my voice. It arouses you.”

Bond’s hand stilled momentarily, and he looked up at Raoul sharply.

“Oh, don’t bother to deny it. I told you we both enjoyed your stay in Fethiye. Even unconscious, you consistently responded to just that alone.” He lowered his voice and said distinctly, “Especially when I spoke in a very specific timbre.”

Bond shuddered.

Smiling, Raoul said, “Now continue, please, but a little slower. We’re not in a race here.”
Bond resumed his stroking, but added sarcastically, “I thought you wanted me to show you what I like.”

Raoul rolled his eyes. “I didn’t mean those times you go for a quick wank in a public restroom. I do have some modicum of class, you know.” He placed his hand on top of Bond’s, forcibly slowing his pace. “How about this? After a mission in a sterile, soulless hotel room, when you realize it’s too much work to seek out some willing female companionship. Your body aches, you’re exhausted, but you’ve got time to kill. Way too much time to kill.” He released Bond’s hand. “At first, you go so slowly that you almost fall asleep, but your body demands some sort of release. So you bring yourself to the brink and then retreat, again and again, because you know as long as you do that, it’ll take your mind off things you’d really rather not remember. You keep at it until you’re bathed in sweat and your touch becomes almost painful, and then you can finally, finally let yourself go. Show me one of those times.”

Bond’s breath hitched. “How can you be such a bloody tease, and you’re not even touching me?”

“It does take a particular talent, I know.”

Surprisingly, Bond did as he requested without further protest, and Raoul had to admit that he did discover one or two things that Bond seemed to prefer that he hadn’t known about. Well, his abuela had told him he should learn at least one new thing a day. It wasn’t his fault she hadn’t defined an appropriate range of topics.

He hadn’t lied to Bond when he’d said he’d been looking forward to this. What he hadn’t expected was that he’d find it quite as arousing as he did. Bond had obediently brought himself close to climax a number of times, but this time when he looked up at Raoul, he had an odd mixture of a pleading and yet somewhat apprehensive expression on his face.

“You want to come, pequeño?”

Bond nodded, then replied aloud, “Yes, Raoul, but . . .”

“Yes, James?”

“Could you . . . could you touch me?”

“I told you I wouldn’t; however, I’m willing to reconsider given the proper motivation. I believe you have something particular in mind, hmm?”

Bond lowered his eyes.

“You have to tell me, James.”

Bond looked up at him. “I want you to touch me . . . there.”

Raoul chuckled. “You still can’t say it, can you, dear heart?” Bond was already exposed due to his position, but Raoul used one hand to spread his cheeks a little wider. He paused. “Is this what you intended, James?” he asked, lightly circling his entrance with two fingers.

Bond breathed in a sharp gasp in response, but he nodded, increasing the speed and the intensity of his grip on his penis.

Raoul continued the slow circles, delighting in his obvious sensitivity there. “You’ve never allowed any of your lovers to touch you here, have you, James?”
Bond’s lovely blue eyes were dilated completely, but he managed to shake his head once in negation. He was obviously very close, but he kept his eyes focused on Raoul as much as he could while rapidly approaching orgasm.

“Were you afraid you wouldn’t enjoy it, or didn’t you like the vulnerability that it implies?”

When he received no reply from Bond, Raoul halted the motion of his fingers.

Bond gasped, his rhythm faltering “Raoul, please. You know the answer to that.”

Resuming the slow circles, Raoul chuckled. “Yes, I do, but I like the sound of your voice also.” He leaned in closer. “Especially when you’re this close to completion.”

Bond’s movements were almost frantic now, and Raoul increased the pressure of his fingers against Bond’s entrance. He lowered his voice once again, saying, “If it feels this good with just my fingers, imagine what my tongue would feel like.”

Bond froze, eyes suddenly wide, and he came with a groan, arching his back with the intensity of his climax.

It wasn’t Raoul’s fault that the sudden motion caused the tip of one finger to penetrate inside Bond. It really wasn’t. Of course, he probably should have anticipated it, but then, no one was perfect, after all.

However, he kept the finger there as Bond slowly recovered, his eyes still dilated and his breathing erratic. The agent made no protest against the intrusion, but Raoul didn’t want to push his luck. He slowly removed the digit, circling Bond’s anus one more time before he placed both hands on Bond’s trembling inner thighs.

“Dear heart, you are absolutely exquisite, but you can’t possibly tell me now that it’s only my touch that effects you — that your response to me means nothing else.”

Bond looked away.

“James, think about all the men you’ve known. You must have felt at least a vague attraction for some of them. Tell me, for how many of those men would you place yourself in such a vulnerable position? And even if forced into this position, how many of them would be granted the breathtaking privilege of watching you bring yourself to orgasm?”

Bond took a moment to reply, but then said in a defeated tone of voice, “None of them. No one. Just you.”

Raoul sighed deeply. At last, it was time.

Mi ratita estaba listo. ¹

Chapter End Notes

¹"My little rat was ready."
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

This is a monster of a chapter, but I decided against splitting it into two because of the content. As Raoul would say, we're about to shake things up a bit.

More than a bit actually, but then, this is Raoul we're talking about.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

James had been right about one important fact. This building really _was_ a gigantic fire trap.

Raoul raced up the staircase that was already filling up with smoke, Luis immediately behind him. They both held wet cloths over their mouths and noses, but the thin material wasn’t doing anything to block the already oppressive heat.

When they stopped at the doorway to Bond’s suite, he was crouched there, evidently attempting to stay as low as he could to breathe the clearer air.

Raoul held out his hand. “James, come. We don’t have a lot of time.”

Bond simply shook his head, his eyes already tearing from the smoke. “You know I can’t. The collar.”

“James, the fire started on the third floor. The computers were still working, and I deactivated the automatic setting of the collar on my way up here. It’s safe.”

“I still get the warning shock when I approach the doorway.”

“I _know_, but . . .”

“Sir,” Luis interjected. “We have to move now if we’re going to get down safely.”

Raoul waved him off impatiently and kept his attention focused on Bond. “James, I didn’t have time to disable all the bells and whistles. Yes, the warning mode is still active, but you _can_ move through the doorway.” He beckoned again with his raised hand. “*Pequeño*, please. We need to get out _now_.”

Bond slowly stood, and Raoul held his breath, keeping his expression open and encouraging. Bond started toward the door, but suddenly flinched and stopped, no doubt again receiving the warning shock. That function itself would slowly increase in amplification each time it was activated, so Bond was getting a significantly increasing degree of negative feedback every time he approached the doorway.

The floor vibrated as, somewhere in the building, a segment of the support structure had evidently collapsed.

“No,” Bond said, backing away from the door. “I think I’d rather burn to death than go through that again.”
“James!” Raoul called desperately. “I told you, it’s been deactivated. You must trust me. When have I ever lied to you, pequeño?”

Still shaking his head, Bond disappeared into the bedroom, and Raoul closed his eyes in defeat.

*Why must the man be so bloody stubborn?*

“Sir,” Luis said again. “We have to go. Now.”

Raoul didn’t bother to look at him. “You go, Luis. I don’t need you here. You have my orders, so please see to carrying them out.”

He heard an exasperated sigh from the man behind him. “At times, you make it exceedingly difficult to do my job, sir.” Luis sounded uncharacteristically frustrated. “I am supposed to see to your safety.”

“And you saw me safely here. Now go. If something should happen, Dr. Almeida has access to the rather substantial severance pay for you and your men.”

Raoul sensed movement at his back and held up a hand in warning. “And if you are contemplating knocking me unconscious or some other equally stupid plan, please be aware that I will regretfully break your fucking neck before you go two steps.”

A pause, and both of them flinched as several window panes imploded at the end of the hallway from the intense heat. “Yes, sir,” Luis said resignedly.

He heard Luis start down the corridor, but then the man said, “You told me once that a wise man always chooses his battles. I can’t help but wonder if the cost of winning this one may be too high.”

Raoul started to reply, then coughed violently as he inhaled too much of the thick smoke slowly filling the corridor. When he caught his breath, he replied, “I also told you that contrary to popular belief, there really isn’t anything worth dying for. I appear to have been wrong on both counts.” He gestured urgently with his hand. “Now go, you’ll find that we rats are surprisingly good at surviving catastrophes.”

Discarding the now useless dry cloth, Raoul approached closer to the door but didn’t go through it. Bond had to come to him. He had to.

“James!” Raoul called, knowing his desperation was only feeding his impotent anger. “I will shock you bloody unconscious myself if you don’t come here immediately.”

Bond finally approached, staggering slightly. The floor was more than uncomfortably warm even through Raoul’s leather soles, and he knew Bond must be suffering by now with his bare feet. He’d evidently immersed his head in water, likely attempting to get some of the grit from the smoke and burning debris out of his eyes, because his hair was wet and dripping. However, the droplets of water running down his neck were even now evaporating from the intense heat.

“You’re still here?” he said.

“Of course I’m still here. I’m not going anywhere without you.”

Bond seemed confused. “I don’t understand.”

“No, you wouldn’t understand, because you’re still trying to think instead of listening to your
instincts. I told you I wouldn’t leave you, ever.” He held out his hand again, entreatingly, as another harsher vibration rumbled through the floor beneath their feet. “Come to me, James. Now.”

Bond took a slow step forward, but then paused, shaking his head as the collar again activated its warning mode. Bond looked up at Raoul desperately.

“You must trust me, James, please.”

An explosion ripped beneath them, heaving the floor upward violently and sending them both tumbling to the floor. Glancing behind him, Raoul saw that a small gap had developed in the corridor behind them, and the flames were already starting to work their way into the fresh oxygen source.

Bond gasped as the overheated floor burned the more sensitive skin of his hip, thigh and hands. He scrambled to his feet just as Raoul did the same, but still he paused, the undisguised fear now unmistakable in his eyes.

“James,” Raoul pleaded. “The collar will not electrocute you.” He held out both hands beseechingly. “Please trust me, corazón mío. Come to me.”

One step. Then another. Bond winced, whether due to the continued warning shocks from the collar or the burning floor beneath his feet, Raoul wasn’t sure.

He kept his hands outstretched, ignoring the now roaring flames behind him, trying to will Bond to obey. Just this once.

Right before Bond passed through the doorway, another explosion caused the entire building to tremble on its foundations, and Raoul knew they had just run out of time. Bond stumbled, going down on one knee, grunting at the impact.

Oh, how Raoul wanted to go to him, but he dare not. Bond had to trust him enough to take the initiative — to take those last few steps across the doorway, regardless of his intense fear of what the collar might do to him. If Bond couldn’t trust him now, he never would. And then Raoul would be forced, however regretfully, to kill him.

If they both didn’t die in this burning derelict of a building first, that is.

However, as Raoul even fleetingly contemplated life without this amazing man in it, he knew he was being a fool. He’d rather die than go back to that soulless existence he had suffered through before Bond.

Staggering to his feet, Bond once again paused, but this time he locked eyes with Raoul’s, seeming to garner strength from that act alone. He took one halting step, then a second. Another explosion rocked the floor beneath them, but Raoul knew he dared not drop his gaze whatever the provocation, and mentally urged Bond to take those last few steps.

When Bond finally crossed the threshold, he grasped Raoul’s hands as if they were a lifeline, and Raoul pulled him violently against his torso, mumbling his gratitude and pleasure at Bond’s monumental effort into his now completely dry hair.

Bond was breathing as if he’d just run a marathon, his muscles locked tight as if he were still expecting the agonizing torture of the collar’s punishment.

Raoul knew they had to get moving, that they were out of time, but Bond was whispering, “You came back. You didn’t lie,” as if it were some kind of mantra, holding onto Raoul for dear life.
Raoul paused long enough to let Bond gain control of his emotions and his abused body. He couldn’t carry Bond that far, not through the treacherous obstacle course this dying building had now become.

“Come, James, we must leave.”

Another set of windows imploded in the room across from them, the force sending debris flying into the corridor. Raoul spun them both around to shield Bond’s exposed skin with his own body. When he looked down at Bond, the man still appeared slightly dazed, but he was aware enough of his surroundings now that his highly developed survival instincts had finally kicked in. He looked into Raoul’s eyes and nodded once, sharply.

Raoul smiled down at him, then grasped his right upper arm and guided him against the wall where he would be more protected, and they both started the long run down the corridor toward the stairway and eventual safety.

The floor was making ominous creaking sounds beneath their feet, as if running over dangerously thin ice, and Raoul quickened his pace. Bond was keeping up, although barely, his eyes slitted nearly closed from a combination of the smoke and the obvious agony of the overheated floor beneath his feet.

As they approached the gap in the floor, the flames suddenly roared up as if sensing their approach. Raoul skidded to a stop, pulling the almost mindlessly running Bond to a stop as well, spinning him around. He quickly shrugged out of his jacket, wrapping the meager protection around Bond’s shoulders, then turned back toward the now almost totally blocked corridor. He approached cautiously, shielding his eyes and attempting to find a way across, but it was looking rather hopeless.

“Raoul!” Bond yelled from behind him. “Move back, now!”

Raoul didn’t hesitate, scrambling backwards toward Bond just as the damaged ceiling directly above the gap cracked and fell in a wave of billowing dust, plaster, wood, and warped metal.

Thankfully, the debris didn’t completely block the corridor, and it had temporarily quenched the flames enough that they could now navigate through the gap without being instantly immolated.

Unfortunately, ‘passable’ didn’t mean ‘clear,’” and Bond grunted as they worked their way quickly through the narrow space covered in burning cinders and twisted metal. When they finally reached the mostly uncluttered section of corridor beyond the gap, Bond was limping badly, and he was leaving blood-stained prints in his wake.

Swearing softly under his breath, Raoul deliberately slowed his pace, not wanting to cause any more injury to Bond than absolutely necessary.

They reached the doorway to the stairwell at last, and Raoul quickly moved to open it.

Bond yelled, “No!” grabbing his arm, and Raoul turned to him in confusion.

“Wait just a minute,” Bond said.

“We don’t have a minute, James!”

Bond knelt down, running his hand down the length of the door, then examining the small crack underneath carefully. “We’ll have even less if you open this door into a backdraft.” Bond looked up at him, grinning madly. “It’s an even faster way of getting rid of unwanted hair than your
preferred method. Unfortunately, it’ll take every bit of your skin right along with it.”

Raoul looked down at him, unwillingly impressed. Bond had always functioned best in a crisis, and he was definitely in his element now, regardless of his injuries and extended captivity.

Bond stood, nodding slightly to Raoul. He carefully touched the handle, again feeling for excessive heat, then gestured Raoul to stand with him at the side of the door frame as he turned the handle and flung the door open wide.

Raoul felt the instant change in air pressure, but it wasn’t followed by a corresponding wall of flames, so their luck was holding for now. It had the added benefit of temporarily clearing some of the trapped smoke in the corridor as well.

As Bond started to go through the doorway, Raoul grasped his arm, saying, “No, I’ll go first.”

The agent looked as if we were about to argue, but either his common sense, or more likely his recent training at Raoul’s hands, finally prevailed, and he inclined his head in reluctant agreement.

Raoul smiled in approval and slipped past him onto the landing and then down the narrow stairway. Fortunately, there was less debris, and with no windows in the stairwell, Raoul at least didn’t have to worry about Bond’s bare feet and broken glass. Regardless, Bond was obviously hurting, and their progress had slowed significantly enough that Bond didn’t even protest when Raoul wrapped an arm around his waist to take some weight off his badly injured feet.

The building was still shaking ominously with intermittent explosions, and Bond said, “Did they design this building to run entirely on gas? Those don’t sound like simple heat-generated explosions.”

“Hmm,” Raoul said. “Actually, that’s probably the incendiary ammunition and the plastic explosives on the second floor.”

Bond stopped suddenly, staring up at Raoul incredulously. “You stored plastic explosives in the same building you’re living in? Are you totally insane?”

Raoul urged Bond onward, saying, “Well, we’ve already covered the likelihood of the insanity theory. Besides, it sounded like a good idea at the time. Easy access, and whatnot.” He shrugged. “It’s not like it was a large amount of plastic explosives.”

“Damn it, Raoul! How much do you think it bloody takes?”

Apparently not very much at all, because as they passed the second floor landing, another violent explosion ripped apart the stairwell just above them, bringing a portion of the wall and accompanying debris cascading down the stairs toward them.

Bond ripped Raoul’s arm from around his waist and pushed him violently down the stairs, evidently knowing he would only slow Raoul down.

Raoul was forced to run a few steps downward to compensate, attempting to regain his balance before he actually fell headlong down the stairs, and he therefore managed to turn the corner just in time to avoid the worst of the fiery avalanche. Cursing, he turned around and headed back up the now debris-strewn stairs to find Bond had been knocked off his feet by the explosion.

“James!” he screamed, dodging the still intermittently raining debris to get to Bond’s side. He lifted a smoldering support beam off Bond’s torso and found the jacket he had wrapped around his shoulders smoldering as well. He flung that aside and pulled Bond up against his chest violently.
“You absolute idiot,” he said furiously, his anger fueled by his terror. Bond was now covered in a new array of burns and cuts, but he was shaking his head dazedly, still conscious, although barely.

Hauling Bond to his feet, they once again started down the remaining flights of stairs to the outside, but Bond suddenly yelped in agony and his right leg collapsed beneath him.

Looking down, Raoul noted the sharp metal fragments scattered across the stairwell, evidently remnants from the incendiaries and other lethal objects previously stored above them. Bond’s feet were now completely lacerated and bleeding profusely, and Raoul swore. There was no way the man was walking anywhere in that condition. Turning the agent toward him, he lifted him up and over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry, steadfastly ignoring the man’s startled protests.

As Raoul staggered down the last flight of steps, Bond wisely didn’t distract him by attempting to struggle, plainly aware he would only send them both tumbling down the remaining stairs if he did.

Luis was hovering anxiously inside the doorway as Raoul approached, another cloth covering his mouth and nose, and he flung the door open wide to allow Raoul and his precious burden to go through into the sunlight at last.

Raoul jogged awkwardly down the street, away from the now totally involved building, and shook his head violently at Luis’ silent offer of assistance. His protective instincts were fully engaged, and he couldn’t bear the thought of another man touching Bond at this point.

Just as he rounded the corner into an adjoining street, he heard the series of massive explosions that indicated the final demise of the building they had just exited. A billowing cloud of smoke and dust followed them down the street, and Raoul picked up his pace until they finally emerged into the relatively clear air of a small plaza. He moved to the center where there was a miserly, wilted strip of grass and went to his knees in relief.

Luis appeared magically beside him with a pair of blankets, laying one out on the ground. Raoul helped Bond to lie on his back, gesturing for Luis to hand him the spare blanket. His second complied and then wisely stepped back, evidently recognizing the dangerous protectiveness radiating from his employer in waves.

Bond groaned as he laid down, but his back was the least damaged place on his torso, and it was the best Raoul could do at the moment.

Raoul turned to bark an order, but Luis held up a hand, saying, “I will bring the doctor immediately, sir.”

Nodding in acceptance, Raoul turned back in time to catch Bond’s shoulders as he attempted to sit up. “Stay where you are, James.”

When Bond once again attempted to sit up despite the restraining hand on his shoulder, Raoul said, “If you like, I can just sit on you, but now that we are out in the public venue, you may not appreciate the audience.”

Looking around, Bond finally noted Raoul’s men at the other end of the plaza, some of them calmly inventorying a series of stacked boxes and supplies, others guarding the perimeter with the usual array of automatic weapons and fierce expressions. Bond had clearly noted the excessive orderliness of the scene, rather than the expected chaos given the circumstances, because he arrived rather quickly at the correct conclusion.

He looked up at Raoul incredulously. “You started that fire yourself, didn’t you?”
Raoul looked at him as if he’d invented him, which in a way, he had. “Such a clever little rat.”

“Are you out of your fucking mind?”

“James, you did say you wanted to get out into the sunlight.”

“Not in a goddamn body bag, I didn’t!”

Raoul sighed. “Always so dramatic, but that’s part of what I like about you.”

Bond’s eyes were wild and frantic. “I’m dramatic? I can’t believe you. You set an entire building on fire, a building filled with plastic explosives, and you call me dramatic? You’re a real piece of work. And just what was the fucking point, anyway?”

“You couldn’t admit to yourself that you trusted me. I had to go to rather extreme measures to prove that you did.”

“By allowing me to almost burn to death?” Bond was trembling, he was so furious. “And what about all your computer equipment, and your precious, priceless Rembrandt, for Christ’s sake?”

Raoul merely stared at him for a few moments, cocking his head. “I saved what was important.”

Bond started to snap back a response, but then Raoul’s meaning sunk in and he froze, looking up at him with such a mixture of emotions crossing his face that Raoul couldn’t begin to categorize them all.

Raoul cupped Bond’s cheek. “You had a choice between life and death, between trust and fear, and you chose me, pequeño.” He kissed his forehead. “You chose me.” He gently placed the spare blanket over Bond’s torso.

Someone behind them cleared his throat, and Raoul stood.

“Ah, Diego. You’re here. I trust you were able to remove your notes and the important equipment in time?”

“It was a decidedly inelegant melee, but I managed. Barely.”

Raoul shrugged. “Sorry, but we had a short window of opportunity. I don’t control all the pesky spy satellites, after all.”

Diego glanced down at Bond and crossed his arms, obviously more than a little cross. “Was it worth it?”

“Definitely.”

“I have a feeling all parties involve do not share your enthusiasm.”

“He’ll come around.”

Diego sighed. “Would you like me to examine him?”

“Of course I do! Can’t you see he’s injured?”

“Yes, I can. But to do more than see, you have to allow me to actually approach him.”

Raoul felt his eyes widen, and he took a moment to self-assess. He then sheepishly made a
conscious effort to lessen his aggressive stance. “Hovering protectively, am I?”

“More like looming dangerously. I do have some modicum of self-protective instincts remaining, you know.” Diego knelt down and opened his medical bag. “I believe it would be best for everyone involved if you were not here while I tended to him. Besides, I believe there is something else you should do before we leave.”

Raoul narrowed his eyes. “Must I?”

Diego merely stared at him in silence.

“Oh, all right. If it will stop you from constantly glaring at me,” but he couldn’t quite make himself move away from Bond’s side.

Diego stood. “You know very well I have no designs on your young man, and I will insure no one else approaches him. Will that suffice, or would you prefer that he continue to suffer needlessly while you delay me?”

“Dirty pool, Diego, dirty pool.”

“One does what one must.” He waved an arm vaguely toward the far end of the plaza. “There are some wildflowers in that direction. You may find them useful.”

“Yes, yes, I understand. I am not an idiot.” Raoul started off across the plaza, but then turned and poked a finger into Diego’s chest, saying firmly, “Absolutely no sedatives. None. Is that clear?”

Diego looked slightly confused, but he nodded agreement upon noting Raoul’s determined expression.

Raoul continued walking, but he kept throwing anxious glances over his shoulder. He shook his head and forced himself to cease his excessive worrying. After all, if anyone should be suffering separation anxiety, it damn well should be Bond, not him.

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Diego knelt down next to the injured but still very dangerous man lying on the ground and decided to take things very slowly indeed.

“Good evening, Señor Bond. I don’t believe we have been properly introduced. I am Dr. Diego Almeida.” He was careful to keep any quick movements to a minimum and didn’t offer his hand.

Bond was looking up at him with narrowed eyes. “Raoul’s pet physician.”

Diego was mildly surprised at Bond’s use of the name. “In a manner of speaking, yes. We have known each other for many, many years.”

“Then you’re a party to my abduction, as well.”

“If by that you mean, did I know of his obsession with you, then yes. However, I was not aware he planned to take his fascination with you to such extremes.”

“But you’re not planning on doing anything about it.” It wasn’t a question.

“If you spend enough time with him, you will come to realize it is next to impossible to circumvent his wishes once he has settled on something.” Diego smiled ruefully. “It is somewhat like asking a mountain to move aside long enough for you to pass. One should not be exceptionally surprised
when it refuses to listen to you.”

Bond eyed him for a few moments, assessing. “Yet you’re not afraid of him.”

“Wary of his moods at times perhaps, but no, he is very loyal to those who are loyal to him.”

“And you are, of course, loyal to him.” Bond’s voice held a hint of contempt.

Diego didn’t take offense. “He saved my life, and continues to do so; therefore, I fear my answer must be ‘yes.’” He saw the implicit question in Bond’s eyes. Very inquisitive, this one was, but that could actually prove helpful in adapting to his new circumstances, because he would certainly never let Bond go now.

“Señor Bond. I know you are extremely unhappy with your situation at the moment, but I ask that I be able to tend to your injuries before he returns.” He gave Bond a rueful half-smile. “He is in one of his moods, so it will be much easier if I do not have to ‘fight him off’ while I work.”

Bond turned his head in the direction the man had headed, then looked back at Diego, finally giving him a curt nod of agreement. “Is he always this damn . . . possessive?”

Diego removed the blanket covering Bond and began to clean and treat the various lacerations and burns on his torso and arms. He considered Bond’s question as he worked. “No, he can be fiercely defensive over those he considers under his protection, but you are the only one who has elicited that sort of reaction from him.”

“Lucky me,” Bond said sarcastically.

Pausing, Diego said, “Yes, I believe you are. As an agent of MI6, he would have immediately killed you otherwise. He is not overly fond of that particular organization.” He found a bad cut on Bond’s left thigh that would definitely need stitches, but it would have to wait until he could apply an anesthetic for that procedure. Bond winced merely from the placement of a temporary dressing on the wound.

“Like he did Severine? Or was she not ‘under his protection’?”

Diego sighed. “So many questions, but I will answer this one, since he will not. Severine was a dead woman the moment she left the Syndicate. Even he would have been unable to protect her forever, but he would have tried, had she kept her promise of loyalty. However, when she chose to betray him, not once, but twice. . .” He shrugged. “We Spanish have a saying, “Lo prometido es deuda — What has been promised, is debt.” He paused a moment, closing his eyes on his own remembered pain. “You will come to see, Señor Bond, that we take our oaths very seriously indeed.”

Bond eyed him pointedly. “As far as I’m concerned, that particular fact remains to be seen, at least in his case.” He looked around warily. “Where has he run off to anyway?”

“He is going to visit her grave.”

Bond snorted. “He hardly seemed perturbed when he had her killed, and he hasn’t actually been dwelling on it since then either.”

“You know him so well, then?”

Bond looked up at him sharply.
“You are a dangerous man as well, Señor Bond, and I imagine you have also done unspeakable things, no?” He paused and Bond nodded reluctantly. “Then you must know that if one dwells too long on the unspeakable things one has done in the past, it becomes that much easier to continue doing unspeakable things in the future.”

Looking away, Bond’s brow furrowed as he considered this.

Diego carefully wiped away the blood and debris covering the soles of Bond’s feet and winced. This was more than he could treat without a surgical suite, so he merely cleansed the wounds as best he could, applied antiseptic, and bound both feet securely in bandages. He would have to deal with this after they had reached their destination. In any case, the agent would not be happy with his interim prognosis. Not at all.

Sighing, Diego said, “He has been dwelling on his past for far too long, and only since following your progress has he behaved more like the man he used to be.” He busied himself with putting away his supplies. “Congratulations, Señor Bond, you have been far more effective than any therapist could ever hope to be.”

“None of this has been my choice,” Bond said fiercely.

“And your choices have all worked out well for you?”

Bond sighed, some of his belligerence seeming to fade. “You’re as bad as he is. I talk to either one of you, and I find myself doubting assumptions I’ve held all my life.”

“Assumptions are just that -- assumptions. Perhaps you should dwell more on the truths and less on the suppositions you have acquired through a lifetime of emotional pain.”

“You talk like a psychiatrist, or a priest.”

“I am neither, fortunately. Those professions are both expected to work miracles.” Diego pulled out his stethoscope to listen to Bond’s heart, knowing his host would insist on that reassurance given Bond’s previous history. Distracted by his thoughts, he said automatically, “Now, Mr. Stethoscope may be a little cold.”

Bond raised an eyebrow at him, and Diego winced.

“I am sorry, Señor Bond, but by training I am a pediatrician. What is the saying, ‘Old habits die hard’?”

Eyes widening, Bond said incredulously, “You’re a pediatrician? Raoul said I was acting like a child, but I didn’t realize he’d taken that to heart.”

“If it is any consolation, I have subspecialties in Cardiology and Neurology.” He raised an eyebrow playfully. “I promise not to bribe you with sweets and colorful bandages.”

A faint smile crossed Bond’s face. “Well, I wouldn’t go quite that far.”

“Ah, so you possess a ‘sweet tooth’, then?”

Bond indicated his badly damaged body and the array of pristine white bandages and plasters. “Not especially, but a little color might break up the monotony.”

Diego laughed. “I will see what I can do, Señor Bond. I will see what I can do.”
Raoul re-entered the plaza just as Diego was once again covering Bond with the blanket. Raoul grimaced when he noted how his oldest friend then stood a careful distance from the man. He knew it wasn’t because Diego was worried about Bond, as injured as he was, so it was obviously Raoul’s reaction he was wary of.

Sighing, Raoul closed his eyes briefly. He hoped he wouldn’t always be so jealously possessive of Bond, or he’d never be able to let the man out of his sight for long.

Diego turned to face him as he approached.

“Well, are you finished then, Diego?”

“For the moment.”

Raoul cocked a questioning eyebrow at him.

“He will require stitches on at least one of his lacerations, and some minor surgery on the soles of his feet to remove any potential embedded fragments and reconstruct some of the damaged vasculature. Both will require anesthetics of some sort and a much cleaner environment than I have available here.”

“That bad?”

Diego crossed his arms.

“That ‘fortune favors the brave’?”

“There is a distinct divide between bravery and stupidity, and I believe we both know which side you’ve plastered your face firmly into.” He indicated Bond, who was watching them bicker with calm interest. “Unfortunately, your young man here is the one who must pay the price.”

Diego’s distinct undertones of anger made Raoul uneasy.

“Eventually. However, he will need to stay off his feet for at least three weeks.”

Bond made a disgruntled noise. “Do you have any idea how tired I am of lying flat on my back?”

“I’m totally fine with it,” Raoul said.

Diego punched him in the shoulder, hard.

“Ow.” Raoul rubbed the sore spot, glaring. “What was that for?”

Diego didn’t look the least bit unrepentant. “You are not helping,” he said firmly, hands on his hips.

Raoul sighed. “We can discuss this later. For now, I want us gone from this place before the next scheduled satellite sweep of the region.” He indicated the south exit from the plaza with a jerk of his chin. “With all the debris, the transport to the harbor could only approach as far as the next street over.” He looked down at Bond. “I’ll have to carry him there.”

“I can walk,” Bond said.
“No, you cannot!” both Raoul and Diego said simultaneously.

Bond sighed, covering his eyes with one forearm.

“If you prefer, James, I can have my men carry you,” Raoul said. “And don’t expect Diego here to be one of them — he’s even shorter than you.”

Bond peered out from behind his arm. “I think you already know my answer to that.” He sat up, wincing. “However, I’m not all that fond of displaying my naked arse in the air either.”

Raoul smiled lasciviously. “Well, I’d say if you’ve got it, flaunt it, but I understand your concern.” He went down on one knee next to Bond. “Fortunately, I’ve been exercising regularly, and you’ve lost quite a bit of muscle mass over the last few months, so there is another option. At least for a short distance.” He placed his hands under Bond’s back and legs and picked him up in his arms.

He was likely going to herniate a few discs, but it was worth it just to see the expression on Bond’s face as he rose to his feet.

“Put. Me. Down.”

“Eventually, James, eventually,” he said, walking toward the transport.

Bond made a move to break free, and Raoul stopped. “If you continue with this foolishness, I can either drop you on your head, which may actually do you a world of good, or I can have a couple of my men take over the transport duties. Do you have a preference, James?”

Nostrils flaring, Bond breathed in deeply, plainly attempting to calm himself. “Just get on with it then,” he said, refusing to look at Raoul.

Raoul smiled, enjoying himself. “If it helps, consider this as practice.” He began walking again.

“For what?” Bond snapped.

“Carrying you over the threshold, of course.”

Bond glared up at him, and Raoul laughed. “So fierce, mi ratita. So very, very fierce.”

By the time they arrived at the transport, Raoul was definitely feeling the strain in his arms and shoulders, but Bond had actually relaxed slightly during the journey. Not that he was any happier with his situation, obviously, but he had accepted the inevitable faster than Raoul had anticipated he would.

Diego opened the rear door of the transport as they approached, then moved to the opposite side to assist.

Raoul carefully eased Bond inside, and when Bond automatically moved to sit up and place his feet on the floor, Diego grabbed both of his legs and shook his head firmly. When he seemed assured that Bond wouldn’t attempt the maneuver again, Diego moved to the front of the transport with the driver.

Sliding in beside Bond, Raoul decided to curtail any future foolishness by pulling the man sideways into his lap so that his legs lay across the top of the seat.

Bond yelped, either from surprise or from Raoul accidentally elbowing one of his existing injuries, he wasn’t certain.
Raoul carefully wrapped his arms around Bond’s torso, keeping his hold light enough not to injure him further, but tight enough that Bond couldn’t move.

“I can sit up by myself, you know.”

“You may trust me in some measure now, James, but you still require precautions against doing something foolish and injuring yourself further. Consider this a safety measure until I can insure the collar is still functioning properly.”

“And here I thought I’d eventually talk you into disposing of that bloody thing,” Bond said.

Raoul looked at him contemplatively. “I did tell you the collar was permanent, did I not?”

“So the trust only works one way.”

“James, some idiot once said, ‘If you love something, let it go,’ but I can’t even conceive of doing such a foolish thing unless I didn’t already love it with all my heart.”

Bond’s eyes widened, and his breath caught.

Raoul clasped a hand over his mouth. “Madre de Dios. I said that aloud, didn’t I?”

“Raoul . . .” Bond replied, very quietly.

_Palabra y piedra suelta, no tienen vuelta._ ¹

So be it. Raoul took a deep breath, then looked at Bond intensely, making sure he had his complete attention. “James, I have told you before that names are very important.”

When Bond started to respond, he covered his mouth with one hand, then leaned down to speak directly into his ear.

“My name is Tiago.”

Chapter End Notes

¹ Literally, "A word or stone thrown has no return." Or more simply, "Words, once spoken, cannot be taken back."

I still haven't made up my mind about the eventual length of this story; however, the next chapter is the decision point, so we'll have a determination of short vs. long then (or more accurately, long vs. longer, given the already ridiculous length of this fic).
“What is it with you and islands?”

Tiago sat down on the bed and cupped one knee with his hands. “Do you not like the view?”

“The view is bloody fine. At least, it’s an improvement over the totally nonexistent one in my last prison.”

“Hmm.”

Bond looked at him sharply. “Were you planning on eventually answering me?”

Tiago merely stared at the gloriously naked man in his bed, and replied, “Shhh. I’m busy enjoying the view.”

Bond stared at him, opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it again and looked away.

Tiago smiled. “Frankly, I’m surprised. Who would have thought pink and purple would be such good colors on you?”

Bond glanced down at his body and grimaced. “I’m beginning to regret saying anything at all to Dr. Almeida.”

Laughing, Tiago said, “You’ll soon learn to be careful what you say to him. The man is very conscientious about fulfilling requests, especially when he believes he’s doing a good deed.” He indicated the fluorescent bandages with a jerk of his chin. “In any case, those should come off shortly. Diego said the only significant damage was to your feet.”

“Only? I’m glad you’re so unconcerned. What would you have done if I’d died in that clusterfuck — send a condolence card to M — ‘Heavens, but I do appear to have toasted your agent. Ever so sorry’ — and move onto your next project?”

“Not a bad suggestion, if I were allowed to see the expression on her face when she received it.” He paused for a moment, locking gazes with Bond and refusing to let him misinterpret what he said next. “However, the correct answer is that I wouldn’t have done anything at all, because I’d have been dead as well.”

Bond was obviously attempting to keep the surprise and discomfort out of his expression, but his nostrils flared ever so slightly, giving him away.

Still haven’t lost your tell, James. Poor thing. Any discussion of true devotion scares you half to death.

Breaking eye contact, Bond said, “You talk a good game.”

Tiago reached out to stroke the smooth metal of Bond’s collar. “And I also play a good game, as you know very well.”

Bond looked down at the hand on his collar — the hand that was carefully not touching the delicate skin of the ankle beneath it. “Then why haven’t you . . . ?” He cut himself off abruptly, pulling his
leg away from Tiago, hissing as he bumped the stitched wounds on the bottom of his foot.

“Why haven’t I touched you except for carrying you? Is that what you were about to ask?”

Bond went back to staring out the huge bay of windows that formed the entire west wall of the bedroom and refused to speak.

Tiago moved closer to Bond, as close as he could without touching him, and said, “Do you want me to touch you, James?”

“I want you to let me go.”

Looming over Bond, forcing his attention, he said, “Do you? Really?”

“Yes,” Bond said distinctly.

“And where would you go, James? What would you do? You saw your previous test scores — MI6 was already half-convinced you were washed up even then. If it hadn’t been for M’s misguided affection, you would have been summarily dismissed from active field service without a second thought. And now . . . hmm? Well, now you’ve been missing long enough that they will suspect very strongly you’ve already been compromised.” He cocked his head to one side. “And if they don’t have the brains or imagination to suspect it, then I would make damn certain they do.”

Bond glared at him furiously.

“Come now, James. You don’t expect me to play fair, especially when it comes to you. I would do anything, say anything, kill anyone who dares to come between us.” He paused, letting his expression soften. “More importantly, pequeño, you know what I’m telling you is the truth. You’ve known for quite some time.”

“It’s not as hopeless as all that. It’s not.”

“James, I meant what I said about choosing your own secret missions. I know better than to ask you to do anything against England, or her interests. There is a whole wide world out there, and ample ways to make a living without compromising your precious principles.” He rolled his eyes. “Or your pathetic love of country.”

Bond was watching him out of the corner of his eye, so he knew he was at least considering Tiago’s words.

“Come now, James, how many times have you been reprimanded for doing something you thought was right, or even been expressly forbidden to take some sort of action that would directly benefit England? Pfft. It’s such a bother, and all because of politics and protocols, rules and regulations. He wagged a finger at him. “Bad boy, 007, we’ll be forced to restrict your movements, cancel your credit cards, bring you back to HQ in chains if you don’t behave yourself.” Tiago sat back and crossed his arms. “There are no oversight committees here, James. No bloated chain of command laced with bureaucrats and politicians. No answering to the public’s ignorant conscience. There is just you . . . and me.”

“You make it sound . . .” Bond shook his head, as if to clear it. “It’s not that easy. I can’t just give up.”

Still carefully not touching him, Tiago moved to straddle Bond’s torso. “Is it giving up that you’re truly worried about?” He leaned in close to Bond’s face. “Or giving in, hmm? To me, perhaps?”
Bond’s breathing had noticeably increased. “Both,” he said quietly.

“Do you want to know why I haven’t touched you since the fire?”

Bond’s gaze immediately dropped, and Tiago felt himself go cold.

“Madre de Dios. You thought I had changed my mind, didn’t you?”

Bond didn’t say anything, but then, he didn’t need to.

“How you can be such an experienced, competent field agent, yet still be so incredibly insecure. . .” He shook his head, putting his hands on his thighs. “It’s no use. I can’t even articulate it. There are simply no words.”

Bond attempted to ease away from Tiago’s proximity, but he already had his back against the headboard and had nowhere to go. “You can’t have meant what you said.”

“When have you known me to say something I didn’t mean?”

“You’ve said a lot of things, but I haven’t figured out what you truly wanted yet,” Bond said in exasperation.

“James, think please.” He held up a finger. “One, I didn’t take you to get information on MI6. I worked for them. I know all their secrets, and what little may have changed since I was an agent, I can obtain via accessing their so-called ‘secure’ computers.” He held up a second finger. “Two, I don’t need you to exact my revenge on M. It should be obvious to anyone after the gas explosion that I can get to her any time I want.” He held up a third finger. “Three, I don’t need you only for your very specific set of job skills — I can, and have, hired extremely competent people to fill those roles.” He placed his hands on either side of Bond’s head. “Now, whatever could be left, I wonder?”

Bond shook his head, still in denial.

Tiago merely stared at him for a few moments until Bond looked him again in the eyes. “How is it you can trust me with your body and your life, James, but not with your heart?”

Closing his eyes, Bond said, “Because I’m not trusting anyone with that. Ever again.”

“Hmm. Honesty at last.” He sighed. “But hope, as they say, springs eternal. James, open your eyes please.” When Bond complied, he said, “I have definitely not changed my mind about you. I meant what I said in that transport. However, since I was ultimately responsible for your injuries in the fire, I didn’t feel I had the right to touch you without your express permission.” He lowered his head until their faces were almost touching. “But if you give me that permission, I can go back to treating you as I think you deserve . . . and as I believe you desire.”

Bond seemed to hesitate, and Tiago pressed his advantage. “Oh, nothing sexual. You’re not up to anything quite that energetic yet.” He smiled encouragingly. “Dear heart, you’ve craved another’s touch ever since you were a child, and believe it or not, you are allowed to have what you want. It’s just the two of us here. No one else need ever know, if that’s what you’re concerned about.” He stared at Bond as earnestly as he could. “Por favor, pequeño. All I want to do is hold you. Please.”

Tiago held his breath, waiting, waiting, until a pair of strong arms finally wrapped around his shoulders, embracing him almost tentatively.
Sighing aloud, Tiago carefully encircled Bond’s shoulders, pulling him as close as he could without putting any excess pressure on the man’s injuries. He planted a quick kiss on Bond’s forehead, rubbing his back in soothing circles.

“Raoul . . .”

“Tsk, tsk. Names are important, James.”

“Tiago, then.” Bond’s brow furrowed, and he pulled back slightly. “Wait a minute. Tiago Rodriguez?”

“Uh-huh.”

“You’re supposed to be dead.”

“So are you.” Tiago waggled his eyebrows. “Just wait until they put your name on the memorial wall. It’s all very liberating, you know.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“That’ll be a first.”

Bond rolled his eyes. “Must you always have the last word?”

Laughing, Tiago said simply, “Yes.” He crawled across Bond to sit against the headboard. When he was situated, he patted the empty space between his legs and gazed at Bond hopefully, eyes wide.

Bond hesitated for a long time, but he finally moved and seated himself between Tiago’s legs, slouching slightly and resting his head against his shoulder. “I’m only doing this because you’re more comfortable than that bloody brick of a headboard.”

“Of course.” Tiago smiled, knowing Bond wouldn’t see it.

“And I’m only a couple of days out from surgery. Don’t expect this when I’ve recovered.”

Tiago froze, only for a split second, but Bond was an expert at reading body language, and he quite clearly felt the slip.

“What is it?” he demanded tightly.

“Hmm.” Tiago stalled. “Actually, it may have been more than just a couple of days.”

“What are you . . . ?” Bond sat up and whipped his head around. “You drugged me again, didn’t you?”

He obviously saw the confirmation in Tiago’s expression, because he immediately attempted to bolt forward out of his arms.

“James, calm down!” Tiago hauled him back against his chest with one arm and placed his other hand over Bond’s forehead, tilting his head back. Bond reluctantly relaxed in his hold, obeying his training in at least that respect, but his eyes were still narrowed and fiercely angry.

“Will you never trust me?” Tiago growled. “I discussed your symptoms with Diego. He told me that while your reaction was unusual, it had been previously documented in the medical literature, and he knew exactly which compound in the sedatives was causing your symptoms. He gave you a
completely different class of drug, James. You were merely kept unconscious so we could prevent your stubborn, intractable arse from getting out of bed and injuring yourself while you healed. Nothing else.” He glared down into Bond’s face. “You’ve spent a little over a week in Diego’s infirmary, and nothing has been done to you other than caring for your physical needs and your wounds. Nothing.”

He saw Bond glance over at the edge of the bed, and Tiago tightened his grip on Bond’s forehead, tilting his head back even further and moving his other hand to the man’s throat. “And if you are contemplating testing that statement by standing up just to see if you fall over again, I will damn well tie you to this bed and leave you here for the next decade. Is that clear?”

He felt Bond slump in his hold, although Tiago could still feel the tension in his muscles from his residual anger. “Yes . . . Tiago,” he said tightly.

Tiago took a few deep, calming breaths, attempting to bring his anger under control. It was always such a battle with this man, such a struggle to make him believe what was right under his nose. Sometimes, he despaired of ever winning his heart.

Well, Maggie Thatcher had once said, ‘You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.’ Thanks to this frustratingly obstinate man, Tiago had become a firm believer in that particular axiom, regardless of its source.

As he watched the last rays of a truly spectacular sunset through the wide expanse of windows, Tiago began to stroke Bond as he had in the past, letting the repetitive, nonsexual caresses calm them both. He felt Bond gradually relax in his arms as the agent began to respond to his ministrations and give into his fatigue. The long spate of forced inactivity had taken its toll on him, and Diego had said he would tire easily so soon out of the infirmary.

When Bond’s head began to nod, Tiago tapped the man on the shoulder, and Bond jerked slightly. “You’re falling asleep, pequeño. Why don’t you let me up, so you can get some proper rest?”

Nodding, Bond moved forward enough for him to get out of the bed. Tiago slipped into the bathroom for his nightly ablutions, taking his time and just the slightest degree of extra care, then walked back into the bedroom.

Bond was sitting up, obviously waiting for him to come out, and when he saw that Tiago had changed into pyjamas, he came to full alertness quite rapidly indeed.

“You’re not sleeping here,” Bond said indignantly.

Tiago stopped at the edge of bed after dimming the lights and raised an eyebrow at him. “Why not? This is my bed, after all.”

“Your bed? Then what the hell am I doing in it?”

“I would hope you’d eventually be sleeping as well, but that decision is totally up to you.” He smiled lasciviously. “If you’d rather molest me in the middle of the night instead, you’ll get no argument from me.”

Bond stared at him as if he’d sprouted horns, so Tiago made a shooing motion with his hand. “Scoot over. I’m taking this side of the bed, so you’re not tempted to get up in the middle of the night when you’re supposed to be staying off your feet.”

“I am not in the habit of sleeping with anyone,” Bond complained.
Tiago snorted. “Really, James?”

Again, the glare. “You know damn well what I mean.”

“Yes, I do, but I’m afraid you’ll have to grow accustomed to it, because these are your new sleeping arrangements from here out.”

“Aren’t you afraid I’ll strangle you in the middle of the night? Because, trust me, that’s quite high on my list of ‘things to do’ at the moment.”

“James, James. Regardless of this,” Tiago tapped the side of his head, “how far do you think you’d get as injured as you are, hmm? Not to mention the fact we’re on an island 32 kilometers off the coast of Peru. We have a supply vessel that comes once a week, and I summon a helicopter if I need something before then, but there is no other transport off this island.” He made a disapproving noise. “You asked earlier what it was about me and islands? Well, I will tell you.” He poked a finger into Bond’s chest. “It makes it much easier to contain the rats, no?”

Bond didn’t reply, his jaw grinding furiously, but he did eventually move over as Tiago had requested, if only to get away from the affronting finger.

Tiago smiled, yanking the blankets out from under Bond as he moved and earning another irate glare.

Sliding into bed, Tiago said, “Do you need anything, James?”

“No,” he said frostily.

“Well, if you do, it’s a good thing that I am here within easy reach, hmm?”

Bond didn’t answer, pulling the covers up to his neck and pointedly turning his back on Tiago. “You’d better not try to steal the blankets, and if you snore, I swear to God I’m shoving you off the damn bed.”

Chuckling, Tiago settled himself in for the night.

*His little rat was so adorable when he was angry.*

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The moon was already low on the horizon when Tiago awoke to find a warm body pressed firmly against his back and an arm flung over his chest. Bond was sound asleep, his breath soft and steady against his neck, and Tiago smiled to himself.

His limpet was back.

But then, perhaps the limpet had never left in the first place and had merely required a small push to restore him to his rightful place at Tiago’s side. The place where they both plainly wanted him to be.

Tiago settled himself more comfortably against Bond’s solid chest and let himself drift back toward sleep.

Perhaps he wouldn’t need to fight this particular battle quite so often, after all.
OK, so it's only taken me 45,000 words to get them sleeping together. Sort of. (Sigh)

The good news (for those of you still reading this) is that I've decided to continue with the longer version of this fic. Regardless of the other projects I have pending and the limits on my writing time that I anticipate in the near future, I just can't seem to abandon my original vision of where I wanted this to go. I haven't completely worked out the details of the subplot yet, so I can't tell you exactly how long this will eventually be.

The bad news is that I'll have to actually let Bond have his clothes back.

The horror.
This is a relatively short chapter, but I wanted to get at least something posted for you before the weekend. I thank you all for your patience with me, but I've been working overtime, have had no less than 5 medical and cat vet appointments, and now have to make another appointment for a root canal. Uhm, for me, not the cat. The cat only has four teeth left. ; )

Hope you enjoy, as we discover what happens when Bond finally pushes Tiago just a tad too far. . .

When Tiago awoke the next morning, it was to Bond’s hand underneath his pajamas, stroking his stomach in a sensual glide. There was also an undeniably impressive erection pressed firmly into his backside -- two rather happy states of affairs that Tiago had absolutely no issues with.

He smiled.

No issues at all.

Of course, he would be even more delighted had Bond actually been aware that he was responsible for said happy states of affairs. However, since the man was still obviously asleep and only now sliding into true wakefulness, he had a strong suspicion that at least one of those happy state of affairs would disappear, very soon.

Dios, but sometimes he hated that he was always right.

Bond came fully awake, took all of two seconds to assess the situation, and then immediately flung off the covers and dove across the bed.

Of course, he was hampered somewhat by his residual groginess and injuries, so Tiago was easily able to turn and snag him by an ankle before he ended up in a heap on the floor and undid all of Diego’s hard work. As it turned out, it was the right ankle, so he had therefore captured Bond by grasping his snugly fitting collar.

He didn’t have to struggle with Bond any further than that. Tiago’s firm grip on the device ultimately responsible for his continued imprisonment was evidently enough to curtail Bond’s flight just by itself. He immediately collapsed where he was, lying rigidly face down on the bed. His breathing was rapid enough that Tiago was afraid he would hyperventilate.

Poor thing. This was a man who faced mortal danger on an almost weekly basis, and yet Tiago had managed to scare him half to death . . . without even doing anything. It was enough to give him a complex.

Almost.

The other part of him was perversely pleased that he was so obviously irresistible.

Tiago released Bond’s ankle and crawled on all fours to lean over him. “If I’d had any idea you
were planning on taking me up on my suggestion to molest me, I would have lit candles.”

Bond buried his head further in his folded arms and said merely, “Go away.”

Tiago said, “James, you cannot possibly believe that I am in any way responsible for this. You did, as the saying goes, come to me.”

“It was not on purpose.”

“Of that, dear heart, I have absolutely no doubts.” Tiago sighed. “Turn over, James.”

“No.”

Tiago slapped him hard on the arse, and Bond flinched, turning his head to glare up at him.

“There, you see, I don’t always have to engage the collar to get your attention.” He stared at him pointedly. “Now, turn over. It’s not like I haven’t seen it before.”

Bond still hesitated, and Tiago added, “Now, James. I wouldn’t want to waste a perfectly good morning erection.”

“Is sex all you think about?” Bond said bitterly, slowly turning over onto his back.

“Well no, actually, I think about you most of the time.” Tiago cocked his head, raising an eyebrow flirtatiously. “However, I must admit that every time I think about you, I eventually end up thinking about sex anyway. It’s a positive feedback loop.”

“Why am I surprised?”

Tiago straddled Bond, lightly pressing his arse on Bond’s still nicely firm erection, and said, “Be truthful, James. You really aren’t surprised, although you are pleased.”

“Like hell.”

Tiago bent over and nuzzled Bond’s neck, and the man almost unconsciously raised his chin to grant him better access. Tiago moved his mouth to Bond’s ear and whispered, “Liar.”

“I hate to disappoint you, but I’m quite aware of your continued attempts to condition me.” Bond turned his head away. “I don’t really want to make love with you.”

Tiago sat up slowly, smiling.

Bond’s head whipped back, and he looked up into Tiago’s eyes, the consternation clear on his face.

Ahh. So his little rat had caught his own slip this time.

Tiago nodded. “No, James, you didn’t say ‘have sex’ or ‘fool around,’ or any of the other quaint, generic euphemisms. You said, ‘make love.’” Tiago shook his head sadly. “You really are your own worst enemy, pequeño. Why you continue to resist something you obviously want so desperately, I will never understand.”

Bond shook his head emphatically. “As you’ve already pointed out, I’ve never had penetrative sex with a man. Why would you think I want something that badly when I’ve never actually experienced it?”

“For the last time, this isn’t about sex, but then, you’re already quite aware of that given your
previous comment, aren’t you? No, I’m referring to something much more basic, but infinitely more important.” He reached down to stroke Bond’s chest and upper arms, keeping the touches firm rather than flirtatious. “It’s about simple contact and the caring that goes along with it.” He cupped Bond’s chin with both hands. “That’s what you’re craving, that’s what you’ve been denied all your life, and that’s what you continually insist on denying yourself now.”

“I’m not denying myself anything, damn it!”

Tiago released Bond’s chin and placed his hands on his own thighs. “No? Then prove it.”

Bond merely gave him a wary, questioning look.

“Touch me,” Tiago explained. “And no, I don’t mean in a sexual manner. I meant what I said about giving you time to heal.” He locked his gaze with Bond’s. “You’re afraid to initiate any kind of physical contact with me, yet it’s obvious from last night that at least your subconscious misses that contact. So, prove to both of us that you can touch me now and not feel the urge to continue doing so . . . or ever feel the urge to do so again.”

Bond lowered his eyes, but not before Tiago caught the wistful expression on his face. However, when Bond raised his eyes again, he was wearing his usual neutral mask. “No,” he said succinctly.

“‘No,’ you won’t do it, or ‘no’, you realize you’d prove yourself wrong if you did?”

“I meant, ‘no,’ I have no intention of playing your idiotic games in the first place.”

Tiago rolled his eyes, then sighed dramatically. “So be it.”

He’d been right the first time — he really would be forced to fight the same battle with Bond over and over again. Well, if this insanely stubborn man was that determined to torture himself unnecessarily, then Tiago felt obliged to make it easier for him.

Tiago wasn’t sure why he was so furious now. Perhaps he had been disappointed once too often, or perhaps it was because he was definitely not a morning person, but for whatever reason, this time Bond had finally overreached the limits of his less than infinite patience.

He clambered over Bond, then walked to a dresser at the far side of the room. Pulling out what he needed from a hidden compartment, he walked back to the bed, keeping the item concealed from Bond’s immediate view.

Bond had sat up in the bed, plainly more than a little concerned about Tiago’s reaction. This was not surprising, given how dependent he was on his captor’s moods for his well being and even his continued existence. He had no doubt trained himself to be aware of nonverbal cues, and since Tiago had always attempted to reason with Bond in the past when he was being particularly stubborn, it was making the agent uncomfortable that events were not following their usual course.

That was fine. It would likely make things more difficult with Bond so wary, but Tiago did not feel like being particularly gentle with the man at the moment.

As he started to climb into bed, he changed directions at the last moment, coming up behind Bond and pushing him forward violently with an elbow, then pulling both hands behind his back. Before Bond could recover from his surprise enough to struggle, Tiago had already attached the padded handcuffs to both of his wrists.

“What the hell?” Bond bit out, eyes wide.
Tiago eyed him dispassionately. “From what you say, it’s become clear to me that you don’t require the use of your hands. I can feed you and take care of your other physical needs — I’ve done all that before. Meanwhile, you can just lie on this bed, unable to walk, unable to use your hands, and think on what we’ve discussed.”

He got off the bed and walked to the dresser again, pulling out his clothes for the day.

“Tiago,” Bond said, his voice wavering ever so slightly. “You can’t leave me like this.”

Ignoring him, Tiago walked into the bathroom, taking his time about performing his morning ablutions.

When he came out, Bond had moved to the edge of the bed closest to the bathroom. He knelt there with his head bowed, obviously miserable.

He looked up immediately as Tiago entered the room, his expression open and pleading. “Tiago, you know how much I hate being restrained. You understand why — I know you do.”

Tiago walked over to Bond, and the man looked up at him hopefully, his body leaning forward instinctively in mute appeal.

He cupped Bond’s chin again.

“What do you need to use the bathroom, James?”

Bond merely shook his head minutely through Tiago’s hold, plainly puzzled but still cautiously expectant.

“All right then. I have set the collar to activate if you stray even one millimeter from this bed. It will not give you a warning this time, so I’d advise you to reconsider disobeying me any further.” Abruptly releasing Bond’s chin, he turned and walked toward the door.

There was a shocked silence, then Bond said, very softly, “No, don’t leave me.”

Flinching inwardly at Bond’s utterly dejected tone, Tiago nonetheless kept walking.

“Please.”

Oh, how he hated doing this, but his little rat plainly needed a substantial push before he allowed himself to follow his heart.

But why, then, did it feel like Tiago was tearing out his own heart in the process?
Okay, don't expect updates this quickly in the future. I think I was just channeling Tiago today. Perhaps because I broke yet another tooth this morning (on an oatmeal-chocolate chip cookie of all things -- there's karma for you). Besides being extremely painful, it feels like half my mouth is missing now. I hope this isn't a trend. However, if you hear anything about suspicious gas explosions, it wasn't me.

In any case, this chapter is dedicated to Joyce, who kindly informed me how much she loved Guilty!Tiago. You get that here, my dear, in spades.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Tiago caught himself staring at nothing for perhaps the fifth time in the last ten minutes, he was more than happy to be interrupted.

“Tiago.” Diego Almeida walked up to his workstation, paused, and then looked at him quizzically.

“What on earth are you doing?”

“Working, of course.” With a wave of his hand, he indicated the impressive array of servers and peripherals that practically filled his computer room. “What else would I be doing here?”

Diego peered nearsightedly over Tiago’s shoulder at the monitor. “Well, I am not a computer expert by any means, but is that not the display you usually refer to as ‘the blue screen of death’?”

Tiago focused his gaze on the computer and noted that yes, his program had indeed crashed the system, some time ago by the look of things, and he hadn’t even noticed. He sighed. Not even a soft reboot would remedy this particular disaster. He recycled the power and gave up for the day. He hadn’t been making progress anyway, as distracted as he was.

“I take back what I said. I’m obviously not working,” Tiago said.

“Then I should assume your mind is on other things?”

“Of course. And from previous experience, I expect that now I will receive a lecture on my inappropriate treatment of the ‘other things.’”

“Do you need a lecture?”

Tiago sighed again. “Diego, you’ve answered my last three statements with a question. I’m beginning to think you’ve been hiding a psychiatry degree from me all these years.”

Diego shook his head. “As I have already informed your young man, I do not want that particular job.”

Tiago rolled his eyes. “Enough, amigo. Regardless of your gray hair, you’re only eight years older than me.” Tiago glared up at his friend. “Besides, based on his recent actions, he is quite obviously not my young man.”
“I see. And how do you feel about that?”

“Diego!”

Smiling broadly, Diego pulled out a chair and sat down. “Regardless of my lack of psychiatry credentials, you look like you need to talk.”

Tiago ducked his head and ran a hand through his hair in a nervous gesture that he thought he had purged a long time ago. He was evidently more upset than he realized if Diego picked up on it so soon after entering the room.

“I haven’t had any serious qualms about my actions for the past ten years, and now, suddenly, I find I’m doubting myself.” He stared hard at his oldest friend. “Diego, am I doing the right thing?”

“I am afraid you will have to be more specific. You know I was initially very unhappy with your plan to abduct him in the first place.”

“Initially? Have you changed your mind?”

Diego sat back further into the chair and crossed his legs. “I have already told Señor Bond that I believe he has been good for you.”

“Meaning that since I’ve met him, I’ve been less likely to run off and kill people?”

Glaring at him harshly, Diego said, “You are far more cognizant of your sins than I will ever be. Señor Bond has undoubtedly also done many things he has regretted. Two wrongs do not make a right, but I believe in the long run, you may be able to help each other with your respective catalogs of sins.” He uncrossed his legs and leaned forward. “And possibly even avoid repeating those sins in the future, eh?”

Tiago stared at him a few moments, then said, “I’m afraid I’ll end up breaking him before any of that can occur.”

“Sometimes, my friend, that is simply inevitable.”

Shaking his head, Tiago said, “And here I thought you were here to chastise me. Isn’t breaking things against your Hippocratic oath?”

Diego looked past him for a few moments before he finally spoke. “When a child from a very poor family was seriously injured, it was often quite some time before they were brought to me. Usually, it was out of simple desperation, when time was obviously not healing the wounds and it looked as if the child might die.” Diego took a deep breath. “A child normally heals much quicker than an adult, but this fact worked against them in situations such as these. I cannot count the number of times I would find a poorly healed bone and know I would have to break it again so it could heal properly.” He paused, lowering his head. “The child always knew, somehow, what I was going to do, and I very rarely had access to anesthetics of any kind. They would cry, and they would beg, but I would do what I had to do anyway.”

Looking up into Tiago’s eyes, he finished, “And yes, it broke my heart, every single time. Yet, I knew it had to be done.”

“Diego, you know I’ve always admired your commitment to those impoverished children, but James is an experienced MI6 agent. He is hardly a child.”

“From what you tell me, the most significant damage to his psyche originated when he was a
child.” Diego shook his head. “And since so much time has passed since his childhood, this only means that his poorly healed injury will require that much more effort, and pain, to re-break and heal properly. This is not something that can be done by a random stranger -- it will take caring and trust on both sides to heal something that traumatic.”

Tiago snorted. “Caring? Diego, the man can barely stand to look at me.”

“I disagree.”

Tiago raised an eyebrow at him.

“Since I am not so personally involved in your . . . relationship, I see things differently than you. I believe his feelings toward you are more complex than he will admit.” He paused. “This impression was only reinforced after my visit with Señor Bond this morning.” He held up a hand, evidently to forestall Tiago’s impending protest. “Yes, I know you have told me the man is dangerous, but I had Luis with me, and no, he was waiting just outside the door. I know quite well how much you dislike other men getting too close to him.”

Tiago glared at him. “This has nothing to do with me. James is uncomfortable about such things when he is restrained as he is. He does not like being so helpless around others.”

Diego smiled at him knowingly, obviously skeptical of his true motives on the matter. “Regardless, Tiago, he would barely even glance at me the entire time I was there. However, I have watched him when you enter his proximity, and you invariably become the sole recipient of his rather formidable attention.”

“No, I am a trained observer. Children, like animals, cannot always tell you what is bothering them, or are willing to trust you if they can talk to you. You learn very quickly to identify what they are truly feeling from the nonverbal cues.”

Tiago sat back, considering his friend’s words. He trusted his judgment on most things, but Bond was a special case, in so many ways. “How is he?” he finally asked.

“Healing,” Diego said. “Much more quickly than I expected, as a matter of fact. I changed the dressings on his feet, and I believe he can begin weight bearing in a few days. I also removed most of his other bandages.”

“Thank God. I was tempted to wear sunglasses whenever I was in the room with him.”

“You needed a little color in your life.”

Tiago started to make a snide remark, then caught the significant look that his friend was giving him. “Yes, I believe I did, and I have become rather attached to one particular shade of vivid blue.”
Diego nodded. “You should go tend to him. He is dehydrated, a side effect from his sedation, and he would accept nothing from me. If you cannot get him to drink, I will have to rehydrate him intravenously.”

“Something else to look forward to.”

Diego reached over and clasped him briefly on the shoulder. “I believe he will eventually accept you, Tiago, but you will have to address his past trauma. He was broken long before he met you, and he will have to come to terms with that first, or you will break him again. Permanently this time.”

Tiago closed his eyes. “That conversation will definitely be unpleasant.”

“Yes, it will, but things will work out in the end, you will see.”

“You always were the eternal optimist.”

Diego shook his head. “Not always, as you know full well. Sometimes I was merely an idealistic fool.” He stood. “Now go to him. He needs you, even more than you need him.”

Tiago stopped just outside the door to his bedroom and took a moment to compose himself. He simply didn’t know what kind of reception he would receive from Bond now, and he was never one to tolerate uncertainty in his life. Not since Hong Kong, at least.

When he finally worked up the nerve to walk into the room, he found Bond lying on his side, his knees curled almost to his chest, apparently asleep.

He cautiously approached the bed, and after determining that the man was indeed sleeping, he placed a few unopened bottles of water on the nightstand. Opening another bottle and placing it where he could access it easily, he climbed onto the bed.

Bond’s eyes opened, and he immediately attempted to put distance between himself and the possible threat. He was unable to do so quickly because of his awkward position and his bound hands, and Tiago could see the brief flash of panic cross his face in consequence.

Tiago didn’t attempt to touch him, allowing Bond time to identify him and come to the realization he was in no immediate danger before he approached any closer.

Finally managing to get himself to a seated position, Bond stared at him with wide eyes, breathing harshly through his mouth.

After Bond had calmed somewhat, Tiago said, “I brought you some water, James.” He attempted to keep his voice level, not allowing any of his previous anger to color his words.

Bond stared at him, obviously waiting to see if Tiago would remove his restraints, and when Tiago made no move to do so, he shook his head emphatically.

Sighing, Tiago said, “Diego has threatened you with an IV if you refuse. Now, I know you’re not overly fond of needles, so you don’t actually want that to happen, do you?”

Bond didn’t reply, instead attempting to move further away from him by pushing backwards with his feet. He stopped fairly quickly, wincing, when he evidently put too much pressure on one of the healing wounds.
“Terco como una mula,” Tiago muttered under his breath. He moved suddenly to get between Bond and the headboard, snagging the man around the torso and pulling him back against his chest.

Bond struggled briefly, then obviously thought better of that and simply froze, his posture rigid, refusing to relax into Tiago’s hold. It would have been an awkward position regardless, given Bond’s restrained arms, but Tiago knew that wasn’t the reason for his rebellious body language.

“Angry with me, are you?” Tiago asked. “At least, now that I’ve come back to you, but I still refuse to release you.”

Bond lowered his head, remaining obstinately silent.

“Well, I imagine you’ll only be getting angrier with me then.” He reached over and picked up the bottle of water. “Now, open your mouth so you can drink this.”

Bond shook his head.

Sighing, Tiago brought his free hand up and pinched Bond’s nose, closing off his airway. When Bond was finally forced to open his mouth to take a breath, Tiago poured some water in Bond’s mouth, then held his jaw closed, not allowing Bond to spit it back out. When the man still stubbornly refused to cooperate, Tiago tilted his chin first down, then up, and stroked his throat until he was forced to swallow the water reflexively.

By the time this was accomplished, Bond was breathing harshly through flared nostrils, plainly both indignant and upset.

Tiago continued to stroke his neck soothingly, allowing him to calm slightly, then removed his hand from Bond’s jaw. “Now, we can continue like this all day, which is likely how long it will take to get a sufficient amount of fluids into you using this method, or you can cooperate and get what you need by acting like an adult. Which will it be, hmm?”

Bond still didn’t answer, but he allowed himself to relax somewhat in Tiago’s arms, and his resultant submissive posture gave Tiago all the information he needed.

“Good choice, pequeño.” He reached for the bottle of water again, and this time when he held it to Bond’s lips, the man obediently opened to allow the water into his mouth.

He continued to give Bond small sips, not rushing or pushing him, until after he finished the second bottle, Bond shook his head firmly in refusal. He stiffened slightly as he do so, evidently expecting to be punished for disobedience, but Tiago was content with what they had accomplished. Giving Bond too much at one time would only make him ill.

“Do you need anything else, James?”

Bond merely shook his head again.

“You’re not planning on speaking to me any time soon, are you?” Tiago asked fondly. He settled Bond as comfortably as he could, wishing he could remove the handcuffs and bind his arms in the front, but that would be too much like relenting. Besides, it would only be counterproductive at this point.

“You tend to become nonverbal when you’re significantly upset, do you realize that? Ever since the incident with your parents, I suppose. Or should I say, the incident with your father and stepmother?”
Bond immediately tensed in his arms.

Tiago feigned surprise. “Come now, James, I saw the copy of the adoption papers, just like you did. The name of Monique Delacroix never appeared in those papers, but your real mother’s name did.”

Bond’s breathing accelerated noticeably.

“Did you ever look for her, afterwards, to find out who she was, or what happened to her?”

“She was a whore.” Bond’s voice was totally flat and devoid of emotion.

“Like Severine was a ‘whore’? Really, James, it’s not like you to make such snap judgements, but then, you were so very young at the time.”

“It doesn’t matter. She abandoned me, too.”

Tiago rested his head atop Bond’s, and the man was so clearly distressed that he allowed the closeness without protest. He no doubt subconsciously needed the contact right about now. “James, she knew she was dying of cancer. She had no living relatives, so she gave you to your father as an infant, believing he would take care of you — that he would love you, as she did.”

Bond shook his head emphatically. “She didn’t love me. I was obviously a mistake, since my father never married her. My existence would have made her chosen profession much more difficult had she lived, if not impossible.”

“So sure, you are.” Sighing, Tiago moved Bond around until he was lying crosswise in his lap. He needed to see Bond’s expression, and surprisingly enough, the agent barely protested being manhandled so blatantly. However, Bond kept his chin pressed nearly to his chest, refusing to even look at Tiago.

He allowed it, for now.

“Your mother was a highly paid escort, not a common whore, and if she wished to continue operating in those elevated circles, she needed to be very, very careful. No, James, she got pregnant with you because she wanted you. Perhaps she thought she was in love with your father, or perhaps she merely wanted to leave the profession entirely, but for whatever reason, you were quite obviously never a mistake.”

“You make a lot of assumptions.”

“So do you, and so, very plainly, did your mother. Your father would never have married her, would he? He was much too conscious of his status and fixated on the continuation of the esteemed Bond line, so instead he married an upper crust Swiss socialite who, as misfortune would have it, turned out to be sterile.”

Bond looked up at him sharply.

“I assumed you didn’t know, but you never wondered why you were an only child?”

Bond ducked his head again, saying nothing.

“Ah, corazón mío, you thought what? — that you were such a burden they wanted no other children after you?” He eyed Bond very closely, observing the tells. “Yes, you did. Poor thing, no wonder you have such self-confidence and trust issues.”
“I am perfectly fine.”

“Of course, you are. However, Mrs. Delacroix-Bond could only resent the child from another woman — the heir her husband needed so desperately, but she would never be able to provide.” He shook his head sadly. “No wonder you could do absolutely nothing to please her, no matter how desperately you tried.”

He grasped Bond’s chin to look into his eyes, but the man quickly turned in his arms and pressed his face into Tiago’s chest to forestall the action. “I would like you to stop, please,” Bond said, his voice perceptibly subdued, even muffled as it was by his position.

“I wish I could, pequeño, I wish I could, but there is only one thing else.” He stroked Bond’s back, first tentatively, then more firmly when his touch was not rejected. “I thought it very odd. Why did they wait eleven years to put you up for adoption? Why do so at all when your father still needed an heir to carry on the Bond line? It didn’t make sense.”

“It’s not important. It’s in the past.”

“I think it’s very important. Your past directly influences your future.” He paused. “From personal experience, I know that better than most.”

“It doesn’t matter — I don’t want to know.”

Tiago bent down to kiss him on the top of the head. “I’m sorry, pequeño, but this is something you have to know and that you must accept. Your parents hadn’t gone to France for a climbing expedition. They were going to a medical clinic, and in fact, had already been there many times. It was a new clinic, for an innovative procedure called ‘in-vitro fertilization.’ Ironically, had they not died in that freak accident, your stepmother would have been among the very first to actually bear a child using that new technique.”

He felt Bond slump bonelessly in his arms as the realization sank in. “They didn’t need me anymore,” he said, his voice very soft.

“No, dear heart, they didn’t need you anymore, but I do. And I swear to you, I always will.”

Pulling out the key to the handcuffs, Tiago awkwardly released Bond’s restraints with one hand so he could still maintain direct contact with his charge.

There was absolutely no hesitation. As soon as he was freed, Bond’s arms immediately wrapped around Tiago’s torso, and he clung to him desperately.

As if he never intended to let go.

Chapter End Notes

1 - "Stubborn as a mule.”

As a side note, when using Craig’s birth year as Bond’s, it actually came out that the new IVF procedures came out exactly around the time of Bond's eleventh birthday. It was just too much of a coincidence to pass up.
Chapter Notes

Okay, chapter 19, take two. I apologize again, folks, but Bond's and Tiago's reactions in this version merge much better with the direction I eventually intend to take their relationship. The general content, however, remains mostly the same.

Again, a great big hug goes out to Joyce who was kind enough to comment and confirm my diagnosis. You rock!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two hours later, Tiago tapped Bond on the shoulder and said, “I’m sorry, James, but I have to ask you to get up for just a few minutes.”

Bond straightened in his lap, looking up at him blearily. He was only partially awake, but then, Diego had warned him that Bond would tire easily for the first couple of days after his extended sedation. If he factored in this fatigue with the emotional turmoil he’d just inflicted on him, Tiago wasn’t surprised that Bond was a little fuzzy around the edges.

However, when it became clear that the man had no intention of moving any further, Tiago grabbed his hips and gently pushed him off his lap.

Smiling at Bond’s resultant indignant expression, Tiago brought his knees up to his chest and waited for the circulation to return to his legs. Bond was still no lightweight.

After a few minutes, when he thought he might be able to walk without falling over, he swung his legs over the side of the bed. He didn’t make it any further than that, because of Bond’s sudden vice-like grip on his upper arm. Tiago was briefly startled, then wondered why the hell he should be, considering his intimate knowledge of Bond’s abandonment issues and the man’s intensely fragile emotional state at the moment.

“Tiago? Where are you going?” Bond asked.

Tiago looked back at the wide blue eyes and felt his heart melt all over again. “It’s all right, James, I’m not going far. I promise. However, some of us do need to use the bathroom every once in a while.”

Bond searched his eyes for a few moments, plainly seeking reassurance, but then he reluctantly released his hold on Tiago’s arm. “Okay,” he finally said.

Smiling, Tiago bent over and kissed him lightly on the forehead. “So glad to have your permission, pequeño. I will only be a moment.”

When he re-entered the bedroom, James was again kneeling at the side of the bed. Tiago was rather surprised at the submissive posture Bond had voluntarily placed himself in, but he assumed it was one of the few positions that didn’t place undue pressure on his soles of his injured feet. However, Tiago had to admit that regardless of Bond’s true reasons for adopting it, he heartily approved of that particular pose.
So much so, in fact, that he had to firmly inform his libido to behave for the time being.

As he approached, Tiago noticed that Bond’s gaze momentarily drifted away from him to the bathroom door. Good, this development should keep Diego and his damn needles away for a little while, at least. He stopped in front of Bond. “I take it you’ve finally become rehydrated enough to require the facilities yourself, hmm?”

Bond paused, then nodded, but when he started to move off the bed, Tiago stopped him with a hand to his shoulder.

“No, James,” he said firmly.

Still plainly not as mentally alert as he should be, Bond looked at him quizzically, then said, “The collar?”

Sighing, Tiago said, “I’m not so indifferent to your well being that I’d forget something *that* important — shame on you for even thinking such a thing.” He paused significantly. “No, James, the limits of your collar’s range now extend well beyond the confines of this bed, but I have no intention of telling you exactly how far.” He crossed his arms across his chest, and continued, “The *real* question is why you think you’re allowed to walk around in the first place.”

“Dr. Almeida said I . . .”

Tiago spotted the furtive expression that momentarily crossed Bond’s face, and he held up a hand to interrupt him. Obviously, the man had yet to regain his normally impressive poker face. “I know exactly what Diego said, because he talked to me immediately after examining you.” He looked at Bond sternly. “Do not even attempt to misdirect me again, *pequeño*.”

Bond began to look frustrated. “Then how . . .?”

Rolling his eyes, Tiago grabbed Bond behind the shoulders and legs and swung him up into his arms.

Bond clung to him briefly, probably due more to the vertigo induced by his rapid change of positions than anything else, but Tiago smiled down at his bewildered expression anyway. “Still practicing,” he said smugly.

Grimacing, Bond opened his mouth to reply but evidently decided against it. He looked anywhere but at Tiago’s face as he was carried into the bathroom.

If nothing else, Bond seemed to regain most of his mental alertness just from this simple act of being carried. Tiago smiled. Well, if one counted ‘practically vibrating with barely suppressed indignation’, that is. In any case, it was a definite improvement over his prior passivity. Tiago wanted Bond to be *somewhat* dependent on him, but not to the point where he thought of him as — heaven forbid -- a father figure.

He mentally shuddered. His libido would never survive *that* particular catastrophe.

“This isn’t exactly the threshold I had in mind, but I guess it will do in a pinch.” He swung Bond down so that he was seated on the toilet. “All right, James, your chariot awaits.”

Bond glared up at him and made a move to rise.

Tiago stopped him with a firm hand on his shoulder. “Your macho image will survive having to urinate in the seated position for a few days.” He grasped Bond’s chin. “Now, do you want me to
continue standing here to hold you down, or would you prefer to take care of business in relative privacy?” He raised an eyebrow thoughtfully. “We could always employ the bedpan initiative, I guess.”

Bond glared at him for a few moments longer. “Sometimes I really do hate you.” When Tiago merely raised an eyebrow at him in response, he eventually relented, his shoulders slumping. “All right. You can move away. I promise I’ll be good.”

“I wish I had a recording device. That must be a first.”

“Don’t push your luck.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Tiago! Stop trying to get the last damn word and leave. Now.”

Chuckling, Tiago held up his hands in mock surrender and backed out the door.

After a couple of minutes, Tiago said, “James, please don’t assume I’m leaving you alone in there for long. I have yet to Bond-proof that room, and I refuse to give you time to manufacture flame throwers out of hair spray again while I’m trying to be thoughtful and kind.”

Tiago heard the suppressed snort of laughter and assumed he had permission to enter. Not that he wasn’t planning on doing it anyway, but sometimes it didn’t hurt to feign common courtesy.

Bond was, surprisingly, still seated when he re-entered the bathroom, and a brief check of the surroundings didn’t register anything obviously missing or out of place.

“Somehow I just knew you were the hair spray type,” Bond said.

Tiago smiled broadly, running a hand through his hair. “Good looks like this come at a price, James. Perhaps someday when your hair grows to a decent length, you’ll be able to experience it as well.”

“I happen to like my hair short.”

“We all have to make sacrifices, James.”

“Yet it always seems to be me who makes those sacrifices,” Bond said irritably.

Tiago moved closer and raised Bond’s chin with a firm hand. “Some day you will comprehend exactly how much I’m willing to sacrifice for you, but until that time, you’ll have to accept there are some things I simply will not compromise on.”

Bond tried to turn his head away, but Tiago didn’t allow it. “James, I know you made countless sacrifices while you were attempting to obtain your parents’ approval. I know the whole concept must seem futile after what they did to you, but I’ll tell you again, I will never abandon you.” He released Bond’s chin and crouched down. “However, neither will I allow you to disobey or second guess my decisions, no matter how trivial they may seem to you at the time. We both lead dangerous lives, but there are a few unexplored landmines in my life that you aren’t aware of yet.” He reached out and caressed Bond’s cheek. “I don’t want to lose you, pequeño. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Tiago.”
His reply was still sullen, so Tiago could tell Bond wasn’t entirely convinced. However, his deep-seated need to completely trust someone was so pervasive that it was difficult for him to reject Tiago completely. He was still extremely wary of being hurt again, but after their breakthrough earlier, he suspected Bond’s resistance to him may have weakened a little further.

Well, there was one way to test that theory. “Come. I’ll take you back to the bed.” He tapped the side of his neck. “Why don’t you try putting your arms around me? The change in the center of gravity will make it less difficult to carry you, and my back will love you for it.”

“I don’t want to be carried at all.”

“I’m very well aware of that, James, but it’s not far.”

Tiago didn’t turn his request into an order, but he did maintain steady, uncompromising eye contact. Bond had to make this decision on his own, without any additional pressure from Tiago, or it would mean nothing. He had to start initiating contact with Tiago, rather than being forced to merely accept it.

Slowly, very slowly, Bond leaned forward and tentatively wrapped his arms around his neck. When Tiago lifted him, purposely fumbling slightly during the attempt, Bond clung to him harder to maintain his suddenly precarious position.

When Tiago had consolidated his hold, he said, “There. That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

Not moving his face from Tiago’s neck, Bond replied, “You are trying to manipulate me again.”

Tiago chuckled as he carried Bond back to the bed. “Only ‘trying’?” He placed him carefully on the bed then crawled up after him, straddling Bond’s lower body. “I do manipulate you, quite often actually, but it’s always for your own good.” He cocked his head playfully. “Let’s just call it ‘honest manipulation.’”

Bond closed his eyes. “Now there’s an oxymoron if I ever heard one.”

“Perhaps, but it’s not necessarily a bad thing, especially if you obtain your heart’s desire as an end result.”

“You flatter yourself.”

“Quite often.”

Bond kept his eyes closed, evidently planning on ignoring him, so Tiago took the opportunity to lower his face closer to Bond’s in the interim.

When the man finally opened his eyes again, he flinched at Tiago’s unexpected proximity. “You are not my heart’s desire,” he said after a short pause, but his nostrils flared.

You poor clueless thing. Still haven’t recognized your own tell, have you?

“You are sure about that, hmm?” Tiago hovered with his lips just over Bond’s, but he descended no further.

Bond drew in a shaky breath. “No, damn you to hell. I’m not. I’m not sure at all.”

And if his lips touched Tiago’s ever so briefly just before he turned his head away, it may have been accidental.
Tiago knew better, however, and his heart soared. Perhaps it was time to reward his little rat for good behavior. He caressed Bond’s neck, as always enjoying the smooth feel of the skin beneath his fingers. “Are you hungry, James?”

Bond turned back to face him. “Are you still thinking about sex?” he asked petulantly.

“Well, I was actually referring to food, but if you were hoping for something else, I’d be more than happy to oblige.”

“I’m not in the least bit hungry,” Bond said, narrowing his eyes. “For anything.”

Tiago sat back and crossed his arms over his chest. “Well, that’s a shame.” He pursed his lips. “It’s such a beautiful day that I thought we could eat on the veranda.”

Bond’s eyes widened slightly. “Outside?”

“Well, yes. That is where one normally places a veranda.” He raised an eyebrow, donning his most innocent expression.

“You are bloody well manipulating me again, but for some reason, I’m suddenly ravenous,” Bond said.

“I thought that might be your answer.” Tiago patted Bond’s knee, smiling broadly. “Let me get a wheelchair, because I’m definitely not hauling your arse quite that far.”

He had just started to turn when Bond leaned in and kissed him lightly on the cheek. “Thank you, Tiago,” he said, then added in a darker tone, “But if you’d ever stop trying to trick me into complying, you might get more than that someday.”

Tiago held a hand to his cheek.

“Imagine.”

“I’ll have to give that some serious thought,” Tiago replied.

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When Tiago returned pushing the wheelchair, he didn’t miss the fleeting expression of relief that crossed Bond’s face.

Obviously, Bond had not completely regained his usual self-confidence and independence, and Tiago only had himself to blame. Regardless of Diego’s counsel, he had come close to breaking the man after all, and that had never been his intention. But then, he could only imagine the degree of emotional trauma Bond had undergone as a child. Forcing him to revisit that trauma had plainly affected him, but as Diego had said, childhood wounds were always the hardest to heal. Tiago only hoped that his actions had helped, rather than hindered that healing.

Well, Bond had made his first tentative overtures toward Tiago. Now, he would just have to see how far that apparent change of heart might go.

Hmm. There was one thing Tiago could do that might assure Bond of his good intentions . . . and demonstrate his own willingness to make sacrifices. Although it was a hefty sacrifice indeed.

Moving to the walk-in closet that lined the back wall, he rummaged through the impressive amount
of items stored there, most of which he’d picked up though the years when he’d been stalking Bond from afar. When he finally found what he was looking for, he smiled contentedly. These would definitely mitigate the impending sacrifice on Tiago’s part.

He handed the items to Bond, who accepted them reluctantly, then looked up at him in confusion.

“What is this?”

Tiago raised an eyebrow at him playfully. “‘Clothes’, James. They’re called ‘clothes’. I hadn’t realized you’d gone native for so long that you wouldn’t recognize them.”

“But you said . . .”

“I know what I said, pequeño, but I’m taking you outside, beneath a tropical sun. There is an awning over the veranda, but you’ve been trapped indoors long enough that you’ve lost your lovely tan.” He looked suggestively at Bond’s body. “I wouldn’t want you to accidentally burn any crucial bits just because I was being careless.”

Bond looked at him for some time, his mistrust of Tiago’s motives written plainly on his face. He had forcibly gone without clothing for so long that this must seem like an almost life-altering change to him. And such a change could be traumatic, even without Bond’s extensive conditioning.

Well, Tiago wasn’t displeased about that particular fact. If he intended to retain the upper hand in their relationship, it was good that he could still unsettle the man from time to time.

When Bond still hesitated, Tiago made an encouraging motion with one hand.

Bond tentatively unfolded the tunic and trousers and set about donning them. It was awkward for him, given his injuries and the requirement to remain seated on the bed. He kept his head lowered, but Tiago could see the intermittent glances aimed his way. Again, Bond’s training was clearly triggering him to expect an adverse reaction to his ‘forbidden’ actions.

When he had finished, he looked up inquiringly, and Tiago found his breath catching again.

Yes, this would indeed make Tiago’s sacrifice a tolerable prospect. The clothes were made of the finest Asian silk melded with a synthetic that allowed for a modest degree of stretching. The short-sleeved tunic matched the vivid turquoise of Bond’s eyes, and the trousers were a shade of midnight blue that bordered on black. They had been tailored to Bond’s exact measurements, and even though the man had lost weight during his stay with Tiago, they clung to him like a second skin.

Without underclothes, they left absolutely nothing to the imagination. Tiago did in fact possess a rather vivid imagination, but sometimes one needed to appreciate assets ‘in the raw’ without wasting additional brain power on mental imagery.

In other words, if Tiago couldn’t have him naked, he’d have the next best thing.

Bond looked down at himself, then over at Tiago. “This isn’t exactly . . . appropriate attire,” he said doubtfully.

Tiago smiled. “Appropriate is boring. I much prefer being inappropriate, and I prefer you being inappropriate even more. Besides, it’s not like we’re headed to the opera, James.”

“I would certainly hope not,” Bond said firmly. He shifted his position on the bed, attempting to surreptitiously tug at the trousers.
“They’re not uncomfortable, are they, James?”

Bond again adjusted his posture, practically fidgeting, and this time he actually colored slightly. He turned his face away from Tiago in a futile attempt to hide that fact. “Not like you’re implying, no.”

Oh.

Oh.

There was absolutely no way he was going to pass that up. Tiago sauntered over to the bed and sat down next to where Bond had assumed a cross-legged position. “Are you telling me that you’re finding the adjustment to wearing clothes to be . . . hard?”

Bond closed his eyes. “You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?”

“Of course, I am. You’re positively gorgeous — what’s not to enjoy?” Tiago reached out to run a hand along Bond’s silk-clad thigh, delighting in the shiver that ran through the man’s frame.

Bond clasped his roving hand with his own, stilling the motion. “You promised we could go outside. You’re only going to get us distracted.”

“‘Us?’” Tiago repeated. He made a point of slowly peering over Bond’s raised knees and then smiled. “Oh, yes, I see. Well, there’s nothing wrong with a little distraction now and again.” He slid his other hand up Bond’s opposite thigh, and this one was also blocked before it could reach anything interesting.

“You’ve run out of hands,” Bond said tersely.

“Who needs hands?” Tiago said, leaning over to kiss his thigh.

“Tiago!”

Tiago pouted shamelessly, but he had promised Bond, after all. “Very well, it’s almost cruel and inhuman punishment to be refused access to something that looks as good as you, but unfortunately, you’re probably right about the distraction aspect.”

“So, we can go outside now?”

Smiling at the man’s barely suppressed eagerness, Tiago said, “Yes, pequeño, we can go outside now.”

Chapter End Notes

My thanks to Min@ruis for coining the term "honest manipulation". It fits Tiago's actions perfectly, at least in his mind, lol!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tiago took the scenic route to the veranda, showing Bond the high points of the extensive underground portion of the compound. Of course, he didn’t fail to notice that Bond was making note of the layout and potential exits, but this procedure was drilled so hard into every field agent’s training that he would have been worried if Bond hadn’t taken that opportunity. He certainly didn’t want Bond to lose his edge. Tiago hadn’t been exaggerating about the inherently dangerous life he led, even without his recent direct provocation of MI6.

The veranda was located directly over Tiago’s suite (with an embarrassingly thick layer of concrete and soil between them), so it also overlooked the ocean alongside the sheer drop of the cliff. As a point of fact, it was the only obviously manmade structure on the island since the majority of the compound was located underground. Even so, the small awning that shaded the table at the perimeter was concealed by a dense covering of vines and the area immediately surrounding the veranda sheltered amidst palms, dense tropical vegetation, and the occasional fruit tree. What could he say? He was particularly fond of grapefruit and not particularly fond of inquisitive visitors.

Tiago rolled Bond’s wheelchair directly to the low wooden railing, also swathed in vines, that straddled the cliff. As usual this time of the day, the trade winds were providing a substantial breeze, mitigating at least some of the ubiquitous tropical heat. As Bond leaned forward to place his arms on the railing, the breeze toyed playfully with his lengthening hair, and Bond irritably brushed it back off his forehead.

He glared up at Tiago with a “See, I told you so,” look on his face.

Tiago merely laughed at him, but he did make an effort to comb the hair away from Bond’s face with his fingers, then he simply rested a hand casually on the top of Bond’s head to keep the frisky wind from harassing his little rat any further.

Bond sighed at the placement of the possessive hand, but he seemed to be enjoying being outdoors too much to actively complain. He simply stared out over the ocean, which in this part of the world was a dramatically clear blue in a variety of shades depending upon the depth of the water. The extensive height of the cliff certainly provided a spectacular vista.

Of course, in Tiago’s opinion, the view was not nearly as stunning as the man beside him. The warm sunshine appeared to worship him, and as Tiago had expected, the sun’s rays magnified the intense hues of Bond’s clothes such that they almost glowed. The outfit truly was a marvelous complement to the man’s eyes.

When Tiago found himself staring shamelessly at Bond and gently stroking the soft blonde hair, he forced his hand back to his side. They had serious matters to discuss, and he couldn’t allow himself to become diverted by more pleasurable pursuits at this point.

Bond looked askance at him when the hand was removed. By now, he was well aware that Tiago preferred to keep some sort of contact between them, so he clearly suspected something was up.

“Beautiful view, is it not?” Tiago asked casually.
Bond’s gaze swept from the ocean to the lush tropical vegetation surrounding them. “The whole island is beautiful.” He looked up at Tiago quizzically. “Why didn’t you build your headquarters here to begin with instead of in that abandoned ruin?”

“This was the first place I built, and it’s been here for almost ten years.” Tiago smiled. “Shame on you, James. I know you’re intelligent enough to realize the vegetation overlying the compound wouldn’t be this well established otherwise, so you’re quite obviously probing for information.”

“Can you blame me?” Bond shrugged. “The Internet doesn’t have national boundaries. From what you’ve shown me, you have the same technical capabilities here that you had on the other island. I don’t understand why you would choose to reside in that gray, broken down, wretched and abandoned place, when you could have just as easily worked from here.”

Tiago was silent for quite some time, wondering if he dared open even this small part of himself to Bond at this point. Well, no one could say he wasn’t a risk taker.

“It suited me,” Tiago said at last. “People fashion their surroundings based on their moods. Some regularly put up and take down wallpaper. Others hang and then remove paintings. As for me, that place perfectly epitomized my emotional state for the past ten years -- ‘gray, broken down, wretched and abandoned.’” He paused, remembering vividly those early pain-filled years after Hong Kong. “I saw no reason to change a thing after the populace left, and I never felt any particular inclination to leave it for greener pastures either.” He waved a hand dismissively, indicating their immediate environs.

Bond had a puzzled expression on his face. “Then what changed your mind? Did MI6 have a lead on my location after all?”

Tiago smiled down at him fondly. “You are still utterly, completely clueless, aren’t you, dear heart?” He crouched down in front of Bond and placed both hands on his knees. “You are what changed for me, pequeño. You are the reason there is finally color in my life . . . and the reason I am here now.”

Bond’s eyes widened in some strange combination of disbelief and tentative delight, and Tiago kissed him slowly, thoroughly, closing his eyes in bliss when Bond reciprocated without any hesitation whatsoever.

He wasn’t surprised, however, when Bond was the one who finally terminated the kiss. He’d been expecting the man’s conscience to eventually kick in. Bond was never one to let his own needs and desires interfere with his pathetic love of country.

Pulling away from him and shaking his head, Bond said, “I can’t. I was sent here to stop you, not . . .” He couldn’t seem to articulate anything further, and he turned his head away in apparent frustration.

“Fraternize with the enemy?” Tiago finished helpfully.

Bond’s head whipped back to face him, and Tiago smiled deprecatingly. He stood up with his back to the railing. “Tell me, James. Did they give you specific instructions on how you were supposed to stop me?”

“Of course not. You’re well aware they never bother dictating specifics to a field agent. ‘No plan survives contact with the enemy,’ and that’s even more pertinent to a double-oh. If we’re to have any hope of successfully completing a mission, we have to be flexible.”
Raising an eyebrow flirtatiously, Tiago said, “And someday, I’m looking forward to discovering just how flexible you are.”

When Bond merely looked at him in exasperation, Tiago sighed. The man was evidently not in the mood to be teased, but sometimes, he just couldn’t seem to resist. “I assure you, James, that I quite understand. What exactly were your instructions then?”

“As if you didn’t know. To retrieve the stolen hard drive, at all costs.”

“And if I told you that you’ve accomplished that mission, what then, hmm?”

Bond’s eyes narrowed. “Three agents have already died because of your direct actions. I’d hardly call that accomplishing my mission.”

“Hmm. Those would be Husein, Surry, and Benelisha?”

“You know damn well who they were.”

“Yes, I do. More so than the fools at MI6, actually. Surry and Benelisha were actually sleeper agents, who have been relaying useless and/or misinformation back to their MI6 handlers for years now.” He shook his head sadly. “And no one ever thought to wonder why, every so often, missions based on their information had such disastrous outcomes. Tsk. Either incredibly sloppy record keeping, or sheer incompetence — I haven’t decided which. Regardless, the rumors of those two particular agents’ deaths were greatly exaggerated.”

“You’re lying.”

“Am I? I can show you the documentation I’ve accumulated over the past three years. You should be pleased. I was only keeping track to make sure you weren’t one of those inadvertently sacrificed to terrorist misinformation and MI6 incompetence.”

Bond was silent for a few moments, apparently digesting this. “And Husein? It was painfully obvious that his death wasn’t faked.”

“Oh, he was a loyal MI6 agent, with the emphasis on was.” Tiago crossed his arms across his chest. “You know how it is, when you’re deep undercover. Sometimes, the lure of the forbidden, or the unintended brainwashing that goes with it, can lead an agent to change his sympathies, especially given the length of time Husein was living with that particular group of fanatics.”

He nodded at Bond’s questioning look. “Yes, he was also feeding erroneous information back to MI6, but he apparently wasn’t able to convince his would-be cohorts that he was now on their side.” He shook his head. “Tragic lack of communication somewhere along the line.” He mimed a pistol shot to the head.

Bond stared up at him, clearly attempting to detect some indication of deceit on Tiago’s part. He wouldn’t find anything, of course, at least not in regard to this.

He continued, “As for Daheer and Inglis, they received anonymous messages that their covers had been blown before I posted their names on the Internet.” He cocked an eyebrow at Bond. “Satisfied now?”

Bond shook his head, as if to clear it. “There are still all those people you killed at headquarters.”

“A rather gross miscalculation on my part, as I was only intending to destroy M’s office.” He shrugged. “If you’re about to ask me if I regret it, the answer is ‘no’. Regardless of their jobs,
“anyone working at a quasi-military establishment like MI6 should expect to wind up on the front lines at any time.”

“So they deserved it,” Bond snapped back bitterly.

“No more so than any troops deserve to die, but there are always casualties in a war.”

“In a war that you started.”

“If that’s what you want to think, be my guest.” Tiago lowered his voice. “For me, however, this particular war started ten years ago. Have M tell you about it sometime. It’s quite the engaging bedtime story -- filled with all the expected optimistic themes of betrayal, imprisonment, abandonment and attempted suicide.”

Bond looked up at him sharply.

Tiago waved him off. “It’s not important. As you’ve said many times, it’s in the past. The essential point I am trying to make here is that you have completed your mission.” He paused significantly. “I haven’t decrypted or posted any more of the names, and the hard drive in question was safely returned to M a week ago.”

Bond snorted contemptuously. “Complete with accompanying explosives, I’m sure.”

Tiago crossed a hand over his heart. “Not so much as a firecracker, I swear. And I even took the time to gift wrap it — something obnoxiously garish and tasteless, but I did at least make the effort. I’m sure she appreciated the thought.”

Shaking his head, Bond said, “You’re not making any sense. Why would you go to all the expense and effort of obtaining that hard drive, just to send it back to MI6? Surely there are plenty of potential buyers for that sort of data. You could have been set for life.”

“I’m already set for life. I manage an extremely lucrative business, as I’ve told you before.”

“Then why the bloody hell did you steal it in the first place?” Bond asked in exasperation.

Tiago merely raised an eyebrow and stared at Bond, letting him draw his own conclusions. He was a smart man, after all.

Bond’s eyes widened. “Wait. You stole it just to get to me?”

“Very good, mi ratita. Of course, I could have abducted you at any time, but it was imperative that you come to me voluntarily . . . well, more or less.” He shrugged. “With a potential security breach of that magnitude, I knew M was bound to dispatch her favorite agent.” Bond opened his mouth to respond, and Tiago pointed a finger at him sternly. “And don’t you dare ask me ‘why’ again, James, because we’ve covered that earlier. Perhaps, someday, you’ll even believe it.”

“I sincerely doubt that.” Bond stared at him intently, his eyes narrowing. “Regardless, you’re still hiding something about the return of that hard drive. You haven’t made a secret of how much you hate M, and frankly, you’re far too pleased with yourself right now.”

“Oh, I assure you, I haven’t substantially changed my plans for dear old Mum. I’ve just postponed them a tad.”

Bond shook his head. “No, it’s more than that. You’re way too fond of grand gestures to make such a simple exchange, and besides, you always have more than one reason for everything you do.” He
paused. “You sent her something besides the drive, didn’t you?”

Shrugging, Tiago said, “All right, so you caught me. I did include a little something extra. It was one of those wobbly-headed English bulldogs that barks a horrid rendition of ‘God Save the Queen’ when you press its tail.” Tiago looked upward and smiled. “It’s perfect.”

Bond stared at him with an absolutely incredulous look on his face, then winced and covered his eyes. “God. I don’t believe it. Not another bloody bulldog.”

“Who do you think gave her the first one?” He winked. “Not that she ever guessed it came from me, mind you.”

“You’re fucking unbelievable. And here I thought the ceramic dog was hideous.” Bond’s eyes widened in sudden comprehension. “Hold on. You really don’t want me returning to MI6, do you?”

Tiago smiled slyly. “I’m not ashamed to use any tactic at my disposal to keep you at my side. Even the underhanded misuse of tacky souvenirs.” He grabbed the handles of the wheelchair. “Come. We can debate all this later. I promised you food, and it’s time to get you under the awning and out of the direct sunlight in any case.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was supposed to include a semi-gratuitous sex scene, but it's refusing to cooperate with me. Since this part stands on its own, I felt it best to get at least something posted this weekend. If you prefer longer chapters (and corresponding longer waits between updates), please let me know. Like James, I'm flexible. ;)

My sincere thanks again for all your kind comments and kudos on this fic. Your continued support has given me a definite lift during the long workdays!
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, folks. With the overtime, I'm having to do all my yard work (and by "yard", I mean, "40 acres") on the weekend, so it's cut back severely on the writing time. I come bringing sex, however. Lots and lots of sex. And it's not even gratuitous sex, because Bond surprised me this time. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Much later, Tiago smiled benignly at the man in his bed. Bond was absolutely adorable when he was pouting, and he was definitely doing that now, regardless of his protestations to the opposite.

“I wasn’t ready to come back inside,” Bond said sullenly.

Tiago indicated the setting sun through the windows. “It was getting dark, James. You wouldn’t have been able to see anything regardless.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’m thoroughly tired of being cooped up inside.”

“I’ll take you back outside tomorrow, I promise.” He sat down on the bed beside Bond. “And when Diego clears you, we can go for a walk around the perimeter of the island. It really is quite a spectacular place. You’ll love it.”

Bond crossed his arms against his chest and didn’t reply.

Smiling in anticipation, Tiago said, “In any case, now that we’re safely indoors and out of the sun, it’s time for you to remove the clothes.”

Bond glanced up at him. “What if I wanted to keep them on?”

“I thought they were ‘inappropriate.’”

“I’ve gotten used to them.”

Tiago leaned back against the headboard. “Are you being rebellious for any particular reason?”

“Regardless of what you think, you don’t own me.”

“I’m feeling very generous this evening, pequeño, so I will let that slide for now.” He sighed, then patted the space between his legs. “Come then. At least let me hold you for awhile. I’m going through withdrawals. I can only keep my hands to myself for so long, you know.”

Bond merely looked at him suspiciously. “I can keep the clothes on?”

“If you like.”

Obviously confused at Tiago’s uncharacteristic capitulation, Bond hesitated.

“Come, James. The offer won’t last forever.”
Bond approached him warily, on hands and knees, a sight which sent a jolt of pure arousal through Tiago, even with Bond completely clothed. Apparently, he’d been depriving himself a little too long.

When Bond had settled himself reluctantly between his legs, Tiago wasted no time in pulling the stiff-backed man close to his chest. He inhaled deeply, enjoying the scent of sweat combined with the faint undertones of tropical flowers.

When he wrapped a possessive hand around Bond’s chest, he found that the silk was still warm from a combination of the man’s almost furnace-like body heat and the ambient temperature from being outdoors. He hummed softly to himself, nuzzling Bond’s neck and running his hand over the warm silk.

Bond shifted slightly, and Tiago latched onto his neck in retaliation, sucking on the skin hard enough to mark him.

The man made a faint noise of protest, but Tiago ignored him, continuing to run his hand over his chest and abdomen. When he felt a nipple harden underneath his roving fingers, he concentrated his attention there, letting the slick material glide sensuously over the pebbled nub.

Bond moaned aloud at the sensation, again shifting slightly, but for an entirely different reason this time, Tiago was pleased to note. He occupied his free hand with the other nipple, feeling it harden to match its mate, while allowing his lips and tongue to continue exploring Bond’s neck. Grabbing a portion of an earlobe into his mouth, he tongued it in the same circular motion as his hands.

He could easily see Bond’s intense arousal through the thin silk, and he released the earlobe long enough to whisper, “Would you like my mouth on your nipples, James?”

The man drew in a shaky breath and nodded tersely, and Tiago obligingly released him long enough for Bond to turn in his arms. He went to his knees facing Tiago, pushing the hem of his tunic high enough to expose his nipples.

Tiago sucked one into his mouth while rolling the other with his fingers, taking his time and tonguing him thoroughly. Bond arched his back, pressing his chest tightly against him, but Tiago refused to be rushed, keeping the pressure maddeningly light and teasing.

Knowing he was particularly sensitive there, Tiago ran a hand up and down the knob of his spine. He was, of course, even more sensitive between his shoulder blades and the back of his neck, but Tiago’s access was obstructed by bunched up silk. He strained his fingers up slightly higher, and Bond shivered.

When he could go no higher, he stilled his fingers.

Grunting in frustration from the continued effects of Tiago’s teasing mouth and the suddenly motionless fingers, Bond moved away from Tiago long enough to pull the offending fabric over his head in an abrupt motion.

Tiago quickly reclaimed his mouthful of nipple, giving Bond the slightly harder pressure he was aching for, and resumed his sensuous caress of Bond’s upper spine, occasionally cupping the lower part of his neck in a blatantly possessive gesture. Bond moaned again, once more arching into Tiago’s mouth.

Tiago switched his attention to the other nipple, and while maintaining the gentle stroking of Bond’s upper spine, moved his other hand to the man’s buttocks. He merely held his hand there for
some time, letting Bond anticipate, before he began caressing him through the thin material.

It became quite apparent that the glide of the slippery material over his buttocks intensified Bond’s already significant arousal. Tiago occasionally ran a teasing finger between his cheeks and down to his perineum, reveling in the slight shiver he received each time.

Removing his mouth from the thoroughly explored nipple, Tiago glanced down to see the material of Bond’s crotch already wet from pre-come. He repositioned himself so could better appreciate the view, ignoring Bond’s moan of protest. Tiago hovered with his mouth directly over the bulge in the front of Bond’s trousers, closing his eyes and inhaling deeply the combined scents of sweat and arousal.

He grabbed a double handful of Bond’s amazing arse and simply waited there, close but not touching Bond’s cock.

When Bond finally uttered a strangled, “Tiago,” he relented and engulfed him through the material of the trousers. The extremely tight silk was already straining over the bulk of his arousal, and it therefore clung like a jealous lover and allowed only a minimal amount of movement over his penis.

Tiago licked and sucked as best he could, but it was obvious the limited friction was not nearly enough for Bond, as he grasped the waist of the trousers and pushed them down over his hips, freeing his erection.

Tiago didn’t wait for an invitation but merely slid him into his mouth, suckling gently. When Bond attempted to force the pace by tilting his hips, however, Tiago released him, then pushed him over onto his back so he could regain control. He had no intention of allowing Bond to come this soon.

Taken completely by surprise by Tiago’s maneuver, Bond didn’t immediately react, but when he did attempt to struggle back to his knees, Tiago held him down with a firm hand to his shoulder and equally firm, “No, James,” aloud.

Bond’s eyes narrowed at the command, but he evidently decided to obey the implicit warning and remained where he was.

“I’m not ready to end this quite so soon, James,” he said, reaching to the adjacent nightstand for supplies he knew he’d need later. “So we’ll slow this down just a bit, hmm?”

“Do I get any say in this?” Bond asked tightly.

“Well . . . no, actually.” Tiago looked at him sharply, “Unless you want me to stop, James?”

“Bloody hell, no,” Bond said. “What I want you to do is get on with it already.”

Tiago smiled down at him. “Patience is a virtue.”

“So are modesty and humility, but you don’t practice those either.”

Laughing, Tiago knelt down next to Bond and took his cock in his hand. “You don’t normally talk this much during sex,” he said, slowly moving his hand up his length and then just as slowly circling the tip with one finger.

“Normally my partners are more interested in having sex and less interested in torturing me in the process,” Bond replied, throwing his head back against the bed.
“Your loss,” Tiago said, continuing his slow motion stroking of Bond’s cock.

“Tiago,” Bond said warningly.

Tiago lifted his hand away as if burned. “Oh, damn. I forgot to approve this with Diego. We really should check with him before we go any further.” He made a move to get off the bed. “I wouldn’t want to accidentally set back your progress.”

“Tiago,” Bond said again, grabbing him by the forearm. “If you even attempt to leave this room now, I swear to God, I’ll kill you. Slowly.”

Batting his eyelids coquettishly, Tiago said, “Oh, James. You always say the sweetest things.”

Bond released Tiago’s arm and closed his eyes in apparent defeat. He said, “You. Are. Impossible.”

Tiago smiled, then while Bond was not paying attention, bent over and engulfed his cock completely in his mouth.

Bond gasped, his eyes flying open, and his hips heaved upward involuntarily. 

So predictable, pequeño. Tiago took the opportunity to shove a pillow underneath Bond’s low back, and when the man started to utter a protest, swallowed him further until he was deep-throating him.

Bond gave out a strangled gasp, and Tiago proceeded to work him, still slowly, but maintaining a strong, even suction that he knew the man particularly enjoyed. When Bond’s eyes again closed involuntarily, Tiago reached to his side and retrieved the tube he had left there. Slicking the fingers of one hand, he reached behind Bond’s balls to firmly stroke his perineum.

Obviously aware of the different feel of Tiago’s lubricated fingers, Bond raised his head. “What . . . ?”

Releasing Bond’s cock briefly, Tiago murmured, “Shh. This will feel good. I promise.”

Tiago continued his ministrations, not increasing his tempo, but gradually moving the stroking fingers closer to Bond’s entrance. As he just grazed the delicate skin there, Bond shuddered.

Bond still had the material of his trousers bunched around his upper thighs, which made it impossible for Tiago to reach any further back from this angle, even with Bond’s hips elevated. He continued to just barely touch the sensitive area around his anus, however, while maintaining a steady pace of suction on his cock.

This clearly felt exceptionally good to Bond, as he unconsciously attempted to spread his legs further apart to give Tiago better access. Thwarted by the strangling silk, Bond swore under his breath and raised his knees so he could push the offending material down his legs. He kicked the trousers off completely, moaning aloud when Tiago took the immediate opportunity to completely circle his entrance with one slick finger.

Fondling the man’s balls carefully with his free hand, Tiago continued to make the slow, teasing circles. Every time Bond attempted to increase the tempo by canting his hips, Tiago stilled completely, refusing to be hurried.

Bond groaned in frustration, but he made no further protest. He grudgingly submitted to Tiago’s pace, but his hands gripped the bedcover tightly in his effort to comply.
Tiago stopped only long enough to reapply the lubrication to his fingers. When he felt Bond was far enough along, he allowed his cock to slip once again further down his throat and at the same time pushed his thoroughly lubricated finger ever so slightly into Bond’s anus.

The man froze, his eyes wide, and Tiago released his cock but left his finger inside. He kept stroking his cock with his hand, however, giving Bond something else to focus on. “None of your other lovers have done this for you, James?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

Bond had to wet his lips before he could reply. “I never allowed them to.”

“Hmm.”

“Feels . . . strange,” Bond said, but he didn’t ask Tiago to remove the digit.

“You know it can feel extremely good as well, don’t you?” Tiago said, bending down to lap at the head of Bond’s cock as he slipped the finger further inside.

Bond grunted, his gaze latching sharply on Tiago, but before he could protest, Tiago once again swallowed him whole and then crooked the finger ever so slightly against Bond’s prostate.

The man bucked so hard that Tiago was forced to hold his hips down. His breathing had already been significantly increased, but he was practically panting now, looking up at Tiago with wide, impossibly dilated eyes.

*Got you.*

Tiago increased his pace then, sucking and tonguing his cock, while he randomly stimulated his prostate, never allowing the man to anticipate the contact. Bond was left straining to alternately thrust into Tiago’s mouth and push down ineffectively against his teasing finger, and Tiago drew it out as long as he dared. He wanted to addict the man to the experience, but not prolong it so long that he might become sore.

When he felt Bond practically shuddering beneath him, he swallowed him completely and applied firm, constant strokes against his prostate. Bond’s eyes widened, and his whole body tensed upward, as tight as a bowstring, as he orgasmed down Tiago’s throat. His mouth was open, but he was seemingly unable to utter a sound. Tiago maintained the suction and the stroking, prolonging his orgasm as long as he could.

Bond finally collapsed back down to the bed, and Tiago carefully removed his finger as Bond shuddered through the aftershocks.

When he had recovered enough to regain speech, Bond said, “That was . . .”

“Amazing, incredible, awesome?” Tiago supplied helpfully.

“. . . Unexpected,” Bond said, eyeing him harshly.

“Yet you did appear to enjoy what I did, at least to some minor degree.” He raised an eyebrow. “See? I can indeed be modest and humble.”

Bond sighed. “I’ve told you before that it’s a matter of biology. You simply know how to make my body respond, and when I’m . . .” He froze, looking down at himself incredulously. “I’m naked,” he said, his voice rising an octave in apparent surprise.

“Why, yes, you are.” Tiago widened his eyes in mock surprise. “I wonder how *that* happened.”
“You . . .”

Wagging a chastising finger, Tiago said, “Uh-uh. I did nothing. You’re the one who removed the clothing, not I.” He waited as Bond realized the truth in that statement, then continued, “I did tell you that I preferred you naked, James. The only acceptable thing about allowing you clothes is the pleasure I receive in promptly removing them again.” He bent down to kiss him briefly on the mouth. “However, I must admit it’s even more satisfying to watch as you — ever so desperately, I might add -- choose to remove them for me.”

Glaring, Bond said, “You are the sneakiest, most manipulative and underhanded bastard I have ever had the displeasure of meeting.”

Nodding, Tiago said, “Yes, but you love me anyway.”

Bond opened his mouth to snap the expected denial, but he closed it again, and an almost pained expression briefly crossed his face.

He stared at Tiago for what felt like a lifetime.

“Yes,” he said at last, eying him thoughtfully. “I’m honestly afraid I do.”

Tiago felt his eyes widen, involuntarily this time. “You do?”

“Yes . . . unfortunately.” Bond crossed his arms across his chest. “I can’t come up with any other reason I haven’t killed you a dozen times over, collar or no bloody collar.”

Tiago sat back abruptly. Well, this was unexpected. Extremely pleasant, but unexpected, just the same. His little rat was simply full of surprises.

His. Finally. Really, truly his. He did so like the sound of that, especially now when it didn’t seem so woefully one-sided. He couldn’t remember when he’d ever felt this content and complete.

Leaning over, Tiago kissed Bond passionately, joy pushing aside most of his innate shadows, at least for the time being. He finally pulled back and said, “I’ll get us some champagne. This calls for a celebration.”

Bond latched onto his arm again. “Wait.”

“No champagne? I have an absolutely lovely Macallan, 50 years old, exactly.” He raised an eyebrow playfully, “It’s like it was preordained.”

Releasing Tiago’s arm, Bond reached up slowly to caress Tiago’s cheek. “I had something . . . nonalcoholic in mind, actually.”

Tiago actually felt his jaw drop, he was so shocked. He closed it with a snap, however, when he saw the smug smile on Bond’s face.

“You do, do you?” Tiago grasped Bond’s hand and kissed it lightly. “I’ve made a study of your refractory period, James, and I hate to tell you this, but you’re not quite ready for another round.”

“Tiago,” Bond scolded. “Don’t be willfully obtuse. You’ve stalked me long enough to know I’m not normally a selfish lover.”

“Very aware. However, your other lovers had slightly different standard equipment installed.” He kissed Bond’s fingers again. “It’s really not necessary, James. I was trying not to rush you.”
Bond raised a challenging eyebrow. “Maybe I don’t want to be the only one naked for a change.”

Tiago paused, considering the offer. He glanced over at the windows, noting that the sun had finally set. The ambient light was low enough, but still he closed his eyes, debating whether he dared drop any more of his internal barriers to this man. Bond was not the only one with trust issues.

*O todo o nada.*¹ This was a precept he’d always lived by, even when his life was at its lowest ebb. Why change now? Especially when his fortunes had finally seemed to change for the better.

Tiago climbed off the bed and began to strip, slowly but purposefully. He was not ashamed of his body, even after Hong Kong. He also knew that Bond, of all people, wouldn’t be repulsed by the scars. It was almost expected, given the lives they led — a rite of passage almost.

When he was completely naked, he knelt beside Bond and waited while the man examined him in that straightforward, purposeful way of his. Bond had, of course, seen him without a shirt before, but only while under the influence of the drug Tiago had unwittingly given him. He was willing to bet Bond recalled very few details of anything that had occurred during that time. Regardless, his primary focus *then* had been on touch rather than his other senses.

Even clear-headed, however, Bond was still a very tactile man. The light was low enough now that he almost unconsciously reached with his hand to follow the path his eyes were taking, tracing the scars and burns with his fingers in a sort of sensory confirmation.

Tiago shivered. Scars were supposed to be dead tissue, inert and nerveless, but he often felt the phantom pain from when the wounds were first acquired. It was sort of like a paraplegic who still received feedback from his missing legs, but *his* scars held more of an emotional component than strictly physical. They probably always would, more’s the pity.

When Bond touched them, however, they felt neither inert nor painful. They actually felt *alive* again.

Like he did.

Bond looked at him sharply. “These were all acquired at about the same time.”

Tiago merely nodded.

“Hong Kong?”

Tiago nodded again.

Bond looked vaguely distressed. “What . . .?”

Reaching out to press his hand over Bond’s mouth, Tiago said, “Perhaps we can talk about this some other time, hmm?” He quirked his mouth into a half-smile.

Bond seemed to comprehend the unspoken request behind his words, because he playfully bit the hand covering his mouth.

“Ow!” Tiago said, responding in kind. He held his hand to his mouth. “I hope you’re not planning on doing that to *every* place your mouth ends up.” He gave Bond a reproachful glare. “There are some parts of me that wouldn’t react well to that kind of abuse.”

Bond shrugged. “I’ll be the first to admit I don’t have experience in everything.” He lowered his
eyes briefly before once again meeting Tiago’s eyes, but his determination was quite plain nonetheless.

*Still a little uncomfortable with this, despite your ingrained sense of fair play, aren’t you, dear heart?*

“Perhaps we should stick to something that doesn’t involve teeth for now, just to be safe, hmm?” Tiago raised an inquiring eyebrow.

Upon receiving a grateful nod from Bond, Tiago reached over and reacquired the lube. “Brace your back against the headboard and spread your legs for me.” He paused. “If you are still sure, James?”

“Yes,” Bond said without hesitation, immediately complying with Tiago’s instructions.

Tiago positioned himself in the space between Bond’s legs, slouching a little and resting his back against the man’s chest. He started to apply the lube with his own hand, intending to make things a little easier for Bond, but the tube was removed from his hand before he could do so.

“I think I can manage this much on my own,” Bond said, a slightly scolding tone in his voice.

“Hmm? Oh, yes. You are quite the experienced hand with the lube, aren’t you?”

Bond froze. “How did you. . . ?” He sighed, dropping his chin on the top of Tiago’s head. “Just how often have you watched me masturbate?”

Tiago waved a hand. “A little here, a little there, but some of the video feeds were a little grainy depending on the country you were in.” He shrugged. “Everyone should have a hobby, and besides, you were a definite improvement over crap telly.”

“Has anyone ever mentioned you have an obsessive personality?”

“All my life,” Tiago replied brightly. “You’re currently my only obsession, however. You should be thrilled.”

“Profoundly.”

Tiago elbowed him gently in the midriff. “Well, stop being thrilled and get on with it before we both die of old age and/or natural causes.”

“Like that’s bloody likely to happen,” Bond replied sarcastically, but he did manage to eventually apply the lube where it was most needed.

Oh yes. Tiago had to admit that the man was definitely a good hand with the lube . . . and with what came after. Tiago was already half-hard, and it didn’t take long for Bond to get him to the point where he was completely hard and leaking. He had expected Bond to rush through this on his first outing with another man, but he seemed to be mirroring what he enjoyed himself, which was more than satisfactory as far as Tiago was concerned.

So, he simply allowed himself to lay back and enjoy the ride, so to speak, and he most definitely was enjoying it. It had been a long time since Tiago had let another man make love to him, and he now realized how much he’d missed the firm grip and firsthand knowledge that only another man possessed.

“Am I doing this right?” Bond asked innocently.
Tiago was tempted to elbow him again, but he was far too comfortable to move. “As if you couldn’t tell, pequeño,” he said, proud that he was only slightly out of breath.

Bond stroked him firmly on the underside of his cock while rolling his balls with his other hand, and Tiago gasped aloud.

“Now I can tell,” Bond said teasingly into his ear.

Tiago tilted his head back in exasperation, and Bond took the opportunity to latch his mouth onto his, invading his mouth forcefully with his tongue while he increased the tempo of his hand on Tiago’s cock. Yes, the man was definitely an expert at this, and Tiago knew he wasn’t going to last long at all.

When Tiago finally arched his back and came, hard, Bond refused to release his mouth until Tiago had collapsed back down onto the bed. Tiago lay there through the aftershocks, gasping for breath, while Bond stroked his hip soothingly.

Bond reached for the hand towel Tiago had retrieved earlier and wiped away the evidence of their lovemaking.

Looking up at Bond after he had finished, Tiago said, “Not bad for a beginner.”

Bond snorted. “Guess I’ll have to practice more.”

Tiago got up, turned, and straddled Bond’s lap, grasping his cheeks with possessive hands. He kissed him hard, then said, “Practice is good. As my abuela used to say, ‘A gem is not polished without rubbing, nor a man perfected without trials.’ I’ve always been particularly keen on the rubbing part.”

Bond’s eyes widened, then narrowed again in disbelief. “Your grandmother said that? It sounds more like a Chinese proverb.”

Tiago shrugged. “What can I say? She made her living selling fortune cookies.”

“You . . .” Bond looked at him incredulously, then shook his head. “It’s no use. There are no words.”

“Good,” Tiago said, kissing him again. “I prefer the strong, silent type anyway.”

Chapter End Notes

1 “All or nothing.”

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I do so love ConnivingManipulative!Tiago. Hope you do, as well!
“Señor Bond?” Diego waited until the agent had focused his attention on him, then added, “May I come in?”

Bond waved a negligent hand. “Mi casa es tu casa¹, except it’s not actually mine, I suppose.”

Diego approached the bed, smiling. “I think Tiago would probably disagree with that statement, especially at this point. He did appear to be in an exceptionally generous mood tonight.” He set his medical bag on the bed, and added, “I am to tell you that he has been ‘held up by boring work stuff’, and he asked me to check on you.”

Bond sighed, placing a hand over his eyes. “Sometimes I feel like a goldfish, and people keep peering into my bowl to see if I’ve gone belly up yet.”

Diego laughed. “I suppose I should admit I have never been able to keep a goldfish alive for more than a few days.”

Bond removed his hand from his eyes, his lips quirking upward into a smile. “That isn’t very encouraging, no.” He cocked his head to one side. “Pardon me for presuming, but you hardly seem like the goldfish-tending type.”

Diego kept the smile on his face by sheer force of will. “My children were quite insistent.”

Bond opened his mouth to reply, but something in Diego’s expression must have warned him against inquiring. This man, like Tiago, was almost preternaturally perceptive.

There was a significant pause, then Bond merely said, “I assume you’d like to check on my feet while you’re here?”

Grateful to the man for his discretion, Diego nodded and waited while Bond shifted himself closer.

After removing the few remaining plasters and a brief visual inspection, Diego pressed gently on the worst scars on the soles of Bond’s feet. He looked up at him and raised an inquiring eyebrow.

“No, that doesn’t hurt, if that’s what you were about to ask,” Bond said.

Diego nodded. “Good. We can attempt weight-bearing in the morning, then. You heal exceptionally quickly, Señor Bond.”

“I get plenty of practice.”

Diego glanced at the array of scars on the man’s body that didn’t quite rival Tiago’s, and said, “Yes, it appears that you do.”

As Diego placed his supplies back in his bag, he glanced up and saw a hesitant expression on Bond’s face. “Did you have something you wished to ask me, Señor Bond?”

The agent closed his eyes and nodded. He seemed to debate with himself for quite some time before he said, “Have you ever done something and then wonder afterwards if it was the smartest
thing you’ve ever done, or the most idiotic?”

Diego smiled. “Oh, yes. Once, when I made the decision to enter medical school, and then again
when I made the decision to actually use that knowledge upon graduation.” Diego shrugged. “Both
were extremely frightening prospects for me.”

Bond looked at him thoughtfully. “Did you ever regret either decision?”

Diego closed his eyes briefly, willing away the disturbing images. “Only once.”

Bond again seemed to realize he was venturing into painful territory, because he merely nodded in
acknowledgment.

“This is about Tiago?” Diego prompted.

“Everything is about Tiago.” Bond looked away, then added, “He told you?”

“Not in so many words, but it was not difficult to infer, because I have never seen him this happy.”
He paused, considering that thought. “It was like I was finally meeting the man he could have
been.”

“What do you mean?” Bond asked.

Diego paused, attempting to put his thoughts into something he could verbalize. “When I first met
Tiago, he was suffering both physically and emotionally, and there were many times in those early
days when I wondered if he would not take his own life to escape that pain.” He looked out the
expanse of windows, remembering. “His eyes would glaze over, he would bow his head, and I
knew that he was considering it. Seriously considering it.” He focused his attention back on Bond.
“I believe he adopted the persona of Raoul Silva at that time as a means of self defense. Only since
he has met you have I seen more than mere passing glimpses of the man behind that all-
encompassing pain.”

“So which one is real — Tiago or Raoul?”

“I think they are both real, but in a relationship with anyone, one must take the good with the bad,
no?”

“Kidnapping and murder are hardly in the same category as someone who leaves their dirty clothes
on the floor.”

“No, they are not, but I believe you have a better chance of curbing those negative impulses in the
future than anyone else.” He smiled. “Unfortunately, not so much luck with regard to the dirty
clothes on the floor, I'm afraid. That you will just have to live with.”

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Tiago spent more time than he would have liked monitoring his various ongoing projects, so it was
quite late before he finally joined Bond in their bed. Even though he’d asked Diego to check on
him earlier, he hadn’t wanted to be separated from Bond this long, especially on this day.

Bond was already asleep, lying on his left side, no doubt exhausted by the busy day he’d had.

And no, Tiago wasn’t feeling the least bit smug about his own participation in wearing the man
out.
He crawled into bed and carefully wrapped himself around Bond. It was almost eerie how well they fit together like this, and he contentedly draped a possessive arm over his chest.

Bond came awake instantly, as he always did, but it took him only a moment or two before he relaxed out of his instinctive reaction against being touched while he was asleep. “I prefer to be on the opposite side of this sort of sleeping arrangement,” he said, but made no immediate move to force the issue.

“We fit together better this way,” Tiago countered.

“You’re not that much taller than me.”

“Tall enough.”

Bond started to turn over in his arms, and Tiago tightened his grip.

“Unless you need to use the facilities, you can stay right where you are, pequeño.”

Bond sighed dramatically, but stilled. “I took care of that earlier, while Diego was here. And he let me use the wheelchair.” He paused significantly. “All by myself,” he added sarcastically.

“Hmmph. Diego is way too fond of you, and he spoils you rotten.” He yawned prodigiously. “I ought to have him whipped.”

Bond stiffened in his arms, and Tiago sighed. “I was only joking, James.” He ran his hand down Bond’s side and spread his fingers wide over his bare hip. “Perhaps I simply prefer you in this position because I enjoy the feel of your arse against me,” Tiago said.

“You’re wearing pyjamas. There’s not that much feeling involved,” Bond said drily.

Tiago bit him lightly at the junction of his neck and shoulder. “I was trying to respect your boundaries,” he said.

“If you had any intention of respecting my boundaries, you’d remove the damn collar.”

Tiago said nothing for a few moments, merely lifting a foot to caress the collar in question with his bare toes. “And as I have told you many times before, James, the collar is a permanent fixture.”

“Yet you claim to love me,” Bond said bitterly.

Tiago slid away from Bond and pulled him over onto his back. Straddling his torso, he loomed over the man, and said quite distinctly, “I will not remove my best chance of getting you back should someone attempt to take you from me.”

“There are other transponders that aren’t quite so bloody obtrusive.”

Tiago’s eyes narrowed. “Like the one that was cut out of your arm by Le Chiffre’s men, or the one in the radio that Severine stole from you?”

Bond glared back at him briefly, but then lowered his eyes, conceding the point.

Tiago drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly, attempting to curb his anger. He would not ruin this glorious day by fighting with his little rat. He reached out a hand to lift Bond’s chin. “Corazón mío, you cannot even begin to conceive what your loss would do to me. I dare not take the chance that someone could steal you from me and I would have no method of finding you.” He lowered his face closer to Bond’s. “I simply cannot face the prospect of losing you, so please do not ask that
of me again.”

Bond looked up into his eyes for a few moments, then said, “You do realize I’m quite capable of taking care of myself?”

“Uh-huh. And how many times have you been captured since your instatement as a double-oh?”

Bond had the grace to look embarrassed, but he finally said, “Regardless, I’ve always managed to get away on my own.”

“Have you now?” Tiago raised an eyebrow. “Always?”

Frustrated, Bond blurted out, “From everyone except you, damn it all.”

Tiago nodded. “And if I can do it, someone else can.”

Bond looked away, obviously peeved. “I’ve already told you the reason why I’m still here. I’m not bloody likely to fall in love with every jumped up megalomaniac who kidnaps me.”

“I certainly hope not. In any case, I’m not going to give some other ‘jumped up megalomaniac’ that opportunity.”

Bond turned his head back to face him and sighed heavily. “I didn’t mean that the way it sounded.”

Smiling gently, Tiago said, “I know you didn’t, pequeño, but my decision still stands.” He trailed his hand down Bond’s leg to his ankle, caressing the collar and the skin to either side of it. “This stays, so that you stay, hmm?”

He waited patiently for Bond’s extremely reluctant nod, then resumed his position lying next to him. “Come, James, turn over and let me hold you. It’s been a long day for both of us.”

As he nestled against Bond’s lovely backside, he belatedly realized he’d left his clothes on the floor in his haste to get into bed.

Oh, well. He’d get them in the morning. He was far too comfortable to move at the moment.

Q sat back from his computer terminal and rolled his neck in a small circle, trying to ease the discomfort from too many hours spent in front of a computer. It had been a long day. Hell, it had been a long, interminable succession of days, and he was no closer to tracking down Bond than when he’d started. It was like the man had disappeared off the face of the earth.

He refused to believe the bloody insufferable agent was dead, because men like Bond didn’t die — at least not without making some kind of grand exit that involved either substantial property damage or excessive loss of life on the part of the bad guys. It was some sort of unnamed law of nature that a double-oh went out in a fiery blaze of glory.

No, Bond couldn’t be dead.

But neither did Q believe that the man had simply gone off the grid like he’d done before. After this length of time, he would’ve had to either access money or make money to live on. From his reputation, Bond had never been one to live frugally, at least not for long. And in this day and age, and with the resources he had available, it was very unlikely Q would have missed detecting that, either through electronic or surveillance means. He was now virtually certain that “Bond’s” very
visible jaunt through the wilds of Turkey had been an exceptionally well planted red herring.

Which meant the agent had been captured by someone, and it was most likely this mysterious cyberterrorist that M had sent Bond to apprehend. It frustrated Q to no end that he was unable to track this man down. (He supposed it could be a woman, but this person’s electronic footprint simply felt male to him.) Computers were Q’s primary field of expertise, yet this man was gleefully running cybernetic circles around him, taunting him, and he’d been unable to even pinpoint a likely country of origin for him.

Well, as Quartermaster, it was his bloody job to insure the safety of agents while in the field, and he intended to do just that. He refused to consider that there might be any other motivation involved in this decision.

“Quartermaster.”

Cursing his distraction, Q barely restrained himself from levitating off his chair and turned to face the speaker. If he was blocking the view of the potentially illicitly obtained data streaming across his monitor in the process, well, that was just coincidence. “Yes, Ma’am?”

M appeared to have visibly aged over the months of Bond’s latest disappearance, but her eyes were as sharp as ever. She may not be able to read minds, but she seemed to come awfully damn close to doing the equivalent through some other means.

“I’ve been indulging you while you worked on your special project, but I have a new task for you that I’m afraid must take priority.”

Q didn’t bother attempting to feign ignorance, because it was quite obvious he’d been well and truly caught out. And he’d thought he’d been so bloody careful about keeping his expanded search efforts a secret.

He took the Eyes Only file from M’s hand and glanced at the contents. His eyes widened, and he looked up at M questioningly. “I thought this sort of thing ‘just wasn’t done.’”

“The world has changed, Quartermaster. There is no such thing as diplomatic immunity anymore, and the sanctity of an embassy or the safety of its personnel is no longer a guarantee.” She raised an eyebrow. “Bond was a not-so-shining example of that particular fact.”

Q bit his tongue and didn’t comment on M’s use of the past tense. He indicated the file with a tilt of his head. “This seems to be on a whole different level of ‘bit not good,’ however.”

M nodded. “Besides the obvious consequences, it has the definite prospect of engendering political repercussions as well.” She looked away for a few moments, obviously pondering how much information fell under Q’s ‘need to know.’ When she turned back to him, she said, “We have been attempting to cement closer ties with Peru now that the Americans have shifted their attention to Mexico and Central America. This has the potential to cause a significant strain in our relationship with the Peruvian government.”

“She’s only ten years old, Ma’am,” Q said sharply.

“Yes, she is. Just celebrated her birthday last month, as a matter of fact.” Her eyes narrowed. “The ambassador is a close personal friend, and that little girl is my godchild. If you’d be so kind as to focus your quite comprehensive search efforts into finding her instead of a ghost, I would be in your debt.”

Q lowered his eyes. “Yes, Ma’am.” He looked up and said softly, “Sorry, Ma’am.”
M merely nodded her head in acknowledgment, then turned to leave.

“Ma’am?”

M turned her head to peer back at him, her hand already on the doorknob. “Yes, Quartermaster?”

“How did you know I was searching for 007?”

“You mean, after I had given you explicit instructions to call off the search for him?”

Q felt his face flush. “Yes, Ma’am.”

M paused, then said, “It became quite apparent you were involved in some sort of comprehensive project that wasn’t sanctioned by either me or this organization. Given your obsession with 007, it could only have been in regard to his disappearance.”

“But how?” Q blurted out in frustration. “The information streams were keyed only to my access, and they were triple encrypted. Not even you should have been privy to them, at least not without my knowledge of you having retrieved them. Begging your pardon, Ma’am.”

M frowned. “I may be a mere bureaucrat now, but I’ve been in the intelligence field for longer than you’ve been alive, young man, so I can make some inferences based on simple observation. Namely, you’ve been working an extended number of hours, you’ve not given any of the data to your subordinates to parse, and you don’t leave this terminal for hours at a time.”

She paused, evidently recognizing that Q had still not made the connection. “In other words, Quartermaster, you were hovering. In this business, that’s a dead giveaway that you care about something more than is good for you.”

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“Stop hovering.”

“I am not hovering.”

Bond turned his head slightly, and Tiago had to move back abruptly to avoid bumping noses.

“Okay, so I am hovering . . . just a bit,” Tiago said. He made an aborted move to cross his arms, but he was too afraid he’d miss Bond if he fell, so he left his arms at his sides. “Sue me.”

“If I thought it would do any good, I would.” Bond glared at him. “I’ve been walking since I was just over a year old, Tiago. I think I can accomplish this without a human set of training wheels.”

“And what if you fall?” He glanced over at Diego, who had the nerve to be smiling slightly. He pointed a reproving finger at him. “You’re a doctor. Set him straight.”

“All right, I will. Stop hovering, Tiago.”


Diego raised an eyebrow. “At this moment, you are both making me feel like I am back working in my clinic in Lima.” He paused, seeming to consider that statement. “I have treated five year old’s who were more mature than you two.”

“It’s my fault he has those injuries,” Tiago said. “I have a right to be worried.”
“Then I imagine you should have considered that before you set a building on fire with your young man still in it.”

“He’s not that young!”

Bond sighed. “Which is why I’m quite able to walk on my own, if you’d kindly get out of my way, Tiago.”

“Fine. Fall then. See if I care.” Tiago took one reluctant step back.

Shaking his head, Bond shifted his weight, gradually moving more of it to his feet. Keeping one hand on the side of the bed, he stood carefully.

Bond took one slow step, then another.

Tiago walked directly beside, but he managed to keep his hands to himself through sheer force of will. He kept a close eye on the man’s face, however, searching carefully for any sign of distress. He knew very well how stubborn Bond was about concealing pain, which was why he’d been hovering in the first place, damn it all.

“How do they feel?” Diego asked.

Bond glanced at Tiago before replying, “Not bad. I can definitely feel the scar tissue, but there’s no real pain to speak of.”

“It’s the ‘not speaking of’ that worries me,” Tiago muttered.

“Hush, amigo.” Diego was watching Bond like a hawk as he took a few more steps, but Bond’s growing confidence was quite apparent as he lengthened his stride. “Back to the bed, Señor Bond, if you please, so I can check for any new damage.”

Bond complied readily enough, turning back toward the bed and swinging his legs onto it so Diego could examine the soles of his feet.

“Hmm. They still look fine. No fresh hemorrhage.” He looked up at Bond and said sternly, “However, you are to take only short walks for the first few days, and you will let me know if there is any new bleeding or significant pain, no?”

“Si, Médico Almeida.”

“And you,” he said, turning and pointing a finger at Tiago. “He is to have hard-soled shoes once he begins to venture any distance. I do not want him re-injuring himself on some stray object.”

Tiago gave him a mock salute. “Whatever you say, Diego.”

Diego narrowed his eyes. “That would be a first.” He turned to Bond and winked conspiratorially. “I did tell you before that you were good for him.”

Bond glanced over at Tiago before he replied, “I believe that still remains to be seen.”

“Ah, but sometimes one must operate on faith.”

Bond eyed him warily. “That’s not one of my strong points, I’m afraid.”

Diego looked at him sharply, crossing his arms over his chest. “You must have faith in yourself first, Señor Bond. Faith in your positive effect on others will follow shortly thereafter.”
Tiago sat on the bed next to Bond and elbowed him gently. “See? My grandmother isn’t the only one who talks like a Chinese fortune cookie.”

Diego sighed. “The younger generation has no respect for their elders, so I will bid you both a good day.” He paused with his hand on the doorknob. “Would you children prefer I write down my instructions, or is it possible you might follow them regardless?”

Tiago rolled his eyes. “I believe we can handle it.”

“See that you do.”

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When Tiago entered the room, it was obvious Bond had understood the significance of the warning pulse from his collar. Although still seated in Tiago’s computer chair, he had already turned it to face the door.

Tiago approached him slowly, disappointed, but not surprised. He’d been expecting that allowing Bond (relative) freedom of movement would result in at least some degree of misbehavior. He was not a double-oh because he dealt well with externally imposed limits.

Bond had his head bowed, but he raised it to stare defiantly into Tiago’s eyes as he stopped in front of him.

“I thought you were going to the gym to exercise, James,” Tiago said. “Imagine my surprise when the motion detector alerted me of an unauthorized entry into this room. I did give you instructions not to enter this room without my presence, did I not?” He cupped the back of Bond’s neck with a firm grip, and some of the defiance melted from the man’s eyes, if not from his posture.

“I did go to the gym,” Bond said sullenly. “I came here afterwards, but I did not actually attempt to access your computer.”

“Yes, I know that.” Moving around so that he was behind Bond, Tiago shifted his grip to encircle the man’s throat. “You wouldn’t have been able to circumvent the password protection anyway, but you do realize that isn’t the point, don’t you?”

He felt Bond attempt to swallow around the pressure on his throat, and he slumped slightly in the chair when Tiago merely tightened his hold.

“Yes, Tiago,” Bond said.

“What exactly were you expecting to accomplish with this disobedience?”

Bond swallowed again. “I feel so . . . disconnected. I just wanted to reassure myself that the outside world still existed.” He tilted his head back to look at him, and Tiago released his hold to allow the movement. “If I vouched for you . . .”

Tiago gripped his forehead to forestall the rest of his comment. “Dear heart, do not be so naive. They would separate us. They would lock me up and throw away the key, and they wouldn’t trust you with so much as a janitorial position at MI6, if they didn’t commit you to some institution first as a potential security risk.” He moved around to the front of the chair. He knelt down and cupped Bond’s cheek. “Is that what you want, pequeño?”

“Of course not,” Bond said with some of his usual fire. “I just need something productive to do, or I think I’ll go crazy.”

Before Tiago could reply to that, he heard the door open behind them.
“Tiago?”

Something in the tone of Diego’s voice sent alarm bells clamoring inside Tiago’s head. He stood and turned to face his friend.

“What is it, Diego?”

Diego glanced at Bond and then back to him, and Tiago nodded his assent.

“I received a message from Michelle. She has come across another one, just like before.” He closed his eyes, then opened them again. “They are back in operation again.”

Tiago hissed through his teeth. “Diego, are you sure? I’ve never stopped monitoring the situation there, and I’ve had no indications that they were restructuring. Not so much as a blip.”

“I trust her judgement, Tiago. That is why I left her in charge when I left.” He sighed. “You know if anyone would recognize their particular . . . style, it would be her.”

Tiago considered this for a few moments, then said, “It will have to wait a few days until I’m sure James has healed. I won’t be separated from him for that long.”

After receiving Diego’s assenting nod, he turned back to Bond. “What is that old saying, James -- ‘Be careful what you wish for?’”

He smiled slightly at Bond’s questioning stare. “Well, they also say Lima is beautiful this time of year, but in the part of the city we’ll be going, it’s really, really not.”

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Chapter End Notes

1 "My house is your house."

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Well, I did promise to get around to an actual plot at some point. ; )
I'm back, finally. Sorry, was out of town for a week, developed Strep throat, had a reaction to the antibiotics, and then hubby ended up in the ER two states away with a concussion, at the same time I was attempting to work 15-hour days. A fun time was had by all.

Tiago cursed softly to himself. He’d known this was a bad idea, but he’d done it anyway. It was too soon to allow Bond exposure to the outside world — too soon to abruptly sever his dependence on Tiago for all his needs. He should have just chained the man to the bed and left him on the island, but he’d recognized that was simply a different disaster waiting to happen.

In any case, Bond was an integral part of his plan, and since this ordeal promised to take quite some time, he really didn’t want Bond out of his sight that long. Now that the agent belonged to him, Tiago had no intention of ever being separated again.

Unfortunately, Bond was like a captive tiger, confined too long in an overly small cage, finally allowed relative freedom and unable to contain his satisfaction with that fact. Head held high, nostrils flaring as he sorted out the prevailing scents of oceanfront and packed humanity, he was trying to absorb everything at once, his stride unconsciously lengthening as they proceeded down the busy promenade filled with tourists and local couples on seaside holiday.

“James, slow down, please.”

The man in question turned his head to look at him sharply, but he did abide by the request, at least for the moment, returning to walk obediently by his side. For some reason, Tiago had the strangest compulsion to go out and buy a leash.

Tiago sighed. He had purposefully walked the relatively short distance from the harbour to his villa, for two reasons. He had known that Bond would enjoy the exercise after his long period of relative inactivity. More importantly, he wanted to be certain that any watchers, and he knew there would be watchers, didn’t miss the fact that Raoul Silva had returned.

Unfortunately, Bond’s reactions to their outing were causing an excessive degree of attention to be focused solely on him. Oh, Bond could be unobtrusive when necessary — he would be an exceptionally poor spy if not — but now, his barely restrained excitement had manifested in an almost pantheresque stride that merely emphasized his innate air of dangerousness. This combined with the snug black jeans and sinfully tight blue polo shirt he was wearing meant that most of the female gazes and a large majority of the males’ were centered on him.

Of course, Tiago had chosen that particular outfit for exactly this effect. He was counting on it, as a matter of fact. Wheels within wheels — his *modus operandi* — because it was essential to his plans that Bond would be noticed.

However, Tiago found he wasn’t quite prepared for others to be so intimately focused on his little rat, at least not yet. He despised the concept of anyone ogling what was patently his, of course, but
there was a more important consideration -- his inability to guarantee Bond’s safety in the depths of Lima’s criminal underworld.

Here, it was exceedingly dangerous to draw the kind of attention Bond was attracting, and sane people who were cognizant of that risk tended to avoid it like the plague. Unfortunately, it was exactly what they’d have to do to resolve this issue, but then, Tiago Rodriguez never claimed to be entirely sane. He only wished he wasn’t forced to involve Bond so deeply. Besides the inherent risks, Bond was not going to appreciate the role he’d be forced to play in this little drama.

There was no hope for it. He’d just have to follow through and let the cards fall as they may. He only hoped that Bond’s training would hold up to the significant strain he was about to place on it.

Bond once again unconsciously increased his pace. Knowing they likely already had an audience, Tiago put a possessive arm around Bond’s shoulders and guided him to the promenade’s railing beneath the meager shade of a solitary palm tree. It was prudent to begin defining their roles from the start, even if those roles weren’t that far from the actual truth.

Bond resisted briefly, but at the warning squeeze from Tiago, he subsided without any telltale sign of disobedience that would be apparent to an outsider.

As they stared out over the pebble beach surrounding the busy harbour, Tiago said, “Welcome to La Punta de Callao -- the ocean gateway to Lima and home to its privileged aristocracy since the early 1800’s.”

Bond watched the intricate, almost dance-like movements of the considerable number of boats for a time, just as the setting sun was beginning to paint the water in red-gold hues. “I thought you said the part of Lima we were going to wasn’t beautiful?”

Tiago glanced at him and raised an eyebrow. “We haven’t gotten there yet.”

Bond nodded, apparently having already surmised that much. Before he could ask anything else, however, he was approached by an obviously intrigued local man who stopped far too close to Bond’s side for Tiago’s comfort.

Tiago warned him off with a single malignant glare. He evidently hadn’t lost his touch, because the man departed with an appropriate degree of haste, not even once looking back.

Bond raised an eyebrow at him. “Perhaps he merely wanted to admire the view of the harbour?”

Tiago snorted. “He was admiring the view all right, but it had absolutely nothing to do with boats and everything to do with your arse.”

“Are you planning on warning off anybody who gets too close to me?”

“Not everyone. I’ll consider allowing young children and small pets within a certain radius.”

“Generous of you.”

“I thought so.”

Bond sighed loudly. “You’ll have to let me out of your sight at some point.”

“Will I?” Raoul moved a possessive hand to the back of Bond’s neck and was pleased to see his vaguely confrontational stance relax slightly. When Bond realized this, however, he immediately started to lift his neck and straighten his shoulders, apparently emboldened by his re-entrance into
the real world.

Tiago gave him a slightly harder warning squeeze, and Bond relented, although barely. They’d clearly need to discuss behavioral issues before he could take Bond back into public again. His potentially defiant reactions could put him at significant risk where they would be going.

In the meantime, however, it was time to openly stake his claim. He needed to firmly establish their relationship for his watchers, and if this had the unintended benefit of keeping other, relatively innocent but still unwanted parties at bay, well, that was fine by him. When he was finished, there would be no doubt in anyone’s mind that Bond belonged to him and was patently not available.

Grasping Bond by one shoulder, he backed him up against the rough bark of the palm tree. Looming over him with his slightly greater height, he again grasped the back of Bond’s neck and tilted his face upward. He kissed him passionately, and when Bond murmured a protest and attempted to break off the kiss, Tiago shoved him forcefully back against the tree with his free hand.

Bond stiffened in apparent displeasure at the treatment, but when Tiago broke their kiss to nip at the most sensitive part of his neck, he eventually relaxed into Tiago’s hold. Making a pleased humming sound, Tiago then proceeded to latch onto the same area of skin with his mouth, marking him thoroughly and extremely visibly.

When he again raised his head, his lower body still pressed tightly against Bond’s, Tiago was pleased to note a slightly glazed look in the man’s eyes. Reaching down, he cupped Bond through his jeans, noting his erection even through the heavy material. He stroked him firmly, reveling in the resultant groan.

Bond grasped his shoulders as if he planned on pushing him away, but his fingers only curled tightly into the muscle, hissing, “Tiago, stop! You’ll get us both arrested.”

“Not here, I won’t. And if we’re confronted, all I’d have to do is pay them off.” Tiago smiled, like a friendly shark. “That’s how it works in Lima, pequeño.”

Tiago rubbed his own erection against Bond’s, and the man groaned again and ducked his head into Tiago’s shoulder. Pleased at the obvious proof of Bond’s helpless capitulation, and knowing how the gesture would look to his audience, Tiago again possessively cupped the back of his neck, stroking and soothing him like one would a treasured pet.

Realizing he was being particularly wicked, and not caring in the least, Tiago whispered into Bond’s ear, “You know, I could take you behind this tree, pull your jeans down to your knees and suck you off, and no one would dare interrupt us.” He reached behind to grasp Bond’s arse, pulling him closer against him and once more grinding their erections together.

Bond tensed, responded briefly in kind, but then stilled and shook his head in protest against Tiago’s shoulder. “You know I’m not an exhibitionist.”

He raised Bond’s face to kiss him again but continued his slow grind against his pelvis, never allowing the man to regain control. “Yes, I do,” he finally replied when they came up for air, “but you’re considering it anyway, aren’t you, dear heart?”

Pulling in a shaky, desperate breath, Bond said, “Yes, damn you all to hell.”

Laughing, Tiago backed away a step, reaching up to stroke Bond’s cheek soothingly. “Well, I
wouldn’t want to be responsible for compromising your principles.”

Bond leaned back against the tree and tilted his head back, clearly attempting to will away his arousal without apparent success. “I believe you could compromise my principles just by breathing.”

Tiago raised an eyebrow. “That bad? Well, since I don’t intend to stop breathing anytime soon, we’ll just have to consider your principles permanently violated, hmm? Come, we have some distance to go yet.”

Grabbing Bond again by the upper arm, Tiago pulled him back onto the walkway, swatting him perfunctorily on the arse when he balked against the manhandling, always conscious of their watchers. “Behave, James, or I assure you, I’ll compromise more than just your principles.”

---------------------------------------------

By the time they were climbing the stone staircase to the front of his villa, Bond was slightly more restrained, sticking close by his side, evidently having sensed Tiago’s vague disapproval of his previous behavior.

Diego and the rest of his men had already arrived, even after arranging for the extensive amount of medical supplies destined for the clinic to be delivered to the villa.

Tiago gripped Bond’s upper arm again as they approached the entranceway, steering him away from the door and around the wraparound terrace to the west side of the structure. He wasn’t in the mood for company at the moment, and with the villa situated on the highest part of the peninsula, it had a breathtaking view of the harbor, and more importantly, some degree of privacy.

Bond allowed the manipulation, a slightly puzzled expression on his face, but as they approached the decorative stone balustrade on the west side, he let out a slow whistle of appreciation.

Tiago sidled close to him at the balustrade, admiring the fiery sunset along with him. He said, “They call it cielo de brujas – ‘sky of witches’. At least in the summer, Lima’s infamous pollution has one positive side effect.”

Bond said nothing for a few minutes, as the intense shades of pink and orange gradually deepened into red. “Are you planning on telling me why we’re here, and who you were putting on that show for on the promenade?”

“Questions, questions, always questions.”

“I don’t like operating in the dark.”

Tiago leered openly at him. “It’s a good thing I do then.” Sighing at Bond’s disgruntled glare, Tiago said, “It will be easier to show you tomorrow than it will be to explain tonight.” He raised a hand when Bond appeared ready to interrupt. “It is not that long a delay, pequeño, and you will understand then why I waited.”

Brushing the hair away from his eyes in what had become a sign of repressed irritation for him, Bond finally nodded his assent.

They watched the remainder of the sunset in companionable silence, but when the sky finally darkened to blue-black, Tiago said, “Come inside, James. We have other matters to discuss.”

Tiago led the way through the cavernous entrance hall, nodding at Diego, who was still
inventorying boxes of medical supplies stacked incongruously on an enormous oriental rug.

As they climbed the ornate curved staircase to the second floor, Bond paused to admire the intricate carvings engraved in the highly polished top rail. He indicated the wood paneled walls, gold-framed paintings and chandeliers with a nod of his head, and said, “This is a step or two up from your previous residence on the island, isn’t it?”

Tiago turned to look at him. “I have a reputation to maintain here.” He raised his chin. “Or I should say, the capo Raoul Silva does.”

Bond’s brow furrowed, apparently well aware of the significance of that title, but Tiago said firmly, “Tomorrow, James.”

He entered the sitting room of their suite, noting with satisfaction that their bags had already been delivered. Good, no interruptions.

“The bedroom is through that door, and the master bath through there.” Tiago indicated each with a nod of his head.

Bond stuck his head into the bathroom, turning to look at Tiago with a lifted eyebrow. “Marble floors, vaulted ceilings and chandeliers in the loo. Definitely a step up from the prior accommodations.”

“It would require a great deal more effort for you to tunnel through the floor of this abode, I assure you.”

Walking back to him, but keeping a measured distance away, Bond said, “Is there a particular reason why I’d feel the need to resort to that again?”

Far too perceptive, his little rat. “Only that you are not going to like what I have to say.”

Bond stiffened. “That sounds rather ominous.”

Sighing, Tiago said, “It’s not all that bad, pequeño.” He walked toward the bathroom. “Come with me.”

Bond didn’t move, crossing his arms. “Why?”

Straightening to his full height, and letting a little of his displeasure leak into his voice, Tiago said, “I was planning to cut your hair, James, but if you’d rather have it remain its current length, then by all means, stay right where you are.” He didn’t wait for a response, but simply turned and walked into the bathroom to ready his supplies. He knew that a haircut was one enticement Bond simply couldn’t pass up on.

He heard Bond walk into the room just as he was finishing up. Tiago pulled out a Chippendale chair from its position against the far wall and raised an inquiring eyebrow at him.

Bond’s expression was an interesting mixture of suppressed delight and defiance, and Tiago knew he had to be firmer with his little rat, or he was very likely to get himself, or both of them, killed in the upcoming days.

“What caused your change of heart?” Bond asked, standing a few meters away. “You were fairly adamant about letting my hair grow out.”

“I could tell it was becoming a distraction for you,” Tiago said. “Distraction in this environment is
something to be avoided whenever possible.” He wasn’t about to tell Bond that it was also a small salve for his conscience in response to the likely unpleasant events to follow.

Perching himself warily on the antique chair as if he was still unsure of Tiago’s motives, Bond looked up as he approached with the comb and scissors. “I trust you’ve done this before?” he asked.

“Hmm? First time for everything, I suppose,” Tiago said. “How hard can it be?”

When Bond abruptly started to rise, Tiago pushed him back down in the chair firmly.

“Relax, pequeño, you’ll be fine. I happen to be very proficient with sharp and/or pointy objects.” He sighed at Bond’s continued doubtful expression. “Yes, James, I have done this before. You can watch the process in that,” he added, indicating the full length, gold-embossed mirror directly in front of them. “Now will you allow me to touch your precious hair?”

Bond had the grace to look at least moderately chagrined.

“You allow some fumble-fingered bimbo to stroke your neck with a straight razor, but you don’t trust me with a simple pair of scissors. Why is that, hmm?”

Bond was silent for a few seconds, but then he met Tiago’s eyes in the mirror, and said, “Because you are infinitely more dangerous than her.”

Tiago paused, working through all the levels of meanings in that simple statement, and then nodded once in agreement. Yes, Bond would see Tiago’s ability to hurt him emotionally as significantly more risky than any purely physical attack.

He cut his hair in relative silence after that, and Bond gradually relaxed as he noted that yes, Tiago did know what he was doing with a pair of scissors. He only met resistance when he tried to bend Bond’s neck forward to shave the back of his neck. It took a sharp, “James!” from Tiago before he allowed the downward pressure.

Tiago finished shaving Bond’s neck, brushed off what little loose hair remained on his neck and shoulders, but refused to allow Bond to rise when he had finished.

He tilted the man’s chin with a firm grip. “Refusing to bend your neck is becoming a habit for you since we left the island.” He tilted his head sharply. “A somewhat bad habit, I might add.”

“You know I’m not going anywhere without you — that I can’t go anywhere without you,” he said bitterly, jerking his chin free. “That doesn’t mean I have to submit to your every whim.”

Tiago’s eyes narrowed. He was afraid that Bond’s small taste of freedom would make him slightly rebellious, but this was worse than he had feared. What’s more, this current mind set was in direct opposition to the one Tiago needed him to adopt in order to make his plan work.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small device. “This is an auxiliary control for your collar. It will be inconvenient for me to spare him, but I will have Luis take you back to the island tonight.”

Bond’s eyes widened. “What? No! You can’t do that.”

“Really? I quite assure you that I can.” Tiago knew he sounded exactly like the hated M at times like these, but unfortunately, it was a necessary evil. “You’re of no use to me like this.”
“You haven’t even told me what we’re up against, or what you need me to do. If you’re going somewhere that dangerous, you’ll need a bodyguard.”

Tiago crossed his arms and looked down at him. “In this place, having a bodyguard is considered a sign of cowardice — an indication that your reputation alone is not sufficient to keep you safe. In any case, a bodyguard would be the first obstacle to be permanently removed by the opposition should things not go as I have planned.”

“Your . . . lover then. It has the novelty of actually being the truth.”

“Ah, yes. Someone who is obviously very important to me and can therefore be used as leverage against me. Makes perfect sense.” He tapped a finger on his cheek. “Tell me, James, have you ever heard of el guiso — the stew? You dump a victim into a very large kettle and then proceed to boil them alive in water. It looks, and smells, like an exceptionally unpleasant way to die, and I have no intention of placing you at risk like that.”

Bond looked uncharacteristically frustrated. “Then what . . ?”

“Peru’s organized crime is involved in four major industries: illegal gold mining, drugs, extortion . . . and the sex trade.” He paused a moment, wondering if Bond would make the connection.

Bond’s eyes widened. “What? You expect me to pose as your sex slave?” He evidently couldn’t quite keep the incredulousness out of his voice.

Tiago merely nodded. “It’s the only way I can keep you close without unnecessarily risking your safety. I have a . . . reputation here. Unfortunately, this means I will require your obedience. Your complete and total obedience, with absolutely no hesitation on your part and no questioning me, or my actions, ever.”

“You can’t possibly be serious.”

Tiago rolled his eyes, turning on his heel to stalk back into the sitting room. “Very well, James. You will leave for the island immediately.”

Bond caught up to him, grabbing his forearm and turning him to face him.

Tiago merely looked down at his arm, then at Bond, raising an eyebrow at him in warning.

Bond quickly released him, lowering his gaze briefly before once again meeting Tiago’s eyes. “Tiago, I’m sorry. I’ll do what you ask. Just . . . please don’t lock me away again.”

Tiago didn’t allow his expression to waver, knowing Bond had to be sincere with his agreement to cooperate or things would go very badly indeed.

“Please, Tiago, I want to stay with you.”

“I wonder sometimes if that is actually the truth.” Tiago narrowed his eyes. “Now, listen to me very carefully, James. You will have to submit to me, not only in public, but in the midst of the worst examples of humanity that could possibly exist. In all honesty, with your background and personality, I don’t believe you’re capable of that.”

Bond’s eyes flared briefly. “I am not a submissive.”

“A fact of which I am very much aware, but that only proves my point.”
Bond turned his head to the side, obviously conflicted, and he licked his lips in a nervous gesture.

Tiago sighed aloud and walked toward the intercom.

“Wait!”

Tiago once again turned to face Bond. “Yes, James?”

“What . . . what do you need me to do?”

“I have already told you that.” Tiago crossed his arms against his chest. “Use your imagination, James, and impress me with your sincerity. Otherwise, I will lock you away someplace I know you will be safe until I have resolved this issue myself.”

Bond closed his eyes briefly, then began to strip, removing the few clothes Tiago had allowed him until he was completely naked. He then sank to his knees in front of Tiago but maintained eye contact with him. “I am not a submissive,” he repeated firmly.

Tiago reached out to lay a hand on top of his head, stroking his hair. “No, you’re not,” he agreed. “But you’ll bend your stubborn neck for me, will you not?”

Without saying another word, Bond sat back on his heels, placed his hands on his naked thighs, lowered his gaze to the floor, and then slowly bowed his head.

Chapter End Notes

Okaaaay, I have no idea where this came from, so please don't shoot me. Gah! I'm giving up on following an outline, because the boys keep shoving their way out of it. I promise I'm not going the BDSM route, but let me know what you think, eh? In any case, I'm going straight to Hell, not passing Go, and definitely not collecting $200. Sheesh.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

WARNING! Please note that I've updated this story's tags, and they now include "child abuse" and "underage prostitution", which I realize are severe triggers for some folks. Neither of these apply directly to Tiago or Bond in their pasts, but they both will figure prominently in the plot line from this point. I'm trying not to be graphic with either one of them, but I wanted readers to be aware they exist.

I sincerely apologize for not including these from the start, but frankly, I hadn't even conceived of continuing this far with the story when I began.

If there are current readers out there who don't wish to read anything involving those tags, but still want to know how the story ends, contact me via my e-mail address found in my profile, and I'll let you know at what point you can safely return to the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tiago let out his breath in a long sigh, stroking the hair of the positively exquisite specimen kneeling in front of him. He had to admit that the sight did rather impressive things for his libido, but it was clearly obvious from the tightness of Bond’s shoulder and back muscles that he was kneeling out of a sense of necessity rather than any true desire.

He’d have been truly surprised otherwise. As Bond had already pointed out, the man was absolutely not a submissive, a fact which no doubt complemented the needs of his chosen profession. However, submission was in direct opposition to the man’s hard-wired, innate disposition, and this was clearly evident in every taut line of his body. Oh, he deferred to Tiago, attributable in part to the collar, his training and his affection for Tiago, but regardless of what he had told Bond when they first met, he couldn’t completely change his nature. Anybody who wasn’t totally blind could tell that this man would not willingly bow to anyone.

And where they were going, that simple fact was sure to get him killed, and there would be little that Tiago could do to prevent it.

No, he’d have to come up with some other plan. Some other way to breech his opponent’s lair -- one that wouldn’t get the most precious thing in his life taken from him prematurely.

“You’re still planning on leaving me behind.”

The soft words broke Tiago out of his reverie, and he suspended the motion of his unconsciously stroking hand. “Hmm?”

Bond kept his head bowed, but he was looking up at him through his eyelashes. “You’ve got that look on your face — the one that means you’re revising some scheme of yours.” He butted his head against the hand still cradling his scalp. “Is this not enough to convince you?”

Tiago smiled down at him. “Dear heart, you are absolutely ravishing like this, but I’m afraid you project about as much submission as a wounded bear.” He moved his hand to cradle the back of
Bond’s neck. “You’d be killed within five minutes.”

Bond glared at him. “So you expect me to cower behind some locked door while you wander alone into an obviously dangerous situation?”

“In a word, yes. I assure you, James, I am quite capable of taking care of myself. I’ve been doing this far longer than you.”

“Damn it, you wouldn’t have brought me along at all if you didn’t think I’d be of use. It’s not simply wanting to keep me close. That isn’t the way you operate.”

Tiago paused, considering how much to give away. “Very true. However, my plans for you foolishly didn’t take into account an important consideration. Namely, now that you’ve mostly healed and are no longer closely confined, your natural rebellious and aggressive tendencies would come to the forefront.”

Bond shook his head in frustration. “I can’t help what I am.”

“I know that, James, but in this sort of environment, your normal disposition would be more of a detriment than a help.” Tiago shook his head firmly. “No, I won’t risk you like that.”

He started to turn away in order to summon Luis, but he was stopped by the stricken look on Bond’s suddenly upturned face. “When I let the people I love walk away from me, they don’t come back.”

Tiago felt his heart break all over again. “Oh, pequeño, it won’t happen like that.”

“I know it won’t, because I refuse to let you leave me behind.” Bond’s tense posture abruptly relaxed, all the subtle facets of defiance and rebellion melting from his demeanor. He straightened until he was no longer sitting on his heels, then pointedly placed his hands behind his back. “I can be what you need me to be,” he said softly, glancing up at Tiago with an entreatying expression. “Please, just give me a chance to prove it.”

With that, he pressed the side of his face against Tiago’s groin, slowly turning his head to nuzzle him gently through the light fabric.

Tiago hissed a long breath between his teeth, startled by how rapidly all the blood in his body seemed to rush toward his groin. Bond kept his hands clasped behind his back, his eyes lowered demurely, and his actions were an endearing combination of hesitant and determined.

He knew Bond had never done anything even remotely like this with another man. The knowledge that Bond would go to such extreme lengths to remain at Tiago’s side resulted in an almost overwhelming surge of possessiveness. The excess adrenaline before a mission often manifested in an increased sexual drive for Tiago, and Bond’s unexpected actions had only magnified that tenfold.

In fact, it was all he could do not to claim him right there on the floor.

Therefore, when Bond carefully took Tiago’s zipper between his teeth, Tiago placed a restraining hand on Bond’s cheek, saying, “Be sure this is what you want to do, James. Be very sure, because you are definitely playing with fire here.” His voice lowered an octave, as his own aggressive and dominant tendencies reared their ugly heads. “At some point, and very soon, I may not allow you to change your mind.”

Bond said nothing, merely pressing his cheek harder into Tiago’s hand. The he moved his upper
torso back slightly, so that Tiago could see his own burgeoning erection between his legs.

Tiago felt the last of his concerns wash away under a fresh surge of arousal. *Por dios,* but how he wanted this man. It was like some sort of irresistible, elemental need, but he firmly reined in his domineering impulses, determined to let Bond set his own pace.

At least for now.

Bond returned to his previous position, once again taking the zipper between his teeth and slowly lowering it.

He seemed somewhat at a loss for what to do next, evidently still feeling the need to keep his hands behind his back, so Tiago obligingly undid the button to his slacks himself. There were some things he didn’t expect a novice to accomplish easily on his first outing.

Bond raised his eyes long enough to give him a grateful look, and Tiago fondly cupped his cheek again, encouragingly this time.

After Tiago had removed his hand, Bond eased the resulting flaps of fabric to one side, giving himself better access, and once again nuzzled him through the silk of his pants. He tentatively ran his tongue along his length, clearly accustoming himself to the texture and the faint undertones of Tiago himself through the thin fabric.

Tiago drew in a calming breath, attempting to curb his impulse to hurry matters. Bond seemed thoroughly engrossed in what he was doing, the tense lines of his body relaxing further as he immersed himself in this novel experience. Bond’s slow, tentative approach was unintentionally inflaming to Tiago, merely emphasizing the fact that he was the only man he’d ever offered to perform this service for.

He placed a fond hand on the top of Bond’s head, letting his fingers slide through the short, spiky strands and making sure he made no overt movements to force Bond closer.

Bond had always seemed to enjoy having his hair stroked, especially now that it was once again the length he preferred, and he therefore hummed appreciatively around his current mouthful of Tiago.

Tiago was surprised enough that he had to abort the sudden, unconscious forward motion of his hips in response.

Bond pulled back slightly, startled.

“Sorry, James. You caught me by surprise.”

Bond was again looking at him through his eyelashes, his expression speculative, and the machinations running through his head were quite obvious.

Tiago chuckled. “Yes, I enjoyed that, *pequeño.*” He gave Bond’s head a slight, encouraging pat in the direction of his groin. “Now, why don’t you continue along those lines without all the excess fabric in the way, hmm?”

Bond nodded once, still choosing not to speak, and he slowly worked Tiago’s slacks off his hips with his teeth, alternating sides until they were pooled at his ankles.

Tiago toed off his shoes and socks, then stepped out of the slacks, kicking them to one side out of their way. He had been fully erect for some time, the tip of his cock now protruding from the
waistband of his pants, and he watched as Bond examined him, licking his lips in what was most likely a nervous gesture.

He stifled a moan. Bond had no idea what he was doing, and he therefore had no concept of the overtly erotic image he was projecting. “Last chance to back out, James,” he said huskily. He stepped closer to Bond. “Once you take me in your mouth, I will have you, one way or the other.”

He saw a small shiver go through Bond’s frame, but he was too lost in his own haze of arousal to attempt to pinpoint its cause.

Bond took a deep, calming breath, then started to lower Tiago’s pants, slowly, alternating sides and making tentative, measured licks to the still covered portion of his cock, as if to more slowly accclimate himself to its taste. The sight was incredibly arousing, and Tiago had to close his eyes briefly, resting his hands lightly on Bond’s shoulders to keep his balance.

He heard Bond make a questioning noise, and without opening his eyes, Tiago said, “I’m not trying to stop you, James. Far from it.” He opened his eyes, returning one hand to the top of Bond’s head. “You are doing fine. Much more than fine, as a matter of fact.”

Nodding once, Bond at long last managed to slide the pants completely off Tiago’s hips. Tiago pushed them down the rest of the way, impatient and needy, and flung them in the direction of the rest of his clothes.

Bond slowly inched closer, inhaling the scent of Tiago’s arousal all along his length, but not quite touching him. When he finally did, it was to lap delicately at the fluid leaking from the tip.

Tiago arched his back with a hiss, once more forced to close his eyes.

Bond then proceeded to taste him, seemingly randomly, varying his efforts between Tiago’s penis and balls, managing to inflame him to a fever pitch without even trying. Damn, but this man was going to kill him with his shy explorations, and he told himself firmly to be patient with him.

When he looked down, Bond was examining him like a puzzle, head tilted to one side, clearly hesitant in his inexperience.

“Just do what you like having done to yourself, James.” Tiago again ran his hand encouragingly through Bond’s hair. “I guarantee you, it won’t take long,” he added ruefully.

And it didn’t. Bond had to strain upwards somewhat to finally, finally engulf his tip in his mouth, and Tiago was forced to widen his stance to keep from losing his balance at the intense sensations. Bond suckled him for some time, getting used to the flavor and texture, before he slowly -- maddeningly so -- slid his mouth down Tiago’s length.

Gasping, Tiago stopped his progress with a firm hand on his scalp, saying, “Far enough, James. You have a fully functioning gag reflex, and trust me, you’ll have no need to deep throat me.”

Bond hummed an acknowledgment, playfully, and Tiago groaned, once more having to forcefully stifle a thrust with his hips. When he’d recovered enough of his control, he tugged at Bond’s hair warningly. “Remember what I said about playing with fire, pequeño?”

Bond returned to his task, seemingly chastised, and he began a firm, purposeful motion on Tiago’s cock, increasing his suction and doing exceedingly well for a beginner, especially limited as he was by keeping his hands clasped submissively behind his back. The sight of Bond’s lips wrapped around his cock was nearly in itself enough to bring him to completion, and Tiago gave a warning tug on Bond’s hair when he felt himself getting close.
He was pleasantly surprised when Bond merely increased the depth of his stroke, humming again as Tiago began to come, swallowing inexpertly but with determined stubbornness. Tiago grabbed onto Bond’s shoulders to keep from crumbling to the floor, gasping for breath in the aftermath.

As he slowly recovered, he found Bond watching him intently, and Tiago knelt down to kiss him, savoring the taste of his own essence in the man’s mouth. It wasn’t quite the degree of possession that his body was increasingly demanding that he take, but it was enough for now.

He finally rose, removing the rest of his clothing with a few impatient movements. “Come, James, your knees must be killing you.” He tugged Bond to his feet, pulling him against his body firmly. “Let’s move this to the bedroom, and I’ll take care of that for you,” he said, indicating Bond’s persistent erection nestled against his thigh.

Bond lowered his eyes, shaking his head in frustration, evidently longing to ask the question that was foremost in his mind but aware that his insistence in asking would merely put him right back where he started.

Well, Bond had made a determined effort just now to prove his compliance, and Tiago found he couldn’t bear to disappoint his little rat, not at this point.

Tiago lifted the man’s chin, and the uncertainty of Tiago’s ultimate decision reflected plainly in the depths of Bond’s eyes. His face, however, was as open and hopeful as he’d ever seen it.

Smiling at him gently, and praying he hadn’t allowed sentiment to force him into making a colossal mistake, Tiago said, “Then afterwards, we’ll get some rest, hmm? After all, we have a busy day planned tomorrow.”

The unabashed delight on Bond’s face cleared away his remaining doubts, at least for the moment.

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“I see now what you meant,” Bond said drily.

“Hmm?” Tiago looked around at the trash-strewn streets and graffiti adorning the close-packed, multicolored walls of the buildings they passed. “Actually, this section of town is fairly well off. Up there, in the hills, are the pueblos jóvenes -- the young towns. If they’re lucky, their homes will be made of scavenged rock and cinder block. Some have only cardboard for walls. At least here, there is usually water and electricity available.” He shrugged his shoulders. “It is amazing what basic needs become luxuries when you are that poor.”

“You sound as if you’re speaking from experience.”

Tiago again paused to consider how much to reveal. He was not especially proud of his past. “I lived here on the streets for awhile, when I was a teenager.” He turned his head to face him as they strode down what passed for a sidewalk on these narrow streets with their ubiquitous low-hanging balconies. “I was supposed to be staying with my grandmother at the time, but I found her rules too restrictive.”

“Who would’ve guessed?”

“I have never been a conformist, James.” He smiled. “It’s part of my charm.”

Bond snorted, not deigning to reply.

As he chatted with Bond, Tiago still kept a wary eye out for threats. Even in broad daylight, these
streets were not safe for those who were unwary or inattentive. He would need time to re-establish his reputation as one not to be interfered with, at least among those who hadn’t been around long enough to know of his past. And with Lima’s ever-present vagrant population, that was a truism rather than a mere possibility.

Although Bond’s stride seemed relaxed, Tiago could tell that he was also on high alert, scanning the dark alcoves and doorways surreptitiously as they passed. He kept close by his side, however, and Tiago was almost amused to note that he kept a respectful half-step behind him. Whether this was in deference to the role he had reluctantly assumed or a desire to protect Tiago’s back, he was not sure, but it worked in his favor either way.

As they approached the clinic, Tiago noted the presence of the beat-up microbus he used as transport for goods, both legal and illegal, and he knew that Diego had arrived ahead of them.

As for Tiago, he had felt the need to walk to their destination -- both to become accustomed to the rhythm of the streets again and to re-establish his presence with the locals. Some of his old network was still intact, mostly through the auspices of the small time drug running operation his men had maintained for him, but he wasn’t certain it was extensive enough for his current purposes.

He would soon see.

Tiago led the way through the waiting room, nearly empty at this early hour, and held up a staying hand to Bond as they approached the two individuals arguing loudly in Spanish in the administrative section of the clinic.

One was Diego, of course, and the other was the woman whose message had started this whole ordeal.

She stopped her tirade when they walked in, looked over at Tiago, and said in English, “What are you doing here?”

Next to him, he noted Bond’s raised eyebrow, but he wasn’t sure if it was related to her belligerent attitude toward Tiago or her extremely strong American Southern accent.

Tiago crossed his arms, smiling at her. “I own the place, remember?”

“As if you’d ever let me forget.”

Sighing, Tiago said, “James, this is Dr. Michelle Pennington, the director of this clinic.” He bowed his head in Michelle’s direction. “Michelle, this is James Bond, my current . . . companion.”

“Oh. He’s not as pretty as your last one.” She placed both hands on her hips. “Mind you, he obviously hasn’t fallen out of an ugly tree and hit every branch on the way down, but he’s still not nearly as pretty. You’re slipping.”

Tiago spread his arms wide. “I’m afraid there’s no accounting for taste, my dear.”

Michelle glared at him again. “Don’t you dare call me that. Regardless of what you provide for this clinic and the people here, I still think you’re lower than a snake’s belly in a wagon rut.” She pointed an accusatory finger at him. “Do try to remember that, won’t you, El Astuto?” She spat his Peruvian nickname like a curse.

Tiago smiled again, admiring her spunk, as always. “As if you’d ever let me forget,” he repeated back to her.
She appeared ready to fire back another retort, but Diego put a hand on her elbow, saying, “Michelle, he has come to help.”

“I still think that involving the authorities has got be a better option than involving him.”

Diego’s face paled. “Michelle, please, promise me you will not make that attempt. You know how well that worked for me.”

She turned to Diego and sighed, returning the gentle pressure on her elbow with her hand. “Yes, I do know. I’m sorry, Diego, but it’s sorta like asking the Devil to mind your baking. You may end up with a good lookin’ loaf, but you’ll never know for sure what’s in it.”

“I think you might be surprised,” Diego said, glancing over at Tiago.

Michelle snorted, obviously disbelieving. “You’re not actually tryin’ to tell me he’s changed, are you? Look at him. He’s obviously still treatin’ other folks like chattel!”

Diego gave her a reproving look, but Michelle just shook her head. “Come along then. I’ve set up a makeshift morgue in one of the storerooms.”

As Tiago approached her on their way to the rear of the clinic, he leaned over and whispered, “You needn’t worry. I can’t bake.”

The firebrand actually took a swing at him this time, but Bond caught her hand, brought it up to his lips to kiss briefly, and then just as silently released her.

Michelle gave Bond a considering look, hands again on her hips, before sweeping abruptly past them.

Tiago glared at Bond. “What was that for?”

Bond gave him his best innocent look, meaning he failed miserably at it. “What? I should have let her hit you?”

“You know exactly what I meant, pequeño.” He looked Bond squarely in the eyes. “There will be no more sampling the merchandise. You’re officially off the market.”

Bond actually had the nerve to be taken aback by Tiago’s concern. “Tiago, the woman’s at least ten years older than me and thinks I’m your bloody sex slave. She’s hardly going to throw herself at me, especially considering her obvious dislike of you.”

Tiago straightened his shoulders. “Actually, her dislike of me makes her more likely to succumb to your charms. She likes to rescue people. She’ll want to get you out of my evil clutches.”

“I happen to like being in your evil clutches.” He paused, considering. “Most of the time.”

“I am quite serious, James.” He reached out to grip the love bite on Bond’s neck that he hadn’t allowed him to conceal. “You will behave.”

Bond looked ready to protest, but then sighed, lowering his eyes obediently. “Yes, Tiago.”

Tiago studied him for some time, attempting to gauge his sincerity, before he finally released Bond and followed Diego and Michelle to the back of the clinic. He needed to resolve this issue and get Bond back to the island before he killed somebody.

Primarily because it would totally defeat his purpose if he actually ended up killing his little rat
himself.

When they met up with Diego and Michelle, the woman was twisting her slightly graying, long blonde hair into a knot on the top of her head. She then pulled on a surgical mask and gloves, and with a curt nod, led them into the storeroom.

She became all business as she entered the room, her voice bereft of its previous antagonism and most of her accent, which seemed to emerge stronger when she was angry or upset. “I’ve kept the body from the worst of decomposition through a combination of refrigeration and ice, but it’s still not pretty.”

“When the family seen the body yet?” Diego asked softly.

“For identification purposes, yes,” Michelle confirmed, then sighed. “It took me quite some time to convince them, considering how long she’s been missing.” She shrugged. “They finally admitted the truth when the mother found her rather distinctive birthmark. ‘Horrified’ doesn’t begin to cover her reaction when I explained everything to her.”

“We will need to see her, Michelle,” Diego said.

Michelle sighed. “I thought as much, which is why I’ve kept her this long, but I’ll be forced to release the body to her family shortly. They’re becoming quite insistent, for religious reasons, to get her interred.”

Diego nodded, then closed his eyes and took a deep breath in an apparent effort to steady himself while Michelle wheeled the body out in a stretcher.

Tiago knew what he was about to see as well, but it didn’t make it any easier.

It never did.

When she brought the stretcher to a stop, Michelle focused her attention on Diego and said, “Like the others, she’s been blinded and has had her tongue cut out.” She took a deep breath. “Extreme violence, even to children, isn’t an isolated incident here unfortunately, so I had a tox screen performed, just to make sure.”

Diego exhaled softly. “You found the Gn-RH analogue?”

“Yes, in a rather acute concentration, just like before.”

“Let us see her then. We owe her memory that much, poor child,” Diego said.

When Michelle pulled the shroud back to the victim’s waist, Bond actually gasped. He looked over at Tiago. “She can’t be more than ten years old,” he said in muted dismay.

“Yes,” Michelle said, “according to her family, she would have turned seventeen in two months.”

Bond looked at her sharply, disbelieving, and Tiago put a restraining hand on his elbow before his pretense as a compliant sex slave was completely blown away by his instinctive attempt at interrogation.

However, Michelle was already looking at Bond with fierce attention, her formidable intellect having already come to its own conclusions. She glanced over at Diego, who nodded, then she turned to speak directly to Bond, ignoring Tiago completely.
“There is a particularly vicious cartel here in Lima — they are called firmas in Peru — who have a rather unique and focused . . . enterprise.” She nearly spat the term and had to visibly gather herself before she could continue. “Prostitution is legal in Peru over the age of eighteen, but there is a smaller and far more profitable segment of the target population who prefer their . . . partners to be younger than that. Much younger.”

She took a moment to insure Bond understood, then continued, “Child prostitutes are unfortunately rather easy to obtain in Peru and are regrettably quite common. They are tempted by offers of profitable employment, lured by good-looking boys off the street, but with so many poor and destitute in the city, most are simply stolen from their families with little fear of reprisal.” She glanced over at Diego, who nodded again. “Unfortunately for the firmas, there is always a time limit involved. Get the child too young, and they are too easily . . . damaged. Too old, and the onset of puberty reduces the value of their merchandise considerably.”

She looked over at Diego, who continued the explanation. “Ten years ago, while I was working in this clinic, I came across a young girl, one much like this, whose nearly hysterical parents told me she was far, far older than her biological age appeared to be.” He shrugged. “I was skeptical at first. Their child had been missing for years, and I assumed they had simply misidentified her body in a desire to find closure.”

Diego sighed. “But they were so insistent that I ran a toxicology screen, several of them, and while there were no narcotics or other common drugs in her blood, I did find an anomalous hormone agonist — a substance called GnRH.” He must have noticed Bond’s total lack of comprehension, because he added, “It is a therapy given to children with a condition known as precocious puberty, in which the child begins developing secondary sexual characteristics at a far younger age than is normal. This drug directly inhibits the pituitary gland. The pituitary gland stops sending messages to stimulate the ovaries and testes to produce sex hormones, thereby arresting the onset of puberty.”

Beside Tiago, Bond drew in a harsh breath as he glanced down at the body on the stretcher.

Diego nodded. “Yes, if you give GnRH to a normal child, it will inhibit puberty for as long as they are given the injections, which are usually administered on a monthly basis.”

Bond looked as if he might be physically ill, and Michelle quietly pulled the shroud back over the young woman’s body.

“And the local authorities actually permit this sort of thing to happen?” Bond asked incredulously.

Diego turned suddenly pale, putting a hand to his head. He shook his head silently when Michelle spoke quietly to him, but he nevertheless allowed her to guide him out of the storeroom.

“That is a story for a different time, James,” Tiago said regretfully. “Suffice to say, the ‘local authorities’ have little interest in cases like this.”

Bond looked confused. “But Diego said on the island that they were ‘back in operation again.’ Who stopped them the first time?”

“Well, I did, of course.” Tiago sighed. “The problem is — I obviously didn’t stop them hard enough.”

Chapter End Notes
"The Sly One"
“I am not going out in public dressed like this.”

Tiago turned Bond away from the mirror and examined him critically. “I think you look just fine. Really, really fine, as a matter of fact.”

Bond crossed his arms across his chest, which regretfully blocked Tiago’s view of the nipples peering out through the mesh shirt, and glared at him.

Tiago sighed. “What exactly is wrong with the clothes this time, James?”

Bond eyed him incredulously, as if he were blind. “I look like a whore!”

Rolling his eyes, Tiago said, “That was the general idea, if you’d care to remember.”

When Bond started to snap back a sharp reply, Tiago merely narrowed his eyes and the man subsided, although obviously fuming internally.

“If it’s any consolation, James, your extra workouts have definitely begun to pay dividends,” Tiago said, stepping back to get a better view of the overall effect.

Yes, he’d have to make sure he gave his tailor a bonus this month. Besides the eggshell blue mesh shirt, Bond was wearing a pair of pure white Lycra slacks that clung to him like a second skin, leaving nothing to the imagination. Tiago had not allowed him pants, of course, since the lines would have totally ruined the otherwise smooth contours of the sheer fabric.

Bond also wore a pair of white canvas shoes and no socks. The slacks were just long enough to cover Bond’s collar, but the thin material couldn’t quite disguise the darker color or the distinctive outline of the black band. It was necessary for his plans that Bond attract attention, but perversely, he still didn’t appreciate others lusting after his prize. Tiago hoped that having the symbol of his ownership barely visible would appease his overactive possessive streak somewhat, but he wasn’t too terribly confident of that fact.

It was either this or lock Bond away somewhere safe, and he knew how well that was likely to go over.

Tiago eyed him contemplatively, cupping his own chin with one hand while supporting his elbow with the other hand. “Hmm. You’re still missing something.”

Bond coloured slightly under the intense scrutiny and turned back toward the mirror. “Of course I’m missing something -- at least another two layers of clothing would be a good start.”

With a barely restrained growl, Tiago spun him around and pushed him back toward the wall, shoving a knee between Bond’s legs to spread them. He pushed Bond’s shoulders back against the wall with one hand while pulling forward with the other hand on his arse, effectively bowing Bond’s back and giving him no leverage whatsoever. He then latched onto the man’s exposed neck with his teeth at his most sensitive spot while rubbing his buttocks in a firm circle.

He ground against Bond’s groin with his thigh until he heard the man let out a subdued groan, then
stepped back abruptly and released him.

Bond slumped backward against the wall, breathing heavily, his tumescent cock now clearly outlined in the thin slacks.

Tiago smiled, pleased with the results. “There. Now you’re perfect.” He grabbed Bond’s upper arm and pulled him toward the door, supporting him when the agent attempted to pull back and then stumbled slightly.

He wasn’t about to tolerate any shenanigans on Bond’s part, and the man was apparently well aware of this, as he offered only a token resistance against Tiago’s manhandling of him.

At least, until Tiago crossed the entrance hall and opened the door to the bright sunlight outside.

Bond let out a slightly horrified, “Tiago, no!” as Tiago hauled him out onto the steps and down toward the street.

Tiago merely chuckled. That’ll teach his little rat not to criticize Tiago’s taste in clothes. Without the barrier of pants, the slick material of the slacks would only exacerbate his existing erection as they walked, and Bond was evidently very aware of this fact.

As they reached street level and Bond once more attempted to pull back, Tiago released his arm and encroached bodily into his personal space. “If we are going to make this work, you will stop acting like a terrified virgin and more like the properly subjugated courtesan you are supposed to be, or I will leave you here at the villa and have Luis sit on you, if necessary.” He paused to consider his last words. “Given the strain your previous antics has put on his equilibrium, he might actually enjoy that, so I’d think about this carefully if I were you.”

Bond looked away for a few moments, chewing on his bottom lip, before he finally turned back to Tiago and nodded slightly. “I can do this.”

Tiago merely stared at him for a few moments before saying, “We shall see, pequeño, we shall see.”

However, this time when Tiago headed down the sidewalk in the direction of Callao, Bond walked beside and slightly behind him without restraint. Tiago did consciously shorten his longer stride so that Bond wouldn’t have to struggle to keep up with him, especially given his other . . . difficulties at the moment.

They definitely attracted attention, but again, that had been Tiago’s goal in the first place. He had his own very distinctive, bright blonde hair and Bond . . . well, Bond didn’t require anything other than the way he looked and the way he was dressed to collect more than his fair share of appreciative stares as well as the occasional wolf whistle.

Nevertheless, Bond remained on guard against potential threats, but he managed to do so while keeping his eyes respectfully lowered and mostly centered on Tiago as they walked. All field agents developed a sixth sense against danger, or else they didn’t survive in the field very long.

Glancing back at him, Tiago had a feeling the lowered eyes also had one additional benefit — helping to hide Bond’s obvious acute embarrassment. This was an emotion Bond clearly had little prior experience with, but again, if it helped to curtail the man’s natural aggressive tendencies, all the better. As Tiago had learned long ago, the easiest way to control Bond was to keep him off balance.

After he decided they had drawn enough notice for his purposes, Tiago flagged down a passing
combi for the remainder of the journey into the Rimac district. Bond eyed the dilapidated, wheezing Toyota HiAce with some distrust, but he seemed to approve of the driver’s skill at weaving the vehicle at reckless, breakneck speeds through the dense traffic. Of course, Tiago had seen Bond drive, so he wasn’t surprised he’d be so enamored of this example of Lima’s nearly homicidal taxi system.

However, Bond was less appreciative of the cobrador — the driver’s partner in luring customers into the vehicle. The van seated up to 15 people, but the cobrador had decided to sit right next to Bond in the empty vehicle, ogling him openly and solicitously holding onto his thigh as the driver careened wildly around a corner.

Tiago was just about to inform him that he had the situation well in hand, but Bond, with his head still properly bowed, looked up at the man through his eyelashes. His expression must have been somewhat less than coquettish, because the cobrador removed his hand as if burned and abruptly decided to seat himself elsewhere.

Shaking his head, Tiago leaned over and whispered, “I thought you were going to behave.”

Bond looked at him innocently. “I didn’t say a word.”

“You hardly need to, pequeño. I’m well aware of the intimidating effect of your best glare,” He gripped his shoulder tightly in warning. “From now on, allow me to ward off any admirers with frisky hands, hmm?”

Bond sighed. “Yes, Tiago.”

Tiago wasn’t at all surprised at Bond’s less than demure demeanor. It was like trying to disguise a tiger as a housecat and expect him to sit tamely in your lap. It might be relatively easy to lure him there, but you shouldn’t be surprised if he decides to have you for lunch afterwards.

It was approaching early evening by the time they arrived in the Rimac district, and Tiago had the driver drop them off some distance from their destination. Michelle had been working in this district’s clinic when one of its staff had brought in the maimed girl. She’d been found not far from a brothel that Tiago knew catered to outre tastes, so he had decided to start his search there.

Bond walked quietly behind him for a few blocks, but then said, “You’ll have to fill me in at some point about what we’ll be facing here.”

Tiago turned his head, eyeing him thoughtfully. Bond was unfortunately correct. It wasn’t wise to keep him completely in the dark, not if he expected to maintain his cooperation through what was to come. “I’ve had encounters with this particular firmas twice before,” he explained as they walked. “They call themselves Los Hados Rigurosos -- ‘Cruel Fate’, but they usually shorten it to Los Hados -- ‘The Fates’. The last time I encountered them was about a dozen years ago, after I had first met Diego.” He sighed. “He was running the local clinic here, making very little money, but knowing the residents needed some form of medical care that the government was simply unable to provide.”

Bond glanced at him thoughtfully. “That was just after Hong Kong.”

Tiago nodded. “I had returned to Lima to lick my wounds, and he helped me to recover, at least from the physical aspects.”

He paused long enough that Bond had to prompt him. “And he encountered one of those mutilated girls then?”
Tiago glanced over at him. “Yes, he was extremely horrified and outraged, of course, and being the civic-minded person that he was, he took his findings to the district’s local Serenazgo, or security service.”

“They refused to help him?” Bond asked, clearly puzzled.

Tiago shook his head. “If only it had been that simple. You see, during that time period Peru had a serious corruption problem with its police and security forces.” He paused, considering his recent investigations. “This is still true in many respects today. However, at the time Diego had gone to seek justice, this particular district’s Serenazgo had already been bought out by Los Hados.”

Bond walked in silence for a few moments, then said, “They went after Diego’s children.”

It wasn’t a question, and Tiago was more than mildly surprised. Diego was extremely reluctant to even mention his children to anyone, but then, he did seem rather overly fond of Bond. “He told you about them?”

Bond shook his head. “Not in so many words, but I could tell something was distressing him any time they were mentioned.”

“Distressed is an understatement. He came home to find that his wife and children, aged five and seven, had been savagely mutilated.” Tiago shook his head sadly. “Unfortunately, since he was a doctor, he could estimate just how long they must have taken to die.”

“Bloody hell.”

Tiago nodded. “Diego is not normally a violent man, but when I found him, he was trying to load a clip into a gun and failing miserably at it. I owed him a favor, and besides, I’m not overly fond of those who can so casually maim children, so I told him there was a better way.”

Tiago noticed that Bond’s attention had drifted from maintaining proper appearances, so he stopped walking and turned to him. “Your distraction is understandable, James,” he said, cupping his cheek, “but you must remember your place, hmm?”

Bond nodded, lowering his eyes once more and leaning slightly into his hand.

Tiago smiled, running his other hand possessively through his hair. “Good boy. I’ll make a proper submissive of you yet.”

“Not bloody likely,” Bond whispered, only for his ears.

Tiago laughed, attracting the attention of the few remaining pedestrians who weren’t already staring openly at Bond.

To maintain appearances and to gain them some relative privacy, Tiago backed Bond against the rough stone of the nearest building.

Although he grunted at his sudden impact with the wall, Bond lifted his head obediently when Tiago bent down to kiss him. When Tiago finally released his mouth, Bond said, “You went after the firmas cybernetically, didn’t you?”

“Uh-huh,” Tiago confirmed, staying pressed close to Bond. “Whoever their capo was at the time thought he was being progressive. Everything from records, to transactions, to income, to communications were handled entirely via computers via a secure network. They had an extremely competent security and firewall system, but not enough to keep me out, of course.”
Bond leaned forward to claim his mouth this time. “Of course,” he murmured against Tiago’s lips. “Point and click. You cleaned them out financially?”

Tiago shook his head. “That would have only been a temporary measure until they earned more. No, at that time, they were closely affiliated with one of the larger Mexican cartels for their drug distribution. I convinced said Mexican cartel, electronically, that they were being cheated by *Los Hados*. The Mexicans took care of the rest.” Tiago kissed Bond’s nose playfully. “They really didn’t appreciate being double-crossed.”

Bond’s eyes widened in comprehension. “The *el guiso* torture you’d mentioned before?”

Tiago nodded. “Among other grisly methods of death and dismemberment. They were really quite imaginative.” Needing to clear his head of those gruesome scenes, he reached down to stroke Bond’s arse, closing his eyes and reveling in the feel of firm buttock through silky fabric.

“Tiago!” Bond hissed, but he didn’t physically protest the action, merely grabbing onto Tiago’s hips for balance. He shook his head slightly, as if to clear it. “But the Mexican cartel didn’t get all the *firmas*’ members. *You* didn’t get them all,” he added, most likely in an effort to distract Tiago from his extremely public display of affection.

He decided to allow it, stilling his stroking hand and feeling Bond settle his weight closer against him in apparent gratitude. “Obviously not. And given the age of the victim Michelle found, they’ve most likely been operating somewhere else and have only recently returned to Lima.”

Bond rested his head against Tiago’s shoulder, wrapping his arms around his waist. “But they’ve left no recent trace electronically,” he said.

Resting his chin on Bond’s forehead, Tiago confirmed, “None whatsoever, so they’ve evidently discovered the reason for their previous woes. No, I’ll have to try a more direct approach, and even though I have no idea who their mysterious capo is, I *do* know the name of his rather depraved second-in-command.” He kissed Bond on the forehead. “And that, dear heart, is where *you* come in.”

Q took another slow sip of his Earl Gray and let his eyes rove over the multitude of ever-changing video clips from the relatively few CCTV cameras he’d been able to access in Lima. To say the video coverage was patchy was a gross understatement. Lima has a population of more than 9 million people, and only a small proportion of them could afford the luxury of security cameras. The local government certainly hadn’t bothered, except for the most affluent areas.

The spy satellite feeds were also intermittent, as none of the major powers had an interest in maintaining geosynchronous satellite coverage over Peru.

Coincidentally, the most consistent number of CCTV’s were operated by factions of the Lima Underworld themselves. They obviously had access to a sufficient amount of cash, and they were by necessity a suspicious, distrustful sort. What better way to keep tabs on your assets, as well as the competition?

In any case, he was looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack, but he couldn’t even narrow his search down to one field, much less one bleeding haystack. They could have moved Eleanor outside of Lima long before now, and there was only so much he could do with the facial recognition software, especially with a child.
Stranger still, there had been no ransom demands, and no one had publicly claimed responsibility for the abduction. As a matter of fact, there had been no telephone or electronic contact of any kind, so Q had nothing he could utilize to track back to the source. Her kidnappers were either totally inept or very, very cautious, and there wasn’t enough data for him to even begin making the determination as to which.

So he was forced to do this the old-fashioned way, and he was very afraid his eyeballs were going to fall out of their sockets, he’d been at this so long.

He was looking for something, anything out of the ordinary, so he therefore took note of the man with a very unusual hair colour given the predominant genetic makeup of the local populace. Q paused the other feeds to get a closer look, more out of curiosity and a need to relieve his boredom than any expectation that he was in any way connected to Eleanor’s disappearance. The other man walking slightly behind him was also worth perusing, but for a completely different reason. His blonde hair wasn’t nearly as vivid as the first man’s, but he had a particularly luscious body and was wearing an outfit that made that fact all too apparent.

This man kept his eyes lowered to the sidewalk, which Q thought a little odd given the obviously dangerous area they were walking in, but when he did lift his head and turn it slightly to look at the other man, Q dropped his favourite Scrabble mug onto the floor and didn’t even notice when it shattered into a million pieces.

No. It can’t be.

He hastily hit record and opened the main feed into another frame so he could expand the image. It wasn’t high definition by any means, but Q would know that face anywhere.

Yes, it was. He’d found him -- he’d actually found 007!

Jubilant, he started to reach for the intercom to notify M, but something odd in the other frame -- the live feed -- caused him to hesitate. Bond’s uncharacteristic eyes-down demeanor had been unusual enough, but as Q expanded the live video feed, he watched as 007 was aggressively and violently manhandled into a shallow alcove without any attempt by Bond to resist.

Q’s eyes widened as the man then proceeded to openly molest Bond on the busy, active street. He could be seeing nothing more than a simple lover’s tryst, in which case this was a horrible breach of privacy, but Q had never known Bond to show interest in anyone who wasn’t of the opposite sex. Not even reluctantly as part of a mission requirement. He’d researched this very, very thoroughly, so he was quite certain of that one annoying fact.

When Bond wrapped his arms around the other man’s waist and rested his head meekly on his shoulder, Q actually pulled back the field of view, attempting to locate anyone or anything that might be forcing Bond’s uncharacteristically passive reactions.

Nothing. Bond was obviously not being restrained, and it didn’t appear as if anyone were threatening him with any sort of weapon, so what exactly was he seeing here? Could this be an aspect of Bond’s psyche that no one had ever known about -- something he didn’t want anyone to know about? Is this why he’d disappeared off the grid, again, or was there something more sinister in play here that Q simply wasn’t seeing?

Determined to get a name and background on the man Bond was with, Q rewound the video until he could get an image of the other man’s face. It wasn’t a full frontal view, but it was enough for his sophisticated software. He’d certainly spent enough time fine-tuning the existing program to meet his exacting specifications.
As he initiated the program, he turned back to the live feed, but Bond and the other man had disappeared from the field of view, and there were no other cameras in the area that Q could use to follow them.

Taking a deep breath to ease his frustration, he sat back and waited for the facial recognition software to do its thing. He decided to delay notifying M until he had more concrete information. He’d learned through bitter experience that “I don’t know” wasn’t an acceptable answer when she asked you a question.

He searched his desk in vain for his tea, until he finally noticed the shattered mess on the floor.

Bloody hell. He’d really liked that mug.

Q sighed. Regardless, it would be worth it if he could finally bring Bond home.

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“This had better be worth it, Tiago,” Bond said.

Tiago looked over at the obviously disgruntled Bond through the haze of cigarette and hashish smoke. “You’d best become accustomed to calling me ‘Raoul’ from now on.” He saw the fleeting look of discomfort cross the man’s face, and he pressed in closer to him, curious. “Is that going to be a problem for you, James?”

Bond took a deep breath, shaking his head. “I still have difficulty integrating the two of you sometimes.”

Tiago raised an eyebrow. “I’m the same person I’ve always been.”

Bond lowered his eyes, and somehow Tiago knew it wasn’t a conscious part of his role-playing this time. “Are you sure about that?” he finally asked.

Tiago wasn’t surprised that Bond associated ‘Raoul’ with the more uncomfortable aspects of his training, but this was another quirk that could actually help Bond maintain the required frame of mind for his role in this little drama. He decided it wouldn’t hurt to encourage that little fact.

“Yes, I’m very sure, mi ratita,” he replied, letting his voice darken somewhat.

Bond actually shivered in the close, dank heat. He pulled away ever so slightly from Tiago, but then jumped when someone’s hand again found his arse in the packed room.

This over-familiarity was what had evidently irritated Bond in the first place, but the brothel was too crowded for Tiago to take much offense at the ‘accidental’ brushing of someone’s groping hand against his property. He was here to get a particular person’s attention, not to start a brawl, but Tiago had to keep reminding himself of that.

Well, two birds with one stone, and all that rubbish. He wrapped an arm around Bond’s back and walked him over to a chair as far away from the overdriven speakers blasting out a bass beat for the dancers gyrating on a raised platform as he could.

Bond looked at the single available chair with adorable confusion, so Tiago merely sat down and pulled the unsuspecting Bond onto his lap. He grabbed onto Bond’s shoulder for balance, but Tiago restrained him firmly when he attempted to rise.

“Tsk, tsk, James. Here I very thoughtfully found a way to protect your delectable arse from further
abuse, and you try to refuse my generosity.”

“You could have asked first,” Bond said.

“And your answer would have been?” At Bond’s resulting glare, Tiago said, “I thought as much. Now, relax. You’re supposed to be enjoying my attentiveness toward you.”

But Bond was still looking around, evidently concerned someone would notice his presumed undignified position, so Tiago decided it was time for a more aggressive stance on his part.

He leaned forward to nuzzle at Bond’s throat, and the man unconsciously lifted his chin to allow him better access. Good. At least some of his training still held. Tiago continued to lick at Bond’s larynx until he swallowed reflexively. The tension in Bond’s muscles abruptly eased when he realized that Tiago was likely to go to even more extreme lengths if he continued to disobey him.

Tiago hummed his approval as Bond allowed himself to relax into his hold. “There, that wasn’t so bad, was it?”

Bond sighed. “No.”

“Say my name, James.”

A slight hesitation this time. “Raoul,” he finished softly.

“Good. Are you thirsty, James?”

At Bond’s nod, Tiago motioned to the barmaid. When she brought back only one beer, Bond looked at her curiously, but she at least had understood the dynamics of their supposed relationship.

Tiago took a long swig out of the glass, then held it to Bond’s lips with an upraised eyebrow and a restraining grip on Bond’s free hand to prevent him from reaching for it himself. To give the man credit, Bond barely hesitated before opening his mouth to allow Tiago to provide him with some of the contents.

However, he did shift uncomfortably in Tiago’s lap when he attempted to repeat the gesture, so Tiago merely held the still chilled glass against a bare nipple that protruded temptingly through the mesh shirt.

Bond yelped in surprise.

Tiago quickly put the beer down on the table, then forcibly pressed Bond’s face into his neck to hide the man’s resultant indignant expression from others in the room.

So much for being a proper submissive. Would the man never learn?

Tiago was so engrossed in enforcing Bond’s cooperation that he failed to notice when his quarry finally approached him.

“Having some trouble with this one, El Astuto?” The man chuckled softly. “You always did seem to gravitate toward the difficult ones.”

Forcing himself to relax, Tiago turned his head to address the speaker. “Ah, Marcos. It is good to see you again.” Keeping Bond’s face turned into his neck, Tiago used his free hand to stroke down his flank and settle onto a hip, stroking it lightly. “I’ve always felt the spirited ones are eventually
worth the extra time one must invest in their training, don’t you think?”

The man smiled at him, genuinely by all appearances, but then, Raoul Silva had once been an excellent source of additional income, apart from the strictly limited fees the man had received from managing this brothel. “If you say so, Raoul. I’ve always preferred mine a little more compliant.”

“Ah, but this one is learning, very quickly.” He moved the stroking hand to Bond’s groin, and if Bond gasped aloud at that shocking degree of intimacy in public, at least he didn’t protest verbally. Not yet, anyway.

Marcos eyed Bond for a few moments, then said, “Are you here strictly for a social call, or is there something I can assist you with? Perhaps you’d care for someone a little more . . . pliable as a change?”

“Hmm,” Tiago said, continuing his teasing stroking of Bond’s cock. “Not for me personally — I really am quite enamored of this one.” Bond had responded to his attentions, albeit completely unwillingly, and he made a soft noise of apparent dismay in consequence.

Marcos chuckled softly. “I can see why. At least he’s responsive, if not exceptionally well behaved.”

Tiago cupped Bond’s neck, stroking him just so, and Bond gasped again, shifting helplessly in Tiago’s lap. “Oh, he’s very, very responsive.”

Marco was obviously entranced. “I agree wholeheartedly.” He licked his lips. “He doesn’t dance, does he? I think he could make good money here if you chose to share him. I’d split the profits with you.”

Bond immediately stiffened in Tiago’s arms, and Tiago turned his head to nip him slightly in the neck as a rebuke. “Alas, I must decline. For all his talents in bed, he doesn’t have enough self-confidence to perform well for others, I’m afraid.”

“Pity,” Marcos said. He was approached just then by one of his employees, and he turned away to answer the man’s question.

Bond took the opportunity to whisper in Tiago’s ear. “The first chance I get, I’m going to gut you. Slowly.”

Tiago laughed aloud. Bond had behaved himself rather well, all things considered, so Tiago could afford to be generous. He said at a normal volume, for Marcos’ benefit, “You always say the sexiest things, pequeño.” He turned Bond’s head for a kiss and invaded his mouth mercilessly, still stroking his erection through his slacks.

Bond voluntarily turned his head back into Tiago’s neck when his mouth was finally released, but he apparently had an ulterior motive for doing so. “I am going to gut you, then hang you by your entrails from the nearest lamp post,” he clarified, speaking quietly into Tiago’s ear while trying to unobtrusively shift away from the tormenting hand.

Tiago didn’t allow it. Bond had definitely made an impression on Marcos, who was generally not even interested in other men. More importantly, Tiago was certain Marcos would pass the information regarding ‘Raoul’s’ latest acquisition to his immediate superior, whom Tiago knew to be definitely bisexual . . . as well as one who preferred a very specific type of partner. Tiago was very cognizant of just how much Bond would appeal to that man — at least, this improvised facade
Marcos turned back to face them. “My apologies, Raoul, but you were saying earlier about your purpose for this visit?”

Tiago moved his hand to Bond’s hip before his little rat lost what little patience he had remaining. “I have an important client I am attempting to impress. He has an established preference for young female companionship.” Tiago raised an eyebrow. “Very young, if you catch my meaning.”

“I see,” Marcos said, looking around to insure they were not being overheard. “And this is something you cannot provide yourself?” he inquired.

Tiago indicated the man seated in his lap. “Not my speciality, I’m afraid. You know I’ve always preferred my acquisitions to be mature and therefore more experienced.” He patted Bond’s hip. “Not that this one is all that experienced, mind you, but that’s only made him more interesting to train.” Tiago kissed him fondly on his cheek, and then looked up at Marcos. “My client is interested in long-term companionship, and many years ago, I remember hearing of a particular faction who specialized in just such a thing. Do you know if anyone is still providing that type of service, Marcos?”

Marcos looked away, as if considering. “I am afraid not, my friend. The government has recently made a point of targeting those establishments that are rumored to employ underage girls, and it has therefore become difficult to acquire such a rarity anymore.” He shrugged. “If I should hear of someone who may be assistance, can I can still contact you at your old address?”

Tiago smiled. “Yes, I’ve returned to my villa in Punta de Callao. You can reach me there.” He nodded briefly. “I thank you for your time, Marcos.”

“Buenos dios,” Marcos said, then disappeared through a curtain at the back of the room.

“He’s lying,” Bond said distinctly into Tiago’s ear.

“Clearly so,” Tiago confirmed. “He used to be a trustworthy source for me at one time, so he’s either trying to protect me, trying to protect himself, or . . .”

“Trying to protect someone else,” Bond said, finally turning his head to look Tiago in the eye.

“Great minds think alike.” Tiago patted Bond’s hip again. “It’s time for you to get up anyway. My legs are getting numb.”

“And whose fault is that?”

“Well, it’s certainly not mine. You’ll simply have to cut back on the flan that Diego is always trying to feed you.” He smiled at Bond’s glare, patting his cheek. “You’re so cute. No, my dear, you needn’t worry — that outfit doesn’t make you look fat.” He shoved Bond off his lap, then took him by the arm. “Come, James, I want to do a quick reconnoiter before someone has the time to add any additional security.”

It was very nearly dark when they exited the brothel, and Tiago led them down a few blocks before taking a right into a narrow, noisome alley. He found a rusted fire escape ladder at the back of one of the buildings, and tentatively tested the bottom rung. Shrugging, he hauled himself up onto the ladder, and when it didn’t immediately send him tumbling back to the ground, climbed the rickety thing to the roof.
Bond had wisely waited for him to finish his ascent before adding his own weight to the decaying ladder, and Tiago gave him a hand over the protruding ledge when he reached the top.

Grimacing, Bond had to adjust himself in the tight slacks. “Next time you plan on doing rooftop reconnaissance, I want to wear something that’s not so likely to split at the seams if I move the wrong way.”

Tiago grinned at him in the waning daylight. “You don’t need to worry on my account — I’d definitely appreciate the view regardless.”

“You are *not* helping.”

Tiago raised an eyebrow at him. “I wasn’t trying to.” He jerked his head in the direction of the brothel. “Come, James, before it becomes too dark to see.”

The buildings were crammed so close together that they had no problems making their way back across the rooftops to the building immediately adjacent to the brothel, even with Bond’s complaints about his relative lack of mobility. There was an alley between the two buildings, and their vantage point was far enough away that they had a good view of both the side and the rear entrances.

If Marcos was planning on doing what Tiago was predicting he’d do, it would be via the rear access to the building.

Bond knelt down next to Tiago. “What is it you’re expecting to see?”

“That,” he said, jerking his chin downward.

A dark, late model van drove up the alley between the two buildings and parked in the back. Its rear windows were covered by some type of dark, obscuring fabric, and even the front windows were heavily tinted. As they watched, two men armed with submachine guns exited the rear of the van, then stood at either side of the doors.

A few minutes later, the rear door of the brothel opened, and a half dozen young girls were herded out to the van, their hands tied behind their backs. One of them, with long, dark hair and an elfin face, stumbled and fell to her knees. One of the guards hauled her to her feet, swearing at her in Spanish, and the girl responded heatedly in English. Her voice carried easily in the dense, humid air, and oddly enough, she had an easily discernible British accent.

Tiago saw Bond stiffen beside him. “I’ve seen that girl before, Tiago.”

She wasn’t at all familiar to Tiago, but then, he’d been out of touch with most things British for quite some time. “Where, James?” he asked, curious.

Bond turned toward him, his face pale. “There was a framed photo of her in M’s flat.”

Tiago stared at him for a few moments, then said merely, “Well, that's going to do bugger all to help.”

Chapter End Notes

I can't even write a short *chapter*, much less a short fanfic. *Sigh*
My continued and sincere thanks to those of you who are still sticking with this 'fic that will not end.' I appreciate your support more than I can say!
“I’ve been asked by the Prime Minister to schedule your retirement ceremony. He would prefer a date within the next two weeks.”

M stared at the man seated across from her desk and raised an eyebrow. “Indeed? I hadn’t realized affairs of state were quite so sedate that he required such an immediate distraction to disrupt the monotony.”

Mallory merely sighed. “Olivia. You shouldn’t be interpreting this as some sort of punishment. The Ministry has been, in general, quite pleased with the results you’ve achieved while in charge of MI6. A GCMG is not awarded on a whim.”

“I see.” M clasped her hands together on the desk. “I assume since they ‘generally’ approve of my accomplishments that there is something in particular that is necessitating my ‘retirement’?”

There was a slight pause, and it was obvious Mallory was choosing his words carefully. “There are those who feel the Service needs to be granted a new . . . direction.”

“I see.” M tilted her head ever so slightly. “And would you be one of those individuals gifted with this miraculous foresight?”

Mallory had the grace to at least look vaguely uncomfortable. “You can’t argue against the fiasco that ensued as a result of the stolen hard drive.”

“The hard drive was returned.”

“There were still agents who were assassinated as a direct result.”

“Not as many of ours as we had first feared, apparently.” M raised an eyebrow. “You really should pay more attention to the daily assessment briefings if you wish to assume effective control of MI6.”

“The interim analyses on those agents’ presumed loyalties have as yet to be confirmed.” Mallory straightened in his chair. “Regardless, you have allowed yourself to become personally involved in these events, which can only be detrimental to efficient management of the department as a whole. First 007, and now Eleanor Lyttelton.”

M leaned forward in her chair, incensed. “Bond was unconventional and rebellious, but he was one of my best agents. He is now most likely dead. Whether I became ‘personally involved’ or not would have had little effect on that unfortunate outcome.” She narrowed her eyes. “On the other hand, Eleanor is my godchild and very dear to me. How dare you imply that I should not do everything in my power to assure her retrieval.”

Sighing, Mallory sat back in his chair. “Unfortunately, Olivia, you have just proved my point.”

M stared at him for some time before she shook her head. “I can only hope that once you are seated in this chair, you will come to understand that treating your assets and mission objectives as mere pieces on a chessboard will not make you a better manager of MI6. It will merely make it easier for you to sacrifice the pieces — a lesson I only learned recently, by the way.” She paused.
"Congratulations, Gareth. If nothing else, I’m sure you will truly excel at writing obituaries."

Standing abruptly, M moved around to the front of the desk. “Now, if you will excuse me, it appears as if I shall be a very busy woman, at least for the next two weeks.”

When Mallory had finally left, M called Tanner into her office.

“You needed me, Ma’am?”

M said nothing for a few moments, gathering her thoughts. Intellectually, she knew that Mallory was in some respects correct. Regardless of her previous statement, she was afraid her sympathetic actions toward Bond had indeed been an indirect cause of his death. Furthermore, she was incontrovertibly involved in the search for Eleanor’s abductors, yet she doubted there was little she could do to alter that outcome either.

But she’d be bloody well damned if she didn’t at least try.

“I hope your bags are already packed, Bill, because we will be leaving immediately. I hear Lima is lovely this time of year.”

*********************************

“Lovely, absolutely lovely.”

Bond tried to edge away from Tiago’s caressing hand and turned his head to scowl at him. “I thought we were supposed to be watching the brothel.”

“You’re watching the brothel. It’s not a task that requires both of us. Besides, I’d much rather be watching you.” Tiago put on a look of mock concern. “Unless there’s something wrong with your eyes?”

“No, there’s nothing wrong with my bloody eyes. You’re just . . . distracting when you do that.”

“What, this?” Tiago once again ran his hand caressingly over Bond’s arse in a slow circle.


Tiago pouted. “But this is the part of field work I’ve always abhorred — sitting around, waiting, and watching your fingernails grow. It’s enough to make a man crazy.” He winked at Bond. “So, here I am, lying next to this absolutely gorgeous specimen of a man, and I see no reason why I can’t find some alternate method to relieve the tedium.”

Bond looked at him incredulously. “How the hell did you survive in the field with that overactive libido of yours?”

Snorting, Tiago said, “You’re one to talk. Besides, given your choice, would you truly prefer I didn’t have an overactive libido?”

“We’re supposed to be doing a job here, so in a word -- yes!”

Tiago had rented them a room in a run-down hotel directly across from the brothel. Since the “room” contained nothing more than a rickety nightstand, a questionably functioning lamp, and a sagging bed, they had pulled the bed parallel to the window so they could maintain their surveillance in relative comfort.

“Liar,” Tiago said smugly. “Regardless, I’m merely trying to maintain our cover. What do you
think I told the clerk when we checked in?”

“You didn’t,” Bond said, his voice tight.

“Of course, I did. He took one look at you, then asked me if I wanted to rent the room for the whole night or just an hour.”

Bond put his head down on his crossed arms. “Good God.” He looked up at Tiago suddenly. “What the hell did you tell him?”

“That I was feeling strong, so give it to me for the whole night.” Tiago laughed aloud at the expression on Bond’s face. “Well, what else was I supposed to say? You’re not exactly dressed like a teacher on Sabbatical, you know.”

“How did you know about . . . ?” Bond shook his head, then rested it on top of his arms again. “Never mind, I really don’t want to know. At least, now I know why the bloody clerk winked at me as we started up the stairs.”

“Did he do more than wink at you?” Tiago asked sharply.

“Of course not.” Bond raised his head once more, this time gazing at him quizzically. “Why are you even asking such an absurd question?”

“Because I need to know if I have to kill him on our way out.”

“You’re not bloody serious.”

Tiago sighed. “James, dear heart, when have you known me not to be serious?” He reached out to stroke Bond’s backside again. “I’ve told you before that I’m not planning on sharing you, ever.” He stopped to consider this, then added in a half-hearted attempt at truthfulness, “Unless it becomes absolutely unavoidable, of course.”

Bond’s eyes widened. “What exactly is that supposed to mean?”

“Don’t worry, pequeño. I’m sure I’ll find an alternate way around it.” He slapped him on the arse to forestall any other awkward questions. “In the meantime, you can take off your clothes.”

Given Bond’s strangled “What?” that was pitched a little higher than his usual tone, this was obviously an even more effective form of distraction.

“You heard me.”

Bond turned to face him. “There are at least a half-dozen young girls facing who knows what with those sadists, and you want me to take off my clothes.”

Tiago sighed. Bond was reading him wrong, as usual. It wasn’t that Tiago was unaffected by the girls’ potential suffering, but they had to track down the firmas’ headquarters before they could do anything to stop them. Unfortunately, there had been absolutely no electronic or even telephone communications between the brothel and their firmas superiors for Tiago to trace. He knew there had to be some method for exchanging records and funds, because the firmas would be too suspicious of their underlings to leave such things to chance, especially when it involved exchanges of a monetary nature.

No, there had to be some system for contact and oversight, so in a process of elimination, Tiago knew they had to be communicating through some purely physical means. So far, however, they’d
been unable to locate that source of contact.

Hence, the reason for their stay at this lovely establishment, as well as his attempt to gain his little rat’s cooperation in alleviating his potentially debilitating boredom.

“James, we’ve followed each and every employee of this brothel in the hope they’d lead us back to the firmas’ headquarters, and not one of them has panned out. We’re back to square one with watching the brothel itself, and whether you are wearing clothes or not should have no effect whatsoever on your eyesight, hmm?”

Bond merely shook his head. “You’re unbelievable.”

“No, I am a realist, and I have no desire to be terminally bored when there is absolutely no reason for it.” Tiago looked at him earnestly. “James, I promise, you’ll be able to maintain your surveillance on our target at all times. Isn’t that assurance good enough for you?”

Not that he planned to give Bond an actual choice in the matter, of course.

“You’re not going to allow me to say ‘no’, are you?” Bond asked resignedly.

Tiago smiled broadly. “You’ve read my mind, dear heart.”

“I don’t know why I allow you to coerce me into agreeing with you.”

Tiago’s hand once again found Bond’s sensitive backside and rested a possessive hand there. He edged closer to Bond, licking his ear, and then whispered, “Because deep inside, you want me to coerce you. It makes it easier for you to accept your secret desires.” He latched onto Bond’s neck, stroking him with his tongue as he applied suction. “I believe we’ve covered that little fact before, hmm?”

“Just because you believe something does not make it true,” Bond said with some heat, but he didn’t try to evade Tiago’s attentions.

“Never underestimate the power of suggestion.” He released Bond and said, “Now, up on your knees for just a moment.”

Bond grudgingly complied and made a move to pull the paper thin tank top over his head, but Tiago stilled him with a hand. “No, no, allow me. I wouldn’t want you to be unduly distracted from watching our target.”

Sighing, Bond said, “For some reason, I’ve learned to get very worried when you use that tone of voice.”

Tiago moved up behind him, straddling his legs while he grabbed the hem of Bond’s shirt. “I’m crushed. And here all I was planning to do was make you feel good while we wiled away the endless hours.” He brushed against Bond’s exposed abdomen as he slowly lifted the hem.

Bond’s muscles trembled at the feather light touch. “That’s exactly what I mean,” he said.

Tiago chuckled. “Relax. I promise not to be too distracting. Just keep your eyes on the target and let me do the rest.” He gradually lifted the shirt until he had unfettered access to Bond’s nipples, which he was delighted to note were already firm and hard. “There’s no need whatsoever to see what I’m doing,” he whispered, rubbing the nipples in slow circles. “Or what I’m about to do,” he continued, as he moved one hand down to stroke Bond’s cock firmly through the equally thin material of his slacks.
Bond grunted, thrusting involuntarily into Tiago’s hand, and his eyes just as involuntarily glanced down in an attempt to anticipate his intentions.

Tiago tsked loudly, and then forcibly pulled Bond’s chin back up with one hand. “Naughty, James. Eyes on the prize, please. I told you, there’s no reason you need to observe what I’m doing.” He continued his firm stroking, feeling Bond harden quickly. “You trust me not to do anything you won’t enjoy, don’t you?”

Bond swallowed, but he nodded his head firmly.

“Tsk, tsk. You know the drill, James. Aloud, please.”

Licking his lips, Bond said finally, “Yes . . . Raoul.”

“Hmmm. Very, very nice. You might get treated to something extra special for remembering that, pequeño.”

“Why does that scare the living hell out of me?” Bond asked, his shoulders slumping slightly.

“Because the unknown is always scary for us humans. We’re hard-wired to fear that which we’ve never experienced before. But I know you’ll enjoy what I’m about to do to you.” He grasped Bond’s shirt hem again. “Now, I’m going to break my promise for just a second and block your vision while I pull this shirt over your head. Unless you’d rather I cut it off you?” He paused for a moment. “I must admit, that thought does hold some minor appeal . . . to me, at least,” Tiago added silkily.

“No!” Bond responded immediately.

Tiago pressed his face against Bond’s. “Don’t you trust me with a blade, dear heart?”

“I trust you just fine. But I feel naked enough walking around in what you consider clothes without doing so in a completely shredded shirt.”

“Well, you may have a point there. Some other day, perhaps.” With a regretful sigh, Tiago quickly pulled the shirt over Bond’s head. He ran an admiring hand over the man’s shoulders and back muscles, enjoying the feel of naked skin under his palms. He truly was superbly formed. Moving back slightly, he said, “On your hands and knees, please.”

Bond started to turn his head, and Tiago swatted him firmly on his arse. “Eyes front, James. You needn’t question every request I make.”

When Bond dropped down to hands and knees, Tiago once again straddled his lower legs so he could undo the clasp to his trousers from behind. He didn’t hurry. Once he had loosened the clothes, he decided to have some mercy on his little rat, and he slid the fabric down his backside and thighs without drawing out the process overly long.

“Lift off your knees for a moment, please.”

Bond complied without comment this time, and Tiago slid the trousers off and threw them to the floor. Without the interference of pants and socks, the only thing Bond now wore was his collar.

Tiago ran his hand over the slick metal, reveling again in the feel of utter possessiveness it invoked every time he saw it. Especially on an otherwise completely naked Bond.

Bond shivered under his light touch, but he kept his eyes focused out the window, as instructed.
“You don’t like being placed in this position, do you, James?” He moved his hand slowly up his calf, to his knee, and then his inner thigh. “It makes you feel too vulnerable.”

Bond shivered when Tiago moved his other hand to the opposite inner thigh, stroking it in tandem with its fellow. “It would make any man feel vulnerable,” Bond admitted.

“Hmm. Only until you’ve gotten over that fear of the unknown we spoke of earlier. Then the position becomes one to be anticipated, not feared.”

“I’ll take your word for it,” Bond said tightly.

Tiago chuckled. “I guess you’ll have to for now.” He moved his hands to Bond’s hips, steadying him as he reached up to nip him gently on the vertebrae of his neck. “But I hope that won’t be for too much longer,” he added, gently gripping Bond’s chin when he instinctively attempted to lower his head at Tiago’s overtly domineering gesture.

Bond shook his head slightly, apparently annoyed at himself for involuntarily baring his neck.

Tiago said, “Don’t worry. I’ll make sure we don’t miss anything important happening on the street, no matter how adorable you’re being.”

Bond again shook his head. “You make things so damn . . . difficult sometimes.”

Smiling, Tiago said, “Oh, you have no idea, pequeñito. You have no earthly idea.” Still holding onto Bond’s hips, Tiago gradually moved his mouth down Bond’s spine, pausing here and there to nip or lick at a spot he knew was particularly sensitive. Bond had some very unusual erogenous zones, and Tiago made sure he explored each and every one on his journey to his ultimate destination.

Once he had reached the cleft of Bond’s arse, he paused long enough to say, “Spread your knees a little further apart for me, James.”

Bond hesitated, and he again plainly fought the urge to turn his head to see what Tiago was doing.

“Yes, I know that will make you feel even more exposed, but I’d like unfettered access to everything . . . important.”

Bond eventually complied with his request, albeit slowly, so Tiago brought a hand between his legs to direct just how far he wanted Bond to go. If he accidentally brushed against the soft skin of Bond’s testicles in the process, well, that was hardly his fault.

When Bond had been positioned to his satisfaction, Tiago then moved his hands to stroke Bond’s arse — a maneuver he’d done many times in the past and knew the man was comfortable with. He continued these ministrations until he felt Bond relax somewhat beneath his hands, then he casually moved his hands to the man’s hips, bent down and swiped his tongue over Bond’s entrance.

Yelping in surprise, Bond attempted to bolt forward from the unexpected sensation, but Tiago was prepared for that and merely held him in place with a firm grip on his hips.

“What the hell, Tiago?” Bond bit out, trembling from head to toe in reaction.

Tiago merely swatted him, hard, on the arse. “I will forgive you, this once, for forgetting to use the correct name, but don’t expect me to be so lenient the next time,” he warned. Without giving Bond a chance to respond, he bent down to continue his assault on this most sensitive area, until he felt the man stop attempting to evade the exquisite sensations Tiago was eliciting and instead begin to succumb to them.
Gradually, Tiago was able to loosen his restraining grip on the hips and start caressing Bond’s pelvic bones, another sensitive area for this exceedingly tactile man.

Bond groaned aloud as Tiago entered his anus with his tongue, probing and exploring.

Tiago inwardly exalted when Bond finally pushed back against the invader. He was every bit as responsive here as Tiago had hoped, and more besides. Knowing he had accomplished what he’d intended to do, Tiago pulled back, but reached a hand between Bond’s legs to grip his achingly hard cock.

Bond jumped again, but Tiago steadied him, merely giving his cock one more hard stroke before releasing him completely. Groaning, Bond visibly slumped, sweat already beginning to pool in the crevices of his body.

“You’re still watching the brothel, aren’t you, James?” Tiago asked innocently.

Bond audibly sucked a shuddering breath through his teeth, then said, only slightly strangled, “Yes, damn you.”

“Oh, good. I’d hate to break my word by accident.” Tiago reached over to the drawer of the nightstand, pulling it open. “Oh my heavens, isn’t this interesting?” He reached inside to retrieve his find. “What a positively delightful surprise.”

When Bond almost involuntarily turned to look, Tiago quickly shifted the object behind his back and tapped Bond lightly on the cheek. “James, James, that insatiable curiosity of yours is likely to get you into trouble someday.”

“I’m a bloody spy -- you know damn well that curiosity is part of the job description.” He tensed his back. “Besides, nothing you do is ever by surprise, which just proves my earlier statement.”

“That I’m ‘scaring the living hell out of you?’”

Bond didn’t answer, so Tiago merely returned to fondling the man’s still impressively hard cock. “Well, they do say adrenaline does amazing things to the body during orgasm.”

“I’d rather that remain one of the mysteries of life — at least in my life,” Bond said tightly, his body strung tight with tension and thwarted arousal.

Tiago moved his hand back to the man’s perineum, stroking him firmly there. “Tsk, James, and here I thought you mirrored my own unbounded spirit of adventure.”

“Just being in the same room with you is adventuresome enough,” Bond said, his voice low and just a bit uncertain.

“Hmm. Must say I agree with you there.” He moved his free hand to Bond’s hip and gripped him firmly. “Now, stay right where you are. Do. Not. Move.” He rubbed his hand soothingly on Bond’s hip as the man tensed even further. “I’d hate to have to punish you so late in the proceedings, James,” he added in admonition.

Bond was almost trembling now, he was wound so tight in anticipation. “Raoul?” he asked, hesitatingly.

Still keeping the object he’d retrieved from the drawer away from Bond’s body, Tiago briefly turned it on.
At the unexpected sound of the vibrator, Bond reared back, and when he began to twist around, Tiago stopped him by wrapping his arms firmly around Bond’s chest. “Relax, pequeño. I told you I wouldn’t do anything to you that you wouldn’t enjoy.”

“You’re not going to . . . ?”

Tiago bit him firmly on the neck, holding the bite until Bond lowered his head in apparent submission.

Tiago salved the bite mark with his tongue, then bent down close to Bond’s ear, and said, “Nothing is going in that delectable arse of yours except my tongue, and eventually my cock, when you’re finally ready to give yourself totally to me.” He gripped Bond around the throat. “I am disappointed in you, James. I had thought you trusted me by now.”

Bond attempted to swallow around the grip on his throat, but Tiago merely tightened his grip, partially cutting off his airway.

When the man eventually relaxed into his hold, Tiago released his throat and pushed him gently back down onto his hands and knees. “This time you will stay there,” Tiago said with confidence.

Bond was breathing hard in an attempt to restore his briefly deprived oxygen levels, so he merely nodded. Tiago didn’t insist on a verbal confirmation this time.

The minor altercation had cooled Bond’s arousal slightly, so Tiago resumed his previous regimen, reaching around Bond’s hip to stroke his cock while he again laved his entrance with a teasing tongue.

It wasn’t long before Bond was again straining into the grip on his cock while simultaneously trying to push back against Tiago’s tormenting tongue. When he thought Bond was far enough along, Tiago reached with his free hand for the vibrator and this time waited until he had pressed it against Bond’s perineum before activating it.

Bond involuntarily jerked forward at the unanticipated sensation, but this time he obediently remained where he was. In fact, he quite unconsciously spread his knees further apart, groaning aloud at the intensity of this external stimulation of his prostate. This was evidently something he had never personally experienced before, and it was affecting him just as profoundly as Tiago suspected — and hoped — it might.

He hadn’t lied to Marcos about how responsive his little rat was.

Bond was clenching the bedcovers in both fists, and it was as if his body didn’t know which point of stimulation it wanted to increase. He was practically quivering with his arousal, and Tiago kept him dangling on the brink, tightening his grip around the base of Bond’s cock if he got too close. He needed Bond to remember this experience, and remember it vividly, so he drew out the process as long as he dared.

He waited until he heard Bond’s, “Raoul, please,” before he impaled the man’s anus with his tongue while holding the vibrator more firmly against Bond’s perineum. Bond came with a prolonged, tormented groan, his body ultimately collapsing onto the mattress in reaction.

Tiago covered him completely and possessively with his own body, pleased at this most satisfactory outcome. However, when he went to chastise Bond for — temporarily at least — failing to maintain their surveillance efforts, he found that the man was unconscious.

Bond’s eyes were fluttering, and he appeared to be reviving almost immediately, but Tiago
certainly wasn’t going to let this happy circumstance go unannounced.

“James, dear, your lover is here,” he said in a singsong tone into Bond’s ear.

Bond’s eyes opened completely, and he instinctively attempted to roll out from under Tiago’s body weight, but he subsided immediately when he recognized who was lying atop him. He relaxed back onto the bed, still obviously exhausted from his exertions, and said, “What the hell happened?”

Tiago moved off Bond, so the man could properly catch his breath. He waited a few seconds, anticipating the reaction. When Bond finally looked up at him quizzically, Tiago raised a teasing eyebrow. “You passed out.”

“I most certainly did not.”


Bond pushed himself up to sit on his heels, cleaning himself off perfunctorily with a convenient towel, a disgruntled look on his face. “As if you weren’t infuriatingly smug before,” he said.

“And yet, you doubted my clearly inspired choice for passing the time,” Tiago said reprovingly.

Bond, however, was staring intently out the window and didn’t seem to register Tiago’s comment. He turned to face him, and said, “Chifa Dim Sum?” in a puzzled voice.

Tiago nodded. “Chifa is the term for the fusion of Chinese and Peruvian cuisine. There are many, many such eateries in Calle Capon, Lima’s version of Chinatown. My grandmother once owned a restaurant there.”

Bond simply stared at him.

Tiago laughed at his bewildered expression. “What, you thought I had invented that bit about my abuela selling fortune cookies for a living?” He cocked his head to one side. “James, you really must learn that I won’t lie to you.”

Shaking his head, Bond turned back to the window. “Isn’t it rather odd to have Chinese food delivered to a whorehouse?”

“Well, I’m sure they’re all kept rather busy in there,” Tiago said with a rueful smile.

But Bond was still staring out the window. “Felix Leiter once told me that he could always tell when there was a major U.S. military operation underway by the number of pizzas delivered to the Pentagon.” He turned to stare intently at Tiago. “He said if he were the enemy and needed to contact a double agent in the Pentagon, he’d use someone disguised as a pizza delivery person, because they were so damn commonplace.”

Tiago felt his eyebrows rising. “Did he, now? That’s interesting. Very interesting indeed.” He tapped his chin with a finger thoughtfully, then sighed. “It is a bloody shame though.”

“What?” Bond said, obviously puzzled.

“Now I’ll have to forgive the man for being so blatantly attracted to you, after all.”

Bond merely rolled his eyes, and Tiago laughed.
“So, James, are you hungry?”

“Famished.”

“Thought you might be. How ‘bout we pick up some Chinese, hmm?”

Chapter End Notes

Sigh. Yes, yet another sex scene. Frisky, frisky things.

I promise, there will be only one more. (I hope.)
Q stared at his monitor as if it had just reached out and slapped him across the face, because given the results it had just provided him, in some manner of speaking, it had.

Or, to be more precise, the lack of results.

The facial recognition software had come up completely negative with his attempted identification of the man who had been accompanying, or more accurately, molesting 007 in Lima.

No matches whatsoever. None.

This just didn’t happen. Q had tapped into every database he could think of, and not just the United Kingdom and its allies. He had accessed Interpol, the U.S. and all the other foreign Intelligence services, police agencies, social services organizations, etc. There was no record of this man ever obtaining an identification card, driver’s license, passport, or undergoing a background check. No record of any arrests or convictions. He hadn’t been recorded on any previous surveillance video. It was as if the man didn’t exist.

As if he’d never existed.

To Q, this might as well be a blaring alarm. The only way someone could be this completely off the grid was if they’d had themselves erased from it. And that required a degree of computer acumen that most of the planet’s elite hackers couldn’t even accomplish.

This had to be the cyberterrorist that Bond had been sent to retrieve. It had to be.

Shaking his head, Q replayed the Lima surveillance camera video for what felt like the hundredth time, but he still couldn’t see any sign of coercion other than the overt manhandling in the alcove, which Bond had seemed to welcome wholeheartedly.

Had Bond gone over to the other side?

No. He refused to believe that Bond would ever willingly associate with anyone who seemed to be as completely amoral as their cyberterrorist showed every sign of being. There was something he had to be missing.

He was just about to rewind the video again when he caught a flash of . . . something on Bond’s right ankle that contrasted just enough with the light-colored slacks Bond was wearing to catch his eye. He froze the video, backing it up frame by frame until he had the optimal perspective.

Whatever it was, it was pitch black, and from the extremely small portion visible and the limited scope of Q’s field of view, it appeared to be a bracelet of some sort. He couldn’t make out any detail, even with isolating Bond’s ankle and enlarging the frame. The resolution of the surveillance camera was simply so poor that the imaging software couldn’t even begin to extrapolate on any details.

In other words, he couldn’t tell if it was merely decorative or something else entirely. He had never observed Bond wearing any kind of jewelry, other than his predilection for exceedingly expensive cufflinks, so this form of personal adornment would definitely be atypical for 007.
But then, so was his obvious affection for someone of his own gender.

Could the bracelet be something more nefarious than simple jewelry?

If it was a device used to control Bond in some manner, it was in a distinctly odd anatomic location for that purpose. Q huffed softly. Not that he was any kind of expert in that field, by any means.

He now had a dilemma. Anyone seeing this video would have no reason to doubt that Bond was willingly consorting with the enemy. Q may be a relative newcomer to MI6, but he was under no illusions as to what would happen to Bond should anyone come to that conclusion, whether or not he was actually guilty of any particular wrongdoing. Or even whether he had been tortured or brainwashed into cooperating. They simply couldn’t afford the risk of someone with as high a security clearance — and as inherently dangerous — as 007 to have been turned.

M would be the only person in MI6 he would even remotely consider revealing this information to, but she and Tanner were both on their way to Peru.

Sighing heavily, Q made his decision. He downloaded the video to his personal laptop, then deleted the file from the server, even going so far as to move the other files, wipe the hard drive, and reload the non-incriminating files back to the drive.

He was confident no one could ever breach the security protocols on his own laptop, so he felt the video would be safe enough there.

Now, he had an even more difficult decision to make.

Namely, what particular combination of medications he’d need to survive the bloody plane trip to Lima.

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Bond placed a hand on Tiago’s upper arm, stopping him before they came in view of the Los Hados headquarters. “Are you going to tell me your plan?” he asked.

Even after discovering the organization’s point of contact, it had still taken them quite some time to pinpoint their base of operations. The “Chinese delivery person” had proven to be as cagey and secretive as the firmas themselves, never making the round of his “deliveries” in the same order or using the same routes. He hadn’t even reported back to his superiors for three days, which had definitely surprised Tiago. This man was obviously no mere lackey, if the firmas had allowed him to safeguard what must be a significant amount of currency for such an extended period of time.

Given Bond’s inherently stronger moral fiber, this unavoidable delay had frustrated him to a significant extent. It never ceased to amaze Tiago how much the man cared about others, especially given his occupation, which often required a callousness that bordered on outright brutality.

However, this particular trait significantly worried Tiago, because Bond’s frustration had manifested itself as a renewed tendency toward independence and significant lapses in his submissive persona. Considering the fact that they were preparing to walk directly into the vipers’ nest did nothing to alleviate that concern. Even without Bond’s unpredictable reactions, Tiago’s plan was highly dangerous at best, and suicidal at worst.

Oh, Tiago had done his best to curb that distracting independence when they were alone. Bond still reacted quite gratifyingly to Tiago’s efforts at reinforcing his training, even going as far as immediately stripping without being asked upon entering their rooms in the villa.
In fact, last night, after a vigorous round of lovemaking, Bond had sat cross-legged on their bed, his lovely body coated in a thin layer of sweat and one hand absentmindedly caressing the collar on his ankle. Not only had he stopped demanding that it be removed, but Tiago suspected he had begun accepting it as a sign of Tiago’s continued devotion to him. “Forever” was a concept that Bond still had difficulties believing in, considering all the betrayals and losses in his past.

However, the collar was something physical, something permanent, and Bond was unconsciously responding to that incontrovertible fact.

Heh. There appeared to have been some benefits to Tiago’s previous psychiatric therapy, after all — he had become especially adept at interpreting, and manipulating, the human psyche. And with an incredibly strong-willed man like James Bond, he needed every advantage he could get.

Tiago’s plan for infiltrating Los Hados also relied heavily on his prediction of human behavior, as well as his admittedly minimal knowledge of his enemy, but it was a plan that Bond was not going to like. At all.

Which was why, of course, he hadn’t told him what it was.

And he sure as hell had no intention of cluing him in now. He’d have to hope that if things got exceptionally heated, Bond would still obey him without question. He knew this was a bit of a reach, but Tiago was nothing but the eternal optimist.

It wasn’t like they had a lot of other options, in any case. Starting a gang war would only get a lot of innocents killed, and regardless, Tiago knew it wouldn’t permanently eliminate this particular scourge. He’d already tried that ploy and failed.

“Just follow my lead, pequeño.” He raised an eyebrow at Bond until the man removed his hand from his arm. “And whatever happens, you must do as I say. At least this once, you’ll have to trust that I know what I’m doing.”

Bond looked as if he were about to argue the point, but then he sighed and lowered his head. “Yes, Raoul.” However, he looked up abruptly, a glint in his eyes. “But if things go to hell in a handbasket in there, we’ll both know who’s to blame.”

Tiago smiled tightly. “Oh, yes, mi ratita. We most certainly will.”

Bond narrowed his eyes at that, apparently catching some nuance in Tiago’s voice that he didn’t like, but Tiago didn’t give him a chance to pursue his misgivings further. He crowded closer to Bond, gripping him at the back of the neck and invading his personal space until the man eventually capitulated and relaxed his stiff-backed demeanor.

“Good,” Tiago whispered into his ear. “Now, keep this attitude at the forefront, and we might actually both survive this upcoming encounter, hmm?”

Without giving Bond a chance to respond, Tiago turned on his heel and started toward the door of the firmas’ headquarters, motioning with a brief hand gesture for Bond to remain two steps behind him. He walked to the front of the building as if he owned it and banged on the door, knowing full well that they had been watched from the moment they had come into view and that this brash announcement was totally unnecessary.

This section of town had once been upscale, but it had slowly lost its affluent population through a mixture of migration and corruption of the local officials. This particular building was certainly pretentious enough, with marble columns supporting a Greek-style portico, but it was imbued with
an air of despair and neglect as if this once grand house was ashamed of what it currently housed.

The man who eventually answered the door, however, was anything but pretentious. He had a long, unkempt mustache and even longer hair tied back into a ponytail. Wearing ill-fitting, ragged clothing that did nothing to conceal an assortment of weapons, he was nonetheless competent enough that the gun he held to Tiago’s head didn’t waver in the slightest. “What do you want?” the man asked with narrowed eyes.

Tiago crossed his arms across his chest, making sure he made no abrupt moves. “I’m here to discuss a business proposition with your superiors.”

The man turned his head far enough to spit, just missing Tiago’s horrified expensive shoes, but still the gun didn’t waver. “We don’t allow solicitors.”

Narrowing his own eyes, Tiago said, “You obviously know who I am, or I would have been dead before I reached the door. Furthermore, your bosses are evidently curious enough to know why I’m here that you were therefore instructed to open said door instead of simply ignoring me.” He reached up slowly to move the gun barrel away from his head, not even attempting to wrest the gun from its owner. “So how about we dispense with all the superfluous posturing and just let me inside, hmm?”

Tiago moved his opposite wrist just so, and a thin dagger descended smoothly from its hidden sheath into his hand, which Tiago then just as smoothly pressed against the minion’s throat.

The man smiled crookedly, and Tiago knew he had passed the first test. Bravado was not only an admired trait in the Peruvian Underworld, it was practically a required one.

“Well, why didn’t you say so in the first place, amigo?”

Rolling his eyes dramatically, Tiago removed the knife from the man’s throat, flipped it in his hand, and held it out handle first. “I am not carrying any other weapons.” Tiago knew the man wouldn’t question that declaration, as this was part of the unwritten code among Lima’s firmas.

He also specifically didn’t mention Bond. Tiago’s meticulously planned public displays had made Bond’s apparent role in Tiago’s life very clear, and the minion was obviously not expecting him to be much of a threat. Besides, it was very evident from Bond’s tight, form-fitting outfit that he wasn’t concealing weapons of any kind on his person.

The man led them through a dark atrium with wood floors desperately in need of refinishing and tall, narrow windows shrouded in what appeared to be some sort of decaying brocade fabric. Combined with the cavernous interior and subdued lighting, it evoked an almost Medieval feel to the place, and Tiago almost felt sorry for the old house. It must have been a grand building in its prime.

They were taken into what was once a formal dining room, and Tiago dutifully noted the trio of heavily armed guards standing in a staggered line against the far wall. The huge oval table at room’s center had been taken over by a jumble of files, paper and . . . typewriters, of all things. The capó’s distrust of all electronic storage apparently applied to his internal documentation as well.

The man seated at the table’s head was not Los Hados’s capo, however. As expected, they would be addressing the firmas’s deputy, whom Tiago knew very well from both description and reputation, although he had never met the man in person. He went by only his given name — Miguel, but most referred to him simply as La Montaña — the mountain. It took only one glance to see why. The man was Tiago’s height but almost half again as wide at the shoulders, and there
wasn’t a gram of fat on him.

He was leaning back negligently in his chair as they entered the elegantly wood-paneled room, but the man’s dark eyes skimmed only briefly over Tiago before focusing intently on Bond.

Also as Tiago had expected.

Bond must have sensed the intensity of the gaze upon him, because his back stiffened and he raised his head slightly in an unconscious attempt to seek its source.

Hoping to avert incipient disaster, Tiago pulled out a chair uninvited and sat down, pulling Bond forcibly into his lap. He then squeezed the man’s thigh to warn him into silence and rested his chin negligently on his shoulder, waiting for his host to speak.

Miguel’s eyes finally shifted to his. “What is it you want, El Astuto? You are well aware we have no need of your rather exclusive distribution services. Of this little fact, I am quite certain.”

Tiago fluttered a hand in acknowledgment, then rested it on Bond’s bare upper arm, stroking the prominent muscles there.

Miguel’s gaze shifted to watch the motion, as if pulled by a magnet.

Continuing his steady stroking of Bond’s arm, Tiago said, “I have a rather specialized product I wish to sell that I think your organization may be interested in.”

Tearing his eyes away from Bond, Miguel laughed — a deep, rumbling sound like an oncoming avalanche. “You must realize we are highly specialized as well, El Astuto. I doubt very much we would have interest in any ‘product’ of yours.” His gaze shifted back to Bond. “Unless you were planning on selling that delectable creature sitting in your lap.”

“Not exactly.” Tiago quickly reached up to nip an earlobe, attempting to thwart Bond’s indignant reaction but feeling him practically vibrate with rage regardless. Tiago paused. “Normally I would be more than happy to recoup my investment in acquisition and training, but I’ve grown rather fond of this one.” He reached a hand under Bond’s shirt, lifting it in the process, so that he could brazenly stroke a nipple.

Bond stiffened again in outrage, and Tiago quickly gripped him at the back of his neck in a warning gesture, which Bond only reluctantly acceded to.

“Even though he can be quite the handful at times,” Tiago admitted.

Miguel snorted. “He is obviously only partially trained.” He eyed Bond again, examining him as one would a horse he was considering purchasing. “He does appear to be remarkably fit, however.” He sat further back in his chair. “Actually, El Astuto, I am surprised one such as you can properly contain this man at all.”

His words were dismissive, but it was clearly evident he was captivated by Bond. La Montaña preferred the opportunity to utterly subdue his “partners.” He wasn’t exactly a sadist, as he enjoyed the process of domination more than the simple prospect of eliciting pain. However, even with the significant advantage of his impressive physique, he tended to insure the odds were distinctly in his favor before initiating any intimate proceedings.

In other words, Miguel had a power trip kink carried to extremes, and Tiago was about to make Bond practically irresistible to him.
“Some things are worth the extra effort, and the inherent risk,” Tiago said smugly. He patted Bond on the hip, indicating that he wished him to rise, which Bond did, his eyes almost unconsciously shifting to Miguel before flicking back to Tiago. He was obviously unsure of the power dynamic here, and his barely detectable apprehension was still very apparent to Tiago, who knew the man’s tells intimately.

Tiago smiled encouragingly as he stood up, but he gripped Bond’s arm and pulled him to the side, away from the desk, where Miguel would have a better view. He then moved back a few paces behind Bond, pulled the spare activator for the collar out of his pocket, and said simply, “Strip for me, James.”

As he had feared, Bond started to turn on his heel, ignoring the implicit command. Before he could even begin the motion, however, Tiago hit him, hard, with the shock collar.

Bond immediately dropped to the floor, gasping, as it had been a long, long time since he had felt the full effects of the collar. He glanced up at Tiago, his eyes wide and disbelieving.

Tiago disengaged the collar almost immediately, as he had hoped he wouldn’t need to use the bloody thing at all, but he couldn’t allow Bond’s stubbornness to interfere with their immediate goal.

He therefore let his eyes and voice harden, and not just for the benefit of their audience. “Now, James, if you would comply with my request, please?”

Bond struggled to his feet, facing away from Miguel and the men standing guard behind him, but Tiago refused to be swayed by the wounded, disbelieving look in his little rat’s eyes. Tiago tapped the control for the activator meaningfully, and Bond’s shoulders slumped ever so slightly. He began to strip, his movements erratic and uncoordinated with the combined residual effects of the shock collar and his obvious stunned disbelief.

When had finally removed the last of his clothes, Tiago made a small “turn around” gesture with his hand, and Bond slowly turned to face the Los Hados deputy.

Miguel let out a long whistle of appreciation. “I see what you mean, Silva. The man truly is magnificent.” His eyes very slowly drifted down Bond’s body to the gleaming black band around his ankle, and his eyebrow raised almost to his hairline. He looked up at Tiago, a question in his eyes.

“Yes, that is the source of the electric shock he just received.” He held out the activator in his hand. “It’s controlled with this device, although the collar has built-in deterrent features as well as a GPS locator beacon.” He purposefully neglected to mention the primary controller lodged directly in his cerebral cortex.

Miguel leaned forward, obviously fascinated. He laughed again. “So this is how you keep this luscious but totally undisciplined jale in line.”

Tiago nodded his head in confirmation. “Currently, its programming allows him to stray only a short distance from me before the collar activates, and of course, should he unexpectedly find some way around that obstacle, I can always locate him through the GPS.” He shrugged. “Besides, this particular collar is made of a dense, ferrous material, and he would have a difficult time explaining it to any airport’s security force should he ever manage to get that far.”

Bond’s head jerked up at that, and Tiago realized he had neglected to pass along that little tidbit of information previously.
“Would you like a closer look at the collar?” Tiago asked helpfully.

A broad smile crossed Miguel’s face. “But, of course,” he said.

Clearing a space on the table directly in front of Miguel, Tiago motioned for Bond to come closer.

Bond did so, extremely reluctantly, his movements as stiff as if he were still under the influence of the collar’s lowest setting. He latched onto Tiago’s eyes as he got close, apparently for some guidance or reassurance, but Tiago could grant him neither given their potentially hostile audience.

Tiago patted the top of the table with his hand, and Bond obediently sat on the indicated spot, now almost visibly trembling. Tiago knew this was most likely suppressed rage, but he had no doubt that Miguel would interpret it as something else entirely, which suited Tiago’s purposes just fine.

Gripping Bond’s right lower leg, he extended it so Miguel could examine the collar.

The big man took his time about it, twisting the collar around Bond’s ankle and lowering his head for a closer view.

Tiago had to suppress his own rage at the sight of another man touching what he considered to be solely his, but when Miguel looked up at him and raised an eyebrow, he answered the man’s unspoken question in only a slightly strained voice. “There are no clasps. It’s welded in place, and there is a significant deterrent to prevent it from being physically cut off without my permission, of course.”

“I would expect nothing less,” the deep voice responded in a distracted manner. The hand that had been on the collar moved up Bond’s calf to his knee, eliciting an abrupt attempt by Bond to pull his leg free.

Tiago merely placed a hand on his shoulder, and he subsided, but Tiago didn’t have to look to know there was murder in his eyes.

Chuckling, Miguel patted Bond’s knee in a mocking display of reassurance. He glanced over at Tiago. “I assume this is the product you were wishing to sell?”

“Uh-huh,” Tiago replied. “I’m sure you can see the applications in your own business. You could loan out your . . . merchandise for extended periods of time without any concern for ever . . . misplacing said merchandise.” He waved a hand negligently. “It would obviously make any necessary reacquisitions easier as well.”

“I am certain it would.” Miguel had both paws on his little rat now, one hand remaining on his knee while the other hand inched slowly up his inner thigh.

Eyes narrowing, Tiago said quickly, “Besides, think how effective it would be with your much younger merchandise if it can constrain a fully trained MI6 agent.”

Miguel abruptly released Bond and rounded on Tiago. “You bring a British Secret Service agent here?” His voice had dropped very low and dangerous, and his men immediately raised and trained their weapons on them.

Tiago sighed in a put-upon manner. “He was sent to capture me. I captured him instead, and his organization now believes him to be dead.” He turned to Bond, who was again looking at him in mingled shock and disbelief. Tiago cupped his cheek with one hand, giving him just the faintest of
warning shocks with the activator that Miguel did not know about, and Bond obediently closed his eyes and pressed his face into Tiago’s hand. He was still trembling, however, and Tiago knew he would have his hands full of outraged double-oh agent when they were out of this place.

If they got out of this place.

Although when he looked over at Miguel again, the man was staring at Bond’s display of helpless obedience with a thoughtful expression on his face.

“I will discuss your proposition with the capo,” Miguel said at last. He gestured with one hand, and his men obediently lowered their weapons.

Tiago stepped back from Bond and clapped his hands together. “Good. I’m glad we have come to such a mutually satisfying agreement.” He paused significantly, lowering his voice. “However, I will only discuss terms and compensation personally with your capo.” He raised his chin arrogantly. “I don’t deal with underlings for such crucial matters.”

Miguel turned to him, eyes narrowed, but this demand was definitely in character for the reputation that Raoul Silva had built for himself, and it wasn’t totally unheard of in the Lima Underworld either. Miguel, therefore, shouldn’t consider it to be an entirely suspicious request.

He hoped.

Bond stirred uneasily beside him, and Miguel’s eyes turned to him again, eyeing him hungrily. However, he eventually shook his head. “The capo speaks directly to no outsiders,” he said almost regretfully.

Sighing, Tiago decided he was forced to play his last card. “Perhaps we can make our own deal, if you could possibly persuade your superior otherwise?”

Miguel cocked his head, plainly intrigued. “What exactly did you have in mind?”

Tiago tugged Bond to his feet, moving him to stand directly in front of the much larger man, and placed a foot between Bond’s legs to indicate that he should spread them slightly. With his little rat thus on optimal display, he bit him lightly on the back of the neck. Looking up at Miguel, he said, “As I mentioned before, I have no plans on selling this one, but I wouldn’t be averse to . . . loaning him out to a trusted colleague.”

Bond’s breathing visibly accelerated, and Tiago pressed a restraining hand on the man’s hip, pointedly caressing it in the process. “Before you answer, Miguel, I may have forgotten to mention one tiny, inconsequential fact.” He paused, moving his hand across Bond’s belly and stroking the soft skin there.

Tiago arched an eyebrow at Miguel as the man’s eyes unerringly followed every motion of Tiago’s roving hand.

His lips quirking upward in a small smile, Tiago said simply, “He is still a virgin.”

Bond attempted to lurch out of his grip, but Tiago merely wrapped an arm around his throat, not even bothering with the collar. The agent turned his head slightly to look up at Tiago, an almost pleading expression on his face, but he wisely made no further attempts to escape.

Miguel chuckled, reaching out to stroke Bond’s cheek. “So spirited, little one.” His hand trailed down Bond’s neck, lingering at one of Tiago’s partially faded love bites, but then he looked up, a broad smile on his face. “I may just take you up on that offer.”
Tiago had to firmly remind himself that he didn’t dare bite off the man’s fingers, at least not yet. He merely nodded in response. “For some reason, I had a feeling you might say that.”

Chapter End Notes

1 Someone with good looks who draws a lot of attention from the opposite sex.

This chapter is a little rough, as I’ve run out of editing time, but I assumed everyone would prefer to not wait another week for an update.

Some of you may have noted that everyone involved with the firmas speaks English, not Spanish, but Bond villains are like air traffic controllers -- regardless of their country of origin or their primary language, they're all required to speak English while on duty. ; )
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

For the first time in 90,000 words, we finally get a Bond POV in this chapter. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tiago backed up a few steps out of Miguel’s reach, pulling Bond with him, and then he released the agent’s throat and indicated with a gesture that he stay behind him until he’d completed his business.

Miguel merely smiled at Tiago’s actions. “You are very protective of this one.” He leaned back against the table, crossing his arms over his massive chest. “By reputation, you were not so concerned with your previous possessions.”

Tiago paused, knowing he was on very dangerous ground here. If Miguel thought he was too emotionally involved with Bond, he became leverage instead of a mere bargaining tool. He shrugged dismissively. “I have had to spend more time than usual breaking him in. Besides, with his unique background, there is no one else quite like him in the world, even if he is only partially trained.” He inclined his head at Miguel. “It is only prudent to protect one’s irreplaceable commodities, no?”

“I agree,” Miguel said. “However, if I am to risk the rather prodigious wrath of my capo to accede to your request, I feel it is only fair that I know he is worth the effort.”

*Maldita sea.* Tiago had really hoped to avoid this. Bond was already near the end of his patience, but he dare not raise Miguel’s suspicions about the true nature of his attachment. There was still the minor issue of them both leaving here alive.

Tiago sighed dramatically. “If you insist. However, you are not to leave this room with him.”

Miguel laughed. “A voyeur, are you?”

“Hardly.” Tiago rolled his eyes. “If you do know my reputation, then you know that I am typically only cash on delivery. I am making a rather extreme exception here, strictly out of the goodness of my heart.”

“A rarity indeed.”

Tiago turned to face Bond, noting that the man was strung tight as a drum. He narrowed his eyes at the agent, attempting to project the importance of complying with this distasteful obligation without saying anything incriminating aloud. He grabbed Bond’s elbow to pull him abreast of him.

Turning to face Miguel, he said, “Only once has he known any other man’s touch than my own. He is, therefore, bound to be somewhat . . . skittish. And with his previous MI6 training, please keep in mind that he does possess claws.”

Miguel stood to his full height. “Ah, but he is so small. Surely, his claws cannot be too long or sharp.” He beckoned with one finger to Bond, smiling. “Come to me, cachorro.”
Bond stiffened, whether at the command or the rather condescending nickname of “cub”, Tiago wasn’t sure, but for the benefit of their audience, he pulled out the spare activator again and tapped it significantly.

However, Bond wasn’t even looking in his direction. He was staring Miguel defiantly in the eyes as he slowly approached the man, and it wasn’t until he stood directly in front of him that he properly lowered his eyes.

Miguel merely stared at him for some time, smiling, and he kept him waiting long enough that when he eventually touched Bond’s shoulder to indicate he should turn around, Bond started almost infinitesimally.

Bond turned, with none of his usual grace or economy of movement, and he clenched one hand into a fist before a sharp “Tsk!” from Tiago prompted him to relax his hand.

Laughing, Miguel shortened the distance between them, leaving only a hair’s breadth between their bodies but not actually touching him. He did absolutely nothing further for several interminable minutes except breathe quietly into Bond’s hair from his greater height.

Tiago could tell the waiting game was beginning to disconcert his little rat, but then, Tiago also knew that Miguel was very, very good at this. The man knew Bond had been expecting to be immediately molested, and he was therefore allowing Bond’s anticipation to work against him. And judging by the shimmering tension in Bond’s body, it was apparently working all too well.

Miguel moved a hand to the side of Bond’s face and then slowly inched it downward over his neck and chest, never actually touching his skin, but close enough that he must feel the heat emanating from the agent’s body. If Bond had still possessed any chest hair, the fingers would have been close enough to barely stir the ends.

“I do like the smoothness of his face and chest, Silva. It is very . . . inspiring.”

The man had bent down and spoke nearly in Bond’s ear, and Tiago saw Bond suppress another start, as he had been so entirely focused on Miguel’s roving hand that he had completely lost his situational awareness of the rest of the man’s body.

Miguel chuckled, seeing the reaction. “In fact, I am somewhat disappointed that you stopped there.” He began to move his hand down Bond’s stomach, hovering over his genitals but still not making contact with his skin. “You’ve had him circumcised. I’m surprised you didn’t also remove the hair from his groin.”

It Tiago bit his tongue any harder, he’d gnaw completely through it. “The circumcision was a medical procedure performed for treatment of a . . . work injury that occurred before we became acquainted. As for the rest, I’ve found that successful training requires a little give and take on both parts. I acquiesced to his rather strong opinions in this.”

“Hmph. Then you are entirely too lenient with him. If you allow them any leeway, they quickly become unmanageable,” Miguel said, bending down to nuzzle the tips of Bond’s hair.

As tightly strung as Bond was, that barely present sensation caused him to shiver violently, and Miguel chuckled again.

“Then one is forced to apply more discipline than would be otherwise necessary, just to keep them in line.” He sighed. “I prefer not to inflict a significant amount of pain unless it becomes truly unavoidable.”
Miguel moved his other hand to join the first, making precise, slow sweeps over the planes of Bond’s body, and Tiago could see that Bond was almost unconsciously attempting to move away from the phantom touches. However, the only direction he could go, trapped as he was within the frame of the man’s impressive arms, was backward. When Bond had inevitably backed up completely against the bulk of Miguel’s body, the man’s hand finally made firm contact with Bond’s skin.

Unfortunately, the place Miguel had settled upon was Bond’s right hip. With an almost uncanny precision, he had chosen the exact spot where Tiago had imprinted Bond to respond so sensually to his touch not so long ago.

Bond gasped aloud, instinctively attempting to evade what was -- to him -- an almost unbearably intimate contact, but Miguel merely held him place with one arm around his chest while he moved his thumb in slow circles over the front of Bond’s hipbone. He nipped lightly at Bond’s ear, distracting him, when it became apparent that the agent was trying to distance himself from Miguel’s attentions.

When Miguel’s other hand began massaging a nipple between his forefinger and thumb, Bond shifted uncomfortably, his penis beginning to lengthen against his will under the dual assault.

When Tiago caught Bond’s gaze, his eyes were wide and almost desperate.

Deal or no deal, Tiago wasn’t going to allow any more blatant pawing of what belonged solely to him. “I assume you’ve determined he is indeed worth the price we agreed upon?”

Miguel kept his focus on the intermittently fidgeting Bond, holding him tightly in place and not stopping either of his slow caresses. “Sí. He is exceptionally responsive.”

“Then you will kindly release him now.”

Miguel looked up at him then, clearly hearing the unqualified demand in Tiago’s voice. His smile broadened slowly, and he said, “In a moment. There is still one other detail I need to verify.” With that, he spun Bond around in his arms.

When he began to spread Bond’s arsecheeks with one hand, Bond had apparently had enough. He pushed himself bodily away from the distracted Miguel and then punched him solidly in the face.

Miguel merely let the blow roll off the side of his head, raising one hand in warning to prevent either Tiago or his guards from interfering, and then took matters into his own hands.

Blocking Bond’s follow-up kick and subsequent left hook, Miguel simply gripped Bond’s left forearm, knocking him off balance with his own body weight, and then spun him around. He forced Bond face down onto the table, gripping both hands and holding them with one of his own much larger hands into the small of Bond’s back.

Firmly pinioned, Bond turned his head to the side, glaring up at the man, and Miguel laughed aloud.

“Nice try, cachorro, but as I said, your claws are not very sharp.” With that, he used his free hand to finish what he had started, spreading Bond’s cheeks and examining his anus carefully, evidently insuring that Tiago’s previous claim was not patently false.

When his thumb circled too close to Bond’s entrance, however, Tiago put a restraining hand on Miguel’s shoulder. “You’ve gone far enough for what was supposed to be a mere cursory examination of the merchandise, my friend.”
Reluctantly releasing Bond, Miguel sighed. “As you wish.” He hauled Bond up by the shoulder and pushed him into Tiago’s arms. “I will contact you with the capo’s decision. Just be certain you keep a close eye on this one in the meantime, Silva.” His smile broadened. “I am looking forward to . . . initiating the little cub, and I would hate to find he has lost something important while we were waiting.”

Still holding Bond in his arms, and feeling his stiff-necked posture and obvious displeasure, Tiago sighed. “I don’t think there’s any danger of that occurring in the near future.”

Bond at least waited until they were in the privacy of their own rooms before he rounded on him, fury written clearly in every line of his body.

“Just what the fuck were you thinking, Tiago?”

Tiago sat down on the bed, attempting to lessen the confrontational nature of their little discussion and therefore not contesting Bond’s use of his real name. They had passed the point where that little issue had been essential, in any case. “If we’re going to permanently dismantle Los Hados, we have to cut it off at its head. That means we have to get to the capo.” He kept his voice level and conciliatory, although he doubted anything would diffuse Bond’s ire at this point.

“And the only way to do that is to cavalierly hand me off to the nearest thug?”

Tiago sighed. “There was nothing cavalier about it. If there were any other means of achieving our objective, while still getting us out of that building alive, I’d have taken it.”

Bond was pacing back and forth, which was very uncharacteristic of him and underscored just how disturbed he truly was. However, he stopped abruptly and turned to Tiago, an outraged expression on his face. “You were planning on using me as a bargaining chip all along, weren’t you?”

Here it comes. “It was one of my contingency plans, yes.”

Bond shook his head. “Plans within plans within plans. That’s how you operate, so I should have bloody well known.” His eyes widened, and he stared at Tiago with something suspiciously like horror in their depths. “Is that why you kidnapped me in the first place? Because you knew I’d ‘appeal’ to that psychopath?”

“What?” Tiago was appalled. “Of course not. Think, James. I didn’t even know the firmas had resurfaced until we moved off the coast of Peru.” He stood to face Bond, trying to project his sincerity on this issue. “I would never casually exploit you like that. Never.”

“You relinquished me quickly enough today.”

Tiago nodded. “And I have already told you the reason why. Besides, you were obviously quite aware of the danger as well, considering how you deliberately pulled your punch when you struck him.”

“Of course I was aware. We could have never dispatched three armed men standing that distance away even if I had taken out Miguel first.”

Tiago was genuinely puzzled. “Then why are you so upset?”

“Why. . . ?” Bond’s eyes were wild. “Because you handed me over like a cheap slag. You allowed some other man to practically maul me, and you never blinked an eyelash. More importantly, you
didn’t deem it important enough to tell me what you were planning in the first place.”

"Pequeño,” Tiago said softly. “I would never have allowed him to go too far.”

“That is hardly the bloody point. You’re quite aware that I can take care of myself.”

“But you shouldn’t have to. Not anymore.” He reached out a hand that Bond pointedly ignored. “I would never permit anyone else to claim you. You belong to me.”

Bond leaned forward aggressively. “And that’s where you’re wrong, Tiago. I don’t belong to anyone.” He lowered his gaze briefly, then met Tiago’s again, but his eyes were now as bleak as the Arctic tundra. “And it’s becoming increasingly apparent to me that I never will.” He turned his back on Tiago and started to walk away.

Tiago stepped forward, gripping Bond’s shoulder in an attempt to calm him. This evidently didn’t succeed as he’d planned, because Bond ducked his shoulder, spun, and then swung at him with his other arm.

He clearly wasn’t pulling his punch this time, because Bond’s fist was the last thing Tiago saw before his world went completely black.

**********************************

No one tried to stop him when he left the villa.

Bond passed Diego and Michelle as he descended the broad stone stairs, but he didn’t respond to Diego’s hesitant, “Señor Bond?”

He was in no mood to speak to anyone at the moment, and he didn’t want the long-suffering doctor attempting to convince him to stay. He respected and liked the man too much to harm him in any way — even with words.

And regardless, it wouldn’t matter in the long run.

He strode down the sidewalk in the wake of the slowly setting sun, heading unerringly toward the sound of the sea.

The ocean had always provided him some comfort in the past. Its vastness and the eternal progression of breaking waves seemed to supply some permanence to his own chaotic life, and he’d always sought its reassurance when he was most troubled. He knew that if he were ever at death’s door, he’d drag himself toward its embrace like a wounded animal crawling desperately for its lair.

But he wasn’t attempting to escape. Not this time. That had become glaringly apparent the moment he stepped out of the villa without taking anything with him, most notably without even absconding with Tiago’s wallet. He had no money, no weapon, no identification — no means at all of getting very far. His only possessions were the more-than-slightly revealing clothes on his back and one shiny, black bracelet.

For now, he simply needed some time alone, but he suspected he wouldn’t have very long. He’d made sure Tiago had not been permanently damaged before he left, and the man was certain to regain consciousness fairly quickly, especially with Diego’s assistance. He would track James down quickly enough via the GPS gracing his ankle.

At least, James hoped he would.
And this was what disturbed him more than anything else — the fact that he expected Tiago to track him down, that he wanted Tiago to track him down, that he needed to know the man actually loved him enough that even James’ recent antagonism and disobedience wouldn’t drive him away.

_Permanently._

It wasn’t doing much for his self esteem that he was this dependent on _anyone_, especially when he was still incredibly angry with the man’s unilateral decision-making today.

James sighed aloud. What was it that Severine had said when they’d been discussing fear? “Not like this. Not like him.” He’d been so sure of himself then. So certain he’d prove all his doubters wrong. So positive there was no one who could _ever_ inspire that much fear in him.

Only to discover she’d been right all along, because now he _was_ afraid — afraid the man would abandon him, just like all the others.

James found a lonely bench half hidden behind a row of stunted trees, only meters away from the still bustling harbor, and sat down wearily. He watched the slow passage of a massive freighter that had been converted into a barge, hauling an ungainly load of scrap metal behind it. The freighter had seen its glory days many decades in the past, and it appeared to be in scarcely better condition than the cargo it was towing.

As the sun slowly set behind the sad procession, James closed his eyes and tried not to think of anything at all.

It was only a couple minutes later that he felt someone sit down next to him. He knew it wasn’t Tiago. It was as if the man’s mere presence electrified the air between them, and he felt none of that oddly comforting presence now. He was just about to tell the interloper that he desired no one’s company when the person spoke.

“Always makes me feel a little melancholy. A grand old ship ignominiously hauling away scrap.”

James’ eyes flew open, and he turned to face the speaker, saying incredulously, “Q! What the bloody _hell_ are you doing here?”

“Good evening to you, too, 007.”

James could only stare at him, dumbfounded. It was a good indication of his current state of internal turmoil that he said only, “I thought you were afraid to fly?”

Q merely rolled his eyes at him. “I’m afraid of water, too. That doesn’t mean I won’t use it to make tea when I have to.”

Abruptly realizing the danger, James made a move to stand, but Q grabbed his upper arm. “Bond. I came alone. MI6 doesn’t even know I’m in Lima yet.”

James shook his head, but he reluctantly remained where he was. He hadn’t even considered that _MI6_ might be a danger to him, but _Q_ apparently held that opinion, so Tiago had been right in his concerns all along.

_Again._

“You’re an exceedingly difficult man to track down, 007. Sacrificed my favourite Scrabble mug in the endeavour, you know.”
“Sorry,” James replied automatically, still trying to process Q’s completely unexpected appearance.

“There was something I was somewhat surprised to find you alone.”

James narrowed his eyes at the odd comment, but when Q’s gaze strayed unerringly toward the black band around his ankle, James felt the totally unexpected compulsion to hide it from view.

He must have given himself away, or Q was simply more perceptive than James had ever given him credit for, because Q sat forward and said, “I see. So it is more than merely decorative.”

They didn’t have time for this. “Q. You had best leave.”

The young man shook his head. “I’ve spent far too many months trying to locate you just to abandon you now.” He was still squinting at the black band in the fading light. “If you’d only let me examine it closer, I could undoubtedly devise a method of removing it.”

“No!” Bond pulled back slightly, experiencing an almost instinctive negative reaction to the mere thought of losing the device. “No,” he repeated in a calmer voice, noting Q’s raised eyebrow. “I don’t need or want it removed. Not now.”

“No now?” Q repeated doubtfully. “Bond, if you’re in trouble, you need to let us help you.” He leaned forward, an intense expression on his face. “Let me help you. Please.”

James took a deep breath. “The only thing you can help me with is information.” He had to make this quick. “There’s a girl — a young girl. English. Long, dark hair. I saw her here in Lima, but M had a photograph of her in her flat. Do you know who she is?”

Q’s eyes widened. “Eleanor? You’ve actually seen Eleanor?”

“Damn it, Q, I have no bloody idea who ‘Eleanor’ is!”

“Oh yes, of course. Eleanor Lyttelton. She’s the daughter of the British ambassador to Peru.” At James’ prompting eyebrow, he added. “And M’s godchild.”

“Bloody hell.”

Q nodded. “Yes, that does sum up the situation rather concisely.”

Aware of the young man’s penchant toward independent action, James said, “Q. Does anyone else in MI6 know I’m still alive?”

“Well... no. I haven’t gotten around to mentioning it yet. M and Tanner had already arrived here in Lima, and that’s not the sort of information one sends in a text, you know.”

Damn. This fiasco just kept getting better and better. “M is here?”

“I do believe that’s what I just said, 007.” Q inclined his head. “Perhaps a hearing test would be in order. You do seem to instigate an inordinate amount of gunfire and explosions in your vicinity, you know.”

Standing abruptly, James grabbed hold of Q’s arms and pulled him to his feet. He held onto both of Q’s shoulders, attempting to instill the importance of his next words. “Q, just listen to me. Don’t tell anyone I’m alive. I will do everything in my power to retrieve the girl, but I need to do this my own way, without interference from MI6.” He glanced around hurriedly, knowing he had to get Q out of here. “Now, you must leave me, and you must leave now.”
He started to give Q a push in the direction of town, but Q grabbed his arms, pulling him close and refusing to budge.

“Not until you tell me what — or who — you’re afraid of, 007.”

James stiffened, suddenly sensing another presence, but before he could turn around, a voice emanated from the gathering darkness.

“Oh, my, my. Isn’t this a cozy little rendezvous?”

Chapter End Notes

Anyone who has read my JP3 story, "Up Close and Personal," will note this last bit is distinctly similar to a scene in that story. And yes, this means I'm essentially comparing Tiago to a velociraptor, but hey, I do absolutely adore both of them. ; )
Chapter 29

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Bond pulled a stunned Q behind him and turned to face Tiago. “It’s not what it looks like, Raoul.”

Tiago stepped out of the shadows and approached the pair. Bond truly was an exceptional agent, regardless of MI6’s meaningless test scores. Even under such extreme stress, he still remembered to use Tiago’s pseudonym while they were in public.

And always so chivalrous, attempting to defend those he considered under his protection.

Adorable.

It was too bad Tiago was going to have to be so harsh with his little rat, but there was entirely too much at stake to be merciful.

“Oh, I think it’s exactly what it looks like. I’d wondered why this one had expended so much effort to locate you.” He stopped about a meter from the pair and crossed his arms across his chest. “He’s spent the entire time you were missing searching very diligently indeed. Do you know he even hacked into the CIA’s mainframe in his endeavors to find you, pequeño? Tsk, tsk. I’m sure Mommy would be very displeased, if she ever discovered just how many regulations he’s broken in the process.”

Bond’s eyes widened slightly, but he said nothing.

How very interesting. Bond didn’t know of the young man’s attraction to him then. Was it willful blindness on his part or merely disinterest? Not that any of that mattered, of course, since Tiago would make very sure nothing came of it.

Tiago sighed dramatically. “Oh, to be young and in love again. It’s really a shame he’s come so close, only to lose you again.” He straightened to his full height and let his voice deepen. “James, come to me, please.”

Bond almost involuntarily started forward at the command, but then shook his head as if to clear it. “No,” he said distinctly, then visibly braced himself for what he clearly expected would happen next.

Tiago didn’t disappoint him. Still keeping his hands crossed ostentatiously over his chest, Tiago activated the collar.

Bond choked off a cry and went down, curling his body in a useless attempt to ease the pain.

Tiago released him almost immediately, as he didn’t intend to use this as Bond’s punishment for striking him. However, he did need to make a certain point for their audience.

Both of them.

Almost before Bond had even completely relaxed his fetal position, Q was kneeling beside him. Bond waved him off weakly, although he didn’t immediately attempt to stand. He was very likely still incapable of it.
Q stood and rounded on Tiago. “How did you do that?” His voice held a rather odd combination of fierceness and curiosity.

When Tiago merely smiled, the young man glanced at Bond’s ankle, so he’d apparently already surmised the visible source of his control over the agent.

Q’s eyes unfocused as he brought his admittedly prodigious mind to work. “You’re obviously controlling duration and most likely intensity as well, so it’s capable of some degree of complexity. It therefore has to be more intricate than a simple single pole switch, most likely a pulse width modulation circuit. Even miniaturized, you wouldn’t be able to hide a device that size in the palm of your hand, not with the innate power requirements, which means . . .” He stared directly at Tiago’s head, his eyes narrowing. “Neural implant,” he said, with no trace of doubt in his voice and at least some degree of admiration.

Tiago clapped his hands together. “Very good. I’d give you a gold star, but I’m afraid I was in a bit of a hurry this evening and left them at the villa.”

Bond had struggled to a seated position while they were talking. “Raoul,” he said, his voice somewhat strained. “He hasn’t told anyone that I’m still alive.”

Tiago stepped forward, pointedly ignoring Q, and held out his hand to Bond.

Bond looked from him to Q, and then apparently decided that cooperation would be in the young man’s best interests as he reluctantly took the outstretched hand. When he attempted to step away after Tiago had helped him to his feet, however, Tiago pulled him back possessively against his chest.

When the agent did nothing to resist the confinement, Tiago could see that Q was somewhat surprised. It plainly did not conform to his perception of Bond’s usual reaction to being forcibly restrained.

Resting his chin against Bond’s head, Tiago said, “I know he has told no one else, pequeño. However, you’ve been in the intelligence field long enough to realize that a secret known by even one other person is no longer a secret.” He stared at Q, who was looking at him with a rather significant degree of disdain. “Hmm,” Tiago said, “What to do, what to do. The obvious solution, of course, is to remove him from the equation . . . permanently.”

Bond stiffened in his arms.

Q merely shook his head. “You make a lot of empty threats for a man who doesn’t exist. Are you certain you’re capable of following through with them, or is all your murdering accomplished via a computer?”

Bond bit out a horrified, “Q!”, but Tiago merely laughed, admiring the young man’s chutzpah. “I agree that I do most of my work on a computer, while still in my pajamas before my first cup of Earl Gray, but I assure you, on those occasions when a trigger must be pulled, I am quite capable of it.”

Q’s eyes widened, as he belatedly realized the considerable extent of surveillance Tiago had at his disposal, at least when it came to monitoring the movements of one particular MI6 agent.

Tiago winked at the befuddled Q, enjoying himself immensely.

The sudden piercing call of a nightbird made Q start violently, which was a clear indication he wasn’t nearly as unconcerned about Tiago’s threat as he claimed to be.
It was very nearly completely dark now as the sun resentfully gave up its sole possession of the sky. There was still sufficient light, however, to see Q’s eyes widen even further when Tiago pulled a gun out of his pocket and shot him squarely in the upper chest.

Bond yelled “No!” and attempted to lurch forward out of his arms, but Tiago merely tightened his grip and gave him enough of a shock with the collar to discourage another attempt.

Q staggered back a few steps, stared dazedly at the point of impact on his chest, then slowly sank to his knees and collapsed to the ground.

Bond’s head snapped violently around, and he said, “What the fuck?”

Ah, so his little rat had belatedly realized that the sound of the pistol shot had come from behind them and therefore the gun in Tiago’s hand was clearly not the source. Pocketing the gun before Bond could get a good look at it, Tiago again activated the collar briefly. He caught Bond as he sagged in his arms and signaled with a sharp nod of his head.

Luis appeared out of the darkness with one of his men, and Tiago said irritably, “It certainly took you long enough.”

Tiago could see the gleam of his second’s teeth as he smiled impertinently at him. “It required more time than we’d planned to displace the last watcher, sir.”

“You didn’t scare him off completely, I hope.”

“No, sir, he’s within visual range -- if he has night goggles — but he shouldn’t be able to hear anything being said.”

Tiago nodded, knowing that Luis would see the motion of his bright hair. “Excellent. I may have to keep you on the payroll, after all.” He thought it over a moment, then added, “Although you might be interested to know that the nightingale isn’t even native to South America.”

“Apenado,” Luis replied, although he didn’t sound very contrite at all.

Tiago sighed heavily. Apparently Bond’s impudence was rubbing off on the hired help as well.

He turned his attention back to the agent in question when he felt him slowly straightening in his hold. He said quietly, “Relax, pequeño, all will be well.”

As Luis and his man lifted Q off the ground, the young man let out a soft groan but didn’t move at all. Apparently, the tranquilizer gun had been filled with an unusually high dose. Not surprising, considering the denser muscle mass of the man it had been intended for.

“Take him back to Diego so he can check him over, then drop him off at his hotel to sleep it off.” He paused, his voice itself a warning, “And Luis, you are supposed to be disposing of a body, so do make sure you’re not followed, hmm?”

“Sí,” came Luis’ rather more subdued reply, as he and his man carried Q away.

Bond was shaking in his arms, but whether it was a side effect of the multiple corrections from the collar he’d received in a short period of time or a result of his rather grueling day, Tiago couldn’t tell. He nuzzled him affectionately on the side of his neck, and Bond slumped in his hold.

“You’re a bloody arsehole, Raoul,” Bond said wearily.
A nearby lamp post switched itself on a short distance away, giving them the barest of artificial light to see by.

Tiago guided him to the bench and sat down next to him. “Don’t even try to accuse me of failing to communicate this time, James. You hardly gave me time with that little stunt you pulled today. I was forced to improvise all of that rather hurriedly.”

“You improvised a tranquilizer gun?” Bond asked with some disbelief. “How the bloody hell did you know you’d need it?”

“I didn’t.” Tiago responded with some heat. “I took it off one of Miguel’s men — the men who were following you with rather dishonorable intentions, I might add.”

Bond merely stared at him a few moments, then said, “But you had an agreement. Why would he . . . ?”

“I’d already mentioned that you should defer to my superior knowledge of this . . . society. ‘Poaching’ is very commonplace here. If you cannot keep a firm enough grip on your valuables, then you shouldn’t be surprised if someone attempts to wrest them from you.” He reached out to grip Bond’s knee. “What you did was extremely foolish, pequeño. If they had managed to immobilize you before I’d regained consciousness, you’d be in Miguel’s hands by now.”

He narrowed his eyes when he saw the incipient argument in Bond’s eyes. “And don’t even try to tell me you can take care of yourself. You were unarmed, oblivious, and distracted, which you’re well aware is a fatal combination. There were no less than four men who had been dispatched to acquire you.”

“I’ve handled worse odd than that before, Raoul. Don’t assume I wouldn’t have been able to handle them.”

Tiago raised an eyebrow. “Uh-huh. And you’re telling me that you’re at the top of your game this evening? Truly?”

Bond had the good grace not to answer that directly.

“I thought so. Trust me, dear heart, if Miguel had gotten his hands on you, he would eventually break you. If not your body, then your mind.” He shook his head, attempting to dispel his own horrid memories. “Any man can be broken given enough time, pequeño, any man.”

Bond winced, apparently having belatedly remembered that Tiago spoke from experience. His voice was subdued as he said, “You were completely unconscious when I left you. How did you follow me so quickly?”

Tiago rolled his eyes. “You have Diego to thank for that. He has a remarkably deft hand with smelling salts.” He cocked his head to one side, considering. “Although I so believe Michelle would have preferred simply dumping a bucket of ice water over my head.”

Bond smiled weakly. “I’m sure she would.”

He paused, and Tiago could almost see the wheels turning in his head. He waited, curious to see if Bond would still refuse to take responsibility for his rash actions. Oh, Tiago knew he was at least partially at fault, but this had been almost too close for comfort. If he’d been only a few minutes longer . . .

“I’m sorry, Raoul,” Bond said at last.
Nodding, Tiago said, “As you should be. However, I’m a little confused as to why you left in the first place. Oh, I quite understand why you felt the need to punch me — it’s your preferred method of blowing off steam, and I’ll admit to being less forthcoming with information than I should have been. What I don’t understand is why you left the villa when you obviously had no intentions of leaving me permanently.”

Bond ducked his head in a fashion that Tiago was all too familiar with.

_Ah. I should have guessed._

“I see. You were afraid I wouldn’t come after you at all, weren’t you?”

Keeping his eyes lowered, Bond said, “Everyone leaves . . . eventually.”

Tiago reached out a hand to raise Bond’s chin, forcing eye contact with him. “I will _always_ come back for you, _pequeño_. _Always._ Trust me.”

Bond simply shook his head within the confines of Tiago’s grip. “You can’t guarantee that. We share a dangerous profession, and it’s not likely that either one of us will live to see retirement.”

Tiago grinned, releasing Bond’s chin. “Do you actually _want_ to live until retirement age?”

Snorting, Bond said more lightly, “Fuck, no. I’d be bored out of my skull.”

“I would as well.” He moved closer to Bond, gripping the back of his neck. “How about this, then? While there is still breath in my body, I will _always_ come back for you. I’ve told you this before, and absolutely nothing has changed.”

Bond ducked his head, either from Tiago’s words or the grip on his sensitive nape, but he nodded ever so slightly, clearly still not totally believing him.

Be that as it may, there was still the minor issue of Bond’s punishment for disobeying him. The man had very nearly gotten himself killed tonight -- or worse -- and Tiago simply couldn’t let that transgression pass with impunity.

As was becoming more and more commonplace, Bond seemed to discern his thoughts without a word being spoken. “You’re considering how to punish me, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” Tiago confirmed succinctly. “Do you have any suggestions?”

Bond looked at him sharply. “You’ve already admitted this wasn’t entirely my fault.”

“Oh-huh. And my punishment was awakening with the instantaneous, appalling knowledge that I may be too late getting to you.” He stared at Bond intensely. “Do you have _any_ concept of how frightened I was?”

Bond paused, then said contritely, “It won’t happen again, Raoul.” He seemed to consider that for a few moments, then added, “At least, not while we’re still in Lima.”

Tiago laughed. Oh _Dios_, never let this man change.

“A new betting pattern, as usual, _corazón mio_. Very well, I’ll accept your word on that, but that still doesn’t alter my need to punish you.” Tiago tilted his head discretely to one side. “Especially considering we still have an observer, and blowing our cover at this point would only get us both killed in our next encounter with _Los Hados._” He paused, letting that sink in. “It would be
extremely unusual if I didn’t immediately punish an obvious escape attempt.”

“I wasn’t actually trying to . . .” Bond sighed, apparently bowing to the inevitable. “Miguel wouldn’t know that.”

“No, he wouldn’t,” Tiago said.

Bond sighed again. “Very well. What do you need me to do?”

“You can start by removing your slacks.”

“Damn it, Raoul. I’m not wearing anything underneath them!”

“I certainly hope not.”

“We’re in public,” Bond stated reasonably.

“Yes, I’d surmised that.” Tiago narrowed his eyes. “Come now, James, I’ve seen your swimming attire. It doesn’t leave all that much to the imagination.”

“No one needs imagination if I’m naked!”

“You can leave your shirt on.”

“Oh, that’s definitely a plus,” Bond snapped back sarcastically.

Sighing, Tiago said patiently, “Pequeño, it’s not exactly punishment if you enjoy it, hmm?”

Bond opened his mouth to protest further, then apparently decided against it. With a long-suffering sigh, he toed off his shoes, then stood just long enough to remove his slacks.

Before he could sit back completely on the bench, however, Tiago grabbed his upper torso and pulled him face down so that his body lay across the bench. This left Bond’s extremely fine arse astride Tiago’s lap, and he restrained the agent with a hand on his neck when he foolishly attempted to rise.

“What the bloody fuck?” Bond bit out. His entire body was tensed, but at least he made no further moves to get away.

“You really should relax, James,” Tiago said.

“There isn’t anything relaxing about this position!”

Tiago sighed. “I understand, but it’s just going to hurt more if you don’t.”

Bond stiffened further. “You are not going to . . .”

Tiago didn’t bother to reply. He placed the first stroke across both buttocks, but then alternated with one buttock at a time, but purposely in a random pattern so Bond wouldn’t be able to anticipate them. He didn’t hold back on the intensity either. As he had told his little rat earlier, it wouldn’t be punishment if Bond enjoyed it.

Bond gave an occasional grunt when Tiago managed to hit a particularly tender spot, but he wisely didn’t protest his ill treatment further. In fact, he eventually seemed to take Tiago’s advice and relaxed his tensed muscles somewhat.
When both Bond’s buttocks were a bright red, visible even with the dim light from the street lamp, Tiago stopped. He rubbed his hand soothingly over the inflamed flesh, and Bond shuddered. “All done, pequeño,” Tiago said quietly.

Bond made no move to immediately rise, which vaguely surprised him, so he continued to stroke Bond’s arse in a slow, circular motion, allowing him as much time as he needed to recover.

“You’d best stop doing that, Raoul.”

“Hmm? I thought it would feel good afterwards. Take away some of the sting.”

“It does feel good.”

Tiago was puzzled. “Then, why . . . ?” He belatedly recognized the growing hardness against his own groin and bit off a laugh.

“Oh, but you are truly insatiable, dear heart.” He allowed his caress to become slightly firmer. “I did mention it’s not exactly punishment if you enjoy it, didn’t I?”

“I didn’t enjoy it!” Bond said hotly.

“No?”

Bond turned his head to glare up at him. “I do not enjoy being spanked like a child, but afterwards . . .”

“You like the feel of my hand stroking your arse.”

Bond turned his head back onto his crossed forearms and sighed. “Yes. Damn you all to hell.”

“Far too late for that, I’m afraid.” He gave Bond’s arse a last little pat, and the agent jerked slightly.

Tiago chuckled. “Come, James, get dressed. We’ll likely have a busy day tomorrow.”

Bond rose off the bench slowly, obviously more than a little sore. He started to turn his back on Tiago to pull on his slacks, then evidently realized he’d only be giving their hidden audience a better view if he did. He was only partially erect, but Tiago decided he rather liked the combination of semi-erect cock and reddened arse.

He’d have to remember that. It truly was a good look on him.

Bond glared at him again as he put his clothes back on. “You’re enjoying yourself far too much. Thanks to that little exhibition you put on for Q, he’ll be completely convinced now I’m your prisoner and not just your . . . companion. He’s bound to alert M.”

“Well, I certainly hope so. If he doesn’t, I’ll have totally lost my touch.”

“What? You want M to know I’m alive?”

Tiago nodded. “Uh-huh. As I mentioned before, now that one person in MI6 knows you’re alive, the word is bound to get out eventually. You know I prefer to control events, and I refuse to spend the rest of my life looking over my shoulder wondering when your cohorts will try to steal you from me.”

Bond was still looking at him incredulously, but Tiago just shook his head.
“No, James. You’re too important to me. I’ll handle this on my own terms and settle issues with MI6 . . . and M . . . once and for all.”

Chapter End Notes

1 "Sorry"

As I've got this planned out currently, there should only be about 4 or 5 more chapters to go. So, yes, 'the fic that never ends' will end eventually. ; ) As always, many heartfelt thanks for all your support!
“Q, what was so bloody important that you had to come to Lima in person? You were supposed to be using your technical expertise to locate Eleanor, not gallivant around the globe.”

M was looking more stressed than usual, which most likely did not bode well for Q, or the information he had to convey. “I did find her . . . sort of,” he said, with a last minute effort at candor.

Raising her infamous eyebrow of doom at him, M said, “Sort of?”

Oh yes, this was going very well indeed. “Actually, I found someone else, and he’s seen her. Since she’s been kidnapped, I mean.”

M sighed. “Quartermaster, while I have come to greatly appreciate your technological talents, your attempts at lucid communication have so far been conspicuously lacking.”

In for a penny, in for a pound. “I found 007, and he’s seen Eleanor,” Q replied in a rush. “Apparently, he knows exactly who has abducted her as well.”

“Bond is alive?” This one fact was evidently so compelling that M had momentarily failed to register the relatively good news regarding Eleanor. Interesting. Q would have lain bets that the dragon lady would have felt little remorse regarding the demise of her most fractious, sometimes unmanageable agent, considering the negative impact his antics had caused to her career over the years.

However, seeing the look on M’s face now, it was fortunate that Q was not a betting man, because he would have undoubtedly lost that particular wager. Handsomely.

M closed her eyes briefly, obviously composing herself, but when she opened them again, her eyes had narrowed significantly. “Well. See if I write another glowing obituary if the bloody ungrateful man refuses to stay dead.”

From his place leaning against the consulate’s ornate sideboard, Tanner was smiling. “That’s exceptionally good news, Q, but why hasn’t he reported to us directly?”

“Hmm. Well, there’s a slight problem with that.”

“With 007, there is always a ‘slight problem.’” M shook her head. “Apparently, the man’s sole mission in life is to put me into an early grave. What exactly is the issue this time, Quartermaster?”

And there was the question that Q was so not looking forward to answering. Any way he stated it, Bond was guaranteed to be seen in a bad light. “Evidently, Bond has been a prisoner the entire time
he was missing. And still is.” Q paused a moment, cocking his head to one side. “At least, this is what that Raoul person expected me to believe, for some inexplicable reason.”

Tanner merely repeated, “Raoul?” with every appearance of never having heard the name before, but M had abruptly gone very, very still.

“What does this man look like?” M asked sharply.

“Hispanic descent, slightly taller than Bond, impressive electronic skills, and strangely enough, very blonde hair. That’s what initially captured my attention while scanning the video feeds.”

M sank down heavily into the opulent chair behind her. “Obviously, I needn’t bother with writing obituaries at all,” she said.

Tanner hurriedly crossed the sitting room to her chair. “It can’t possibly be Rodriguez?”

M merely nodded. “I fear it is.” She looked up at Tanner, and her voice hardened. “I should have bloody well guessed. This whole scenario has his signature written all over it. It was a convoluted game much like this that got him incarcerated by the Chinese in the first place.”

Q looked from M to Tanner and back again. “I’m relieved that someone knows who he is, because he’s not in any database accessible to the Internet. The man may as well be a ghost cybernetically.”

M sighed. “Tiago Rodriguez was . . . is . . . a very dangerous man with a genius IQ, an unmatched talent with computers, and an uncanny ability to penetrate anyone’s psyche and discover their innate weaknesses, no matter how closely guarded they might be.” She stood and stared intently at Q. “I deliberated for some time before I granted him his double-oh designation, but I thought it would be safer to keep him under MI6’s dubious control than allow him a chance to freelance. Apparently I was absolutely correct in that assumption.”

“Well, that does explain a great deal,” Q said thoughtfully. When both M and Tanner stared at him, he added, “He is a rather exceptional marksman, considering how dark it was at the time.”

“He shot you?” Tanner asked incredulously.

“Tranquilizer gun. Stung like bloody blazes and gave me the worst hangover I’ve ever had.” He paused, considering. “Which doesn’t say very much, actually. I was a bit dull at Uni.”

M sighed. “Perhaps you should start from the beginning, Quartermaster.”

Q obligingly outlined how he stumbled upon Bond, his thwarted attempts at identifying his captor, and finally his decidedly odd encounter with Bond in the flesh.

“How on earth did you know where to find him?” Tanner asked curiously.

“Mostly blind luck, actually.” Q shrugged. “Bond didn’t have much of a tan, so I assumed he hadn’t been in Lima all that long. I checked the surveillance videos in all the major airports in and around Lima for the past several weeks and found no sign of either of them. Since Bond had last been seen in Turkey, traveling by train or automobile would have been unlikely. That left entry by sea, and I was merely strolling down the promenade after investigating the marina in La Punta de Callao when I literally ran into Bond.”

Tanner smiled. “And you’re certain you have no interest in field work?”

Q was appalled. “Heavens, no! Just think of all the aeroplane travel that would entail.”
“And Bond was alone?” M asked, silencing her second with a quick glare.

“At first.”

“He had escaped, you mean?”

Q considered best how to phrase his thoughts. “If he was attempting to escape, he was doing a right botch job of it. He was literally strolling along, wasn’t armed, and was clearly, uhm, not suitably dressed for a serious escape attempt.”

Tanner looked at M quizzically. “Do you think the encounter was staged?”

“I don’t think so, at least not entirely. Even for Tiago, the variables would have been too complex, even if he had known Q was in the general area.” M shook her head. “No, if Tiago has kept Bond for this long, it’s for a very good reason, and he’s far too possessive to allow a prisoner that important to him out of his sight for very long.”

“For what it’s worth, I don’t think Bond is technically a prisoner at all,” Q interjected.

“Well, it certainly sounds like it to me, considering the punishments Rodriguez delivered via that ankle bracelet you told us about,” Tanner said doubtfully.

Q gazed at the ceiling as he gathered his thoughts. “Perhaps, at one time, but Bond’s reactions were all wrong for someone who is merely a prisoner, and nothing else.”

M shook her head. “There is such a thing as Stockholm syndrome, Quartermaster, and Bond is certainly not immune.” Her eyes went vacant for a moment, then she added, “In fact, given his past, he may be more susceptible to it than most, even with his specialized training.”

He was insanely curious as to M’s reasoning behind that last bit, but Q was certain she wouldn’t elaborate even if he asked. Sighing, he said, “It’s difficult to put into words, but this wasn’t merely misguided affection for a captor. You didn’t see his face when this Raoul, or Tiago I suppose, first appeared. What I observed was relief followed by something very much like joy — not exactly what you’d expect from an abused prisoner, even one with Stockholm syndrome.”

Tanner said softly, “There is documented proof of instances where prisoners have actually defended their former captors at all costs, Q. That’s likely all you were seeing there.”

Privately, Q disagreed, wholeheartedly. Bond had still been Bond, exasperating and stubborn, and Q had seen nothing that indicated the man was completely under Tiago’s thumb, regardless of the obvious role-playing that had been portrayed for Q’s benefit. Bond had been with Tiago because he wanted to be with Tiago — the man was simply too hardheaded to have stayed a prisoner this long otherwise.

“Regardless, it’s a moot point,” M said. “After being a captive for this long, Bond has clearly been compromised, regardless of his emotional state at the moment.”

“‘Compromised’ is a harsh word, Ma’am,” Tanner said doubtfully.

“However, it is an accurate one. England cannot allow that pair to remain together. Individually, they are each dangerous in their own right, but together . . .” M took a deep breath, and said, “Together, they could be downright terrifying.”

“007 would never betray England’s interests, Ma’am,” Q said firmly. “Besides, Bond claims to have a plan for retrieving Eleanor. That has to be in conjunction with Tiago’s goals as well, for
whatever reason. If we attempt to . . . retrieve Bond now, we’d be risking the girl’s life.”

Tanner said, “That may have been the original plan, but now that Rodriguez knows MI6 is onto him, he’s likely to simply cut his losses and run. If he disappeared this thoroughly before, he’ll believe he can do so again.”

M merely shook her head. “No, Bill, you don’t know Tiago like I do. Running is the last thing he’ll do. He’s allowed Q to live for a reason. He has a plan — he always has a plan — and I have a feeling we’ll be hearing from him. Very, very soon.”

The incoming message alert sounded on M’s laptop, and she merely raised an eyebrow. Walking slowly toward the computer, she opened her in-box to retrieve the message.

Have you thought on your sins? If so, meet me at the Plaza Grau at 3 p.m. tomorrow.
And dearest Mum, do come alone — it’s a private party. Just you . . . and me.

“Well, he’s never been one to waste time,” M said with the slightest degree of satisfaction in her voice.

Tanner moved toward the intercom. “I’m sure we have enough agents available to cover the plaza . . .”

M held up a hand. “No, Bill. That won’t be necessary. I won’t allow Tiago to believe he’s walking into a trap. He’ll want to propose a deal, and honestly, I’m desperate enough to consider one, at least until Eleanor has been returned to her family. If he thinks I’ve betrayed him . . . again, he’ll disappear permanently and take Bond — and our only lead on finding Eleanor — with him. I can’t risk that.” She narrowed her eyes. “I won’t risk that.”

“But he’s already attempted to kill you once, Ma’am,” Tanner replied.

“No,” M said with quiet certainty. “If he had planned to kill me, I’d be dead. That gas explosion was simply a message, and knowing Tiago, it was a message he overdid in an effort to be grandiose. In fact, after discovering that all those assassinated agents of ours were either double agents or turncoats, I don’t believe he ever intended to kill anyone at headquarters.” She lifted her chin. “Not that I intend to let him get away with murder entirely, even if it was unintentional.”

Tanner sighed. “I’ll defer to your better judgement, Ma’am.”

“Besides,” M added with a reproving frown, “He’s not likely to kill an unarmed woman in a public area without a very good reason, and frankly, I don’t plan on giving him one.”

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“Tiago, relax. It’s not as if I’m going to let anyone capture me without a fight.” Bond smiled. “I may be out of practice, but I believe I could still take down M if she attempted to overpower me.” Bond patted the suitcase in his lap. “Especially now that I’m armed.”

Tiago used the rear view mirror to straighten his collar. “Very amusing, James. If she actually did come alone, I would perhaps share your confidence.” Tiago turned to look at him, narrowing his eyes. “More importantly, if you truly believed she’d come alone, you wouldn’t have demanded so ferociously to accompany me.”

“I dislike leaving anything to chance.”

“As do I. And I definitely do not like the idea of MI6 minions anywhere close to you.”
“Tiago, you still don’t trust me to do my job,” Bond said firmly, but without much heat in his words. “The roof of the Naval History Museum is far enough away for a clear line of sight to the plaza, but still well outside any potential cordon that MI6 might attempt to set up.” Bond hesitated. “Unless it’s the fact that you’ve finally allowed a gun in my hands that has you so concerned.”

Tiago sighed heavily. “Of course not, pequeño. If I had any doubts, I wouldn’t have given you such a dangerous weapon to begin with, hmm?” Always so insecure, his little rat. He shrugged. “I worry. It is my nature and not something I can easily control, especially when it comes to your continued well being. I will not apologize for it.”

Bond nodded reluctantly. “Well, at least I’ve been granted slightly less revealing clothes to wear for the excursion.”

“Don’t get used to it, dear heart.”

Rolling his eyes, Bond said, “I’d best go and set up.” He started to open the door, then turned back impulsively and kissed Tiago solidly on the lips. “Do try to be careful for once,” he said as they came up for air.

“Always,” Tiago said cheerfully.

Bond glared at him, then exited the car, heading obliquely for the rear entrance to the museum.

Tiago glanced down at his watch and sighed, the smile vanishing from his face.

He sincerely hoped he wasn’t making a huge mistake this time.

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Tanner waited anxiously in the car parked a block away from the Plaza Grau and tried not to tap his fingers on the steering wheel. It was a bad habit he’d gotten into, and it annoyed M to no end when he did it.

Not that she was here at the moment to chastise him for it.

This side street was as close as M would allow him to wait while she met with a likely unbalanced cyberterrorist bearing a grudge, and while he understood her reasoning, it didn’t mean he had to like it.

He was so focused on staring uselessly out the windscreen that he nearly jumped when someone opened the passenger side door.

“Good afternoon, Tanner,” Gareth Mallory said pleasantly.

“Sir!” Tanner said, his voice rising in his confusion. “I didn’t know you had arrived in Lima.”

“Hmm. Just flew in yesterday.” He locked his gaze completely on Tanner’s face. “As a matter of fact, I arrived just in time to overhear a rather interesting conversation between you, M and your Quartermaster.”

“However, sir, or listen in with a surveillance device?”

“Oh, the latter, of course, but as it turns out, it was a very good thing that I did.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”
Mallory sighed indulgently. “I have attempted to inform your superior that she has allowed her personal concerns to interfere with her better judgement, and this . . . rendezvous has conclusively proven my point.” He shook his head. “Insisting on meeting with a known terrorist, alone and with no backup is simply the height of irresponsibility.”

“If you ‘overheard’ the entire conversation, sir, you’d realize there’s no one in the world who knows Tiago Rodriguez better than M. If she says she knows how he’s likely to react, I’d bet my life on it.”

“Ah, but it’s not your life that’s at risk here, is it?”

Tanner said nothing, because the man was unfortunately quite correct in that respect.

“Regardless, I have no intention of allowing a known terrorist to escape and perhaps disappear, as he has proven himself quite capable of doing previously.”

Tanner felt his blood run cold. “What exactly have you done, sir?”

Mallory raised an eyebrow. “What should have been done in the first place. I’ve arranged for a squad of agents to encircle the plaza. Once we have this renegade in our hands, it will be easy to discover where young Ms. Lyttelton has been hidden.”

“Sir, I really don’t think this is a good idea.”

“I understand your concern, Tanner, but as Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, it’s my ultimate responsibility if this criminal is allowed to elude MI6’s grasp yet again.” He lifted his chin slightly. “The captain of a ship is always held responsible for any disaster, regardless of whether he was even on the bridge at the time. I plan on insuring at the outset that there is no such disaster.”

“I see, sir, but perhaps it would’ve been prudent to inform M of your plans beforehand?”

“And what do you think her response would have been if I had?”

Tanner sighed. “She made her opinion quite clear last night, sir.”

“That she did.” Mallory unlatched the door, then turned and added, “It’ll all be for the best, Tanner. She’ll be leaving MI6 with a definitive plus on her record, and the Free World will no longer have to contend with such a dangerous terrorist. She’ll thank me for it, in the end.”

As Mallory departed down the now suspiciously deserted street, Tanner said aloud, “For some reason, I don’t believe she will.”

“Nor do I.”

Tanner did actually jump this time, since the voice came directly in his ear through the open window. “Bloody hell, Q! I thought you were monitoring this from the consulate?”

“I was, until I found the microphone in the consulate’s sitting room.” He moved around the front of the car and slid into the seat Mallory had just vacated. “There wasn’t time to alert you before M left for her appointment, so I decided to come here directly.” At Tanner’s raised eyebrow, he added, “And yes, I know it would’ve been quicker to contact you by phone, but if the sitting room was bugged, I think it’s safe to assume any external communications would also be monitored.”

Tanner nodded, grudgingly. “So much for the inviolability of a consulate.”
“Doesn’t count when it’s violated by someone who is *supposedly* on your side.”

“So it would seem.” Tanner sighed. “I’m afraid this is going to end very badly, Q.”

Q nodded firmly. “I agree, but that doesn’t mean we have to sit by and actually *watch* things go to hell in a handbasket, do we?”

Tanner looked at the young man doubtfully. “Does that mean you have some sort of a plan?”

“Oh, I *always* have a plan.” Q straightened his glasses on his nose. “Whether it’s a good one or not remains to be seen, especially since I missed my afternoon cuppa.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger (again), folks, but I knew I wouldn’t be able to update next weekend. This was all I could manage in a relatively short period of time, but I’m at least *trying* to be proactive about updating on time. ; )
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Oh, my. 100,000+ words. I still can't believe there is anyone out there still reading this, but I profusely thank those who remain.

Hmm. And everyone has noted the "Angst" tag, right? -- Just checking!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As he passed the ring of gently swaying sentinel palms and stepped onto the blood red brick of the Plaza Grau, Tiago wondered again if this were one of his more brilliant plans. He could have managed to meet with M without alerting her and MI6 first, but Tiago Rodriguez was almost physiologically incapable of doing anything without making a grand production of it. His love of theatrics was going to get him killed one of these days, and while that thought wouldn’t have disturbed him in the not-so-distant past, he now had someone else to think about.

Someone who would be positively shattered if anything distressingly permanent happened to him.

However, he had first encountered M in a plaza much like this, had met her there again that fateful day he had been captured by the Chinese, and he felt a compelling need to complete that disastrous cycle. After he had concluded this transaction with M, he could dispel all the shadows from his past that her organization had bestowed upon him.

Yes, he could definitely do this now that he had in his hands, or rather in his arms, the sole, blazing beacon of light that MI6 had ever produced — the only person even remotely capable of dispelling those shadows permanently.

He slowed his pace as he approached the imposing monument at the center, but not because he needed to dodge the tourists that normally occupied the plaza in significant numbers. It was a gorgeous, clear day, which was unusual for Lima this time of year, and both the local populace of Callao and its temporary visitors had flocked instead to the beaches that dotted the peninsula.

M was therefore easy to locate as she stood alone at the statue’s base, ostensibly reading one of the several plaques that adorned it.

The intervening years had not been kind to her, as she appeared to have aged far more than the relatively short span between their meetings would account for. He was not surprised, however, as Tiago was under no illusions regarding the difficulties her job entailed. Oh, he could understand her position and the daunting decisions she was forced to make, but that didn’t mean it justified her actions. Not by a long shot.

Especially if that inept Moneypenny bitch had actually managed to kill Bond after receiving M’s order to shoot from such a less-than-advantageous position. He’d made certain that Patrice had known exactly what would happen to him if he accidentally killed Bond, but he hadn’t expected that Bond’s own colleagues would be such a dire threat.

But that wouldn’t be a problem in the future. Not if Tiago had anything to say about it.
M turned to face him as Tiago started up the shallow steps, and his lips twitched upwards as he realized she must have been using the reflection in the bronze inlays to monitor his approach. He had to admire her for that much — she had always known how to work all the angles.

He wondered if she had already worked out Tiago’s actual reason for meeting her. Or if she would even believe it when she knew.

She nodded to him briefly as he stopped in front of her, saying merely, “Tiago.”

He smiled his best shark smile. “Olivia.”

Her eyes narrowed at the use of her given name, but Tiago was long past caring if she was displeased with him or not.

“You appear to have misplaced someone,” Tiago said blandly.

Her chin jerked upward. “According to my Quartermaster, apparently there are two individuals I have misplaced,” she said.

Tiago drew in an exaggerated breath and looked skyward. “Well, you could hardly have missed him all that much, since you didn’t expect him to come back in the first place, as ill-prepared as he was to encounter me.”

“007 has surprised me before, and I thought he deserved the chance to prove himself.” She paused. “I would think that you, more than most people, would understand the importance of that.”

Tiago heard his voice harden. “Not when proving oneself capable gets you thrown to the wolves afterwards in gratitude.”

She studied his face for a few moments, but if she were intimidated by the anger in his voice, she didn’t show it.

“If I had known I was sending Bond after you, I would have never done so.” She straightened her back and stared him in the eyes. “Bond is my toughest agent, always managing to survive despite desperate odds, but his one significant weakness is something that only you could have uncovered . . . and taken advantage of.”

“Because I’m brilliant and intuitive?” he shot back.

“No, because you share the same weakness.”

Tiago found he couldn’t argue with her about that statement. He and Bond had always been two sides of the same coin, and it was the primary reason he had been able to . . . convince Bond to stay with him in the first place.

“Tiago,” she added firmly, “you must let him go.”

“Like hell I will.” He pointed a finger at her. “You have nothing to say in the matter. Not anymore. It is his choice to remain at my side.”

“I see,” she replied in her annoyingly sensible voice. “Which is why you felt the need to apply a restraining device to his ankle? Because remaining with you is his choice?”

Tiago laughed. “You’re just angry because you didn’t think of it first. You can’t tell me you haven’t thought about something similar after he’s blithely disobeyed your orders time after time.”
“I’ve always been a believer in the concept of free will. If one of may agents disobeys an order, then he or she merely has to abide by the consequences of that decision.”

Tiago seethed, a curtain of red clouding his eyes. “Even consequences should have limits. You abandoned me.”

“I did tell you that you shared Bond’s weakness.” She shook her head. “I had such high hopes for you. You had all the requisite qualities to assume my position when I retired — you were brilliant, intuitive, and best of all, ruthless. So, tell me, Tiago Rodriguez, if you had been in my position all those years ago, what would you have done?”

Tiago actually took a step back, as if she had threatened him. “I would have found some other way.”

“I see. And if there had been no other way?”

Tiago merely shook his head. “It is that sort of reasoning that will be your downfall. More importantly, if you do attempt to take that easy way out — the ‘moral’ way — it will only instigate a cascade of events that will annihilate everything and everyone you ever cared about. I, for one, would not sacrifice the stability of my country for one individual.” Her eyes narrowed again. “Think about it this way, Tiago. If you try to ‘save’ Bond now and for any reason abandon him in the future, you will utterly and totally destroy him. And in a much more effective and permanent manner than the Chinese ever did to you.”

Tiago took a deep calming breath, and not for show this time. He would make her understand, or this risk was all for nothing. “You say this because you love England above all else — more than your colleagues, your agents, even your own husband.”

She flinched slightly at that, but she didn’t deny it. She couldn’t, since they both knew it was the simple truth.

“But I hold no such entrenched, lofty loyalties,” Tiago said. “I love James with everything that I am, with everything that I ever will be. I will never abandon him. Not to any enemy. Not to any situation. Not even to bloody England.” He stepped closer to her, and she merely tilted her head to maintain eye contact. “And because of him, I will do something now that I swore I would never do.”

She jerked her chin upward. “And that would be?”

“Forgive you.”

Her eyes widened.

Tiago nodded. “I know who has your goddaughter. I will retrieve her. I can also insure that you are not forcibly retired and can continue your glorious reign over MI6 and its minions until you actually choose to retire.”

M took the step forward this time, bringing all her self-contained fierceness to bear. “I will not preserve my position knowing you have cavalierly eliminated all the competition in order for me to do so.” She glared at him. “The mere concept is utterly reprehensible to me.”

“Tsk, tsk,” Tiago said, shaking his head. “Grant me the illusion that I employ some degree of subtlety with my machinations. I have matured from the brash young agent you once knew.” He brushed back a lock of hair blown into his eyes by the prevailing wind from the nearby harbor. “It
is in my best interests to maintain the status quo in MI6. I will guarantee that no one connected to that organization is physically harmed in any way. I also promise never to interfere directly with England or its interests in the future. And for all this, I ask for only one thing in return.”

“Bond.”

He nodded. “Yes. I do not wish to spend the rest of my life wondering when the retrieval squad will appear out of the nether.”

“It should be his choice.”

“It is his choice.”

M’s lips tightened into a thin line. “I have only your word for that.”

Tiago took another half-step closer, well into her personal space. “My word is my bond. That was good enough for you . . . once.”

“Bonds can be broken, especially given enough time . . . and concerted effort.”

Tiago shook his head, laughing. “And here I thought that I was the master of the double entendre.” He looked hard into her eyes. “Hear me. I have never broken a bond, and I don’t intend to start.”

“That remains to be seen. Regardless, there is still the issue of the crimes you have committed in the past. As long as I know you are alive, I am obligated to apprehend you to answer for those crimes.” She looked at him steadily, the expression on her face implying something far deeper than her words. “It would have been best for everyone if you had remained dead, Tiago.”

Tiago felt the smile cross his face. “Unfortunately, I appear to have established a relationship with a man who counts resurrection among his hobbies.”

M started to reply, then looked past his shoulder, her eyes widening.

Tiago immediately spun on his heel, grabbing M and pulling her in front of him while retrieving the pistol from his pocket.

He caught the flash of the sniper scope reflecting the sunlight from a doorway in the building directly across the courtyard. It wasn’t anywhere near Bond’s position, and Tiago felt himself almost shaking with rage. He looked down at M. “You betrayed me . . . again,” he snarled.

“Don’t be a bloody fool, Tiago. If I had planned to betray you, I certainly wouldn’t have given you an opportunity to use me as a hostage first.” She looked up at him. “I may be old, but I’m certainly not senile. Yet.”

“No, but as we’ve already discussed, you’re not above sacrificing anyone for your precious ideals, are you?”

A squad of heavily armed and armored men spewed from their hidden positions, and Tiago swore under his breath. He had no idea how to retrieve himself from this mess. He knew Bond well enough that he wouldn’t deliberately injure a fellow agent. He also knew that given the extreme difference in their heights, M was hardly suitable as an effective shield. The encircling agents would merely shoot him rather than allow an extended hostage situation, regardless of the risk to M. He was quite certain of the orders they would have been given.

Maldita sea. He hadn’t intended to break his promise to Bond, but the odds were definitely not in
his favor. Actually, he had dreamed about almost this exact scenario once — how he would end his unbearable pain and take the source of that pain with him — but his life had taken an unexpected uplifting turn after fixating on a certain double-oh agent.

Well, come to think of it, there was one more tactic he could attempt.

*When in doubt, threaten.* It was his little rat’s favorite maxim, after all, and it couldn’t hurt to give it a try.

He leaned over, bowing his head and holding his cheek against M’s to make a more difficult target, and then held the gun to both their heads.

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M barely had time to stiffen in Tiago’s almost intimate grasp before all hell broke loose.

She jolted forward in surprise when a lone gunshot disrupted the relative silence of the plaza. Tiago cried out in pain, dropping his gun, the entry wound in his upper arm immediately beginning to ooze blood.

Additional shots soon followed the first, but these caused the agents approaching them to quickly separate and dive for whatever cover they could find.

Trust Tiago to have his own backup in place. But if that were the case, where had that first shot originated from?

It was puzzling, to say the least. Given her captor’s suddenly lax grip, M could have certainly made her escape, but she had no intention of doing so. She was absolutely furious that someone had disobeyed her orders, and there was going to be hell to pay when she discovered who that person was. She was quite capable of managing Tiago Rodriguez on her own, and she certainly wasn’t going to be an accessory to tacit murder, regardless of what the man had done in the past.

Her word was her bond, as well.

“Quick,” she ordered. “Get us behind the monument while they are still pinned down.”

Tiago looked down at her sharply — the utter and complete fury on his face muting temporarily to surprise — but he had already been walking them backward even as she spoke.

Great minds think alike. It really was a pity that he couldn’t assume her role as chief of MI6. She hadn’t lied to him about her preference for successor, at least all those years ago when he had been merely rash and not mentally unstable. The intervening years had obviously not been kind to him, but then, she would have expected no less given his extended captivity and admittedly obsessive personality.

They reached the dubious protection of the monument itself, but this stalling tactic would only buy Tiago a few moments. From the reactions of the approaching agents, they had obviously come to the conclusion there was only one man providing the covering fire. And since this man had a totally unobstructed field of view and had fired multiple shots — none of which had hit their marks — it had also become glaringly apparent he wasn’t attempting to actually hit anyone.

Well, other than Tiago, that is.

M’s eyes widened as she abruptly made the connection.
Bond. It had to be Bond up there. Tiago would never risk his life on anyone but an expert marksman as backup. Patrice had not been the only such talented mercenary for hire.

However, Tiago was swearing almost continuously under his breath, mostly in Spanish, and he was looking up at the building where the shot had apparently originated with wild and furious eyes.

If it was Bond up there, it didn’t make any sense. Tiago had obviously trusted him enough to allow a rifle in his hands, but apparently Bond must be having second thoughts regarding their continued association since he had clearly targeted the man. She simply refused to believe he had been aiming for her and missed.

But why, then, would he continue his efforts to pin down the approaching MI6 agents if he were attempting to escape from Tiago?

The agents in question were also firing now, but not directly at them since Tiago was still using her as a shield. She belatedly realized they were attempting to keep Tiago far enough away from his dropped gun to prevent him from reacquiring it.

The MI6 agents were already beginning to encircle the monument, and if they accomplished that, Tiago would definitely be trapped. She didn’t bother attempting to call them off herself, since she knew they would merely ignore the order. Tanner would never have disregarded her instructions, so these agents’ orders had to have originated from a higher authority.

And she had a damn good suspicion exactly who that higher authority might be.

She must have muttered something scathing under her breath, because Tiago said with some degree of amazement, “You really didn’t arrange this fiasco, did you?”

“No, I most certainly did not,” she replied fiercely. “For what little it’s worth, I’m sorry, Tiago.” She looked up at him. “Not for Hong Kong, never for that, but for allowing myself to be even an unwitting participant to this.” She thrust her chin in the direction of the cordon of agents.

Tiago looked at her silently for a few moments, then said, “I actually believe that was sincere.” He looked at her incredulously. “Well, first time for everything, I suppose.”

Just before Tiago was completely cut off from any hope of escape, the shots from the approaching MI6 agents ended abruptly. All of them. At exactly the same time.

She watched in amazement as the agents frantically checked their suddenly malfunctioning weapons. Once they determined the guns were useless, they had no choice but to apprehend Tiago physically and were even now approaching en masse at a dead run.

Tiago wasted no time in exploiting this unexpected opportunity. He shoved M in the direction of the onrushing agents, then dove for his own weapon, firing off a few quick shots that sent the men sprawling once again onto the ground. He hesitated for only the briefest moment before he tossed his gun to M with a sharp nod, then sprinted awkwardly with his wounded arm in the direction of the harbor.

M just as awkwardly caught the pistol, had to fumble slightly to get the business end pointing in the right direction, then said, “The first one of you imbeciles who decides to continue this pursuit, which I have categorically not authorized, will find themselves abruptly invalided into early retirement.”

The men looked at her doubtfully at first, but they must have determined from her expression that she was quite serious.
The sound of an idling motor suddenly roared to full life, and she glanced behind her to see a sleek, black speedboat already taking the fugitives out of range.

As one of the nearby agents lowered his now useless gun, she saw the series of three conspicuously red lights embedded in the grip and shook her head in amazement.

Evidently there was a glitch with the new micro-dermal sensor technology. She would be forced to chastise someone for the technical lapse, of course, and she would most certainly do so.

Right before she congratulated him on a job superbly well done.

When Tanner appeared suddenly at her side, looking wide-eyed and breathless, she finally lowered the pistol.

“Are you all right, Ma’am?” he said.

“I’m fine, Bill,” she said, then looked up at him. “I assume we’ve had a surprise visit from the Chairman?”

Tanner sighed. “Yes, Ma’am. I’m sorry, Ma’am, but you were already in the plaza when we discovered what he planned to do.”

“It’s all right, Bill.” She nodded her head in the direction of the milling squad with their array of mysteriously malfunctioning guns. “Just remind me to give our new Quartermaster an increase in pay when we arrive back in London.”

Smiling, Tanner said, “I’ll do that, Ma’am.” He looked around at the conspicuous lack of casualties and noted, “It’s a good thing our cyberterrorist’s accomplice is such a horrendous shot.”

M merely shook her head. “Or an exceptionally good one, which is somewhat unexpected given his most recent marksmanship scores.”

Tanner looked down at her in surprise. “That was Bond? But why would he shoot Rodriguez if . . . ?” He looked around, searching for the errant agent, whom he obviously thought had just initiated an escape attempt by shooting his captor.

“You won’t find him, Bill. I saw him leave in the boat with Tiago. Apparently voluntarily.”

“But why . . . ?”

“I don’t know why, but I certainly hope he had an exceedingly good reason . . . and that he can convince Tiago of it. Very quickly.” She shook her head. “Before I hire any field agent, I have to insure they have at least the potential to kill another human being. You can usually see it in their eyes, Bill, that willingness to kill.”

She let out her breath in a long exhale. “I just saw that look in Tiago’s eyes, and for once, it wasn’t directed at me.”

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“Oh, my. This is not good.”

Dr. Diego Almeida happened to be standing on the villa’s terrace with Michelle when Tiago’s boat approached its berth from the harbor.

Michelle peered over the railing to examine the boat and its occupants. “Silva seems to be the only
Michelle,“ Diego said reprovingly.

“Well, it can’t be all that bad if he’s still on his feet,” she said, hands on her hips.

Diego shook his head. “It is not his injuries I was referring to. There is another problem.”

“Huh. That man’s got more problems than a math book.” Michelle looped her long hair back into a bun, a maneuver she always did before tending to a patient. “What is it specifically you’re referring to?”

Sighing, Diego led the way to the room they were using as a makeshift infirmary. He knew Tiago would eventually meet them there. “It is hard to put into words. His stance, his expression. He is patently furious with someone, in a manner I have not seen in quite some time.”

Michelle snorted as she turned on the tap at the sink, scrubbing her hands thoroughly. “Looks like he’s been shot. Can’t say as I blame him there, since that would make even me mad as a mule eating bumblebees.”

In spite of himself, Diego had to smile at her turn of phrase. She was one of the few good things to have come out of his time spent in Lima. “I would agree with you, Michelle, but I am afraid it is Señor Bond with whom he is so angry.”

She paused in her handwashing, looking over her shoulder at him. “Are you sure, Diego?”

“They are generally inseparable. He has not allowed anyone to apply even a makeshift dressing.” Diego shrugged. “It is merely an impression given past experiences, but I truly do fear that is the case.”

She turned off the tap with the back of her hand and donned a pair of gloves. “That is not a good thing. Given his position as Silva’s property, James won’t be able to defend himself.”

As he took his turn at the sink, Diego considered how much he should tell her. Tiago would not be pleased, but if he expected her to navigate this particular minefield, she would need all the pertinent information. “You might be surprised at how capable Señor Bond actually is at defending himself.” He turned off the tap and applied his own gloves. “He is an MI6 field agent . . . just as Tiago once was.”

Michelle dropped the roll of bandages she had just removed from a shelf and turned to face him. “What did you just say?”

He smiled lopsidedly at her. “I believe you heard me just fine.”

She absentmindedly retrieved the fallen roll of bandages and straightened slowly. “But he’s . . .”

She shook her head. “That don’t make a bit of sense. By ‘Tiago’, you do mean Silva?”

“His name is actually Tiago Rodriguez. He spent many years with MI6 before he was captured and tortured by the Chinese, for several months at least.”

She looked momentarily stunned, but then shook her head again. “That don’t give him no right to do the same to someone else,” she said, her accent much stronger than usual.

Diego sighed. “I agree with you, and I was quite displeased with Tiago when he . . . detained Señor Bond. At least, at first.”
Michelle raised an eyebrow. “At first?”

“They are . . . good for each other, in a way no other partner could ever be.” Diego walked over to her, retrieving the bandages from her lax hand. “They are both very violent men, Michelle, with an equally violent occupation, and I believe they will eventually balance each other out in a manner that will benefit both of them.”

“You always were the eternal optimist, Diego Almeida.”

He smiled at her. “That is what Tiago said.”

She put on an appropriately horror-stricken expression. “Heaven forbid I should ever agree with that man on anything.”

Tiago chose that moment to walk, or rather stalk, into the room, his gaze darting from Michelle, then back to him.

“You’ve told her then,” Tiago said, his words clipped and sharp.

Diego nodded. “Sí. I thought it to be the appropriate time.”

Tiago stared at him for some time, disturbingly silent, but then he merely stripped off his jacket and shirt, not even wincing as he moved his injured arm in the process.

This was not a good sign. Tiago had often told him that rage was his most effective counterbalance against intense pain, either physical or emotional.

Behind them, Michelle gasped as she saw for the first time the extensive array of scars and poorly healed wounds that crisscrossed his torso.

Tiago simply ignored her.

Beckoning to the exam table that was situated against one wall, Diego waited until his patient had seated himself before examining the wound. “Since there is both an entry and exit wound, the bullet is obviously not lodged in your arm,” he said, knowing this was a fact that Tiago was already well aware of. “It also does not appear to have damaged the humerus or any major blood vessels.”

Michelle handed him the bottle of antiseptic and sterile dressings. “You don’t want to do an exploratory, Diego, in case there was fabric introduced into the wound from the bullet’s passage?”

Diego glanced at his patient. “I have a feeling the answer to my request for that procedure would be ‘no’, unless obvious signs of infection develop.”

Tiago merely nodded with the briefest jerk of his head, still saying nothing.

Sighing, Diego thoroughly cleaned and dressed the wound, applied a topical antibiotic, then wrapped the entire thing in gauze to keep it clean and dry. He then looked at Tiago, and asked with some degree of trepidation, “It was Señor Bond who shot you, was it not?”

Tiago’s eyes blazed, and it was all the confirmation Diego needed.

Diego explained patiently, “If I wished to shoot someone and cause the very least amount of permanent damage, this is how I would go about it.”

Tiago glared at him then, his eyes narrowing. “Do not try to defend him.”
“Tiago, there has to be a reason . . .”

“He betrayed me,” Tiago snarled as he stood up abruptly from the exam table. “I trusted him, and the pendejo\(^1\) had the nerve to shoot me in gratitude.”

Diego moved quickly to block Tiago’s path, knowing he needed to calm the man down before he did something he would seriously regret later. “Where is Señor Bond, Tiago?”

“I haven’t killed him, if that’s what you’re worried about.” When Diego merely raised an inquiring eyebrow at him, Tiago added tersely, “Since he has proven himself so unreliable, I have chained him to the bed in my suite.”

Diego knew there was little chance his words would make any difference with Tiago in one of his black moods, but he had to try, for his sake as well as Señor Bond’s. “Tiago,” he said calmly. “I know I am already deeply in your debt, but I would make one more request of you.”

“Out with it, Diego. I have a pressing prior engagement.”

“Promise me you will talk to him first, Tiago. That is all I ask.”

Tiago smiled, but it was a thoroughly unpleasant one. “Moshe Dayan once said, ‘If you want to make peace, you don’t talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.’” He pushed past Diego but paused at the door. “I think that’s rather appropriate in this case, don’t you think?”

Chapter End Notes

\(^1\)This implies some variant of "Jackass" or "Asshole" -- take your pick. Although the literal meaning is "pubic hair." ; )

And sorry -- again -- for the cliffhanger. Things will get better, I promise!
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

Eh. Sorry this is so late, but as you will see, this is truly a monster of a chapter. And I wasn't able to split this one up, for some unknown reason. //coughs delicately//

And, ahem, just a brief warning that this chapter is decidedly _not_ worksafe. In fact, it's about as non-worksafe as they come. Pun intended. ; )

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been a long time since Tiago had been _this_ angry, but then betrayal by someone he trusted — and loved — had always managed to provoke that particular emotion in him.

He simply couldn’t wrap his mind around the fact that Bond had actually _shot_ him. He would have lain odds that the man had loved him in return. Tiago knew he was hopelessly smitten, and therefore hampered with the accompanying emotional blinders, but he thought he was a better judge of character than that. And now . . .

And now he didn’t know what he was going to do.

Bond hadn’t even struggled earlier when he’d pushed him into the bedroom, bound his hands tightly behind him, and quite literally chained him, with an extremely _short_ length of chain, to a bedpost.

The man’s passivity had been disconcerting. In fact, it had been almost eerie how Bond had simply stared at him without saying a word — stared at him as if he were afraid he’d disappear if he took his eyes from him. This fact, and his continued silence, were the only two things that had kept Tiago from actually striking him in his rage.

But then, Bond had spent enough time with him to become very well attuned to his moods. He evidently hadn’t lost all his instincts for self preservation and must have assumed it was in his best interests to remain silent.

He had assumed correctly.

As Tiago re-entered the room after having his gunshot treated, he saw that Bond had managed to work himself into a kneeling position. He had his head bowed, and although he must have been aware of Tiago entering the room, he didn’t raise his head. In fact, other than a very slight tensing of his muscles, he made no acknowledgment whatsoever of Tiago’s presence.

For some reason, this incensed Tiago even more. He needed some reaction, some justification, some _clue_ as to why he had betrayed him so unforgivably, and Bond’s refusal to display even his _contempt_ for Tiago’s trust in him positively infuriated him.

As he approached the bed, he pulled out his sheath knife, determined that he would get a reaction from Bond. One way or the other.

Climbing onto the bed next to him, he sheared viciously through the shirt and jacket at Bond’s back without any warning, cleaving them both neatly in two. Other than a slight flinch from Bond
when the back of the blade brushed against his skin, he made no other indication of the violence of Tiago’s action.

Tiago wasn’t surprised that the man had flinched — the stainless steel blade was likely nearly as cold as his heart, although the blade would warm up as he used it.

He was fairly certain that his heart would not.

“I did tell you not to get accustomed to wearing clothes, did I not?” Tiago snarled, as he moved the knife to slice through both sets of sleeves, then ripping the tattered remains of shirt and jacket from Bond’s torso and throwing them to the side of the bed.

Bond still didn’t reply, and Tiago felt his blood pressure soar. He moved the knife to the outside of one of the man’s ankles and started tearing through the slacks from ankle to knee to hip. Bond should consider himself lucky that these were not nearly as form-fitting as those he normally allowed Bond to wear. As a consequence, he only managed to nick the skin of one knee slightly, and that only because he was being even less careful with the opposite limb after not receiving any reaction from Bond with the first.

Tiago could have completed the removal of the slacks by continuing his cuts from hip to waistband on either side, but that would be too straightforward and wouldn’t cater at all to Tiago’s primal need to punish.

Kneeling on the bed, and facing Bond directly, Tiago held the knife over Bond’s groin, resting the handle of the blade on his naked stomach. When Bond still kept his head lowered, Tiago reached out with his free hand and forced his chin violently upwards.

“So what do you think, James? It’s too bad you’ve already been circumcised, because now I may have to go for a slightly more radical procedure. It’s a good thing I’m so handy with a knife, hmm?”

Bond’s eyes remained blank and unresponsive, and Tiago snarled, “Answer me, damn it!”

“I don’t care what you do,” Bond replied in a monotone.

Nostrils flaring in rage, Tiago snarled again and sliced through the front, then the back of the slacks, barely caring what damage he might do. When he had flung the remains of Bond’s clothes aside, and the man was once again completely naked but still bound and helpless, Tiago held the knife against Bond’s neck.

“You should care. You should care a great deal. You of all people know what I’m capable of when I’m this angry.”

Tiago had expected Bond to be rebellious or combative given his unforgivable betrayal, but the man wasn’t displaying any sign that he intended to defend himself physically at all. If Tiago didn’t know better, he’d assume Bond was retreating behind the shell he’d erected to protect himself from overwhelming emotional pain — the same barrier he’d created when he was a child and his entire world had crashed down around him.

But this implied he was still emotionally invested in Tiago, even after shooting him, so that was patently impossible.

Wasn’t it?

Bond closed his eyes briefly, then reopened them, but now his gaze was as open and honest as Tiago had ever seen it. Like a child’s. “I knew you’d be forced to punish me afterwards, but you’re still alive,” he said. “That’s all I cared about.”

Tiago nearly dropped the knife in shock, his eyes widening. “What?”
“I couldn’t let you do it.”

Now thoroughly confused, Tiago unconsciously relaxed the pressure of the knife against Bond’s neck. “I don’t understand. Let me do what? — kill M? I told you I would let her live. You must have known I could have killed her at any time during that rendezvous without endangering myself in the process.”

Bond just shook his head within the limits of Tiago’s grasp, clearly not caring the least about the blade still pressed against his jugular. “You weren’t thinking about killing her. You were thinking about killing yourself.”

“No, I . . .” Tiago immediately started to respond, then realized that he had been reminiscing about darker times. And much darker thoughts.

_Infinitely_ darker thoughts.

“I watched you through the scope,” Bond said, his voice low and distressed. “Dr. Almeida had described how you were before. I watched as your eyes glazed over, and I watched as you bowed your head. I could see it on your face, just like he’d said.” He lowered his gaze. “I couldn’t let you do it,” he repeated softly.

Tiago could only shake his head, unable to reply because he was so insanely furious, but not at Bond this time. At himself. He’d been an absolute _idiot_ — a term Tiago definitely didn’t enjoy applying to himself. He released Bond’s chin, lifted the knife away from the man’s vulnerable throat and hurled the weapon at the far wall, its handle quivering with the force of the impact.

How could he have been so wrong about his little rat’s motives? Was he that certain that everyone he loved would eventually betray and abandon him?

And here he’d complained that Bond had trust issues.

_Maldita sea_. He had the man beat by _kilometers_ on trust issues. It would appear that dearest M was right, and they _did_ share the same weakness.

Several of them, in fact.

Bond was stronger than any man he’d ever met, but he still possessed an extremely fragile psyche — a psyche that Tiago may have just irreparably damaged thanks to his inexcusable misreading of the man’s motives.

It would serve him right if Bond never trusted him again.

“Pequeño,” he said softly, when he felt he could trust his voice. “Yes, I have thought of killing myself. Many times, in fact.” He paused, waiting for Bond to raise his head. “But not recently, certainly not since I’ve met you. _Never_ since then.” He reached out to cup Bond’s face with both of his hands. “Can you accept that as long as you are with me, I never will? Can you possibly trust me that much after what I’ve done?”

Bond was silent for so long that Tiago feared he wouldn’t answer. Or heaven forbid, that he would answer in the negative.

But when Bond did speak, he said merely, “Fuck me.”

Tiago gasped aloud. That phrase could have been intended as an expression of discontent, or as a statement of futility in Tiago’s expectations of trusting him, but Tiago knew better. He could tell
from the open, vulnerable expression on Bond’s face, from the lowering of all of the man’s formidable barriers, that he meant it as the ultimate demonstration of his continued trust in Tiago.

He meant it literally.

Tiago felt so lightheaded that he feared he might actually pass out, and it wasn’t entirely due to the amount of blood abruptly rushing to his groin. This was the most precious gift Bond could ever give him, and it was one he had given to no one else. More importantly, it wasn’t simply a gift of his body — he was giving all of himself to Tiago. Without any reservations whatsoever.

And to have done so even after Tiago had nearly killed him in his rage? Such a rare, precious gem his little rat was. So brave to trust this absolutely after he’d been nearly destroyed by it so many times in the past.

Tiago shook his head in amazement. And to think that soon he would belong to Tiago completely. Irrevocably. It was almost more than he could bear to contemplate.

But he would do this right. He would make amends in the only language that wasn’t open to further misinterpretation or miscalculation.

He would do it through his actions.

Tiago rolled his head, attempting to release his accumulated tension, and he wasn’t surprised when he finally felt the faint throb of his wounded arm now that the cushioning curtain of rage had lifted. However, the arm didn’t hurt nearly as much as it should at this point, so evidently Diego had snuck in a painkiller amidst the antibiotics. He wouldn’t put it past the man to know he might need such a thing before this day was over.

He’d have to thank him for his foresight later.

Much later.

When Tiago looked back at Bond, the man had once again bowed his head, but unlike their previous encounters, this time there wasn’t a gram of resistance in his body. He was being the perfect submissive, and Tiago knew just how difficult this feat was for a man of Bond’s natural temperament.

The ultimate gift indeed, and it was enough to send a bolt of pure, unadulterated lust through Tiago. He had to take a few calming deep breaths or this would be over all too soon.

And that was certainly the last thing on Tiago’s agenda.

He moved behind Bond to release the chain binding him to the bed, but when he reached for the man’s wrists to remove those bindings, Bond said quietly, “You can leave me tied, if you like.”

Tiago hissed a breath through his teeth, again intensely aroused by the man’s submission, but after a brief pause, he finished removing the restraints.

Bond glanced back at him in surprise, and Tiago merely smiled. Running his hands lightly down Bond’s arms, he leaned in close and whispered, “Ahh, but that’s what you have lost today when you decided to trust me so absolutely. I won’t ever need to tie you again, will I?” He lightened his touch until he was barely skimming Bond’s skin, and the man shivered. “You’ll do anything I ask now, without hesitation, won’t you, dear heart?”

There was no delay in Bond’s reply. “Yes, Tiago.” But then he lifted his chin, and added with only
slightly narrowed eyes, “In the bedroom, at least.”

Tiago laughed, dropping his chin to his chest when he finally recovered his breath. Always hedging his bets, this one was, and just as obviously unable to remain the perfect submissive for very long. But that was all right, because he wouldn’t have him any other way. It was enough to know that no one would ever have this man again but him. No one.

Tiago wiped his eyes, and said, “All right, corazón mío, I will allow you that.” He leaned in to lightly nip Bond’s neck. When he continued to nuzzle his neck and then slid his hands slowly around to rest possessively on Bond’s sensitive hips, Bond grunted in surprise. Looking down over Bond’s shoulder to note his already impressive arousal, Tiago added, “But in all things sexual, you are mine to do with as I please.”

Bond didn’t reply, but he immediately rested his head on Tiago’s shoulder, his eyes drifting closed and his whole body radiating trust and complicity. Tiago almost instinctively thrust his still clothed groin against Bond’s backside in response. Bond’s eyes flew open at that, but there remained no resistance in his body.

As Tiago continued to rub small circles on Bond’s hips, the man shifted, now fully aroused as Tiago focused entirely on this distinctive erogenous zone — the one he had used to first imprint the man to his touch.

It felt almost like coming home.

“Aren’t you slightly overdressed for this, Tiago?” Bond said, with a slight rasp in his voice.

Tiago thrust slightly again, enjoying the feel of the soft cloth between him and Bond’s naked arse. Chuckling quietly, he said, “I would ask if you were in a hurry, but you are a little nervous, no?” He reached down to nibble on an earlobe. “And when you are nervous about something, your instinct is to tackle it straight on and get it over with.”

Bond tilted his head to allow Tiago better access, but he didn’t deny that assertion. He looked up at him, his eyes still soft. “I can’t guarantee I’ll enjoy it,” he said.

“Hmmmm,” Tiago said, moving his mouth down the man’s neck and taking the time to mark him thoroughly. “Perhaps not, but I certainly can,” he said smugly.

“Egotist.”

“Realist.”

Bond squinted up at him in exasperation, and Tiago laughed again. “You really must trust me, pequeño.”

Sighing, Bond said, “I do,” and his body melted even more against Tiago’s in confirmation.

“Ah,” Tiago responded, enjoying all too well the sensation of that exquisite body against his. “Hold that thought, please.” He rolled off the bed, started removing his clothes hurriedly, and swore when his shirt caught on the overenthusiastic bandage Diego had applied to his upper arm. Reaching back for the knife still impaled on the wall, he yanked it free and sliced the sleeve of his shirt to remove it more expeditiously.

Bond was gazing at him with heavy-lidded eyes. “You tend to be hard on wardrobes. Your tailor must hate you.”
Tiago removed the last of his clothing and flung it across the room. “À contrario, mon ami. My tailor loves me, because he’s always having to replace said wardrobe.” He crawled back into bed and sighed contentedly at the feel of naked skin against skin. “And I pay him very, very well.”

Bond narrowed his eyes. “Through monetary means only, I assume.”

Chuckling, Tiago turned Bond around and ravished a nipple until the man thrust his chest forward to insure greater contact. “Jealousy doesn’t become you, pequeño,” he said as he released the nipple.

“Get used to it. You’re mine now.”

Tiago raised an eyebrow at him. “I thought that was my line, or did I perhaps misunderstand your earlier request?” Not giving Bond a chance to answer him, he moved his mouth to the opposite, sadly neglected nipple.

“I meant what I said.” Bond squirmed as the nipple became oversensitized. “But you sometimes tend to be all talk and no action. Or at least, not the right kind of action.”

Tiago smiled broadly at him. “Oh, really?” He drew out the last word in his delight. He could tell that his smile was disconcerting Bond just a bit, but it served him right for doubting him in the first place.

He always did adore a challenge.

Pushing Bond backward so that he was lying flat, Tiago moved up his body until their groins met. Moving against him in a slow, languorous glide, Tiago once again laid claim to a particularly sensitive spot on Bond’s neck.

Hearing the man’s low groin vibrate through his vocal cords, Tiago whispered in his ear. “After we’re through here today, just remembering what we’ve done will be enough to make you hard. And I’ll be very certain to remind you at the most inappropriate times, in public, when you have absolutely no hope of concealing your condition with the outfit you’ll be wearing. Everyone in the room will know that it’s me who affects you so. And when I take you by the arm and haul you into an empty room, they will all know exactly what is about to happen to you.” He paused, smiling down at Bond. “Then we’ll see who’s all talk and no action.”

Bond groaned again, thrusting up against him almost involuntarily.

Tiago chuckled, but he didn’t allow him to speed up their mutual thrusting. “That scenario excites you terribly, doesn’t it? And as you say, you’re not an exhibitionist, so it must be the knowledge that I can — and would — do that to you that arouses you so.”

Bond closed his eyes. “You talk too damn much.”

“Only when I know I’m right.” He paused to consider that. “Which does happen rather often, I must admit.”

Growling, Bond once again attempted to speed up the tempo, but Tiago rolled off him abruptly. Kneeling next to him, Tiago waited until Bond had once again relented and relaxed into a more compliant posture.

“That’s better,” Tiago purred. “I refuse to let you hurry this.” He started to straddle Bond again, but at the last minute changed direction and simply engulfed Bond’s cock with his mouth, swallowing him whole.
Bond thrust upward into his mouth, but obediently stilled when Tiago merely tapped a hip with one hand. Grabbing a fistful of bedcovers in an apparent last ditch effort to remain still as Tiago sucked him in long, slow strokes, Bond said in a strangled voice, “Jesus, Tiago.”

Tiago smiled around his mouthful of cock, but he didn’t release him until he could tell Bond was close. Holding himself up on his elbows, and pointedly ignoring Bond’s pleading eyes and leaking cock, Tiago said conversationally, “You know, when I was very, very young, my madre once told me she had almost named me ‘Jesús’, but in hindsight, it is likely a good thing she did not.”

Gasping, Bond said, “‘Diablo’¹ would have been a better choice.”

Winking at him, Tiago said, “Well, I never have told you my middle name.”

His eyes widening, Bond stared at him for a few seconds, then said decisively, “It is not.”

Shrugging, Tiago said, “No, it isn’t, but some reason, it became my nickname very early in life.”

“Colour me surprised.”

“Hmm,” Tiago said, looking down at him. “Normally, I would finish you first in order to relax you properly, but after waiting this long, I do believe I’d rather have you come on my cock.”

Groaning, Bond squeezed his eyes tightly shut. “Just do something, please.”

“Oh, I plan on doing much more than that.” He reached into the drawer of the adjacent nightstand to retrieve a tube of lube, and then slapped Bond lightly on a hip. “Turn over, please. On your hands and knees.”

Bond’s eyes flew open at that, but to give him credit, he didn’t even hesitate to do as Tiago asked, quickly assuming that admittedly vulnerable position. But then, he had obviously enjoyed the last time Tiago had been “practicing” to get him relaxed enough for penetration, so this wasn’t a total surprise.

Bond rested his head on his crossed arms and didn’t even flinch when Tiago reached out to stroke the soft skin of his arse. Tiago kept the touch light and teasing, only occasionally drifting to the even softer skin around his anus, but he could tell Bond was enjoying the attention nevertheless.

Once he had lulled the man into an appropriate degree of receptiveness, Tiago touched just the tip of his tongue to his anus. After a brief jolt of surprise, he was pleased to note that Bond almost immediately pressed back into the teasing pressure.

As he continued to lave Bond’s entrance with his tongue, the man started to shift the weight off his elbows, and Tiago paused in his efforts long enough to say, “Oh. If I haven’t mentioned it before, you’re not permitted to touch yourself at any point during these proceedings. Entendido?”²

Bond groaned, but relaxed his weight back onto his elbows and replied almost absentmindedly in the same language, “Sì, Tiago.”

Once Tiago had loosened him as much as he could with his tongue, he applied a generous amount of lube to one finger and stroked it around Bond’s entrance. The man tensed slightly as this, but relaxed again almost immediately when Tiago rubbed one hip in a soothing manner with his free hand. After circling a few more times, he slowly inserted the digit, pausing occasionally and allowing Bond to become accustomed to the intrusion.

Tiago moved his free hand from Bond’s hip to his buttock, then up and down his spine in long,
soothing strokes, feeling the incipient tension drain from the man’s muscles as he did so. Smiling slightly in anticipation, he inserted the finger just a little further and curled it, giving Bond’s prostate only a glancing touch.

Grunting in surprise, Bond rose up onto his hands and stared back at Tiago with wide eyes.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did I hurt you, James?” Tiago asked with feigned innocence.

Bond closed his eyes briefly in apparent exasperation, but all he said was, “Do that again.”

“You mean this?” Tiago asked, as he moved the finger out, then back in, curling it again and brushing the prostate more firmly this time.

Bond jerked, his back straightening and his hips jerking once reflexively.

Using this time while Bond was distracted to his best advantage, Tiago slid another finger in to join the first. Bond flinched slightly at the pressure of the additional finger, but Tiago merely gently nudged against the sensitive gland until he relaxed. He then reached around to stroke his cock in time with the thrusts of his fingers, and very shortly the man was actively pushing back against the invaders in an effort to increase the stimulation.

“I did tell you that you’d enjoy this, did I not?” Tiago said, increasing the strokes against his prostate slightly.

Bond’s cock jerked in Tiago’s grasp, but he said merely, “You still talk too much.”

Chuckling, Tiago removed the fingers, applied more lube, then gently inserted three digits into Bond’s arse, moving more slowly when Bond hissed and tightened involuntarily around the intruders.

“Relax, pequeño,” he said soothingly, removing his hand from his penis and again stroking up and down Bond’s spine until he became more accustomed to the increased pressure.

Bond seemed to gradually relax, moving once more tentatively on Tiago’s nearly stilled fingers, and Tiago asked, “Are you still doing all right, James?”

Glancing behind him, Bond nodded his head, but then sighed and added in a resigned tone of voice, “I couldn’t have been abducted by someone with a small dick, could I?”

Startled into a snort of laughter, Tiago said, “Believe me, dear heart, you’ll come to appreciate the fact that you weren’t.”

“I’ll take your word for that.”

“You won’t need to,” Tiago said smugly, pausing the motion of his fingers to concentrate on massaging the man’s prostate.

Bond pushed back, groaning. “If you try to tell me, ‘The proof is in the pudding,’ I swear to God I’ll punch you.”

Smiling, Tiago replied, “I’m afraid you said that, not me.” He removed his fingers and gripped Bond’s hip. “Now turn over onto your back.”

Bond looked at him in surprise, and Tiago shrugged. “It’s more of an awkward position for your first time, I know, but I want to see your face.”
Not even hesitating, Bond did as he was instructed, lying on his back and obediently lifting his hips so Tiago could place a pillow beneath them. Tiago knew Bond had to be at least somewhat anxious at this novel experience, but his expression still held so much unconditional trust that it managed to humble Tiago with its intensity.

How in the world had he ever managed to doubt Bond’s sincerity in their relationship?

Tiago slowly moved in front of Bond’s spread legs, and he wasn’t entirely surprised to find that his own hands were shaking as the adrenaline rush of this moment struck him like a lightning bolt. He had to take several deep breaths to settle his nerves, stroking the insides of Bond’s thighs as he did so, and he wasn’t quite sure which one of them he was attempting to reassure.

As he slicked himself up and positioned himself at Bond’s entrance, the man wrapped his long legs around Tiago’s waist without prompting, and Tiago watched as he took a deep breath, clearly attempting to remain open and relaxed for him.

That small consideration almost undid Tiago completely, and he had to close his eyes until he got his rolicking emotions under control.

“Tiago?” Bond said softly.

“Sorry, pequeño, got something in my eye.”

Tilting his head, Bond said, “I believe you told me once you’d never lie to me.”

“Yes, I did.” Tiago sighed. “I apologize, and I certainly don’t mean to keep you on edge. I was simply wondering what I’d done to deserve you.”

Bond smiled one of his lopsided smiles that were so endearing. “Other than kidnap me, you mean?”

“Are you sorry I did?” Tiago asked, genuinely curious.

“No, not now.” Bond tightened his legs around Tiago’s waist. “But if you don’t get on with this, I reserve the right to change my mind.”

“Heaven forfend.” With that, he thrust just far enough to breach the ring of muscle, then stopped. He had to tear his gaze away from the sight of his cock finally embedded inside Bond’s body, but he still managed to catch the slight grimace on the man’s face before he had smoothed his expression. “It will get better, I promise,” Tiago said, reaching up to stroke the now slightly wilted erection.

“Hmm,” Bond replied, closing his eyes and clearly focusing his attention on the feel of Tiago’s hand on his cock to distract himself.

Tiago pushed in further, slowly, carefully examining the man’s face for any sign of extreme discomfort. He used his other hand to stroke a prominent hipbone, and he was pleased to note that the lines of strain on Bond’s face gradually eased when he had finally seated himself home.

“That’s . . . different,” Bond said, opening his eyes and locking gazes with Tiago.

Smiling, Tiago said, “Good. Then I guess you’re ready for the next step.”

A puzzled expression crossed Bond’s face, until Tiago pulled his hips back slightly and thrust more firmly, insuring he scored a direct hit on Bond’s prostate.
Gasping, Bond’s eyes went wide and his body tensed under the intense stimulation.

After a dozen of these, Bond’s ankles tightened around his waist and he pulled himself into Tiago’s thrusts, throwing his head back. Reaching again for the lube, Tiago slicked his right hand and grasped Bond’s cock, tightening his grip and running his thumb over the tip at intervals.

When he heard Bond’s breathing accelerate as he neared completion, Tiago removed his hand from Bond’s cock, slowing his thrusts and pointedly not striking his prostate as he did.

Bond looked up at him wildly. “Tiago, no!” He attempted to deepen the thrusts with his legs, but he didn’t have quite enough leverage to do so with Tiago actively resisting him.

“James,” Tiago said, a chiding tone in his voice.

Bond capitulated, ceasing his attempts to force the pace, but he was also clearly resisting the urge to bring himself to completion against Tiago’s orders.

“It will be better this way, trust me,” Tiago said soothingly, but he kept to a slow, maddening pace with only occasional light brushes against his prostate.

Bond wiped a rivulet of sweat from his eyes. “Just promise me you won’t drag this out all night. I’d like to survive my first experience with my arse relatively intact.”

Tiago smiled lazily. “Oh, don’t worry. I won’t force you to wait too long for your first orgasm.”

Bond’s eyes widened. “My first . . . ?”

Not giving him a chance to finish the question, Tiago increased his pace once more, resuming his stroking of Bond’s cock and rolling a nipple between his fingertips as well.

Bond’s eyes rolled back in his head and he gasped as Tiago added a slight corkscrew motion to his hips, striking a slightly different angle on the man’s prostate. When he felt the cock in his hand start to pulse, he slammed up hard and rolled his hips as Bond came, arching his back and thereby increasing the depth of their contact.

Bond groaned, his entire body stiffening as he came, then gradually relaxing back to the mattress as he was finally spent.

Tiago moved his hands to Bond’s hips, but he had no intention of removing his cock from Bond’s arse, at least for a little while. He was careful to remain very still, however, as he waited for Bond to come to the obvious conclusion.

His eyes still slightly glazed, Bond shifted ever so slightly, then looked up at him, puzzled. “You’re still hard.”

Tiago merely smiled. “Uh-huh.”

“But why didn’t you . . . ?” Bond shook his head as he correctly interpreted the smug expression on Tiago’s face. “No. No. Hell, no. There is no bloody way I’m coming again after an orgasm like that.”

“Are you sure about that?” Tiago coughed delicately into his hand. “I am rather well known for my stamina.”

Looking at him askance, Bond said slowly, “Of course, you are. But why . . . ?”
Tiago tsked. “Because I wanted your first time to be memorable.” He held up a hand as Bond started to interrupt. “And I wanted to feel myself inside you after you had come, knowing I had done that to you. Knowing that no one else would ever have you this way. And knowing I would be doing it to you again. Very, very soon.” He shifted slightly inside Bond, and the man jerked, wincing. “At first, you’ll be too oversensitive to appreciate it, but gradually that will change, and you’ll begin to become aroused again, even if you don’t want to, and you’ll be feeling me inside you — hard and eager and leaking in anticipation — the . . . entire . . . time.”

“Fuck, Tiago,” Bond said, his pupils blown wide.

“Yes, I do believe that’s the general idea.” Tiago reached across their bodies to the nightstand, causing Bond to curse softly as he shifted once more into the man’s prostate, and used a clean cloth to wipe away the evidence of Bond’s orgasm. “Don’t want you to get cold,” Tiago explained reasonably as Bond continued to stare up at him in disbelief.

Leaning down, Tiago captured Bond’s lips in a kiss, coaxing with his tongue until the man opened to receive him. And if he wriggled slightly to get into a better position, then it certainly wasn’t his fault, was it?

After he had sufficiently plundered the man’s mouth, he shifted his attention to every erogenous zone he knew on Bond’s neck, nipping and sucking and laving with his tongue until Bond was doing some wriggling of his own. This time, when Tiago thrust upward once with his hips, Bond didn’t flinch, he groaned. Tiago smiled as he felt Bond’s penis, which had been trapped firmly between their bodies, twitch once against his abdomen.

“That doesn’t bloody well mean I’ll be able to come again, Tiago,” Bond said, adorably flustered.

“Oh, ye of little faith,” he said, then grabbed Bond’s upper arms firmly and pulled him along as he flipped himself backward onto the mattress.

Of course, he managed to impale himself deeper into Bond as they made this rather abrupt change in position, and it took the startled Bond a moment or two to realize he was now sitting atop a prone Tiago.

Staring wide-eyed and dazed down at Tiago, Bond said, “A little warning might have been nice.”

“Why?” Tiago smiled. “You seemed to enjoy the trip,” he said, thrusting upward with his hips and indicating the definite interest Bond’s cock had taken in the proceedings.

Bond groaned and clung to Tiago’s left arm like he was about to drown, but be he was still careful to avoid gripping the injured one. “Stop that,” Bond said, trying to subtly change position so that Tiago’s cock wasn’t constantly pressing against his prostate.

Happily ignoring him, Tiago reached once more for Bond’s cock, stroking it lightly at the same time he rolled his hips as much as he could under Bond’s not inconsequential weight.

“Tiago!”

“Hmm?” Tiago looked up at him coyly. “I’d say we’re definitely making progress here. I only wish I could take you in my mouth at the same time. You seem to genuinely appreciate my talents there.”

“God,” Bond muttered. As his cock started to lengthen once more, he unconsciously attempted to thrust into Tiago’s purposely light grip, momentarily forgetting that he was still impaled on Tiago’s cock. His eyes widened almost comically, and Tiago laughed.
“I assume it’s starting to feel very good again, _pequeño_?”

“Fuck you, Tiago,” Bond said, obviously planning not to move any time soon, just to be obstinate.

Shrugging, Tiago said, “Perhaps someday, if you are very, _very_ good.”

When Bond looked down at him in astonishment, Tiago tightened his grip on Bond’s cock and thrust upward into him again. “But you’ll have to do at least _some_ of the work this time.” He smiled lazily up at him as he continued to stroke his cock. “Come now, dear heart, don’t be so stubborn. We both know you want to fuck yourself on my cock.”

“Bloody hell,” Bond swore, but he squeezed his eyes tightly shut, shaking his head. He placed his hands on his thighs, clearly aching to remove the incessantly teasing hand on his cock, but knowing better than to try.

Tiago finally saw the light. “Oh. _Oh_. You’re trying to wait me out, aren’t you?” Tiago laughed. “You little devil. You actually think I’d lose my erection while you’re stalling?”

“I _told_ you I wouldn’t be able to come again this soon,” Bond said tightly.

“Tsk. If you move just a little bit, you’ll see how much better it feels now,” Tiago said coaxingly.

Bond merely shook his head, his fingers digging slightly into his thighs.

Sighing, Tiago merely activated the collar — extremely briefly and at an almost negligible setting - - but the sheer unexpectedness of it made Bond lurch in surprise. His eyes flew open as the sudden movement brought his prostate firmly into contact with Tiago’s cock.

“That’s not bloody fair!” he complained, his voice rising an octave.

Tiago blinked. “‘All’s fair in love and war,’ I believe the saying goes.” He smiled. “Besides, when have you _ever_ known me to play fair?” He activated the collar again, just as briefly, and Bond groaned this time at the result of his involuntary movement.

It felt extremely good to Tiago as well, but he didn’t want to be abusive with the collar. His little rat merely needed a little convincing, after all.

“Well, I could eventually make you come by just stroking you off, but I’m not going to.” He released Bond’s cock and placed both hands on the man’s hips. “I want to watch my cock sliding in and out of your arse. I want to watch your face when you discover just how good that makes you feel, and I want to savor this experience while you’re making _yourself_ mine.” He rubbed small circles on Bond’s hips with his thumbs. “Can you do that for me, hmm?”

Shuddering, Bond said, “God, what you do to me,” but he finally gave in and lifted himself partially off Tiago’s cock only to tentatively drop back down. His eyes widening slightly, he increased both the tempo and the force of his movements, his chin lowering to his chest in concentration.

As Bond lifted himself off his hips, Tiago was able to apply the same corkscrew motion that had set the man afire earlier, and Bond moaned aloud at the sensation.

“Damn, but you feel so good. So incredibly tight,” Tiago muttered, hoping he’d last long enough for Bond to bring himself off. It was definitely going to be a close thing at this rate, seeing Bond like this, so he resumed his stroking of the man’s cock, letting him set the pace, increasing the tightness and speed of his grip only when Bond increased the pace of his own movements.
Thrusting harder into Bond as the motion of his hips became more erratic, Tiago said, “That’s it. You have no idea how incredibly stunning you look, impaled on my cock. Come for me now.”

Bond groaned once, arching his back, and when Tiago finally felt Bond’s release in his hand, he only had to thrust twice more into Bond’s suddenly pliant body before he came himself. Hard.

Clearly exhausted, Bond made a move to roll off him, but Tiago wouldn’t allow it. Not yet. He wanted to prolong their connection as long as he could, and Bond seemed to accept that readily enough, merely clinging wearily to Tiago’s torso as they both took the opportunity to catch their breath.

As Tiago felt himself begin to soften, Bond muttered a relieved, “Thank God.” When Tiago raised an eyebrow at him, he added, “You’d have killed me if you’d forced me to go again. I’m not as young as I used to be.”

Tiago merely smiled contentedly, patting Bond on the hip to let him know he had permission to move.

When Bond slowly pulled himself off Tiago and then tried to roll into a seated position on the bed, he yelped in surprise.

Laughing at Bond’s baleful glare, Tiago said, “Oops. You may want to be careful how you sit for a few days, dear heart.”

Yes, all was right with the world again.

Chapter End Notes

1 "Devil"
2 "Is that understood?"

I apologize for the length of this particular sex scene, but after making Tiago wait for so long, I didn't think it would work to have it any shorter. But Jeez, is he an egotistical bastard or what, lol!
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a little more lighthearted than the previous fare, but I felt everyone needed a little bit of a break before the serious angst begins. ; )

And I did try to keep the sex out of this chapter, I really did, but Tiago had other plans (as usual).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tiago looked down at the lovely man lying in his bed and sighed.

It was still very early in the morning, but then, they had both fallen asleep rather early considering their considerable exertions the previous day. And Tiago certainly wasn’t going to apologize for exhausting his little rat so thoroughly.

They had both slept on top of the sheets given the warmth of the Lima evening, and Bond was still lying face down with his head resting on his crossed arms. He had been lying on Tiago’s shoulder until Tiago had wormed his way out from underneath him earlier, and it was a testament to Bond’s level of fatigue that he hadn’t even woken when his ersatz pillow had abandoned him.

Now fully dressed, Tiago was slightly amused by how soundly Bond was sleeping, something the agent would never have done if he didn’t implicitly trust his bed partner. In fact, Tiago knew that Bond had only rarely stayed the night with any of his previous conquests, much less slept this deeply in their presence.

Of course, he didn’t have a choice regarding that decision any longer. He’d remain in Tiago’s bed every night, even if Tiago had to chain him there.

Curious as to exactly how long Bond would remain asleep, Tiago reached out a hand to caress Bond’s naked body, attempting to keep his touch light enough not to wake him directly. He couldn’t make his touch too light, because surprisingly enough, Bond was extremely ticklish in a few select spots. Bond didn’t know Tiago was aware of this, and in fact, the man actually might not be aware of it himself. No one else had ever made such an intense, intimate study of Bond or his body.

However, Tiago was hoarding that particular piece of information for a time when he wanted to subdue him without use of the collar, and the thought of a helplessly wriggling Bond moving against him made it well worth the wait.

But for now, making shameless use of his knowledge of Bond’s erogenous zones, Tiago continued his light caresses until he heard the man moan softly and shift slightly on the bed.

Bond’s legs were slightly parted, so Tiago brushed his fingertips from his knee up his inner thigh to his scrotum, rubbing lightly on the small amount of exposed flesh he could access easily.

It was evidently enough, because Bond moaned again, his hips moving slightly now. The silk sheets he lay on obviously felt quite good to his trapped penis, because Bond increased the motion
of his hips, encouraged by the continuous stroking of Tiago’s roving, teasing hands.

Now hopelessly aroused as well, it wasn’t until Tiago forgot himself and caressed Bond’s tempting arse that the man finally awoke. His poor little rat was evidently still more than a little tender there.

Bond raised his head to look up at him blearily, and damn but the man looked exquisite, sleep rumpled, thoroughly aroused, and pliable with that delectable arse so prominently on display. Tiago had to tell himself firmly that he couldn’t have Bond again quite so soon, especially not after Bond’s reaction to such a light caress.

For some completely unknown reason, his body insisted on ignoring him.

Bond took stock of his current physical condition and looked at him quizzically. “What were you doing to me?”

“Something your body was clearly enjoying and my body was seriously wishing it could participate in.”

Bond shifted, and Tiago smiled when he saw the man had to abruptly stifle the urge to thrust into the silk sheets. “Have you done this to me often?”

The agent sounded somewhat concerned, and Tiago took some pity on him, knowing his issues with lack of control. “Not recently, pequeño.”

He was attempting to reassure, but Bond merely stared at him warily. “I know that look on your face, Tiago. What are you thinking so intensely about?”

Tiago smiled lazily. “I’m thinking if I got you drunk enough the night before, I could bring you off without waking you at all. I’m thinking about taking your cock in my mouth, and making sure the suction was so light and so perfect that it became part of your dream cycle. I’m thinking I would remove my mouth you just before you came and watch you wake the next morning with your come drying on your stomach and wondering why you’re still having wet dreams at your age.” He raised an eyebrow at Bond. “That’s what I’m thinking about.”

Bond squeezed his eyes tightly shut. “Bloody fucking hell, Tiago.”

“Well, you asked.”

Eyes still tightly closed, Bond said, “Any time you open your damn mouth, I regret it. You’d think I’d learn my lesson by now.”

“Much more fun for me if you don’t,” Tiago said brightly.

While Bond was distracted, Tiago reached out a hand to stroke the man’s arse again, and as he had expected, Bond flinched slightly when he brushed lightly over his anus, something he would never have done if he were completely awake and alert. The man took stoicism to extremes sometimes, but if you caught him just after awakening — or while sufficiently aroused, apparently — you could occasionally get an honest physical response from him.

Bond made a move to rise, but Tiago pushed him back down with a hand on his shoulder, saying firmly, “Stay where you are, please. I want to take a closer look at you.”

Bond groaned, but this time not from arousal. “Tiago, I’m fine.”

“Then you wouldn’t object to me taking your arse again this morning?”
Bond winced, almost imperceptibly. “Well, I may be just a little sore,” he said.

Tiago merely raised an eyebrow at him, and Bond sighed. “Okay, maybe more than a little sore, but I’ll be fine, damn it all.”

Tiago had to smile at Bond’s disgruntled expression. The man was obviously embarrassed but not about to admit it. “I’ll be the judge of that. Now lie still.”

Bond twitched slightly when he carefully spread the man’s arse cheeks, but he remained obediently where he was, his arousal evidently having abated with his discomfiture at Tiago’s examination.

“Hmm,” Tiago said. “I don’t see any bleeding or obvious tearing, but I’d best have Diego examine you, just to be safe.”

Bond’s head snapped up at that. “Bloody hell, no! I told you, I’m fine. There’s no need to involve Dr. Almeida in this.”

Tiago sighed. “‘No’? James, you know how much I detest hearing that word from you.” Cocking his head and narrowing his eyes, he added, “Are you questioning my judgement?”

Bond stared up at him for a few moments, but he must have detected the steel in Tiago’s words, because his head slumped back down onto his arms. “No, Tiago.”

He stroked Bond’s back soothingly. “Good, because regardless of your now quite understandable ulterior motives, I’m still a little displeased with you for shooting me. I’d hate for your continued rebelliousness to interfere with my compulsion to look after you properly.”

“I’m fine,” Bond repeated stubbornly, but Tiago detected the tone of voice that indicated he hadn’t actually capitulated and was merely choosing his battles. He also knew how creative Bond could be with regard to avoiding medical examinations while at MI6, and he had no intention of allowing him to get away with that while in his care, especially since he had some errands to run and wouldn’t be around to keep his little rat in line. Diego was entirely too soft-hearted to appropriately deal with a cantankerous and rebellious Bond.

Ah, well. There was an easy solution for that.

He climbed off the bed, grabbed a set of restraints, and then moved back to the head of the bed. “Give me one of your hands, please.”

Bond’s eyes went wide when he saw the restraints. “Tiago, no! That’s not necessary,” he said frantically.

“Is it not? Tell me you weren’t planning on evading Diego’s examination, and I’ll leave you unrestrained.”

Bond’s eyes darted to the side as he attempted to find a way out of the situation, but being truthful with Tiago had been programmed into his psyche now, and he simply couldn’t do it. He visibly slumped, his eyes closing tightly in defeat, and then he ever so slowly extended his right hand.

Tiago gently engulfed the slightly trembling hand into his larger ones and simply stroked along the tendons and muscles for a few minutes, silently indicating his approval of the man’s capitulation.

Bond gradually relaxed under his tender ministrations but said quietly, “You told me you wouldn’t need to tie me anymore.”
“And you were quick to inform me that your obedience only applied during sex, did you not?” He carefully applied the padded restraint to Bond’s wrist then attached the other end to a specially designed ring in the headboard. “Now, try to be good for Diego, and I’ll see you soon.”

Bond looked up sharply at that. “Where are you going?”

“I merely have some errands to run, pequeño. I won’t be long.”

“Errands?” Bond looked at him in disbelief. “Tiago, all of MI6 will be searching for you now. You can’t go out there without me.”

“And you don’t think they’d be after you, as well?” Tiago shook his head. “Dear heart, we’ve been through this before. MI6 will not just pat you on the back and tell you ‘welcome back.’ You fired multiple shots at their agents in unmistakable, deliberate support of a known terrorist.” He couldn’t help rolling his eyes at the last word. “If they get their hands on you, they will lock you away somewhere with rubber walls painted in pleasant pastel colours until they can manage to ‘deprogram’ you.” He reached out to cup Bond’s cheek. “I know you. I know you very well, corazón mío, so I’m quite aware that the process alone would destroy you, much less the fact that they’d never trust you as a field agent again.”

Bond shuddered slightly, confirming Tiago’s assessment, but he still looked up at Tiago with determination in his eyes.

“I don’t like having you out of my sight,” Bond said. “You attract trouble like a bloody magnet.”

Tiago laughed. “You’re one to talk, dear heart.” He leaned over to give Bond a quick kiss, then rose from the bed.

He was almost to the door when Bond said, “Tiago, if you do something reckless and stupid, I swear to God, I’ll kill you myself.”

Tiago was about to chastise Bond, but then he saw the pleading expression in the man’s eyes, and he smiled gently and said only, “I’ll try to keep that in mind.”

*********************************

With his mind on plans and counterplans, Tiago merely knocked perfunctorily on Diego’s bedroom door and then opened it to walk through, without waiting for a reply.

He had evidently forgotten just how early it was, and now he really wished he’d waited for Diego’s acknowledgment first. Tiago stopped abruptly in front of the bed. “Hijo de puta! What the hell is she doing here?”

A clearly nude Dr. Michelle Pennington rose up slightly on one elbow, then said in a stage-whispered aside to Diego, “I thought you said he was a genius?”

Diego looked as miffed as Tiago had ever seen him, which was saying a lot for the normally placid and even-tempered pediatrician. “There are some areas in which his genius is somewhat less apparent — say, as in employing common sense and rudimentary manners.”

Tiago backed hurriedly out the door, shut it firmly, then leaned back against the wall in sudden dire need of the support. Ugh. Now he was going to have to bleach his brain, and he hadn’t even seen anything overtly sexual. You’d think he would have noticed how close those two were becoming. Bond had evidently been far too distracting, or else his mental faculties were finally slipping.
Scary thought, that.

Diego eventually came out into the hallway, demurely dressed in a floor length dressing gown. “Did you actually need something, Tiago, or were you merely practicing being inappropriate and impulsive?” He crossed his arms over his chest. “Because, trust me, amigo, you do not require any additional training in either.”

Tiago merely stared wide-eyed at him, attempting to appear at least vaguely contrite. “Uhm, I’m sorry?”

Sighing, Diego uncrossed his arms and said, “No, you are not. At least not in the manner most people would be sorry, but I assume you are here regarding something at least reasonably urgent. Is your arm troubling you?”

“Yes, it is reasonably urgent, and no, the arm is fine.” He rolled his eyes. “Well, at least as fine as it can be after your lover recently shot you with a high powered rifle.”

Diego’s eyebrows rose. “Lover? Am I to surmise that you and Señor Bond have come to an understanding after all?”

Closing his eyes in remembered bliss, Tiago said, “Hmm. Yes, I can definitely say we’ve come to an ‘understanding.’”

“Tiago, please do not tell me you barged into my bedroom at this hour of the morning just to announce your conquest.”

“Of course not! What do you take me for?”

Diego merely raised an eyebrow at him.

Sighing, Tiago said, “I should be glad you didn’t answer that question, hmm?”

“Sí,” Diego said firmly.

“I truly am sorry, Diego. However, I’m leaving the villa briefly to make some arrangements, and I needed to talk to you first.”

“I am listening.”

Looking upward at the ceiling, Tiago said, “Well, the first is a bit delicate, but I need you to examine James for me.”

Diego immediately had an alarmed look on his face. “Tiago! What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything! Well, I obviously did something, well, quite a bit of something actually, but . . .” Tiago let out his breath in a long sigh. “Damn it. I’m afraid I may have been a little over-enthusiastic, and since this was James’ first time, I merely thought . . .”

“You think you may have injured him?”

“Well, I was trying to be careful, and he says he is fine . . .”

Diego’s eyes widened. “Is his definition of ‘fine’ the same as yours?”

“I don’t know. Probably?”
“I will get my bag and check on him immediately. Is he still in your suite?”

Tiago tsked. “I certainly hope so, since I chained him to the bed.”

“Tiago!”

“If you actually do want to examine him, that’s the only way I could guarantee it. Otherwise, he would have climbed out a window, or disguised himself as a piece of furniture, or some such.” At Diego’s raised eyebrow, Tiago added, “What? You have no idea how resourceful that man can be when it comes to avoiding medical attention.”

“Oh, I believe I have some minor degree of insight there. I have dealt with you for many years, after all.”

“I am wounded, horribly so.”

“Quite often, actually.”

Tiago sighed, conceding the point. “Will you look after him for me, until I return?”

“Of course. But kindly see that you do indeed return. I doubt there is anything I could do for him if you did not. I have mentioned to you before that no one in the medical profession can actually perform miracles.” He must have noticed the uncomfortable look on Tiago’s face, because he added, “Was there something else?”

Tiago pulled the device out of his pocket and handed it to Diego. “Yes, there was. I need you to hold onto this for me.”

“And what do you expect me to do with it?” Diego asked, clearly puzzled.

Tiago explained to him exactly what he needed done, and if Diego was clearly discomfited by the details, there was little Tiago could do about that.

Plans within plans. He had to account for all contingencies, especially in a matter as important as this.

And the continued well-being of his little rat was very important indeed.

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When Tiago returned to the villa later that morning, he found Diego and Bond chatting amiably together. Diego had placed a thin sheet over Bond, possibly to protect his modesty, but more likely to avert the consequences of any rampant jealously on Tiago’s part. He was sitting cross-legged in a chair that was a conspicuously respectable distance from the bed, at least.

However, Tiago’s gaze almost immediately went to the man reclining on the bed. It did strange things to Tiago’s insides to note Bond’s eyes immediately latching onto his when he entered the room, the worry lines on his face easing perceptibly after he determined Tiago had suffered no obvious damage.

Diego rose from the chair, stretched, and walked over to Tiago. “He has suffered no apparent injury that I can detect, at least without an endoscope, which I do not have available here.” He held up a hand before Tiago could speak. “No, I do not think it is necessary to obtain one. I have one on the island should he develop significant pain or signs of occult injury, but it is my opinion, as he has said, that he will be ‘fine.’”
“Are you certain, Diego?”

Diego sighed. “You worry entirely too much.”

“I do not!”

Diego merely stared at him blankly.

Tiago worked his jaw from side to side in aggravation, but finally said, “Okay, I do worry too much, but I’m not exactly small, so . . .”

Bowing his head and covering his eyes, Diego said, “Michelle has a saying, ‘You can't judge the depth of a well by the handle of the pump.’ I would keep that thought in mind if I were you.” He nodded politely to Bond and left the room without a backward glance.

Tiago was still grinning after he’d gone. “I truly do like that man. Most of the time.”

Bond was smiling as well. “I’d definitely say he has your number.” He paused. “Especially since you usually allow him to have the last word.” He sounded a little disgruntled at that.

Walking over to release Bond’s restraints, Tiago said, “Rule number one in the Rodriguez handbook -- ‘Never piss off your personal physician.’”

Bond rubbed his wrist when it was freed, then rotated his neck in a small circle. “Is that all it takes? I knew I shouldn’t have misplaced that bloody medical license.”

Removing the sheet still covering part of Bond’s torso, Tiago started massaging the muscles at the junction of his neck and shoulders, one at a time so he could favor his own injured arm. He smiled when he saw the man’s eyes close in shear contentment. He leaned in close to whisper, “Don’t worry, pequeño. I will allow you the last word as well, someday.”

One eye opened a slit to gaze at him doubtfully, and Tiago laughed.

Once he had Bond suitably relaxed, Tiago rose and walked over to the door, picking up the parcel he had left there. “Here, I bought you a present.”

Bond accepted the package but eyed it warily, as if he were afraid it would explode.

“Come now. Just open it. I had to search forever to find just the ideal thing.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Bond said, but he opened the parcel regardless.

The look on his face when he pulled out the garments was priceless.

Just . . . priceless.

Bond winced, as if he’d suddenly developed a blinding headache, which may very well be the case. He looked up at Tiago with narrowed eyes. “I assume you’ve received an acceptance from the firmas on your proposed deal?”

Tiago smiled brightly. “You assume correctly.” He nodded his head at the clothing. “Don’t you like them? Your primary function, at least in the opening phase, will be to act as a distraction, so I need you to look particularly fetching.”

“‘Fetching’ isn’t exactly the term I’d use for these.”
Tiago pouted. “You haven’t even tried them on yet.”

“I have a vivid imagination.”

Tiago rolled his eyes. “When providing a prospective client with a gift such as yourself, it is considered proper protocol to insure that the gift is packaged very nicely.” He sat on the bed next to Bond, pursing his lips. “I suppose we could go a slightly different route and still abide by that general concept.”

Bond eyed him warily. “I’m almost afraid to ask.”

“Hmm.” Tiago cupped the side of Bond’s face, turning his head toward the better lighting. “Perhaps a little mascara, some eyeliner to accent those beautiful blue eyes of yours, then maybe just a touch of rouge to accentuate your cheekbones, not enough to be overtly feminine, mind you . . .”

Bond’s chin dropped to his chest. “Oh, bloody hell. I’ll wear the damn clothes.” He glared at Tiago when he began rubbing his thumb in small circles on Bond’s cheek. “Must you always try to manipulate me?”

Smiling broadly, Tiago said, “Have to keep in practice, dear heart. Have to keep in practice.”

Chapter End Notes

1 *Hijo de puta* – "Son of a Bitch"

Just a warning to all -- the road gets a little rocky from here on out, so I hope you enjoyed the brief quiet interlude, lol!
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

This is yet another massive chapter, which is still massive after breaking it into two parts. So yes, that means there shall be yet another cliffhanger. Sue me.

And please be advised that the Bond angst mentioned in the tags officially begins with this particular chapter. Don't laugh -- I'm quite serious!

Jeez. Don't say I didn't warn you. :)

“You’re not going to insist I continue wearing something like . . . this,” Bond said, “after we’ve finished dealing with the firmas, are you?” He looked down the length of his body and shuddered dramatically. “I look ridiculous.”

Tiago sighed, a long, drawn out sigh of sincere appreciation. “I disagree. I think you look positively ravishing, and I can quite guarantee that everyone in the room will have their eyes on you as well, which is essentially the goal, if you recall.”

“People can’t take their eyes off the aftermath of a train wreck either, so that doesn’t mean anything.” He glared at Tiago. “Besides, I think I’m wearing this because you like the clothes, rather than any ulterior motive.”

Tiago smiled. “You caught me. However, in my own defense, I will remind you that I rather enjoy seeing as much of your exquisite body as I can.”

Bond could protest all he liked, but he truly did look extremely fine in this particular outfit. He wore an ice blue, sleeveless tank top the colour of his eyes that extended only a few inches below his nipples and a pair of skin tight trousers made of velvety soft, supple black leather. The top of the trousers rode just below his hip bones, barely covering his groin, and the combination of both items still left most of his sculpted arms, chest and abdomen exposed.

He also wore a belt made of twisted, multicoloured cord and an actual broad leather collar, also dyed the colour of his eyes, that adorned his neck. The overall effect was that of subdued dangerousness combined with a subtle element of vulnerability, and he was nigh on irresistible.

Which was also part of the plan. Unfortunately.

Surprisingly, it took Bond very little time to grow accustomed to the weight of the collar around his neck, but it was the trousers he was having the most difficulty with. He kept trying to tug them a little higher on his hips, which of course, was not going to happen given the exceedingly precise tailoring.

Tiago laughed at him. “I did try to convince you that going a little lower with the electrolysis would be a good idea, but you disagreed. Now, I’m afraid you’ll just have to live with any exposed hairs.”

Bond sat down, still very carefully, in a chair. “You are not going anywhere near my groin with that damn machine.”
Tiago knelt on the floor, spreading Bond’s legs to move in closer. He left one hand on Bond’s thigh and moved the other down Bond’s exposed, hairless chest to his abdomen and then cupped his groin lightly through the soft material. “But I like having you bare,” Tiago complained. “Think how much better my lips and tongue would feel on all that silky smooth skin.”

Groaning, Bond captured Tiago’s hands in his and held them away from his body. “You cannot get me hard while I’m wearing these — you’ll cause me permanent, irreversible damage.”

Tiago said nothing, merely staring intently at Bond’s groin until the man shifted uncomfortably in the chair.

“Tiago!”

“What?” Tiago said, pouting. “I’m not doing anything.”

“You don’t have to do anything. I can hear you thinking.” Bond shifted again, his trousers noticeably tighter. “Besides, you only have to get too close to me, and . . .”

“. . . You start remembering the other night?” Tiago finished helpfully.

Bond ducked his head, releasing Tiago’s hands. “That’s not what I was going to say.”

“No?” Tiago rose, pulling an unprotesting Bond up with him. He pulled the man close to him, stroking a hand over the thinly clad arse. “Then I must have been doing something wrong, hmm?”

Bond settled into his embrace, relaxing completely against him. “I’m not answering that. You don’t need any additional strain on your already overburdened ego.”

Feeling a sudden, almost overwhelming surge of possessiveness with Bond’s pliable body conformed tightly against his, Tiago moved his head far enough to latch onto the skin of the man’s neck, just above the collar he now wore, until Bond made a small sound of protest.

Bond pushed away from him far enough to look him in the eyes. “What was that for?”

Tiago wasn’t about to admit to the rather substantial degree of apprehension he was feeling about tonight’s mission. He smiled sadly. “Something to remember me by.” He cocked his head. “Although it was actually more for my benefit, knowing I have to allow another man to molest you, at least for a little while.”

Bond winced. “Well, I’m certainly not looking forward to it.”

“That’s good. It would be a horrendous blow to my overburdened ego if you were.”

*******************************************************************************

The sun had long since set below the horizon by the time they made their way back to the grand old mansion harbouring the most notorious firmas in Lima.

“I would feel better if we had at least some sort of backup,” Bond said as they walked toward the door.

Tiago glanced over at him. “If they suspected any type of police presence, or any interference from my organization, for that matter, they would kill those girls. Truly, James, they wouldn’t even hesitate.” He raised an eyebrow at him, smirking. “Besides, you’ve got me at your side. What more do you need?”
“A little humility, perhaps?” Bond muttered, but then he went silent as the door was opened without any need to announce themselves.

Miguel was waiting in the anteroom for them, his eyes barely skimming over Tiago before they latched firmly onto Bond. “Very nice, Silva,” he said appreciatively, “very, very nice.”

“So glad you approve.” As expected, the attention of all the guards was focused on Bond as well, regardless of the fact that most of them were undoubtedly heterosexual. He cleared his throat, and Miguel reluctantly turned his attention back to him. “Is your capo prepared to receive me?”

“Sí,” the big man replied, but his attention was already returning to the scantily clad man beside Tiago.

Tiago held out the manual activator temptingly. “You may have this . . . and him when your capo and I have been properly introduced.”

Miguel smiled. “I am looking forward to it.” He gestured with one hand. “This way, por favor. He is waiting for you in the library.”

When they entered the library, Tiago had to utilize all his extensive experience and acting abilities not to stop suddenly in surprise. He hadn’t expected to recognize the firmas’ capo, but even in the bespoke clothes he now wore, it was impossible not to. After all, he and Bond had followed the ‘Chinese food delivery man’ around the backside of Lima long enough to make that fact inescapable.

At least now some things made sense, like why a lowly courier was allowed to keep the funds he was collecting from the brothels without returning it immediately to headquarters.

What chilled Tiago to the core, however, was that the man had very likely known he was being followed and had led them back to his home base regardless. That degree of purposeful intention left Tiago feeling very uncomfortable indeed, because the man undoubtedly had an extremely good reason for doing so.

Tiago wasn’t used to being outmaneuvered this thoroughly so early in the game, and he found it an exceptionally uncomfortable experience.

“Welcome,” said the tall, thin man leaning casually against a bookshelf. “You may call me ‘Damarion.’” He straightened slowly, insuring that the lines of his impeccably tailored suit were still perfect. “Not my real name, of course, and I’m a little disappointed that you didn’t attempt to discover that on your own, Mr. Silva.” He smiled lazily. “Names are very important, but then, we all love our pseudonyms, do we not?”

_Dangerous, very dangerous, indeed. Tread carefully, Tiago._

“Terribly sorry to disappoint you, Damarion.” He stressed the name ever so slightly, shrugging casually. “But I have been rather distracted of late. It leaves so little time for nonessentials, I’m afraid.”

The capo’s steel gray eyes strayed to the man standing almost directly behind Tiago, but he had to shift slightly to his left to do so.

That was odd. Tiago hadn’t even realized he’d moved to block the man’s direct line of sight to Bond. He apparently was a little uneasy about this turn of events.

“Yes, I see. _La Montaña_ has been likewise ‘distracted,’ and for much the same reason.” Damarion
raised an eyebrow. “But I must admit that I can definitely see the appeal.” His gaze dropped to the activator Tiago was still holding in his hand. “I understand my deputy had an arrangement with you? I am here. You are here, so I believe all of the requirements have been met.” He smiled, silently daring Tiago to renege on their deal to ‘loan’ Bond for the night.

_Maldita sea._ This was not good, not good at all.

“But, of course,” Tiago said airily, nodding his head to the _capo_. He held out the activator to Miguel, who examined it carefully, then moved to stand next to his superior. Miguel then beckoned with one finger to Bond.

Bond evidently shared Tiago’s unease at events getting out of control, because he looked over at Tiago for confirmation before obeying the summons.

Tiago nodded once, tersely, having already surmised what was coming next, but at least they were prepared for that much at least.

That didn’t mean that either one of them was going to enjoy it.

Bond moved slowly to stand in front of the much larger man, and he must have displayed his typical degree of defiance with his trademark glare, because Miguel smiled down indulgently at him. He cupped Bond’s face, then his hand moved down to the leather collar around Bond’s neck. “This is a new addition, is it not, Silva?” He ran his fingers around the periphery, stroking the skin of Bond’s neck as he did so. “It suits him.” He tilted Bond’s chin up with one finger. “And you managed to match his eyes perfectly,” he rumbled appreciatively.

Bond jerked his chin away but didn’t move otherwise.

Damarion said, “Yes, you do appear to spend a great deal of time and money on this one, Silva.”

Tiago shrugged. “It seems counterproductive to set such a fine jewel in a tarnished setting. It would only lessen his value.”

Holding a hand up to his own face, apparently to examine the quality of his manicure, Damerion said, “Oh, I heartily concur.” He looked over at Tiago sharply. “You would not object then, if my _deputy_ tests the effectiveness of your device?” He indicated the activator with a nod. “I would hate for Miguel to damage the jewel through wholly unnecessary applications of force when a proven method for deterring rebellious behaviour already exists.”

Refusing to allow his body to tense, Tiago waved a hand negligently. He and Bond had both known this was coming. “Of course, be my guest.”

Bond glanced worriedly at Tiago, taking an involuntary step back, but the pain dropped him immediately to the floor when Miguel activated the collar. He curled into a ball, obviously attempting to stifle any noise, but it seemed an interminable time before the deputy finally turned off the device.

The _capo_’s eyebrows rose. “Yes, I see now why this man bows to your will, Silva. It is indeed an impressive accomplishment.”

Tiago smiled dismissively. “One does try.”

Bond slowly and carefully got to his feet, swaying slightly.

Damarion stared at Tiago intently. “Of course, I would expect nothing less from such an
accomplished electronics expert as you, Mr. Rodriguez.”

Tiago didn’t even allow himself to blink. “Excuse me?” he asked in what he hoped was a perfectly normal tone of voice.

The capo laughed. “Oh, you are good. Very good, indeed.” He wiped his eyes. “But then, I would have been disappointed if just any vaguely competent agent could come so close to dismantling my organization twelve years ago.”

Tiago didn’t bother attempting to bluff any longer. This man was far too astute. “And here I thought I had covered my tracks.”

“Oh, you did. I had determined that it was an MI6 agent who had almost destroyed me, but I couldn’t pinpoint the actual perpetrator. Which is why, once I had completely restored my organization and power base, I had the godchild of MI6’s chief kidnapped.” He smiled. “After all, she would have been accountable for all the agents under her command and therefore ultimately bears the final responsibility for their actions.”

Tiago swore under his breath. The irony was that he hadn’t actually been employed by MI6 when he had taken Los Hados down, but he had still been using the techniques he’d been most familiar with at the time. That had been a long time ago, before he had attained his current level of innovation and expertise.

“You tracked it to MI6 through my use of their security protocols.”

“Of course.”

“Then how did you know it was me in particular?” Tiago was genuinely curious. “The protocols were utilized organization wide at the time.”

Damarion shrugged. “I didn’t, not for certain. But one Raoul Silva mysteriously appeared in Lima almost immediately after the MI6 computer expert Tiago Rodriguez disappeared, and my organization was attacked via a purely electronic means. When you recently began poking around the outskirts of my organization, my suspicions were raised and I allowed you to follow me back here.” He smiled. “When Miguel described the collar to me, I was certain it had to be you. That degree of technical competency could not be a mere coincidence.”

“Can’t win them all,” Tiago said brightly. He glanced over at Bond, but the man was still too disoriented from the collar, and besides, they were horrifically outnumbered considering the array of Damarion’s heavily armed men lining the far wall.

He had to hope that Miguel’s undisguised lust for Bond would prevent at least that part of Tiago’s plan from falling completely to pieces.

As if on cue, Miguel asked, with a hopeful tone in his voice, “Are you finished with the little one, Capo?”

“Not quite,” Damarion replied calmly as he silently plucked the activator from his deputy’s hand. Bond had his back to them, attempting to catch Tiago’s eyes for guidance, so he couldn’t see what the capo was about to do.

Tiago knew this was purposeful on the man’s part, in the event that Bond had merely been faking his incapacitation from the collar. It was a sound theory, but incorrect. The activator had genuinely triggered Bond’s collar, but it had been programmed to work only once.
If the *capo* knew the activator would not control Bond, he would very likely injure him severely to keep him immobilized and helpless, or simply kill him outright.

He could only hope his little rat would eventually forgive him for what he had to do. Taking a deep, steadying breath, Tiago activated the collar himself when he saw the *capo* press the activator’s button.

Bond’s eyes went very wide, since he must have realized exactly *who* was controlling the collar this time, but the pain from the continuous electric shock would not allow him to concentrate on anything but his abused nerves. He went down for the second time in less than five minutes, and Tiago prayed the *capo* would suspend his experiment when he realized Bond had not been faking his reaction earlier.

Unfortunately, he didn’t. In fact, he simply ignored Bond’s suffering and instead focused his attention entirely on Tiago.

Attempting to read his reactions, undoubtedly. It was what Tiago would have done in his place.

“Interesting,” the man said eventually, after an interminable period of time had passed. “As I thought, this one isn’t merely a prized possession. He *means* something to you.”

Tiago thought he had managed to control his distress, but apparently his passionate devotion to Bond had made him soft. And now his poor little rat would pay the price for his shortcomings.

Glaring, Tiago said, “I’d rather he die this way than suffer through the tender ministrations of your pet sadist here.”

*Take the bait, damn it. Just take it.*

Damarion looked at him doubtfully. “Extended use of the collar will kill him?”

“We’ve already had to pull him out of cardiac arrest once,” Tiago said. A little truth with a little lie — the intensity of the collar wasn’t set nearly as high this time, although he had no doubt that even at this setting it would still kill Bond -- eventually.

Miguel was staring down intently at the man writhing on the floor. “*Capo*?”

“Very well. I would hate to accidentally deprive you of your new plaything, Miguel,” Damarion said, pressing the button again.

Tiago almost slumped himself when he could finally deactivate the collar. He’d been able to maintain their deception, but unfortunately, he was afraid the effects on Bond would incapacitate him far longer than they had originally intended. Bond was still breathing, thankfully, but he was either unconscious or merely faking it for their captors’ benefit.

Unfortunately, Tiago feared it was the former.

“You may take him and do with him as you please,” the *capo* said to Miguel, “but do not kill him yet.” He looked over at Tiago. “I would prefer to do that myself while this one watches. I’m sure we can find *something* suitably unpleasant that will take an extended period of time for him to die.”

He handed Miguel the activator, who promptly placed it in a pocket, much to Tiago’s relief. Miguel started to walk toward Bond, but Damarion stopped him with a hand on his elbow. He reached behind him to the bookshelf and picked up a set of restraints. “Put these on him and do not
Miguel looked from his superior to the man lying motionless on the floor, and he said, “But, Capo . . .”

“Do as I say,” the man replied sharply. “Regardless of their obvious role-playing, this man is still British Secret Service and therefore dangerous.” He turned to eye Tiago. “Only a fool underestimates the wounded tiger.”

“Si, Capo,” Miguel said reluctantly. He walked over to Bond, turned him roughly onto his back, and bound his wrists together in front of his body. He then picked Bond up like he weighed no more than a child and carried him from the room.

Tiago attempted to catch Bond’s gaze as he was carried from the room, but it was just as he had feared.

His little rat was unconscious.

Damarion pulled out a chair and sat down. “Now, Mr. Rodriguez, why don’t we have a pleasant, civilized chat while Miguel enjoys his reward for fulfilling your little bargain, eh?”

James regained consciousness reluctantly, knowing that something was definitely amiss.

Keeping his eyes closed, he attempted to take stock of his situation without bringing attention to the fact that he had awakened. He was lying flat on his back on some sort of mattress or bed, which in of itself was not unusual, since he seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time in that position after encountering one Tiago Rodriguez. However, nothing felt familiar -- neither the firmness of the mattress beneath him nor the overall ‘feel’ of the room itself. He was always giving Tiago grief about the quality of his ‘accommodations’, but his rooms had always felt fresh and well ventilated. This one had the musty smell of a building long past its prime.

His hands were tied together and stretched over his head, so they were likely attached to something behind him. He didn’t dare test that theory. More importantly, his body was wracked with the almost overwhelming sensation of misfiring nerves and quivering muscles that followed an extended session with the collar. But surely Tiago wouldn’t . . .

It was then that his traumatized brain recalled the most recent events, and he stiffened involuntarily.

There was a soft chuckle nearby and then a very heavy weight depressed the mattress next to him. “Open your eyes, cachorro. I know you are awake.”

James complied, but not out of any actual desire to obey the command. He simply needed to assess the situation and do so very quickly. He had a feeling he was already at a significant disadvantage here.

“Ah, but you do have beautiful eyes.” He turned James’ chin toward him. “Such a terrible waste — a lovely creature like you belonging to someone like Raoul Silva.”

Narrowing his eyes, James said, “I don’t belong to anyone.”

One of the man’s heavy, dark eyebrows inched upward. “You truly believe that, don’t you, cachorro?” He shook his head sadly. “That is his genius, you know. He ensnares his victims so
thoroughly and completely that they never know they have fallen into his trap, until it is far too late, that is.” The big man cupped the side of his face. “When he is bored with you, he will abandon you, or kill you, just like he has all his other conquests. He has quite the reputation in Lima, you realize.”

James felt his heart rate accelerate. It couldn’t be true that James meant nothing to Tiago. He seemed so utterly devoted to him, but what if James truly was just one more rat caught in the man’s cleverly baited trap? Would he eventually become ‘superfluous’ to Tiago as well -- something to be casually discarded, like Severine?

Closing his eyes, James attempted to steady his breathing. No. No, he wouldn’t. Perhaps that might have been true at first, when James had been merely Raoul Silva’s trophy, his method of seeking revenge at M, but that had changed. He knew it had changed. Tiago would never leave him now. Never.

Reopening his eyes, James said distinctly, “Go to hell.”

The big man merely laughed, then reached into his pocket for the activator to James’ collar and placed it on the bed within easy reach.

James had assumed that possession of the device would lull the man into a false sense of security and that he would subsequently untie his hands, but for some reason, he didn’t seem in a hurry to do so.

That was definitely not good.

Miguel knelt on the side of the bed, and then he simply stared at James, his eyes moving ever so slowly from his head down to his feet, which were now bare. He reached out almost reverently to roll up James’ left trouser leg, exposing the collar completely to his view. He seemed utterly fascinated with the device, possibly for its impressive functionality, but more likely he saw it as physical proof of James’ subservience and inability to oppose the collar’s owner.

And now, through his current possession of the activator, he apparently envisaged that James was subservient to him now.

When Miguel reached out to lightly stroke the device and the sensitive skin beneath it, James shuddered violently, his skin crawling from the sensation of the wrong man’s fingers upon him . . . and his collar.

He would never have dreamed, when he’d first received the shiny black band, that it would eventually hold such a significantly deeper meaning for him, but he had no other explanation for reacting so violently to a stranger merely fondling it.

Miguel evidently did not miss this reaction either. He bent down to stroke the collar with his tongue this time, grasping James’ foot firmly when he attempted to wrest it violently away. He laved it completely and thoroughly, turning the collar in his hand to insure he had not missed a single spot. Whenever his tongue brushed against James’ skin, it felt like it burned, his reaction to this violation and blatant display of ownership was so intense.

When he had finally finished, the big man eyed him thoughtfully. “Poor little one. You obviously consider this a symbol of his devotion to you, but you are forgetting one important fact.”

James refused to respond to him, still shaking from the man’s unwanted attentions.
Miguel patted the activator. “He can kill you with it, just as easily.”

“Fuck you,” James said, refusing to be baited further.

“Ah, such spirit,” Miguel said, gazing at him now with hooded eyes. “I will enjoy being the one to finally break you, since your previous owner has chosen not to complete that process.” He placed a possessive hand upon James’ naked stomach. “He has come very close, however. Do you want to know how I’ve determined that fact, cachorro?”

When James merely glared at him, Miguel’s hand drifted from James’ stomach to his hip, just centimeters from his groin. The man smiled lazily. “You look to him for guidance and permission before you take any action, and you do so every single time.”

James felt his eyes widen. No. He didn’t actually do that, did he?

Chuckling, Miguel bent down and kissed him lightly on the forehead, and James was so distracted with his inner turmoil that he didn’t even protest the action.

“I did tell you that was his genius, did I not?”

James mentally shook himself. Tiago had warned him that Miguel was extremely good at using mind games to aid in breaking his victims. Of course, James would look to Tiago for instructions — it had been Tiago’s plan all along to fool the firmas into believing that James was nothing more than a sex slave. It was acting. It was role-playing. He was an undercover operative as well as a field agent — it was part of his bloody job description.

So get a grip on yourself, Bond, and just do the damn job.

Forcing himself to relax completely, James looked up at the man with his best sultry expression and said, in a voice heavily laden with sarcasm, “I can’t help it. The man is so amazing in bed that he’s impossible to resist.”

For a moment, Miguel looked positively flummoxed, but then he sat back on his heels and laughed. When he had finally gotten his breath back, he said, “Oh, you are too precious for words. Such bravado for one so small and defenseless.” He began to undo the belt on James’ trousers. “If that is actually true, then you should find me even more difficult to resist, cachorro.”

Bloody hell, but this wasn’t going how they’d planned.

Once they’d left the guards behind, James was supposed to have overpowered an overconfident Miguel, but they hadn’t counted on the second application of the collar. He did understand why Tiago had been forced to activate the collar himself, but even if James wasn’t firmly tied to this bed, it had left him feeling too shaky and weak to attempt any effective resistance at this point. James needed time to insure he could take down the larger man, and he wasn’t sure he was going to get that time.

Not until he was forced into a situation that would make Tiago extremely angry, at least.

Once he had undone the belt, Miguel opened the clasp and then slowly, glacially so, pulled the trousers down James’ legs. James was, of course, wearing nothing underneath. The soft leather was so form-fitting that Miguel practically had to peel them off, and he was apparently in no hurry to do so. The large, meaty fingers explored practically every inch of his bare legs in the process, and James once again had to resist the urge to give into his repulsion and fight back, regardless of the consequences.
No. He had only one viable option here, and that was to project at least a minimal degree of submission and appear as meek as possible. He had to force the big man into making an error in judgement, and he’d never be able to accomplish that if he fought him at this point. It was a fine line, because if he capitulated too suddenly, it would only make Miguel more suspicious, not less.

So exactly at what point had his life gotten this bloody complicated?

Miguel finally removed the trousers and tossed them off the bed. He then placed one hand proprietarily on the collar and lightly skimmed the other up James’ thigh.

James remained still but allowed his breathing to increase slightly. If Miguel thought that was a result of either fear or arousal, all the better. However, he couldn’t stop the shiver that went through his body when Miguel stroked lightly over his hip bone, apparently recalling James’ previous response to that unusual erogenous zone.

Miguel was clearly cataloguing his reactions and kept his gaze on James’ face as he continued the teasing caress of his hip. “Ah, so you are indeed very sensitive here. How utterly intriguing.”

Closing his eyes tightly, James tried to convince his body that it wasn’t totally repulsed by the man’s touch. It would be better if he were able to attain some sort of erection, if only to further encourage his captor into making a mistake.

However, when Miguel’s other hand began a similar caress of his opposite hip, James realized he needn’t worry on that score. His body had apparently been preprogrammed to respond to that particular teasing sensation, regardless of the source, and he shifted uncomfortably when he felt himself begin to harden.

Miguel chuckled. “I truly do adore how responsive you are. We are going to have so much fun together, you and I.”

James didn’t reply, keeping his eyes closed. If he didn’t, he knew that the irresistible urge to slug the man’s undoubtedly smiling face would cause him to lose whatever erection he had.

Miguel removed a hand from one of his hips, and James tensed involuntarily, not knowing what Miguel was planning to do. And damn, but the man was good. He seemed to sense James’ unease and made no new explorations, merely making James wait, his whole body almost quivering in expectation of the next touch. And yet, Miguel never slowed the maddening caress of that one hypersensitive hipbone, and it was driving him totally insane.

What are you complaining about, Bond? You needed time to recover from the effect of the collar, and he’s giving it to you.

“You continue to keep your eyes closed, cachorro. Are you imagining it is your previous owner who is tending to you?”

James simply shook his head, not feeling the urge to reply. It would take a lot more than closed eyes for him to mistake anyone for Tiago.

“Well, since you are so insistent on that, perhaps I should make it easier for you.” The mattress lifted as Miguel rose from the bed, and James’ eyes flew open in dismay.

The big man pulled a piece of black cloth from a drawer and then returned to the bed.

James made an involuntary sound of protest when Miguel moved to tie the cloth over his eyes.
“Yes, it is one thing to choose not to see, but when it is forced upon you, it is a totally different prospect, is it not?” He finished tying off the cloth behind James’ head and then lightly stroked a cheekbone. “A little sensory deprivation is very useful in one who is only half-trained, like yourself. I thank you kindly for reminding me.”

“Go to hell,” James said again, but he let his voice quiver slightly. It wasn’t very difficult. He hated the inability to see — not having the forewarning to brace himself against what might be coming. It triggered his lifelong, entrenched fear of vulnerability. Not to mention that one particular punishment session when Raoul had done much the same thing to him.

Damn it. You’re simply stalling for time here. Don’t think about anything else.

Miguel said softly, “Now, where we? Ah, yes.” And with that, one massive hand was back on his hipbone, but this time the other hand delved under his shirt to brush lightly against a nipple. The man experimented with both light and rough caresses, but damn, he was a quick learner. He soon discovered the exact degree of intensity that James normally enjoyed and applied it mercilessly.

James had been trying to remain silent, but he belatedly realized that if he wanted Miguel to ever release his hands, an outward display of stoicism would certainly not help.

Therefore, when Miguel lifted the short tank top to suckle the opposite nipple in his mouth, Bond didn’t suppress his resultant gasp. The combined assault on both nipples and his hip soon brought him to full arousal regardless, and he shifted again, his body unconsciously seeking some sort of relief.

After a few minutes of this, blind and still slightly disoriented from the collar’s effects, James couldn’t help but moan when the big man’s hand shifted suddenly from his hip to his cock, giving him a long, firm stroke from base to tip.

James’ hips rose involuntarily, but the hand retreated to his hip and did not return. Miguel kept up the teasing stroking of his hipbone, but did nothing more. He remained completely silent, and James’ head turned instinctively toward him, trying to predict when and where the next caress would come from.

Miguel made him wait, and wait. Every once in a while, he felt the man shift, and he had the phantom impression of a hand moving across his body, but he never actually touched him. It was positively maddening. James licked his lips, feeling the sweat pool on his body, but his lips were so damn dry.

He felt the mattress shift again, and he tensed, but there was still nothing, nothing. When James had finally decided the man was never going to touch him again, a warm mouth abruptly engulfed his cock, and the strong, slow suction forced a moan out of him. The man placed both hands on James’ hips while he continued sucking his cock, and James writhed again, groaning.

Miguel released his cock with one last lick of the tip, and then said with no small degree of admiration in his voice, “You are indeed exquisite, cachorro, but I’m afraid I will have to cut our session short or I might not last myself.” He laughed. “But perhaps I can convince the capo to keep you alive for a little while longer, no? I would look forward to seeing exactly how long I could torment you before you begin to beg for my cock.”

James shook his head, unable to trust his voice just yet.

“Oh, I think you would. I think you most definitely would,” Miguel said, his voice as dark and deep as a crevasse.
James felt him move toward the head of the bed, and he forced himself not to tense, attempting to appear merely pliant and helplessly aroused. He still wasn’t certain he had recovered enough physically from the collar to take the man out, but he knew he’d run out of time. He could only pray that the man would choose to untie him, or else he was screwed.

Quite literally.

However, he was determined to fight that with everything he had, regardless of whether he remained restrained or not.

James felt the man reach behind his head to untie the blindfold, and he blinked rapidly as his eyes attempted to adjust to the light, as dilated as they undoubtedly were.

The man merely knelt there for a few moments, his own eyes narrowed in concentration. “If I am only allowed to have you this one night, I would prefer that you were completely naked. I want absolutely nothing to come between us.” He smiled. “Nothing but your two collars, that is,” he said as he ran his fingers around the broad leather collar on James’ neck.

James shuddered, not entirely for artistic purposes, as the man’s fingertips then caressed the exposed portions of his neck. He lowered his eyes, refusing to allow Miguel to see how much it affected him.

This seemed to bolster Miguel’s decision, because he said lightly, “I will have to untie you to remove the remainder of your clothes, since I am not foolish enough to carry a knife to do so when it could potentially be used against me.” He stroked James’ cock again, lightly, just enough to tease. “I’m still quite certain your claws are not sharp, cachorro, but I will accede to the capo’s wishes and make sure you are incapable of resistance.” He shrugged, removing his hand. “It will, of course, remove any vestige of this lovely erection in the process, but we have all night for you to recover it.”

He picked up the activator, and James had to restrain himself from slumping in relief.

Thank God. He wasn’t anywhere near his top fighting form yet, but it would have to suffice. He wouldn’t get another chance.

James widened his eyes in simulated mute appeal and pulled violently against his restraints.

The man stepped away from the bed and then casually pressed the button. James immediately convulsed his body into as much of a fetal position as he could attain with his arms restrained. He had no trouble faking the symptoms of the collar’s use, since he’d certainly had more than enough experience with its debilitating effects in the past.

Miguel, however, had only seen it in operation twice before, and it was a well known fact that one saw what one expected to see.

James made certain he kept Miguel in his field of view, however. It wouldn’t be good if he missed the point when Miguel pressed the button and thought he had turned off the device. Fortunately, all James had to do was look up at him occasionally with a pleading expression in his eyes. Tiago had thoughtfully given this activator’s switch a distinctively loud ‘click’ when pressed.

Miguel kept the device ‘on’ for a full two minutes. He had evidently surmised from James’ previous session with the collar that this would render him sufficiently incapacitated to do as he pleased.

It certainly would have, if the activator had actually been programmed to function a second time.
Miguel finally clicked the button, and James slumped into the mattress, gasping. His erection had indeed subsided in the interim, but not for the reason Miguel had expected. James had simply focused his entire concentration on what was to come in the next several minutes, and that had absolutely nothing to do with sex.

James groaned softly as the man climbed onto the bed, but he didn’t move. Curling into the fetal position had allowed him to get his knees under him, and he wasn’t about to lose that valuable degree of leverage.

He remained still as Miguel unclipped the length of chain attached to his restraints, but when he felt his right hand come free from the handcuffs, he didn’t wait for Miguel to undo the other one.

James immediately exploded upward, bringing his freed fist under Miguel’s chin and snapping the man’s head backward. He tried to follow through with an incapacitating knee to the big man’s groin, but his muscles were still not cooperating fully with him. He didn’t score a direct hit on his intended target but did manage to at least temporarily knock the breath out of him. James hit him again, this time with his left hand, which still had the handcuffs attached. The punch was enough to knock the bigger man off the bed, but Miguel grabbed the loose end of the handcuffs and pulled James down with him to the floor.

James tried to roll away, knowing he couldn’t stay in this close to the larger man and win the fight. Miguel had the benefits of size, strength and reach, not to mention his muscles weren’t still quivering with the aftereffects of a severe electrical shock.

Unfortunately, Miguel hadn’t lost his grip on the handcuffs when he’d impacted the floor, and James’ left arm was wrenched violently as his roll was abruptly halted. He soon found himself being hauled roughly to his feet by an extremely angry man.

James didn’t hesitate. He spun in a half-circle, flipped Miguel over his shoulder and then stamped hard with his heel on the man’s hand as he hit the floor. Even with bare feet, it was enough of an impact to force Miguel to release his grip on the handcuffs, but it scarcely even slowed him down. He was back on his feet almost immediately, shoving a shoulder into James’ midriff and pushing him backward until he hit the wall next to an immense fireplace, temporarily knocking the breath out of him.

Trying desperately to regain the upper hand, James swung at him while still gasping for breath, but the larger man easily stopped the oncoming fist. He grabbed James’ other hand and held them both over his head against the wall. Transferring his grip so that he restrained both of James’ hands in one of his, he used his free hand to encircle his neck above the collar and then started to squeeze.

Eyes widening, James abruptly allowed his full body weight to fall into the man’s hold and then kicked violently against the wall with both feet, toppling them both once more to the floor.

The momentum and their combined body weights actually did manage to disable Miguel briefly, but he was like a man possessed. James had barely rolled away and gotten to his feet before Miguel grabbed the fireplace poker and swung it at James’ head.

Backpedaling desperately, James ducked the first swing but the quivering muscles in his right leg abruptly gave out on him, and he went down hard onto his knees. Before he could totally regain his footing, Miguel swung at him again. James managed to almost block the blow with his left arm, but he heard the uniquely sharp crack of a breaking bone, and there was still sufficient momentum from the man’s powerful swing to knock him solidly onto his back, his ears ringing.

That was odd. He barely felt the pain from the broken bone or the blow to his head, so apparently
there must be some benefit to getting his nerves scrambled by the collar. His eyes wouldn’t focus properly either, but he could see well enough to distinguish Miguel tossing the poker behind him, safely out of reach.

Smiling maliciously, the big man reached down with both hands to effortlessly pluck James off the floor.

James wondered idly if the man planned on simply killing him now.

Because if he didn’t, Tiago sure as hell would.
This is another beast of a chapter, but since it's basically one extended action scene, there wasn't a good place to break it. However, I don't think anyone will be complaining too loudly. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Miguel grabbed James’ upper arms and slammed him hard against the wall.

With his head still spinning, James couldn’t even bring himself to resist until he felt the man grasp his left hand, which was still handcuffed, then his right hand and bring them both together.

Knowing he couldn’t allow himself to be restrained again, James once again tried to break free by pushing back against the wall, but this time Miguel was prepared for it. He merely slammed James’ left forearm into the wall, and while James hadn’t truly felt the pain from the initial break, this time it bloody well hurt.

When the big man slammed the arm against the wall a second time, James felt his vision begin to blacken. Miguel obviously didn’t plan on killing him, but James was almost beginning to wish he did. He was gasping for breath, trying desperately to remain conscious, and he had no clue how to extract himself from this particular debacle.

Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the same fireplace poker used to incapacitate James swinging wildly at Miguel’s unprotected back.

The big man’s eyes widened as the heavy poker slammed hard into his spine. It would have been more effective if it had been aimed at Miguel’s head, but James Bond was never one to miss an opportunity. Miguel’s hold on James’s arms loosened just enough that he was able to break his left arm free.

Heedless of the agony of his broken arm, James punched the man hard in the face. He would get no second chances. James could live with the pain of a mangled arm, but he and Tiago were unlikely to leave this place alive if Miguel actually did manage to immobilize him again.

James simply wasn’t accustomed to being the weak link in a chain, and he’d be damned if he started now. He followed the punch to Miguel’s chin with a knee to the man’s groin, and this time he didn’t miss. The man doubled over and James spun him around, wrapped the short length of chain from the handcuffs around the man’s neck and pulled back. Hard.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t hard enough to break the man’s massive neck, but James kept Miguel’s back arched enough with one knee so that he couldn’t get the leverage to break free. He held on for dear life as he slowly choked the breath out of the man, but even with his admittedly tenuous hold, he couldn’t resist saying into the man’s ear, “Sorry, but I wouldn’t have been much of a conquest regardless -- not actually a virgin anymore.”

When Miguel finally slumped against him, either unconscious or dead, James’ weakened state and the man’s immense bulk meant that James ended up sliding down the wall onto the floor with the
man’s dead weight covering him. James never lost his grip on the handcuffs, however, insuring without a doubt that the man wasn’t merely faking unconsciousness.

James was so focused on this endeavour that he totally forgot there had to be a third individual in the room until a high, thin voice said quietly, “Are you all right?”

Incredulous, James released his choke hold on the motionless man, then turned his head far enough to the side to see a young girl with long, dark hair and an elfin face staring down wide-eyed at him.

James bit back his almost automatic, “What the bloody fucking hell?” at the very last moment and said instead, “Ms. Lyttelton, I presume?”

She nodded rapidly. She stared for a few moments longer, than said hesitantly, “Do you need help getting out from under him?”

Feeling like he’d just been run over by a train, several times, James almost nodded in acquiescence. Then he remembered who he was talking to . . . not to mention the relatively insignificant but still awkward fact that he was almost completely naked. Closing his eyes in mortification, James said, “Actually, I’d like you to go to the other side of the room and turn your back please.”

“But, why . . .” Then she saw one of James’ totally bare legs only partially covered by Miguel’s body and let out a startled, “Oh!”

When she simply continued to stare at him with wide, dark eyes, James sighed and made a shooing gesture with his uninjured hand.

Eleanor twitched, then said, “Oh, yes. Quite right.” She retreated to the far side of the room and made a point of turning on her heel in an almost military fashion to face the door.

After insuring she was planning on staying there, James heaved the massive bulk of Miguel’s body off him with a barely suppressed groan and then simply sat for a moment, trying to get his scattered thoughts together.

First things first. Apparently, Miguel was only unconscious, not dead, which was probably a good thing considering the tender age of his unwitting audience. He found the key to the handcuffs, removed them from his already swelling wrist with a grateful sigh, then hauled Miguel toward the bed and cuffed one arm to it. The bed was bolted firmly to the floor, so the man wasn’t going anywhere in a hurry, even if he did regain consciousness.

James kept throwing glances over at the patiently waiting Eleanor, but even though filthy and clothed only in a grime-covered, bedraggled dress, she was standing as straight and square as if she were waiting in the headmaster’s office in a pristine uniform. More importantly, she was keeping her eyes fixed firmly on the door.

He found his discarded trousers, and with a lot of silent swearing given the state of his injured arm, was finally able to coax them up his legs and secure them with a final grunt. He found his shoes as well, lying only partway under the bed.

“May I turn around now?” Eleanor said.

“Yes,” James replied with some degree of distraction, attempting to determine exactly how much damage his left arm had suffered. “I’m dressed.”

She turned around slowly, then said doubtfully, “Are you sure about that?”
James looked down at his only minimally clothed body and let out an amused snort, the adrenaline and pain making him more than a little giddy. “Actually, no, I’m not.”

Eleanor looked relieved. “That’s good.” She paused for a moment, apparently considering how much more she should say. Evidently, sincerity won out over good manners, because she said in a rush, “I’m terribly sorry, but I’m afraid you look rather ridiculous, that’s all.”

“Thank God,” James muttered under his breath, as he began searching the room for his belt. Then he stopped abruptly and turned to look at her thoughtfully. “Do you think you could repeat that opinion to a friend of mine once we get out of here?”

She seemed to consider this, still wide-eyed, but she nodded her head slightly. “Good. Otherwise, I’d never hear the end of being rescued by a ten-year-old girl.”

Eleanor actually looked affronted. “I’m almost eleven, and besides, I wasn’t rescuing you. I was merely providing timely tactical support.”

James laughed, discovering that he really, really liked this child. “I wonder where I’ve heard something similar to that before?” He held out his right hand. “My name is James. James Bond.”

She shook his hand solemnly, saying, “Eleanor Lyttelton.” She cocked her head at him. “You work for Auntie Olivia, don’t you?”

James made the obvious connection to M and then said hesitantly, “Until recently, yes.” Not wanting to continue that uncomfortable line of questioning, he continued his search for the missing belt.

“I thought I recognized the name.”

James finally found his belt underneath a chest of drawers. He peered up at her, puzzled. “M . . . Olivia told you about me?”

“No directly. But she mutters under her breath sometimes when she doesn’t know I can hear.” She paused. “For some reason, she uses a lot of ‘colourful epithets’ when she mentions you. That’s what she calls them anyway -- I’d just call it ‘swearing.’”

A fond smile on his face, James said, “Well, I imagine I’ve given her enough cause over the years.” Pulling apart the multicoloured stands of cord on the belt, he freed the black one containing the wire. Pausing, he looked over at Eleanor thoughtfully. “I came here to rescue you, but obviously that wasn’t strictly necessary. How did you get free?”

She shrugged. “I picked the lock to the door. Auntie taught me -- she said you never know when that kind of knowledge might be useful.”

“M can pick locks?”

“Can’t everyone?”

James smiled. “I usually prefer the more direct approach myself. Regardless, I do appreciate your ‘timely tactical support.’ It couldn’t have arrived at a more opportune moment.” He considered this as he undid the clasp on his neck collar, then gratefully removed it. “Why didn’t you escape before now?”

“There’s always been at least one guard at our door.” She shrugged again. “Something pulled him
away tonight, then I heard a commotion and decided to investigate.” She looked down at Miguel, still lying unconscious on the floor and shuddered. “I didn’t like him very much.”

“But when you struck him, you didn’t know me at all.”

“‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend,’” she quoted solemnly.

James pondered that as he removed the earpiece and transmitter from their hidden compartments in the collar and then connected them to the wiring from his belt. “I believe the lines between ‘enemy’ and ‘friend’ tend to be a little gray sometimes, but your theory is sound.”

“So glad you approve,” she said with a little heat.

“Wholeheartedly,” he replied with a smile, then delved into a drawer until he found a shirt to put on over the ‘rather ridiculous’ outfit he currently wore. It clearly belonged to Miguel, considering it was at least four sizes too big for James, but this meant that it dropped to the level of his mid thigh and therefore covered a lot of sins, so to speak.

He found a stiff leather shoehorn in one of the drawers and secured it to his broken arm with a few torn strips from another shirt to act as a temporary splint. Luckily, only one of the two bones in his forearm appeared to be broken, but that didn’t stop it from hurting like bloody blazes, especially after the abuse it had just suffered.

He cinched the voluminous garment around his waist with the remainder of his belt, then attached the transceiver unit to the belt, running the wire to his earpiece on the outside of the shirt. There was absolutely no need to disguise the wire now.

James inserted the earpiece, turned on the transceiver, then said softly, “Tiago?”

The pause was long enough that he feared no one was on the other end, but then, “Sorry to disappoint you, 007, but you’ll have to settle for me.”

“Q? What the hell?”

“Your . . . partner . . . asked for my assistance yesterday. Something about keeping you out of trouble? I didn’t think that was even remotely possible, and I told him that.” He paused. “For some reason, he just laughed.”

James was still a little dazed, and not just from the recent blow to his head. He really wished Tiago would deign to confide in him, at least occasionally.

Q continued, “I’m here to help you get Eleanor out. I can track you through the mansion’s internal security cameras.”

“I thought this organization was virulently opposed to any kind of electronic equipment, surveillance or otherwise.”

“That’s what Rodriguez said, but he gave me the specs based on his visual reconnaissance during your last visit there. These particular cameras are self-contained and aren’t on any sort of external network, so they probably assume it’s perfectly secure without any connection to the outside world. However, I’ve accessed them by piggybacking onto the AC power input for the units. They’ve installed a scrambler on the commercial power feed, but I’ve tapped into it directly from the wiring just inside the mansion. The visuals are extremely grainy since I’m getting the signals second hand, but there’s enough detail to distinguish most objects. Well, the larger ones at least.”
“Lovely.”

“I can let you do this on your own, if you prefer, 007.”

“Just get on with it, Q.” James paused, looking over at Eleanor. “I’ve already found Eleanor, or rather, she found me, but we still need to retrieve the rest of the girls.” He looked over at Eleanor for confirmation, and she nodded briskly.

“Understood.” Q sounded surprised, which was definitely unusual for the usually stoic quartermaster. “Yes, well. M did say the child had a rather phenomenal IQ and the bloody-mindedness to match.” James heard the tapping of keys and then, “All right. Come out into a hallway, and I’ll see if I can locate you.”

James motioned for Eleanor to stay back, listened intently at the door for a few moments, then opened it slowly. Until he managed to acquire a weapon, he wasn’t about to take unnecessary chances while he had an innocent to worry about.

“Got you,” Q said. “What’s wrong with your left arm, 007?”

James spotted the video camera at the far end of the hallway. “Nothing that won’t heal eventually.”

“I see why the blokes in Medical turn such a peculiar shade of green when you’ve been dispatched on a mission. Turn left, take another left, then go through the second door on the right.”

James started to follow the directions, but Eleanor tugged urgently on his good arm.

She stood on her toes and whispered, “Our room is that way,” she said, indicating the hallway to the right, then she immediately released his arm and looked at him expectantly.

M was evidently correct about Eleanor’s IQ. Very few children her age would instinctively realize the necessity for making as little noise as possible, or know to release James’ arm so he could remain unencumbered in the event they ran into unexpected company.

He nodded to her that he understood. “Eleanor says the other girls are being held in the opposite direction, Q.”

“I know, 007, but you have to retrieve something else first.”

James relayed his comprehension of the instructions, but in actuality, the library was the direction he truly wanted to go. He felt almost compelled to check on the status of Tiago, although he knew that was utterly irrational. The whole purpose of them splitting up -- with the majority of the guards occupied with protecting their capo while in Tiago’s presence — was to limit the number of men roaming the hallways in the rest of the mansion. That knowledge didn’t make his near compulsion to reach his lover’s side any easier to bear.

But he had a job to do, and he’d best get on with it so he could get back to Tiago.

James briefly considered leaving Eleanor in the room they’d just left and returning for her, but he discarded the idea just as quickly. She was just as likely to encounter a stray guard checking on the firmas deputy if she stayed there as she did wandering the halls with him. Besides, he didn’t want her anywhere near Miguel if he regained consciousness, regardless if he were restrained or not.

So they both headed in the direction Q had indicated, James stopping and listening carefully before they entered a new corridor. When they safely entered through the door Q had indicated, they
found an immense room with a vaulted ceiling, but completely empty except for some ancient, discarded furniture.

“Why am I here, Q? You expect me to incapacitate someone with a vintage Chippendale?”

“The bad guys have most of the windows boarded up for security and to counter electronic surveillance. The window in this room is the only one close enough.”

“It’s too high and too narrow to escape from, Q. Even Eleanor is too big.”

“Escape is not the purpose, 007. If you and Ms. Lyttelton would step back from the window please?”

As soon as James had indicated their adherence to the instructions, there was a loud crash as something broke through the window. Landing neatly in front of James’ feet was a rather large rock with a package in a shock-proof cannister tied to it with incongruously pink ribbon.

James eyed the package incredulously. “This is exceptionally low tech, even for you, Q.”

“Sometimes the old ways are best, 007. I would think you would comprehend that better than most.”

James opened the cannister to find something entirely unexpected. “Night vision goggles?”

“You sound surprised.”

“I was expecting a gun. Or a letter opener. Hell, some sort of weapon, at least.”

“There wasn’t room. It’s fortunate that the bad guys rely on their cameras for security and don’t have guards patrolling the grounds, or I wouldn’t have been able to risk the noise to provide you even that much. You’re going to need the goggles — you’ll have to trust me on that.”

“Now, there’s a scary thought.” James looked up at the very high window. “You must have one hell of a throwing arm, Q.”

“Not especially. I’m in the tree directly across from it.”

“A tree?”

“I did tell you I had to tap directly into the power grid, didn’t I? Can’t do that sitting around at home in my pyjamas. Luckily, this tree is practically leaning against the house.”

“God help us.”

“Again, you’ll have to settle for me, I’m afraid.”

Shaking his head, James put the strap for the goggles around his neck so he could keep his hands free. He looked over briefly at Eleanor to see how she was holding up, and although obviously tired and worn, she merely nodded her head at his questioning eyebrow.

They exited the room and headed back the way they came, but before they could enter the last corridor, Q said suddenly, “Bond. Bad guy approaching.”

James tapped the microphone once to indicate his receipt of the warning, then motioned for Eleanor to move back partway down the corridor. Waiting patiently, James struck the man as he rounded the corner, then swung him round and slammed him head first into the wall. Not
expecting the attack from out of nowhere, the man went down hard and stayed down.

Taking a deep breath and waiting for the sharp pain from his broken arm to subside, James crouched down and made sure the man was out, then confiscated his gun. He was evidently not on active patrol because he had no spare ammunition or equipment belt, although he did at least have a full clip in the gun.

Better than nothing. Besides, he’d only alert the entire building if he actually did use the bloody thing until he got the girls out, but at least he had *something* in the event of a dire emergency.

Fortunately, they encountered no one else as Eleanor led him to the room where the other girls were being held. James stopped in front of the door. “Q, can you tell me if there’s anyone in there besides the captives?”

There was a distinct pause. “Not for certain, 007. There aren’t any cameras in the room, and with the limitations of this setup, I can only access one camera at a time. That means I’m cycling through *all* of them in sequence, and I’ve been concentrating on those directly in your path. I can’t guarantee that I haven’t missed someone entering the room.”

“Understood,” James replied. He discretely tried the doorknob and found it locked. He looked over to Eleanor, and she whispered, “I locked it on my way out, in case the guard came back.”

James was again amazed at her levelheadedness, but he shook his head when she asked if she should unlock it again. He didn’t want her anywhere near the door in case there was someone behind it — someone prepared to shoot through it if they heard anything suspicious.

Motioning her back, James braced himself then slammed his right shoulder violently against the door. Luckily, the aging lock couldn’t withstand the impact, and James was through the door and scanning the room with a raised gun before it had even swung completely open.

Fortunately, there was no one else in the room other than the kidnapped girls, and they had been so repeatedly traumatized during their captivity that they thankfully didn’t even scream as he broke through the door. However, it was also possible that Eleanor coming into the room almost immediately behind him had at least partially reassured the girls.

Regardless of the reason, James was relieved. This was going to be difficult enough without attempting to chivvy a group of *completely* hysterical girls through a heavily armed stronghold.

His Spanish wasn’t exactly fluent, but he thought he was able to get across to the girls what he needed them to do. They seemed to look to Eleanor for guidance, however, which wasn’t surprising to James. Her Spanish was actually better than his, and she possessed a level of maturity that was totally unexpected for her age. He suspected that being the child of a top level diplomat must contribute to this, at least to some degree.

He would have liked to keep Eleanor next to him, but given the girls’ reliance on her, he favored having her take the rear position to insure they didn’t lose anyone along the way. James had a feeling he’d be otherwise occupied, and thankfully, Eleanor readily agreed to this arrangement.

“All right, Q. We’re ready. Which way?”

“One minute please, 007.”

Easy for him to say. James had never been one to enjoy waiting around for anything, especially with a group of very young, very distraught girls to worry about.
“All right. Just needed to make sure the connecting corridors were clear. This place is bloody immense. Take a left and go all the way to the end. There’s a stairwell, but it’s a blind spot for me, so be careful.”

There was no one in the stairwell, but just as they exited through the door on the next level down, Q said, “Oh, oh. Bond, put on the goggles. Now.”

James did so, and he had just instructed the girls to hold hands to keep them together when all the lights went out. The mansion was too old for emergency lights, and with most of the windows either boarded up or covered in dark curtains, it left everything in pitch darkness.

“What’s going on, Q?”

“How the hell do I know, 007? The internal cameras aren’t infrared.”

He might not have known Q for a long time, but he could definitely tell when someone was deflecting. “Tiago?” he asked worriedly.

“Bond, just get the girls out. Turn right at the next corridor, then right again. Go through the kitchens and into a small room. It’s some kind of storage room or pantry, at least that’s what it looked like from my limited vantage point. There’s a door that should lead down to the cellar, and there’s an exit on the south wall. They shouldn’t be expecting anyone to attempt escape that way, since it’s boarded up on the outside. However, you should be able to break through it easily enough, if you put your back into it, that is.”

Q had barely finished his instructions when there was an incredibly loud explosion, causing the floor to actually vibrate beneath their feet and send showers of plaster dust raining down from the ceiling above, which luckily the girls couldn’t see. Regardless, they screamed at the noise and the unexpected tremors amidst the all-encompassing darkness. It took some time, but James and Eleanor were finally able to get them moving again once the worst effects of the explosion had dissipated.

As they walked hand-in-hand down the corridor, James found he had difficulty adapting to the size of the incredibly small hand that clung tightly to his. He’d been with Tiago for so long that he’d become accustomed to being engulfed in the man’s much larger ones.

Luckily, he couldn’t dwell on that thought extensively, because even with the goggles, he was having difficulty navigating around the obstacles and debris in their path and still confirm that all the girls were staying with him.

That didn’t stop him from worrying about Tiago, however, not with an unexpected explosion of that magnitude. “Damn it, Q! Where is Tiago?”

“I don’t know, but he’d asked me yesterday to plant the incendiary next to the relief valve for the gas line. He must have remotely triggered the explosion. That wasn’t me.” There was quiet swearing over the feed. “Unfortunately, the explosion has started a fire and it’s spreading like a wild thing. You need to get out of there now, Bond.”

“I’m trying,” James said furiously, limited by how fast he could push the girls in pitch blackness. “Bond, I’m effectively blind right now, so I’m getting out of this tree. I’ll meet you at the south exit. Do try to be careful.”

“Always.”
“That’s not what I’ve heard, 007.” There was the sudden sound of breaking branches and a lot of colourful swearing over the wire, which James was thankful the girls couldn’t hear. Just when he was about to ask Q if he was all right, he heard, “Well, that was vexing.” There was another pause. “Bloody hell, but I despise field work — I’ve got twigs in my hair.”

The disgust in Q’s voice forced a smile from James even with the significant strain he was under.

“Field work isn’t for everyone, Q.”

“Tell me something I don’t know, Bond.”

James didn’t reply, because he saw the wavering light from at least one person approaching rapidly with a torch from the connecting corridor just ahead. He bit back a quiet oath and told the girls as quietly as he could to stay right where they were and not to move under any circumstances.

Damn, but he hated leaving the children unattended, for any reason.

A hand felt for his in the darkness. “We’ll be fine, James. Go.”

Thankful again for Eleanor’s steadiness under stress, he wondered idly what she planned to do when she grew up. He couldn’t help but think she’d make an excellent field agent. Shaking his head fondly as he sprinted up the corridor, he made a mental note that if she did decide on that particular occupation, he was bloody well going to teach her how to shoot first.

It turned out to be more than one guard. In fact, there were three of them, but one was obviously injured, and his clothes appeared to be actually smouldering slightly. Evidently, the fire was closer than James would have liked, so he didn’t waste time on aiming merely to incapacitate. He took out the man with the torch first, of course, with a clean shot through the chest.

The bulb for his torch must have shattered when it hit the floor, since the light doused immediately upon impact. The injured guard he got with his next shot, but the third man wisely threw himself around the corner and out of James’ line of sight.

Swearing, and knowing he didn’t have the luxury of wasting time trading blind shots, James silently moved to the opposite side of the hallway, which of course would put him in the line of fire sooner — if the man was actually able to see him, that is. Therefore, when an arm appeared around the corner and fired in the direction James used to be, James quickly ran forward, dived to the floor as he rounded the corner, and shot the man before he could even fully turn in James’ direction.

The night vision goggles appeared to be exceedingly useful after all, so he figured he owed Q an apology.

What a novelty.

Hurrying back down the corridor, he rounded up the girls and headed once more in the direction Q had indicated. It wasn’t a moment too soon either, because the hallway was rapidly filling up with smoke. James seemed to be making a habit of escaping from buildings set aflame by one Tiago Rodriguez, but at least this time he had the distinct advantage of wearing shoes.

That vivid memory brought on a fresh pang of worry for Tiago, but he brushed it brutally aside. They were quickly running out of time, and besides, the sooner he could get the girls out, the sooner he could go back and retrieve the irritating man.

He heard the explosive sound of window glass bursting and tried to speed up their pace, but the girls were already coughing in the thickening smoke. If he didn’t come across that pantry door soon, even he would become blind in the swirling smoke.
Finding the cavernous kitchen area at last, James guided the girls through the long rows of counters and found the door into the pantry. He prayed that Q was right about the location of the door to the cellar, because if he wasn’t, they were going to be well and truly trapped. He hadn’t seen any other way out of there, and the smoke and heat were only becoming more oppressive.

Coughing himself now, James almost slumped with relief when he saw the door. Hurriedly placing a hand on the door, checking to make sure that the fire hadn’t beat them to their escape route, he found it mercifully cool to the touch. The door was locked, but with time at a premium he simply shot the lock out, which caused a few startled screams from the girls who couldn’t see what he was doing. He spoke to them quietly for a bit, trying to calm them, but he knew they were rapidly running out of time.

When he thought the girls were steady enough, James led them slowly down the rickety stairs, letting them feel their way in the pitch darkness with their hands on the bannister.

Once they reached the cellar floor, James gripped Eleanor’s elbow lightly and said, “Eleanor. I’m going to try to find the exit Q mentioned. Could you try to keep everyone here and calm for me, please?”

She nodded, obviously remembering that with the goggles James could actually see the gesture, and therefore needn’t acknowledge him aloud. James shook his head again, marveling at her composure. With a constitution like this at such a tender age, James would have suspected she was actually M’s granddaughter rather than goddaughter. She certainly seemed to possess the MI6 chief’s iron will and steadiness in a crisis.

The cellar turned out to be a combination of storage areas and secure-appearing holding facilities, no doubt for the purpose of human trafficking. None of the cells appeared to be currently occupied, thankfully.

There was an ancient pot-bellied stove along the far wall, and James finally spotted the boarded up exit from the cellar not far from it. It was not full height, only about a meter tall, but it was more than sufficient as an escape route. Next to a partially split pile of wood was an axe that had seen its better days, and he prayed it was still sturdy enough to break through the door. Even in the dampness of the cellar, he could feel the heat increasing from the fire above them.

James ran back to get the girls, who were thankfully still huddled together at the foot of the stairs. They had only made it halfway across the cellar, however, before a portion of the ceiling behind them dropped with a fiery crash.

Swearing aloud this time, James checked to make sure no one was injured, but he finally managed to get them to their escape point across the seemingly endless expanse of concrete floor.

It took him longer than it should have to break through the solid oak door, but he wasn’t precise enough while attempting to swing the axe one-handed. He knew he was doing his broken, significantly swollen arm no favours by using it to increase the accuracy and force of his swings, but he didn’t have a choice.

For this reason, when he finally managed to make a large enough hole, he simply dropped the axe and kicked the rest of the broken boards out.

When James stepped through the splintered door, he saw Q waiting for them at the other side, as promised. He was easy to locate as his normally placid face was eerily reflecting the flames from the burning building, and he was anxiously darting glances between the structure above them and the door. He had his laptop clutched tightly under his arm and did indeed have twigs in his hair.
“You certainly took your time, 007,” Q said with relief as he assisted James in getting the girls through the door. “Did you stop for tea?”

“I tried, but the service here is utterly reprehensible.”

“Not totally unexpected, I should say.” When they’d gotten everyone out, Q said, “This way, Bond. Hurry.”

He led them through an alley behind a building whose roof was also smouldering ominously, and James wondered if the entire block would end up in flames. They came out onto the main street, and James could hear the still far-off sounds of sirens approaching.

There was a nondescript, light-coloured van parked a safe distance away, and as the small group approached, James saw Diego and Michelle emerge from the back, medical bags in hand. Michelle immediately ran over to examine the girls.

James saw Diego start toward him, concern showing plainly on his lined face, but he waved the doctor off with his good hand. James had completed his part of the mission, and he had to get to Tiago before it was too late.

He had to.

James turned to Q and said tersely, “Watch over Eleanor and the rest of the girls.”

Q’s eyes widened as he evidently surmised James’ intentions, and this was as much pure emotion as James had ever seen displayed on the young man’s usually impassive face.

“You can’t go back in there, 007.” Q grabbed James’ elbow, gesticulating sharply with his chin, indicating the mansion now almost completely engulfed in flames. “You wouldn’t make it past the doorway.”

James shook his arm free and then ripped a strip off the oversized shirt as a mask to cover his mouth and nose.

Q tried again. “Bond, he’s probably already dead. I lost contact with him some time ago.”

Shaking his head, James said, “No, he’s still alive. I’m told we rats are amazingly resilient.”

James ran toward the house, but before he had gone more than a few meters, there was another massive explosion that shook the ground like an earthquake and sent a massive fireball into the sky.

Even before James could skid to a stop, his collar sent a brief spike of such unbearably intense pain through his body that he screamed in agony and dropped to the street like a stone.

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Dr. Diego Almeida saw Señor Bond fall to the ground as if shot and knew immediately what had happened to Tiago. He briefly hung his head, but he knew he would have to postpone his grieving until he could afford the time for that particular luxury.

The young man with a laptop under his arm started toward Señor Bond, but Diego waved him back imperiously. If Tiago had been correct, and he usually was, the young man would be busy with other issues very soon, regardless.
Sure enough, before Diego could even reach Señor Bond, the young man said, “What the hell?” and hurriedly opened his laptop case. He began tapping on keys frantically, but then he simply stared at the screen in apparent shock. Diego heard him mutter, “It’s downloading something, but what? And how did it get through the firewall?”

The district’s firefighting personnel finally arrived, horrendously late as usual. Dropping to one knee, Diego checked Señor Bond’s pulse and breathing to make sure the collar had not caused him significant damage, but fortunately that did not appear to be the case. The man was conscious, but his eyes never strayed from what was left of the burning house.

A plain black car with diplomatic plates pulled in behind the still growing array of emergency vehicles, and Diego knew he’d run out of time.

Diego said softly, “I will return shortly, Señor Bond.”

He walked quickly to where the young man was sitting on a kerb, still staring in shock at his rebellious computer. Diego pulled the activator for Señor Bond’s collar out of his medical bag as well as a sizable medical kit stocked with very specific supplies. “Here,” Diego said quickly, “I am told that you will need these.”

The young man stared at the objects just handed to him, then at the continuous stream of data downloading onto his laptop. He looked up at Diego in puzzlement.

Diego said, “He assumed you would eventually decipher it on your own, since he considered you to be a ‘relatively bright boy’, but that he would transmit explicit instructions as well, to be safe.”

The young man looked at the activator, then at Señor Bond, and his eyes were wide when he finally turned back to Diego. “Rodriguez?” he asked.

Diego nodded.

An elderly woman emerged from the black car and ran over to envelop one of the kidnapped girls in an embrace. Knowing he could waste no further time, Diego turned to leave, but the young man grabbed his elbow. “What does all this mean?”

Diego stared at the man who seemed far too young to take on such an overwhelming responsibility and said, “Tiago has entrusted him to you.” He looked over at Señor Bond, who was still lying where he had fallen, unmoving and in apparent shock. “You have a very difficult task ahead of you, young man. I only pray you are up to accomplishing it. For his sake.”

“But...”

Shaking his head to forestall any further attempts at questioning, Diego returned quickly to the stricken man’s side. “Señor Bond, could you sit up for me, please?”

There was no response, so Diego tugged lightly on the man’s uninjured arm, and this time said, “James?”

The agent finally tore his eyes from the flames to look up at him blankly, but then his eyes drifted once more to the blazing house.

In desperation, Diego employed a tone of voice he had heard Tiago use when his young man was being especially stubborn, and said firmly, “James, sit up for me please.”

To Diego’s relief, James complied almost immediately, and Diego was finally able to get him into
a seated position. He hated to be so manipulative when the man was in obvious shock, but he had to get James mobile, and do so very quickly. He would not fail Tiago now.

James sat quietly, his injured arm cradled close to his chest, but he kept his eyes downcast.

“James,” Diego said quietly, “May I see your arm please?”

Still in a perceptible daze, the man obediently held out his injured arm, which Diego took into his hands very carefully.

He pulled off the makeshift splint and palpated the arm gently to gauge the extent of the damage, but it appeared to be a clean break with very little, if any, displacement to the fractured ends.

Diego had almost completed his examination when James looked up at him, eyes wide, and said so softly, “It hurts, Dr. Almeida.”

Diego knew he was not referring to the broken arm. His own heart breaking at the clearly perceptible despair in the man’s voice, Diego said, “Yes, I know, James. I know it hurts.”

With additional medical personnel having arrived to assist with care of the girls, Michelle jogged over to help Diego with his injured charge. As Diego pushed on the fracture to completely align the bone, Bond barely flinched, his eyes once more locked on the house now completely enveloped in flames. His view was unobstructed, as the firefighters had apparently decided the mansion was a total loss and were merely concentrating their efforts on preventing nearby structures from becoming involved as well.

Michelle handed Diego a splint, which Diego carefully placed around Bond’s forearm and wrapped securely in place with several layers of gauze and a protective waterproof covering. With only the ulna broken, he did not feel the need to apply a permanent cast, especially since the swelling was rather substantial — significantly so, given the relatively minor severity of the break.

However, knowing this man, James had likely been using the arm as if it had never been broken, regardless of the potential consequences. Tiago would have done exactly the same.

Madre de Dios, but he already missed that infuriating man.

But as he looked into the haunted, despairing eyes of the man sitting before him, he realized he was not the only one.

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After insuring that Eleanor was relatively unharmed, M assigned Tanner to keep an eye on her wayward goddaughter while she tended to other matters. She had already noted there were two medics capably tending to an injured Bond, so she walked over to her equally wayward Quartermaster, who was sitting on a kerb and staring intently at his laptop as if it were about to attack him.

She wasn’t going to ask how he’d managed to arrive on the scene before she and Tanner did, as she was quite certain she wouldn’t like the answer.

Her eyes kept straying back to Bond, however. Her agent was being uncharacteristically cooperative with the two medics, and she didn’t like the look in his eyes at all. It reminded her far too much of the haunting photograph of a recently orphaned and obviously heartsick child she had first seen so many years ago.
Now, Bond merely looked numb, as if he were missing a limb and hadn’t yet grown accustomed to its loss.

She stiffened as she abruptly realized what else was missing. “Where is Tiago?” she asked Q.

Not even looking at her, Q merely jerked his chin in the direction of the burning house.

“Are you sure?” she asked doubtfully.

Q closed his eyes briefly, then opened them. “There was a final explosion. 007 dropped immediately to the ground, and it wasn’t from the concussive blast. At the same time, my laptop began downloading data -- something that should never have occurred given the security protocols I have entrenched in it.”

“What exactly did it download?”

“As far as I can tell -- specifications, electronic schematics and a very specific radio frequency.” He looked over at the man sitting quietly on the ground.

“Bond’s ankle bracelet?” she asked incredulously.

Q merely nodded. “He refers to it as a ‘collar.’ Rodriguez had been using a neural implant to control it. I’m assuming the download was initiated by some type of dead man’s switch.”

M closed her eyes. “Good God.”

This was definitely not good news. Bond had lost far too much, far too often. She already knew how fragile the man was emotionally, regardless of his controlled and extremely competent exterior. She also knew how incredibly persuasive and manipulative Tiago Rodriguez could be when he wanted something, and he had apparently wanted Bond very badly indeed.

When she reopened her eyes, the two medics had finished placing a splint on Bond’s left arm and were now examining the rest of his upper body. The male medic was speaking softly to him, and the fact that Bond was obviously deferring to him without putting up any kind of fuss had all her internal alarm bells ringing.

She was so entrenched in watching that vaguely disquieting scene that she didn’t even notice Gareth Mallory and two of his lackeys approaching until Q cleared his throat loudly, hurriedly closed the lid of his laptop, and tucked it under his arm.

He then placed some kind of device into his pocket and tucked another package behind him where it was mostly out of sight.

It was fortunate she was blocking Mallory’s view as he drew near them, because Q was about as subtle as a runaway lorry in a glass factory.

She turned to face Mallory so he would hopefully keep his focus on her . . . and off the obviously disconcerted Quartermaster.

But Mallory was smiling as he stopped in front of her. He glanced over at Bond and the two medics and said, “Good work, M. I see you’ve detained 007. Where is Rodriguez?”

M stared at him with narrowed eyes. “I have ‘detained’ no one, and Tiago died in that conflagration over there while assisting in the rescue of six young girls.”

Mallory eyed her doubtfully. “He’s been declared dead before.”
“Look over there.” She jerked her chin in the direction of Bond. “Now tell me you think he believes Tiago is still alive.”

Mallory eyed the obviously distraught agent for a few moments. “I see your point.” He straightened to his full height. “However, it’s also quite obvious Bond will require extensive rehabilitation, and of course, his days as a field agent are finished.”

“That’s odd,” M said tightly. “I thought I was still in charge of MI6. Has something changed in the last hour since I’ve spoken with the Prime Minister?”

“Come now, M,” Mallory said patronizingly. “You can’t possibly trust a man as dangerous as Bond after he’s been clearly fraternizing with the enemy for such an extended period of time.”

“I trust him more than some others I could name,” M said frostily.

Mallory merely inclined his head in acknowledgment. “Regardless, I believe we both agree that the man will require extensive professional assistance in recovering from his ordeal. Or would you deny him the support he’ll obviously need?”

“Apparently, my idea of ‘support’ differs somewhat from yours, Chairman,” M replied, crossing her arms.

Having finished treating Bond, the two medics were assisting Bond as he got to his feet.

Mallory turned to the two agents accompanying him. “Have Bond brought to the embassy’s infirmary and keep him under close guard. Very close guard, do you understand?”

The agents nodded and walked quickly toward Bond.

Finally seeming to register the events going around him, Bond’s eyes widened slightly as he caught sight of the approaching men. As they neared the outwardly disabled agent, Bond attacked both men nearly simultaneously, actually hitting one agent with his splinted arm.

M had seen Bond in action many times before, of course. He’d been in desperate situations more often than she cared to count, but unlike those other missions, he wasn’t fighting like he had everything to lose.

This time, he was fighting like he had absolutely nothing to lose, and it was positively heartbreaking to watch.

Bond still managed to disable both agents before anyone else could intervene, and he gave M one quick, pleading glance before he turned and started to run.

Mallory swore and started after him, but the female medic turned suddenly as he passed her, colliding into him and knocking them both to the ground.

“Oh my. I’m so darn clumsy!” she said with a clearly American accent, getting to her feet quickly and attempting to help Mallory, who just shook off her hand and stared at the rapidly disappearing Bond.

Mallory chose to ignore the still apologizing medic and looked over to where his car was parked, but it was now totally surrounded by newly arrived emergency vehicles.

He turned to M. “You’d better find him, M. And find him quickly. I’d hate to have to issue a ‘shoot to kill’ order on one of our own.” With that, he turned on his heel and stalked to his car, gesturing
angrily for one of the rescue vehicles to move out of his way.

Once he was out of earshot, M said, “You heard him, Quartermaster. I believe you are more qualified than anyone else to find 007 now.” She glanced down at the laptop he still held under his arm.

“But . . .” Q said, staring at the obviously furious Mallory.

“I said find him, Quartermaster. Not return him.” She sighed. “I’m afraid England would only destroy him now.” M looked over at the two medics, who were staring sadly in the direction Bond had disappeared, supporting each other with linked arms. “Or merely complete that process, I should say.”

The two medics knelt down to check on the men Bond had disabled, but considering how trusting the typically wary Bond had been in their presence, M knew the medics had to be part of Tiago’s organization. However, she couldn’t quite bring herself to arrest them. Sometimes the gray areas were just that, and if she did intend to save Bond, she’d have to make many such uncomfortable decisions along the way. It was unfortunate, but she to admit that sometimes the shadows she fought were indeed a shade of gray and not completely black.

But hadn’t that been her problem all along as head of MI6? How exactly does one arrest a shadow, in any case?

She rounded on Q, having made her final decision. “I’m putting you on administrative leave.” She stared at her quartermaster significantly. “I have no idea why, but Tiago has obviously trusted you with his most precious possession. Find Bond, stay with him, and make sure he doesn’t . . . do anything permanent.”

Q’s eyes widened. “Yes, Ma’am. I’ll do my best.”

The swirling smoke was obviously making her eyes tear up, and M wiped furiously at them.

“And Quartermaster?”

“Yes, Ma’am?”

“I’d suggest you find him quickly.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm obviously winding this story down, but after 127,000 words and a year in a making, it's probably well past time, lol!

And thanks to everyone for the kudos and the lovely comments -- you're the reason this fic has gone on as long as it has. Bless you all!

FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT WISH TO READ SPOILERS, STOP HERE, PLEASE!
Edit: Since I've obviously panicked quite a few people since I've posted this chapter, I'm revising this note to remind everyone that there is no "character death" warnings included in the tags, so please rest assured that however bad things look, Tiago is merely being his usual conniving (although definitely insensitive) self and has not actually perished in the fire.

Although he may wish he had before things are all said and done. ; )
Chapter 36

“One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life: That word is love.”

Sophocles (496 BC - 406 BC)

When Tiago finally arrived on his island after coming back from the dead, the first thing Diego did was punch him in the face.

Of course, since the man had never hit another human being in his life, the only significant damage he caused was to his own wrist.

However, Diego’s influence over Tiago had never been physical. Through a careful choice of words, he could make Tiago feel no more than a few centimeters tall, but this time, he wasn’t even choosing his words, carefully or otherwise.

No, he swore at Tiago, continuously, for almost a full five minutes. It was the most amazing thing, because he never repeated himself once. He’d used insults that Tiago had never heard in his life, and given Tiago’s less than congenial disposition at times, he’d been the recipient of a great many insults.

From professionals, no less.

It was actually starting to worry him, because he had never, ever seen Diego this angry. Even after his family had been murdered, Diego had been as much devastated as furious.

Perhaps he should have informed Diego, as well as Luis, of his faked death?

No. He’d had a plan, and he’d followed through with it. In order to insure that MI6 believed Tiago to be dead, Bond had to believe it. And he knew very well that the kind-natured doctor would not have been able to resist informing his little rat of that fact.

When the doctor finally paused to take a breath, Tiago said, “I’m sorry, Diego, but I wouldn’t have done this if it weren’t absolutely necessary.”

If the flash of renewed anger in Diego’s eyes was anything to go by, his statement didn’t appear to have the expected calming effect. In fact, the man was practically vibrating with fury.

“Necessary? Necessary, you say? There is nothing important enough to justify causing someone that much immeasurable pain.”

“I said I’m sorry, Diego! I let you know just as soon as I could.”

“I was not referring to myself, you ignorant, insensitive clod!”

Oh.

Taking a deep breath, Tiago said, “James is a field agent, as I was. He will understand the necessity of what I had to do.”

Diego’s eyes went wide. “Will understand? You have not told him you are alive yet?”
“Well, not exactly, no.”

There was another spate of vicious swearing. “Is James still alive?” Diego was practically shouting now.

“Of course, he is! Why shouldn’t he be?”

Diego stabbed a finger into Tiago’s chest, hard. It was certain to leave a bruise. “You were not the one who had to look into your young man’s eyes immediately after he believed he had watched you die. I know utter despair when I see it, Tiago. I seem to remember seeing something very similar in your eyes at one point in the not-so-distant past.”

*Oh.* Perhaps he had better check on Bond’s status again. Soon.

Very soon.

“Where . . . is . . . he?” Diego asked, still furious.

“He is with Q at one of my safehouses. I transmitted the locations along with the collar’s specifications. He’s *fine*, Diego.”

“As I have mentioned before, your definition of ‘fine’ is hardly the same as normal human beings.” Diego shook his head. “If I did not know with absolute certainty that you loved him beyond measure, I would assume you were merely trying to kill him in the cruelest manner imaginable.”

“Diego, he is with Q. That young man is nearly as obsessed with James as I am. He has the spare activator. James cannot do any significant harm to himself while he is still wearing the collar. That was its main purpose.”

Diego glared at him for a few moments. “You are so certain of that? *You* are the one who has told me how resourceful James can be when he is sufficiently motivated. I believe you are underestimating his abilities and overestimating the restraining effects of that collar. James stayed with you because he *chose* to remain at your side, not because of the presence of any electronic device.”

“Perhaps *you’re* certain of that fact,” Tiago muttered under his breath.

Diego went very, very still. “Tiago. Is *that* why you have not informed him yet? Do you have the colossal nerve at this point to actually be *testing* him?”

“Of course not! Well, not entirely.” He held up a hand to interrupt Diego’s next tirade. “To keep us *both* safe, there were things I had to do that were not entirely . . . legal. That was my primary reason for delaying. While Bond was with Q, and M knew that Bond was with Q, he could not possibly be implicated as an accessory to what I had done.”

There. That sounded logical. And if he were actually testing Bond *and* Q in the process, well, Diego didn’t actually need to know about that part.

He was in enough hot water as it was, considering the icy glare he was still receiving from his oldest friend.

Diego said quietly, “If I were you, I would avoid being anywhere near Michelle in the immediate future. She is quite the expert in occult poisons.” He started to turn on his heel, and then added, “And I am a very quick learner.”
After he had stormed out of the room, Tiago put a hand to his forehead. Either he was still losing his touch, or he had indeed cocked up royally this time.

He wasn’t sure which was worse.

Slightly alarmed at Bond’s most recent biometric readings from his wrist monitor, not to mention the aftereffects of Diego’s tirade, Tiago had flown almost immediately to the Greek mainland. This is where Q had finally caught up with Bond, and since then, they had both resided at Tiago’s sizeable villa overlooking the Aegean.

He found the young man on the villa’s terrace, components of a computer spread over a large, glass-topped table.

“I was wondering when you were planning to make an appearance,” Q said, but he didn’t even bother to turn around to face him.

Tiago had to admit that he was impressed. He had always known that Q possessed a brilliant mind, but he apparently possessed a sufficiently devious one as well. Tiago knew he had covered his tracks exceptionally well, yet the young man had apparently worked things out. Not to mention that it was the rare individual indeed who would be comfortable having Tiago Rodriguez at their unprotected back.

Sauntering over to the whitewashed wall enclosing the terrace, Tiago leaned back against it and crossed his arms over his chest. “How long have you known?” he asked, genuinely curious.

Q glanced up from his work on the computer, squinting in the bright midday sun. “Only recently,” he said. “Quite recently, actually.”

“What gave me away?”

Q didn’t answer immediately, picking up a multimeter to check a few components on the motherboard he was working on. He explained as he worked. “I found it curious how Gareth Mallory was implicated in the deaths of two murdered Chinese agents while on a diplomatic mission there. Quite the flap, I understand. It was fortunate that M still had connections with the Chinese and therefore managed to keep him from facing a firing squad for the dubious crime of organizing an ‘armed mass rebellion.’”

Tiago smiled. “Tsk, tsk. Got caught with his hand in the proverbial cookie jar, hmm?”

Q looked up, cocking his head. “The Chinese are extremely difficult to hack, as I’m sure you’re very aware, but it seems that the two murdered Chinese agents had been previously stationed in Hong Kong some time ago, doubling as prison guards.” He paused. “As had several other Chinese operatives who have mysteriously met unexpected early demises over the last 10 years.”

“You don’t say?” Tiago looked skyward, tilting his face toward the beckoning sun. “Did you pass that particular tidbit of information along to M?” he asked casually.

“Oh of course not. I doubt she would have appreciated the fact I had hacked into their systems in the first place.”

Tiago looked over at him and smiled darkly. “Oh, she most assuredly would not have appreciated it.”
Q narrowed his eyes at him. “Be that as it may, at this point Gareth Mallory would be fortunate to land a job as a janitor in the Mongolian embassy, yet the Prime Minister was so grateful to M for averting a potential diplomatic crisis that he reinstated her indefinitely as head of MI6.”

Tiago raised his eyebrows. “Oh, dear. So she’ll be forced to postpone all her stimulating retirement plans until the nebulous future, then?”

Q picked up a soldering iron, but paused to look at him quizzically. “You have to realize she suspects you’re still alive.”

Tiago pushed himself back from the wall, stretched leisurely, then walked over to Q. Placing both hands on the table, he leaned in and whispered conspiratorially, “She can ‘suspect’ all she wants, but as long as she has no concrete proof that I am alive, she will not be obligated to act upon that knowledge.” He raised an eyebrow at him. “That forbearance is not for my benefit, mind you, but she does have her current favorite double-oh’s well-being to consider.”

Sighing, Q placed the soldering iron back in its holder and said, “I suppose that means you’re going to kill me then?”

Tiago widened his eyes. “Why ever for? You’ve been looking after James for me while I’ve been away, have you not? That deserves some degree of dispensation, especially considering he can be quite the handful at times.”

Q cleared his throat. “Yes, well, about Bond . . .”

Feeling a sudden chill even with the oppressive midday heat, Tiago said tersely, “Q, where is James?” He hadn’t checked the GPS locator beacon since before boarding the plane. It hadn’t varied more than a few meters since Q and Bond had arrived here more than six weeks ago, therefore, he hadn’t felt the need.

Looking disgruntled, Q said, “If I knew the answer to that, I wouldn’t be attempting to resurrect my laptop in order to retrieve his GPS frequency.” He sighed. “Just in case you’ve ever wondered — saltwater and electronics do not mix.”

Incredulous, Tiago said, “You allowed James to throw your laptop into the water?”

Eyes flashing, Q said distinctly, “No, I did not. He threw me into the water. I merely happened to be carrying the laptop at the time and the collar’s activator, which also did not respond favorably to immersion in water, by the way.” He glared up at Tiago. “Damn near drowned me in the process, as well.”

Tiago swore, fluently, in two languages. “How long ago?”

“Yesterday evening,” Q sighed, then looked up at him intently. “For what it’s worth, Rodriguez — I’m sorry.”

Tiago bit back the scathing response when he saw the abject misery and worry in the young man’s eyes. “Did you tell James of your suspicions of my faked death?”

Shaking his head, Q said, “No. I didn’t want to raise his hopes in the event it was merely a coincidence.” He paused. “It would have shattered him completely if I’d been wrong.”

Tiago took a deep breath in an attempt to calm himself. “He’s stronger than you think.”

Q shook his head, then said ominously, “You haven’t seen him recently.”
Closing his eyes briefly, Tiago said, “I will go and retrieve him.” He turned on his heel and strode toward the door.

“Wait,” Q said. “Do you have a GPS locator with you?”

Tiago paused briefly, but without turning around, he said, “I don’t need it. I know exactly where he’s gone.”

James knew he was safe here.

The only other person who knew of this place, and knew that it had any meaning for James, was dead.

The tiny shack on the Fethiye beach was empty now except for James, a couple of bottles of truly fine scotch, and one additional item that he desperately needed. There was no electricity and no moon this night, so the room was therefore in pitch darkness, but that was fine.

He knew his way around well enough, and besides, you didn’t need any illumination at all to drink scotch.

It had been entirely too long since he’d had the opportunity to indulge in a true drinking binge. Tiago had already known of the alcoholism he’d developed after the gunshot wounds and fall from the bridge, but for some reason, Q had guessed this as well and had refused to provide him any alcohol, despite his demands.

But then, maybe Q hadn’t simply guessed? Perhaps Tiago had left him that information along with all the remainder of his instructions on the care and feeding of a washed up, ex-MI6 agent? He would never know for certain now, of course.

He had time enough to wonder, but not time enough to worry. He’d been careful not to leave any physical trail here, and it should take Q quite some time to rebuild his laptop and track the collar’s frequency.

He felt marginally guilty about what he’d had done to the young man, because it was obvious, very obvious, that Q cared more than he should for one aging, beat up, and currently unemployed field agent.

But there was nothing he could do about that.

So, he would just lie here, drink his lovely scotch, and listen to the waves beat endlessly upon the shore. The heat wasn’t all that oppressive this evening, but he removed all his clothes anyway. For some reason, he felt more calm and at peace that way.

He might as well make himself comfortable. He would need light to do anything else, and he could afford to wait until dawn.

He didn’t have all the time in the world, but he had just enough.

By the time he arrived in Turkey and made his way back to the familiar beach, Tiago was almost frantic. Well, not exactly frantic, per se. With sufficient planning and the money to insure things went as you planned, there was no need to be frantic.
But he was . . . concerned.

Diego’s words were haunting him. The man had been correct, as he usually was, and Tiago’s little rat had actually managed to slip his leash. He couldn’t even totally blame the upstart Q for that, since he didn’t have the advantage of the neural implant, as Tiago did.

Therefore, on the journey here his mind had sufficient time to imagine all sorts of uncomfortable scenarios. What if MI6 had caught up with Bond first? What if one of Tiago’s enemies had found him? Tiago had killed Damarion with his own hands immediately after setting off the first explosion, but what if one of the capo’s men had escaped before he’d set off the second one? What if Miguel had managed it?

Maldita sea. Now, he was being completely irrational, because even if any of the firmas members had survived the conflagration, they couldn’t possibly have tracked Bond here, certainly not this quickly.

But Q’s oblique comment on Bond’s current condition was worrisome, and it was likely the agent would be absolutely no match for someone like Miguel now.

Tiago had to admit it. He had miscalculated and miscalculated badly. He had assumed that Bond would simply turn to Q for emotional and perhaps even physical support, as he had while under Tiago’s care. But he’d misjudged both of them. He’d misjudged Q in assuming that the man would somehow force his misguided affections on Bond, and he’d misjudged Bond in that . . .

Well, he had obviously assumed that Bond would take him up on it.

Tiago had always known intellectually that he had his own problems with trusting others since Hong Kong, but he’d somehow managed to drastically underestimate the sheer depth of Bond’s devotion to him, and to him alone, apparently.

It was still pitch dark when Tiago approached the hovel he knew Bond would be staying in. However, dawn was approaching rapidly, and for some reason, Tiago felt compelled to reach Bond’s side before then.

He doused his torch as he approached the shack. The phosphorescence from the breaking waves provided just enough light to orient himself so that he needn’t risk alerting anyone to his arrival. Besides, Tiago was very familiar with these environs from his time spent here before, and he could have probably navigated from sheer muscle memory alone once he set foot on the beach.

As he entered the shack, he immediately relaxed upon hearing the familiar sounds of a deeply sleeping Bond. He paused and listened carefully, but he heard nothing that indicated the presence of anyone else in the building with him.

He felt his way carefully to the bed, but winced when his foot kicked some sort of bottle lying on the floor. Bond didn’t awaken, however, which was exceptionally surprising for the usually vigilant agent. When Tiago smelled the overwhelming odor of spilled spirits, however, he realized that Bond must have drunk himself into a stupor to be so unaware of his immediate surroundings.

Tiago swore softly. Anyone could have entered this shack and injured or even killed his little rat while he was so indisposed. Anyone.

This was what happened when Tiago allowed Bond to be separated from him.

Well, that certainly wasn’t going to occur again. He’d discovered all he’d needed to know these last weeks, and besides, being apart from Bond for so long had nearly driven him mad. He had
absolutely no desire to go through that again.

Knowing from prior experience that Bond would not easily wake in his current condition, Tiago crawled into the bed next to him. He reached out toward the sleeping man, and his hand immediately encountered the bare skin of one of Bond’s shoulders. Sighing contentedly, he passed his hand down Bond’s body and discovered he was totally naked.

Tiago was again somewhat surprised. Bond rarely left himself so relatively vulnerable in an environment that he didn’t control completely. The door had no locks, and the beach was frequented by all sorts of undesirables and riffraff. He was being extremely rash and careless, especially for a field agent of his caliber.

Well, he would chastise him for his recklessness once he had awakened, but for now, Tiago was content simply to run his hand down the familiar contours of his lover’s body and reacquaint himself with the texture of his skin after so long an absence.

He hadn’t set out with the intention to arouse, but his fingers seemed to drift almost of their own accord to all of Bond’s most sensitive areas. Ah, but how he had missed the soft gasps and quiet groans that his unconscious little rat made as Tiago’s hand drifted over those familiar pathways. It felt almost like coming home.

When his hand brushed against Bond’s partially erect cock, Tiago smiled to himself.

Why not? He was certainly not going to allow Bond to get this drunk ever again, and he had promised not to drug him without his permission. He therefore wasn’t likely to get another opportunity like this one, and besides, his immense relief at finding Bond unharmed and unaccompanied had kickstarted his own libido.

Tiago gently spread Bond’s legs apart and settled himself between them. He then licked lightly at the man’s cock until he was fully erect, then engulfed him with his mouth. He deliberately kept his suction so soft that it was barely present at all, so he wouldn’t inadvertently pull the man from sleep.

He only had to bob his head a few times before the sleeping man took over the motion with gentle thrusts of his hips, lazily, like one does in the very early morning when there is no place you have to be, and no one else you’d rather be with. Whenever he thought Bond was lessening his thrusts and falling too deeply back into his drunken slumber, Tiago would merely flick his tongue several times over his tip or provide just enough extra suction that Bond would groan and resume the languid motion of his hips.

Tiago wondered what James was dreaming about, whom he imagined he might be with, because his ever-so-gentle thrusts indicated he wished to spend significant time with whomever that person might be.

Disgusted at being so jealous of an imaginary lover, Tiago took the time to thoroughly wet one finger and insert it gently into Bond when he had his hips partially raised.

The man immediately gasped, then stilled, and an almost broken-sounding “Tiago” emerged from his lips.

Tiago froze, thinking that Bond had awoken, but he never opened his eyes, nor did his respiration change.

Inwardly pleased at being the subject of his erotic dreams after all, Tiago gently stroked against
Bond’s prostate just once, then let the man continue fucking himself on Tiago’s finger while he sheathed him with his mouth.

When Tiago added a second finger, Bond’s pace increased, and since Tiago was afraid he’d exert himself so much that it awakened him, he increased his suction and his strokes on the man’s prostate until Bond was almost gasping for breath.

Tiago wanted desperately to replace his fingers with his cock, but he’d rather have Bond sober, awake, and feeling every single moment of Tiago’s possession of him. He could wait. They had all the time in the world, and Tiago had every intention of reclaiming his little rat very, very soon.

Feeling Bond’s cock begin to pulse, Tiago removed his mouth and stroked hard against his prostate.

The sun had still not risen above the horizon, but the brightening sky through the single, grimy window provided just enough light to observe Bond’s climax and the rapt expression on his face. It truly had been too long.

Bond groaned as he came, but still he did not awaken.

Very, very drunk indeed.

Tiago was tempted to let Bond wonder about the source of the erotic dream that had caused him to climax in his sleep, but given Bond’s level of inebriation, he might not stir for quite some time. Therefore, Tiago climbed off the bed and walked into the tiny bathroom to fetch a cloth.

Regardless of what Diego thought, Tiago could indeed be considerate.

When he wanted to be.

When he re-entered the bedroom, however, he found that Bond was indeed awake, sitting cross-legged on the bed, and he had evidently already cleared away the evidence of his climax. However, he had both arms wrapped around his torso as if he were attempting to comfort himself, and he had his chin pressed almost to his chest. It was still very dark in the room and therefore difficult to see, but was he . . .?

Madre de Dios!

Tiago rushed to the bed, climbed in next to Bond, and pulled him roughly into his arms. What had he done?

However, Bond barely reacted to his presence at all, merely stiffening slightly at the abrupt, unexpected movement.

“James, dear heart, what’s wrong?”

Bond didn’t speak for a moment or two, and when he did, his voice was slurred from sleep and alcohol. “You’re not real, and I’m dreaming again.”

“Pequeño, no. You’re not dreaming. It’s really me.”

When Bond didn’t reply, Tiago moved backward until he could prop himself against the headboard, then pulled Bond to sit crosswise on his lap. He knew he had to get through to him quickly, and Bond responded most readily to the sense of touch. It was disturbingly easy to manhandle him into position, as Bond was frighteningly passive and had apparently again lost
significant weight.

Tiago pulled Bond’s face against his chest, attempting to reassure. “I’m not dead, James. You’re not dreaming.”

Bond sighed and shook his head slightly, but then Tiago felt him inhale deeply against his chest. Bond stiffened and slowly pulled back to look him in the eyes at last.

“Tiago?” he asked, still extremely hesitant.

Nodding briskly, Tiago smiled. “Yes, James. It truly is me.”

He watched as belief slowly dawned on Bond’s face, but when Tiago reached up to touch his cheek, he immediately ducked his head into Tiago’s chest.

Tiago was basically in a state of shock himself and therefore allowed the evasion. So this is what guilt feels like. Not a very pleasant feeling at all.

He reached out to gently stroke Bond’s hair. “I actually made you cry,” he said, almost to himself.

Bond had wrapped his arms tightly around Tiago, as if he were afraid he were going to disappear, and Tiago felt him shake his head. “I’m not crying,” he said, still slurring his words, and still obviously, painfully inebriated. He was more drunk than Tiago had ever seen him, and he’d probably never been this drunk in his life.

“Aren’t you?” Tiago pulled Bond away from his chest. “It certainly looks that way to me,” he said, using both thumbs to brush away the tears.

Bond shook his head again, dislodging Tiago’s hands, and once again burrowing into his chest. “Got something in my eye,” he replied tersely.

Tiago smiled sadly, but still, he couldn’t help reveling in the feel of the man clinging almost desperately to him. “Both eyes?” he asked doubtfully.

Bond paused, then nodded once against his chest.

Shaking his head fondly, Tiago said, “I am truly sorry, pequeño. If I had known my . . . death would hurt you this badly, I might have done things differently.”

There was a long silence, and Tiago could hear Bond taking deep, steadying breaths, attempting to get himself back under control. “Don’t ever do that again,” he finally said, and his voice held an odd mixture of anger and desolation.

“I’ll try not to,” Tiago replied, with as much honesty as he could spare. He reached for a pillow to relieve the pressure on his aching back from the unforgiving headboard and discovered something he never would have expected lying underneath it.

“James,” he said sharply, disconcerted. “What is this?”

Bond had stiffened again, so he was obviously coherent enough to realize exactly what Tiago had found, but all he said was, “You know what it is.”

Tiago eyed the well used, slightly warped hacksaw with distaste, noting that even with its rusting blade, it still appeared wickedly sharp.

He shook his head, unexpectedly hurt by Bond’s obvious intention in acquiring it. “James, I have
told you before, if you attempt to remove the collar, it will only shock you unconscious before you’ve barely begun.”

There was a significant pause.

“I wasn’t planning to cut off the collar.”

Tiago froze, feeling as if someone had just punched him hard in the stomach. Incredulous, he looked down at Bond and stammered, “But... but you would have bled to death!”

Bond laughed — a bleak, harsh sound that was cut off almost immediately. “Well, what do you know? — you really are a genius.”

He pushed abruptly away from Tiago, but with a strangled protest of his own, Tiago merely pulled him tighter against him, rocking them both back and forth, shocked to his very core.

How could he have misjudged Bond so badly, yet again? If he’d ever needed proof that Bond loved him as desperately as Tiago loved him, he’d just gotten it.

In spades.

And if Tiago had taken just a few hours longer to reach him...?

He moaned aloud. “You are never, ever to consider something so blatantly irrational again,” Tiago said vehemently.

“Then don’t leave me again,” Bond replied reasonably, but just as sharply.

Tiago sighed, berating himself once more. Of course this would only have triggered Bond’s significant abandonment issues. “Diego tried to tell me I was being a fool. Well, he used slightly stronger language than that, but he did try to tell me.”

“So he didn’t know you were alive?” Bond asked, sounding almost relieved.

“No, pequeño, he didn’t know.”

“And Q?”

“Not until very recently, and he’d only guessed.”

Bond seemed to consider this. “Is he still alive?”

“He did tell me you attempted to drown him.”

Bond snorted, the first real humour Tiago had detected from him since his arrival here. “The water was only a meter deep. He only thought he was drowning.” Bond pulled back slightly, surreptitiously wiped his face, then looked Tiago square in the eye. “Is he still alive?” he asked again, significantly.

Well, I guess I deserved that after what I’ve put him through.

“Yes, James,” Tiago said distinctly, “he’s still alive.”

Bond searched his face for some time before he evidently decided that was the truth. “I assume this whole charade was to convince MI6 that you were dead. Now that Q knows you’re actually alive...”
Tiago rolled his eyes. “If he does inform MI6 of that fact, he’ll be forfeiting his Christmas bonus this year.”

Bond looked at him quizzically, still very drunk and therefore unsuccessfully attempting to decipher Tiago’s meaning.

Tiago had mercy on him. “Once he gets his computer working again, he will find a very generous job offer waiting for him. I would be highly surprised if he doesn’t accept it. He’s a smart boy, after all.” He rolled his eyes. “And besides, he’s entirely too infatuated with you to decline.”

Bond was looking at him wide-eyed. “You offered Q a job?”

“Keep your friends close, and your potential rivals closer.” He narrowed his eyes. “You’ll just have to force yourself to keep your hands off him.”

“He’s still got spots!”

“Well, he certainly won’t have them forever.”

Bond stared at him, aghast. “I don’t know why I love you. You are the most irritating, infuriating, impossible man I’ve ever met.”

“Why, thank you, James.”

“Damn it, Tiago, that wasn’t a bloody compliment!”

Chuckling softly, Tiago pulled the still indignant Bond against his body and began rubbing his naked back soothingly until he eventually, inevitably relaxed against him.

The man was so utterly intoxicated that the gentle motion of Tiago’s hand and the tranquil sound of the breaking waves soon had him fast asleep in his arms, regardless of the tumultuous morning he’d had.

It was a shame, but Bond probably wouldn’t even remember that Tiago had finally allowed him to have the last word. But then, that was just his bad luck, because Tiago wasn’t likely to do so again.

He had to keep his little rat in line.

For his own good, of course.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Silva,

You have something that belongs to me.

Be a good boy and give him back please?

ESB

Chapter End Notes

That’s it, then. Almost a year to the day since I started posting this, and it’s certainly been a wild ride. My sincere, heartfelt thanks to those who have followed this since the beginning, and especially to those who have buoyed me along the way with all your lovely comments and kudos. As I mentioned before, you’re the reason this fic is as long as it is. Besides, comments are my drug of choice, and I’ve thoroughly enjoyed the contact with my readers.

For those of you who may wonder why I’ve seemingly glossed over Bond’s interlude with Q — well, the reason is simple. That’s a whole other story, and since this fic was intended to be strictly 00Silva, I didn’t want to include a long interlude of 00Q, even if it is one-sided. Besides, this bloody fic is long enough, lol! If I feel sufficiently motivated someday, I may write it, but Bond and Q’s relationship (at least in this fic) is infinitely more complicated than Bond and Silva’s, so it’s a little intimidating for me to even consider.

Again, my sincere thanks to all you wonderful readers for your support!

(Edit 3/4/16) - If 132,000 words of this fic wasn't enough for you, however, I've recently posted a Tiago/James A/U fic called Dead Reckoning. It's not set in the same universe as "Obsession", but it does include some significant Bond!Whumpage as well. (I doubt if I could write a 00Silva fic without it, lol!)

(Edit 5/30/17) - Just in case someone missed that this is now a series, well, it's now a series! ; )

Before you go and click on that tempting "Next Work" link, however, please consider leaving a kudo or a comment on this fic, if you did indeed enjoy the story. Between the extensive research and writing, this totally consumed a year of my life, and I absolutely adore hearing from my readers. Thank you!

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