Summary

James Bond needs to save the world, again. Silva volunteers to help, and there's a reason why.

Notes

Featuring GORGEOUS FANART by the INSANELY TALENTED 00silvad:

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

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Culiacán, Mexico

Beneath the unrelenting rays of the hot summer sun, James Bond considered this was not his greatest moment.

Laying in the dirt, chest heaving, groaning in pain from having been caught off guard by a gang of thugs; he was barely coherent enough to notice the tip of a boot come flying through the air.

Connecting solidly to his skull, the Agent's world went black.

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Paris, France, 03:50, the seemingly placid and cloudless night sky melded seamlessly with the gloom that emanated from within the palatial Avenue Montaigne penthouse.

Cloaked within the shadows, Raoul Silva topped his snifter and carefully returned the bottle of Courvoisier to its spot above his new one-of-a-kind Kuhn-Bösendorfer grand piano.

Not that he played, but it lent a certain... finishing elegance to the whole assemblage of furnishings.

He took a slow, satisfying sip of the amber liquid, feeling its pervading warmth flow through him as he leaned against the window overlooking the city; the gleaming electric lights sparkling like stars from below.

A twinge from that old scar between his shoulder blades pressed Silva into recalling his old raison d'être. A smile crossed his face and he laughed, letting it echo against the vast high-ceilinged séjour. It was poetically ironic that he should be alive and well when Bond was, evidently, rather damaged from his latest excursion.

"Reckless," he huffed with amusement. One does not simply tango solo with a gang of Cartel brutes and expect to end up the unscathed victor.

He turned to the glowing computer display before him and admired the snapshot ID of 007 that flickered on screen. He clicked his tongue, it was such a shame to imagine anyone marring that handsome face.

Of course, that face belonged to the very same man who had quite literally stabbed him in the back with a 7-inch bowie knife. Nevertheless, Silva considered he could understand, better than anyone, the man's actions had not been ill conceived. The call of duty was an enchanting mistress.

James, whether he knew it or not, blinded himself to M’s true objectives, his faith had been misplaced and disappointing with its regularity…so tedious…so dull.

Silva could have done so much more with such loyalty.

So, very much more.
Days flew by one after one like a blur until he realized it had been nearly two-years since they'd last met within Bond's ancestral home upon the Scottish Downs. It was with a certain amount of obsessive greed which found Silva monitoring the Agent. Months prior to Bond's most recent excursion, in a pique of boredom, Silva had infiltrated the double-oh database.

Oh, how unashamedly he'd sift through the droll section bulletins, eagerly awaiting with bated breath any sliver of information made available on his erstwhile... 'brother-in-arms'.

And that was a whole other brand of nostalgia in and of itself.

Pulling a hand through his slick blonde locks, the length nearly grazing the top of his Prada clad shoulders, he sighed listlessly and reached out to touch the screen; to touch the image of that man’s face, unattainable and intangible, merely a pulsing electrical signal through liquid crystals. Without any sort of self-consciousness, he traced along that masculine jawline.

“What would you have me do, 007?”

“Meu rato solitário... meu pobre querido destroçado...meu James.” The name rolled from his tongue like quicksilver, possessive and perfect.

Without rhyme or reason, an idea crept into his head; manifesting with a sort of poignant clarity as the hours passed, he sat, neglected drink perched upon his knee as the shadows stretched up the length of the wall with the rising sun behind him.

'Perfect', Silva thought, eyes shuttering closed, infused by a sudden breathlessly wonderful, aching, inner thrill, it would be a crime to disregard such inspiration.

Gazing out across the room at the projected image yet glowing on the screen, a slow grin spread across Silva's face and he downed the rest of his drink.

“Shall I, perhaps...” He asked aloud, “Move the stars for you?”

Yes, he mused, perhaps in this particular instance the cosmos would require some realignment.

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“What the hell were you thinking?” Mallory chastised over the monitor, raising a hand before Bond could get a word in edgewise.

“No, I don't want to know.”

“No more explanations. No more excuses. I am at my wit's end. Do you understand how very close I am to stripping you of your status, let alone your job? Do you fully appreciate the strings I've had to pull to even keep you on this assignment? I have superiors I must answer to, and you answer to me. Is that anything you ever even consider, 007?”

Battered and bruised as he was, and feeling sort of ridiculous with the overly large bandage taped across his temple, Bond stiffly maintained eye contact with M.

“I understand. We were misled by our informant. My men weren't in the right place.”

“No, they weren't.”

“The Cartel has disbanded their base in Culiacán. After you're debriefed, I need you to get back to Chihuahua. We may have a potential lead.”
Bond's eyes widened slightly in surprise.

“What's the source?”

“I think it's best if you await Q-branch’s report on the matter. We've had an interesting day,” the MI-6 director explained, wearily pulling a hand down his face, “I'll transmit you in a second.”

M paused for a moment before he looked directly in the eyes of the reckless double-oh Agent that stood before him.

“007, you better know what the hell you're doing out there. I've had it up to here with your continual non-compliance to protocol. This continued arrogance. We cannot have you cavalierly running amok, putting our positions in jeopardy simply because you are unable to reign yourself in.”

“Understood, M.”

Bond raised his hand to the bridge of his nose and rubbed it lightly. He was tired, and his head ached where that shoe had connected with his skull.

Three days prior, a British consulate in Nairobi, Kenya, had been infiltrated. As a result, a single volatile jump-drive, that contained delicate information on several covert operations throughout South America, was now drifting around somewhere in Mexico.

Tracing the path was simple, discovering whom the drive had been sold to, however, was proving to be more difficult. NATO Agents embedded throughout the tropics would be eaten alive by the widespread Cartel should they not retrieve it in time.

The Agent sighed audibly.

Q blipped into transmission, standing in the bunker below the London headquarters, computers and wires and screens whirring behind him.

“We've been hacked again,” he announced cheerily, mug in hand.

Bond blinked slowly.

“Did you hear what I--”

“Yes, I heard you clearly,” The Agent snapped back.

“So as I said,” Q continued, gesturing to the large computer screen over head, “our system was hacked at 3:15 from an unknown location and with an untraceable ID.”

Bond gaped at Q in dismay while he looked over the computer monitor.

“Before you say anything more, it's a good thing, actually! It's how we got the inside scoop on our Cartel’s operations.”

“Elaborate,” The Agent directed.

“Our system was undermined by a superior polymorphic engine that mutated the code and breached our fire wall. Ring any bells?”

“Not specifically.”

“In any case, it was more of a flashy ploy for attention. You see, our mystery friend hacked our
system in order to provide several encrypted files through cache poisoning, which upon reconstruction conveyed some rather fascinating messages and vitally significant information, including IDs on Cartel Kingpins as well as specific coordinates for narcotic operations.”

“That sounds wonderful for the American DEA, but how does that help us locate the jump-drive?”

“According to our friend’s eye on the global satellite system, the scan indicated the buyer had already attempted to decipher the access code thereby enabling a read on coordinates on our end.”

“So, what you're telling me, is that our Intel comes from some glorified jumped-up hacker, and we're just going to go with it for lack of a better option?”

After M had chewed him out for essentially being a testosterone-fueled, wild card rebel standing on his last leg at MI-6, Bond was displeased to find the department head was evidently more lenient with other divisions. MI-6 systems had been breached for the second time in less than two years and this was somehow excusable.

The world has no sense of justice.

“It’s the better option. The best option, in fact…actually, it's our only option, but the point of the matter is that it’s reliable!” Q defended.

“Right. Explain this to me again in words I can understand. None of that techno-babble you're so fond of using.”

“Techno-babble?” Q admonished, “007, you realize you're becoming quite stodgy and cantankerous in your old-age?”

Bond glared at the screen as the young man continued to cajole, “as you may or may not know, this new-fangled device you're using to communicate with me is called a ‘computer’–”

“Business, Q, if you wouldn't mind. It's been a long…” Bond frowned as he glanced at the time on his wristwatch, “16 hours.”

“Simply put, remember the Rubik’s Cube hack in 2012?”

“That sounds vaguely familiar,” Bond intoned, recalling the face of a man he’d put to rest approximately two years ago.

“I thought so as well, only, this one is by far more complex. The coding is…elegant,” Q marveled with quiet excitement. He was far too enthused for someone who just had his personal pet-project broken into and played with by a potentially malevolent mystery hacker.

Bond raised an eyebrow, amused by his colleague’s reaction, the bandage wrinkling with the stretch of skin, “do I even want to know why you look like someone who has just been asked to their first formal?”

The bespectacled young Quarter Master bestowed him with an unnerving, toothy grin through the screen, “Our lovely hacker-turned-informant clued me into just what procedures he’d taken to override the system. In response, while you were busy getting your brains bashed in, I designed the most advanced and impervious security firewall to date!”

“Father must be proud,” Bond muttered.

“Singing praises, 007, singing praises,” Q retorted with a cocky grin.
“Why would he…or she…or they,” Bond amended, “break in only to show you just how to prevent them from doing so again?”

“That's the crux of it– I have no bloody clue!” Q continued, “It's a double-edged sword. Here we have a grandiose display of technological superiority cluing us into our deficiencies while serving us up a solid lead. It's a strategic move either to impress us, or validate their genuine desire to take down the Cartel, or–”

“Or, much more likely, an attempt to intimidate MI-6,” Bond finished.

“It's madness or genius or both, I suppose,” Q sighed with a small shrug, “I'll be the first in line to shake their hand, either way.”

“Stop looking so star-struck, Q. It's unbecoming of you.”

“You're just jealous.”

“Obviously,” Bond groaned, kneading his brow to alleviate the growing tension between his eyes.

“You don't know the best part yet, 007, you’ll want to sit down for this one, alright? Our hacker wasn't out to impress me. This…this was about you.”

Bond squinted at the devilish glint in the Quartermaster's eyes.

“What,” he deadpanned.

“Exactly. Once I decrypted the code, this was the message left at the tail end of it: Hello, James. Here's to your health. I can only hope this returns you to our Queen and Country, safe and sound.”

“It's a trap for me, then.”

“Initially, that's what we'd conjectured, however, we were assured otherwise with the following message detailing that, upon news of your secure return from Culiacán, we will be issued a follow up list of coordinates of the Cartel's syndicate Ops in Brazil.”

“You've got to be kidding.”

“Someone out there has a soft spot for you,” Q teased, “which is lucky for us since your secret admirer seems to think the best way to win your esteem is by helping you with the mission.”

The young man paused with a momentary thoughtful expression before shrugging, “Not a bad idea if you think about it. Better than flowers or chocolates at any rate.”

“So basically, we're just going to take some deranged hacker's word based on their supposed interest in my personal well-being?”

“I'd say ‘eccentric’ seems a more fitting description–”

“For all I know I'm walking my men straight into a trap.”

Q frowned, “I understand your hesitation, but M issued the directive three hours ago. The informant may have played this strangely, but the leads are real, 007. We're going in.”

“By ‘we’, you mean ‘me’,” Bond corrected tiredly, “…send me the coordinates from your precious lead and get off my damned computer.”
Silva leaned forward at his desk, fingers interlocked beneath his chin as he considered his next move, glass of Veoh at his elbow.

The resulting sweep from MI-6 and the US Feds had taken down the largest Cartel west of Guadalajara rescuing the jump-drive from the consulate before it could jeopardize MI-6's foreign operatives.

Quite the familiar stunt, Silva considered with wry bemusement.

The fate of the Cartel was inconsequential to him; however, the individual whom had arranged the infiltration of the Nairobi Embassy was a client. Silva had only to make one phone call and that dangling thread had been snipped clean. It was an unfortunate loss as the man had been a reliable connection, however, it was far cleaner to simply eradicate the threat than have the man end up in Guantanamo, or worse.

‘Once a shark tastes blood...’ Silva considered, tapping his stylus against the glass monitor.

Well, he'd known that from before, of course.

Back then, his name had been Tiago Rodriguez, or perhaps more simply, 001.

Of course, there had been 001’s before and sure enough after, but those were the glory days. He'd been the star of the show, the dangerous, well-kept secret of their division, and Bond, the promising new recruit.

Their trajectories had little chance to intersect, however, Silva had discreetly followed the other's career, intrigued from the very start. His fascination with the Agent did not subside with increased time or familiarity. Their missions orbited around each other for months with increasing pull of gravity, and then, all at once, his world crumbled to the ground when M sold him out in Hong Kong. It was a travesty to come so close. Bond had so much raw talent and potential; Silva had wanted to mold and sculpt and claim that potential into equitably valuable worth.

More than anything of late, Silva had found himself worn down by apathy. The world was his oyster and amidst the variety and freedom he was lost. He reigned as Lord atop a vast empire, and with leisure he could pick and choose whatever endeavors amused him, but what he wanted, no, needed was someone to stand at the line of horizon, looking over the precipice by his side.

Silva was self-aware enough to admit he wasn't born for the isolation of command. Once upon a time, M had filled that role in his life with her sparing efficiency and clever mind. But he had only been a tool for her to utilize in the field. Another blunt-instrument for her to use at her disposal.

In his admiration-- no-- his adoration, he'd assumed his value to her was greater than what it truly was. But then, he was younger and far less cynical in those days and to be fair, he had never been dissatisfied by their arrangement. M was his Queen and he her vassal.

He was at his best when he'd been given a project, a mission, a purpose, which M had provided him.

And curiously enough, upon reflection, he had also been at his best... at least in the field-- paired up with a partner.

‘Professionally,’ he corrected himself of his straying thought.

That was something, wasn't it? His sheets were awfully cold these days.
Silva's preference leaned decisively towards a desire for the strong hard lines and athleticism of the male physique and parallel acuity of mind. He accepted there was a degree of narcissism to this theory, yet even so, he was not explicitly homosexual. As an equal opportunist, his standards, however, were exacting. His innate charisma drew to him willing partners like moths to a spotlight, but he batted them away with exception for only the very few with the brightest of wings.

Sévérine was a diamante em bruto, her damage increasing her allure, yet she had fundamentally lacked any real, enduring substance.

Granted, she had been a convenient transitory accessory, and he'd taken his pleasure in her nubile form for a time before his apathy had led him to a sort of ‘avec le temp’ asceticism. Of course, at the time, he'd had more pressing priorities to attend.

Silva sighed as he swirled the liquor in his glass, the ice clinking delicately against the crystal.

To be fair, she had served her purpose well. The seductress had effectively lured Bond to him, unwittingly over-estimating her value to the Agent; secured to the man with false intimacy.

‘Ahh, that’s a waste of good Scotch,’ How…cold, Mister Bond.

It was to a great degree, his fault for having spoiled her so. She had outlived his curiosity and he'd grown complacent. In his distraction with other matters he'd let her run rampant and the woman had become far too dangerous in her own right. He'd allowed her ego to become inflated and go unchecked for far too long, and Sévérine defied him incessantly with a chafing sort of arrogance.

Within his fixation, she'd seen an opening to take advantage of, and Silva knew if he would not be her end, she'd inevitably, ultimately be his.

With the completion of her purpose delivering Bond to his island, Sévérine had become unnecessary.

‘There's nothing...nothing superfluous in my life. When a thing is redundant it is, blip, eliminated.’

Silva inhaled deeply, pressing the glass to his lips.

What had at first been a mere power-play; a ploy designed to throw the Agent off-kilter, to Silva had become something else; as a seed was planted into his mind.

Closing his eyes, he could still feel the lingering phantom warmth through the tips of his fingers where they'd stroked the Agent's chest. If only he'd had more time to explore that warmth before MI-6 had descended upon Gunkanjima.

Well, in retrospect anyway.

Now with the flex of luxury he could liberally afford himself, the idea was a tantalizing one.

Such a magnificent physical specimen; a true 'Vetruvian Man' made flesh and blood; in equal parts passive and passionate, reserved and fierce. A perfect yin and yang, a gentleman by blood and a soldier by circumstance.

Of course, Silva was a perceptive individual, and when Bond had been bound to that chair, the wear and tear was evident in the hard lines of his face and the defiant set of his chin. Yet... he looked tired and tired equated with malleability.

The consummate MI-6 machine had been flawed since their battle at Skyfall, perhaps even before, damaged by a veteran's wisdom of years dodging fists and bullets, lying and hiding, seducing and
bedding, killing and watching as one-by-one his colleagues continued to fall, names collecting, as years passed, on sterile memorials carved into cold stone.

James Bond was invulnerable to persuasion yet perhaps, Silva considered, the man would be open to an evolution of perspective.

In his estimation, the financial ramifications of his most recent loss were minimal compared to his newfound priorities. Silva understood well the value of making small sacrifices to secure larger investments.

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Adherence to protocol be damned! What could he do?

The new mission was a tangled, hairy, disaster from the very start. MI-6 intelligence had inferred the new threat to be the work of a widespread international freelance terrorist organization; notorious for causing chaos to governments from the inside out. Their dossier boasted everything from arranging high profile assassinations to large-scale coup d'états.

They were of particular interest of late due to their sudden merger with a discreet and efficient cyber terrorist cell that claimed the ability to conduct large-scale operations, which could wreck havoc on a global scale. Correction. Had wrecked havoc – past tense. Bond reminded himself frowning at the sheets tangled at his ankles.

The group’s latest conquest was the New York conEdison power grid. In a display of casual rodomontade they simultaneously disabled security checkpoints at JFK and Heathrow, shut down traffic control at Times Square, and managed to siphon billions from a major Japanese account paralyzing the global stock exchange for nearly two days. The CIA was working tirelessly with MI-6 and MI-7 to track down the rogue organization.

But the whole operation was like a herd of elephants chasing after spiders.

Their original plan was unfeasible.

Bond could see the mission would require a special sort of ‘outsourcing’. What he needed was a foot soldier with Q's brain and a bona fide web of shady connections. What he needed was apparently ‘unattainable’, at least according to M.

Bond stared vacantly upwards as the ceiling swam fluidly above him. He downed the last of his drink, reaching over he set it down with a clank onto the unfamiliar nightstand in the unfamiliar room, and lay back down by the unfamiliar, ginger-haired vixen, naked and pale and gloriously asleep beside him.

They were all more glorious asleep, he mused cynically as he faded from consciousness.

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MI-6 was getting sloppy, and as days wore on it was clear Bond’s impotence in achieving any headway in this mission would lead him down the road to disenfranchised cynicism. The man could not sit still. If he wasn't jumping around and shooting things the complacency would drive him mad. How could he be expected to succeed if he wasn't provided the instruments with which to do so?

Silva merely had to step in, a knight in shining armour, to save the day with the answers only he possessed. He couldn't fathom a more perfect opportunity to secure his acquisition.
‘We can either eat each other...hmm? Or everyone else.’

‘We.’ The nominative plural had never sounded so desirable as it did right now.

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From the granite countertop of his apartment's kitchen, a porcelain bulldog, decorated with the Union Jack, surveyed a hungover and gloomy Bond as he scanned through his briefings.

The Agent groaned, cradling his throbbing head, vision blurring as he struggled to discern how he could feasibly comply with these new orders. The whole thing would be voluntary suicide, he, as the sacrificial tribute of Her Majesty's Royal Secret Service. M may as well have personally signed his death warrant.

Not that Bond wasted his days by trying to prolong them. Life was running and jumping, throwing fists and taking punches, emptying clips and dodging bullets... The only thing he feared now-a-days was becoming obsolete; a useless relic unable to perform. Purpose was the essence of survival and in turn it had a minimizing effect on fear. In addition, his training had been arduous and unforgiving; consequently, Bond himself was severe and merciless.

Especially with himself.

He put his reflections aside as he got up to pour hot water into his mug in order to steep some Earl Gray. With a yawn and a stretch, he opened his shades, and stood beside his window, basking in the warmth from the unseasonably bright sun and cloudless morning.

The Intel itself was vague, Bond sensed, though the dots more or less connected themselves. The assignment had such maddening potential to be interesting. Something a younger 007 would have jumped at earlier in his career, but at this juncture, he was under no illusions that his obscurity had evolved into infamy among the criminal contingency.

This mission was a footwork masquerade and he had no mask to wear to the party, his usual application of methods would prove ineffectual unless he could somehow convincingly abdicate his known allegiances.

A short rap at the door jolted him from his thoughts. Securing his robe about his waist, Bond grabbed a gun off the table and quietly made his way to the door, flipping the remote to switch on the camera in order to verify the identity of the individual.

“Parcel delivery,” announced an innocuous sounding voice muffled through the door.

Bond peered out through a slim crack from the entryway into the hallway, frowning suspiciously at the courier, “Yes?”

“Package must be signed for, are you Mister Bond?” The Agent nodded abruptly, wary of the small box between the man's hands. “Right then, sign here,” he passed Bond a small receipt.

“Thank you and have a good day, Sir.”

He glanced about the hall as the man departed and shut the door behind him, heaving a sigh as he voiced the code resealing the electronic locks. He'd have to move again it seemed. Sitting down at the table he stared across at the package. The sender was infuriatingly presumptuous to assume Bond wouldn't simply turn it over for inspection.

He sipped his tea slowly, still debating whether to open it or alert MI-6.
Though, he considered, all parcels went through a security screening process anyway, so there couldn't be anything overtly treacherous waiting to snap his hand off the second it was opened. Curiosity ultimately made the decision for him.

Tearing through the brown paper package Bond lifted the cover easily from the box to inspect its contents, which appeared to consist of a hermetically sealed mobile and a handwritten letter.

His unfolded the letter carefully, pushing aside his mug, as he was instantly struck by the strange yet unnameable familiarity of the script.

[I find it so much more elegant to communicate the old-fashioned way, paper missives, brown paper packages, tied up with string...so simple. No ribbons of digital information flying through the air easily intercepted by anyone if they have the means.]

Bond cautiously removed the mobile from its plastic encasing and glanced at it carefully before setting it aside.

[Of course, James, this is no ordinary mobile, it seems so obvious to explain its necessity, but yes, this is your permission to contact me. It's like that game we played as children. Circle the 'YES' if you like me, or...well of course you wouldn't circle 'NO'. Let us face facts, James, you're lost and you need me.]

I am willing to bail you out – consider this round two.

I know you must be asking yourself 'why?' A good spy knows that trust is never an advantage; even so, try not to look this gift horse in the mouth.

Simply text 'YES', and I will send you an address and a time and a place to go. No traps. My word is my...bond. Ha ha ha.

**Do not inform MI-6 of this arrangement, believe me when I promise you, I will know. CCTV's are everywhere and I have many 'friends'.**

Of course, as much as I would love to trust you, I feel I must also forewarn you. I am a very dangerous and powerful individual. I don't mean to boast, I merely must point out that it would be extremely disappointing for all concerned if you were to involve your friends in high places.

This is not about helping them, James. This is about helping you.

Just as an extra precaution, I must warn you from dissembling your new mobile. You won't find anything really special inside other than a microchip programmed to run interference against tracking, using my own personal network, and a small explosive device that will trigger if you attempt to bring this within the coordinates of a One Kilometer radius surrounding any MI-6 related facilities, and trust that I am aware of every last bunker and tunnel, so don't get inventive.

I wouldn't want to risk you losing any of your appendages.

We'll need them for that little PPK of yours with the microdermal sensor.

**Q-branch gives you such fun toys!**

Here is the part where I sell you on why you will follow my orders and accept my assistance, of course, recall, it is entirely your choice, there are no threats and there will be no consequences if you decline.
Obviously, you are now aware that I know to the last detail every bit of what your current mission entails. You need an inside man. You need to be able to go undercover. **Convincingly.**

You need me for the introductions. After all, how can the known double agent James Bond, glide safely and effectively through the underworld with such notoriety? You would need a powerful ally with a sterling and established reputation to vouch for you. One whom, by your side, none would ever have cause to doubt that you would never settle for selling out to Queen and Country. I would lend you the credibility. I can make you important enough by association that none would dare touch a single hair on your pretty head.

Here's the game. You must play the rogue Agent spurned and salivating for a chance at burning MI-6 to the ground. **Easy sell.**

Now your hackers need a mastermind for hire, one more formidable than the entirety of Q-branch, with an impressive resume and hands in all the jars. Their good fortune is that I'm on the market for clients! What serendipitous convenience! What a grand way to make friends and influence people.

**We’ll tear them down from the inside out**

And what more could you ask for than a partner who is a better shot than yourself?]

Bond bristled at the thinly veiled insult, desperately curious to discover just how this person could know so many particulars, let alone presume to infer superiority in the field.

[So, James, what will it be?

**YES or YES?**

**Lucky you, I offer my services free of charge. Consider it a courtesy from an old, mutual friend.**]

Bond knew himself to act rashly, but he'd typed out 'YES' and sent it before he'd even paused to consider the ramifications. He'd deal with them later, if need be. He knew an opportunity when he saw one, and this had been hand-delivered.

If Q only knew he'd be shortly setting out to shake the hand of their mysterious ally from the Nairobi case he'd be frothing with envy, Bond imagined, grinning into his mug.

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The location of their rendezvous point was, in a word, discreet. The back alley entrance seemed almost cliché with its non-descript sign and open door. Once inside the establishment, Bond observed a number of booths and tables lined against the long narrow stretch of wall opposite the bar. The dim lights cast a soft glow of red and black over the patrons, immersed within their own worlds.

Bond felt strangely at ease and with a subtle glance around the room he took his seat, noting a party of several men in expensive tailored suits, cast in the shadows toward the back.

One man in particular caught his eye. Unlike the others, this gent resounded of poised power beneath a barely tamed flare for the dramatic. His insouciant sense of self-awareness was achieved through his choice of a fitted designer sport coat that contrasted nicely with an ostentatious oxford shirt, that all together made him appear undeniably handsome, bordering on devil-may-care.

The other fellows continued to converse amongst themselves, oblivious to their companion's sudden shift to speechless captivation, his eyes dark beneath tinted glasses found Bond’s own and faceted to
them with surprised pleasure.

The man humoured him from afar waiting patiently for Bond to connect the dots; he snapped his fingers for the bartender’s attention and whispered quick orders before waving him off. His full lips spread into a greeting smile that stretched the scope of his face, highlighting the masculine cut of his cleanly shaved jaw and dimpled chin.

Bond let his eyes travel up to the familiar sweep of stark, nearly white, bottle-blonde hair, an unusual contrast to the man’s tanned face. For an endless second he forgot to breathe, the cogs in his mind whirred, spinning rapidly into motion as they began connecting fragmented whispers and shadows together to inevitably transpose the result upon the stranger before him. Then, with sudden breathless recognition, in spite of the impossibility of it, he knew.

“One Vesper Martini, courtesy of a friend,” the bartender announced as he set down the champagne goblet interrupting the Agent from his startling revelation. Bond sucked in a sharp breath.

“Vesper.”

He closed his eyes as the name pulled at a part of him he couldn’t afford to think about at that moment.

Collecting himself, Bond glanced up to find the man had risen from his seat, and with a casual, inimitable swagger, was heading directly toward him, grinning broadly.

“I don't typically accept drinks from strangers.”

“Ahh, but we're not really strangers,” Silva corrected, sidling onto the stool beside him, “Are we?”

He savoured the taste of his cocktail and studiously ignored the heat of Silva’s eyes as they shamelessly swept over his seated form. The drink was perfect, down to the type of vodka.

“Tom Ford has always flattered you, 007,” Silva whistled approvingly under his breath, “James.”

Bond’s answering smile was wan and did not meet his eyes.

“Jonathon,” Silva spoke, alerting the bartender with a wave of his hand and a wink at his companion, “I'll have what he's having.”

“It seems you've adopted my hobbies,” Bond stated laconically.

Silva propped an elbow on the counter to rest his head in his hand. As he leaned in closer, he swung up and across a companionable arm to rest atop Bond's back-rest.

“Now which could you mean, the drinking or the resurrecting?”

“Both.”

“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,” the blonde responded coyly when his drink was placed in front of him.

“And the lemon-peel, too, nice touch.”

“The devil is in the details, as they say,” he quickly checked his mobile before slipping it back inside his vest pocket, “very good, I see you've followed my orders.”

Bond schooled his features as he stared stiffly ahead at the glistening liquor bottles reflected in their mirrored encasement, “It appears I've walked into a trap after all.”

Silva laughed. It was short, sharp, and empty.
“Just look at yourself, James. Look at that ugly purple lump on your forehead…it's pretty transparent that you seem to have a certain predilection for living life on the wild side.” He paused with a toothy grin as he ran a hand up the Agent’s back to smooth out a wrinkle in the collar, “wouldn’t you say so?”

Bond remained stoically dispassionate as ever, much to Silva's enjoyment.

“Oh, I'm teasing you. Don't be so tediously dense, if I wanted you dead,” he said with a snap of his fingers, “like that, you'd have been dead ages ago.”

Silva tilted his head to the side, gazing at his companion fondly, “There are no hard feelings between us, James, I've let bygones be bygones.”

“How generous of you.”

“No, not generous,” he responded with a swift wave of his hand, “reasonable. My letter was very genuine. I am here to help you.”

“Yes, you seem to have taken a rather keen interest in helping recently,” Bond acknowledged, “you're practically Mother Teresa.”

“What a marvelous comparison,” Silva said, bowing his head graciously.

“You know my Quartermaster is rather taken with you?”

“Oh, is he?”

“He wants to ‘shake hands’ if I recall,” Bond said with a bemused smirk while lifting the drink to his mouth.

Silva chuckled, “is that all he wants to shake?”

Bond stared at the other man humourlessly, the innuendo falling flat.

“I bet he found my assistance rather invaluable with regards to MI-6’s fancy new firewall.”

He watched with mild fascination as Silva traced the rim of his glass with one finely manicured fingernail before dipping inward to snare the lemon-peel. Bringing it to his mouth, he caught a droplet of alcohol, and provocatively licked it from his bottom lip.

“Your hack bypassed his last one, you could do it again,” Bond said with a shrug of his shoulders.

“True,” Silva nodded, wrapping the peel in a napkin before tossing it into an ashtray, “if I had the inclination. I am rather proud of my latest code. It's like an all-access-pass, a key to the kingdom, if you will.”

“It's remarkable how you managed to reassemble more than a decade’s worth of network in under two years, I was under the assumption MI-6 had been thorough in its deconstruction of your headquarters.”

Silva leaned back in his seat and crossed his ankles.

“Did you ever hear the story of the solar-powered PC tablets that were left in the hands of destitute children from an Ethiopian refugee camp?”

Bond shook his head, peering interestedly at his companion.
“Within minutes of them being dropped off, one child not only opened the box and pulled out the tablet, but found the on/off switch. He powered it up.”

“Within five days, the children, whom had never been privileged with an education and had never seen a computer before, were using apps.”

“Within two weeks, they were singing ABC songs in English. Soon after, they figured out the camera, circumvented the security, customized their own settings and disabled hardware…and within five months, they'd hacked the company's system.”

Silva paused, gauging his companion's look of interest and smiled.

“It’s staggering to think what man is capable of when he has the means, a little ingenuity, and just the right amount of,” he leaned in and pressed his lips against Bond's ear, “…motivation.”

Under the counter of the bar, Silva brazenly slid a hand up Bond's thigh, his small finger lightly tracing circles along the inner seam.

*The Agent glowered, resisting the impulse to push the intrusive hand away.*

Somehow, no one paid them any mind; it occurred to Bond that perhaps the crowd here knew better. He swallowed, pressing his lips together as Silva kept his mouth just near enough that he could feel his warm breath and hot lips graze the helix of his ear while Silva hummed to the tune playing through the speakers overhead.

‘I was so scared you were what I feared,’ the music played, *immersing the room within its gentle melody.*

‘And though I never dared...’

‘With you I somehow did,’” Silva sang along, smirking at the Agent's more than obvious discomfort.

‘I was alone, I was alone.’

“Such a sour face, my dear, you don't like this song?”

“Stop it,” Bond demanded in a quiet, clipped tone.

“Or what? Oh, come now, I didn't think you'd be such a spoilsport,” Silva admonished, his wandering fingers remained on their path slowly trailing up his companion's inner thigh.

With great effort, the Agent suppressed a shiver as the light touch sent pleasure sparking upward and blood coursing downward, stirring him with a conflicted cross of nervous lust and repulsion.

“Is this your price?” Bond inquired, regarding the hand in his lap before looking up at the man with a raised eyebrow.

Silva tossed his head back and laughed in genuine delight, “Perhaps if I were to let you name it!”

“You flatter yourself,” Bond rebuke, inhaling sharply through his nose.

He would not give the man the satisfaction of seeing him lose his composure.

“Well, of course I do. A man should always be aware of his gifts, but, I do think you protest unfairly, you see, I am fluent in your language, James, and where your tongue tells lies, your body,” he
squeezed Bond's groin to illustrate his point, “...simply cannot.”

Bond jerked away, nearly upturning his drink, his face heated with anger at the loss of control of his traitorous body mingled with the flush of arousal.

“Relax...” Silva directed, his eyes wide with amusement betraying some small amount of either feigned or genuine concern, “you need to relax.”

He flattened his hand against the Agent’s back soothingly, “I really had no idea you were so easily riled. I recall our previous encounter differently, I suppose. What's changed, my dear? You used to know how to play this game.”

“This is beyond a game.”

“Is it?” Silva queried curiously.

“It really doesn't do much to convince me that you're doing this out of friendly courtesy,” Bond pressed.

“So insistent! One would think you want me to charge for my services after all.”

“Your actions speak clearly.”

“Mister Bond!” Silva exclaimed, scandalized, “are you implying that I'm trying to seduce you?”

“Trying, being the operative word,” Bond smirked.

“Now, now, whosoever you choose to warm your sheets is not what we've come here to discuss.”

“Isn't it?”

“Tsk tsk, naughty boy.”

“Your flirtation is unusually aggressive for one who claims to be above all that dull physical stuff.”

“...You have an intriguingly eidetic memory for words, haven't you?” Silva raised an eyebrow suggestively, “we can always try and have you prove me wrong.”

“What exactly do you get out of this arrangement,” Bond asked, running a hand atop his short-cropped hair as he relaxed back in his seat.

“Entertainment, exercise, the pleasure of your company... take your pick.”

“Your reasons are your own, fine,” Bond accepted, “but precisely how do I fit in this equation? I am not underestimating myself, but if you had a legitimate reason for doing so, you could conceivably work as a one-man operation. What sells anyone on why you'd even partner with me?”

“Is this truly a valid concern of yours? I can't imagine anyone would be overly suspicious of your motives if you're with me. We play our roles. It isn't complicated. Now shake my hand, James.”

The Agent extended his hand warily, “I don't trust you.”

“The beauty of it is,” Silva grinned, sealing the deal with the firm requisite handshake, “you don't have to, I wouldn't expect you to! I'd be surprised if you did, frankly...I don't trust me.”

“That's reassuring.”
“But you do need me, regardless of your suspicions.”

“For lack of any better option,” Bond agreed reluctantly.

Chapter End Notes

1. Meu rato solitário.. Meu pobre querido destroçado: my lone rat, my dear, my poor injured darling
2. diamonte em bruto: diamond in the rough
3. avec le temp: momentary

The song is Of Verona's 'Castles'. 
The coastal countryside of Northern England was a stream of endless green and blue as seen from the passenger window of the Sedan.

Tucked at the Agent’s side, was a small satchel containing some changes of clothes, items of personal necessity, as well as a small arsenal Q had provided – much of it unnecessary considering whom he’d be working with during this escapade. It was with a critical amount of effort on his part that Bond had managed to provide just the right amount of information to MI-6 while strictly maintaining the confidence of his associate. M was dubious of his methods but Bond had never given MI-6 too great a cause for alarm. He would get the job done. Chicanery was an art form Bond was well versed in but even this level of deception made his head spin.

Escorted by one of Silva's lackeys to a discreet, private runway in the middle of Purbeck, Bond silently watched as his reception party came into view. In front of a small Lear 35A Charter, Raoul Silva stood flocked on either side by the same crowd from the other evening. In one gloved hand he held a silver case that glistened in the sun while the other was buried in the pocket of a light beige resort jacket.

“James, my dear, so glad to see you again, I trust you have your arrangements in order? You've your PJs and your PP7s?”

“I have.”

“Well then, come aboard, we are going to take a short trip to La Coruña. Of course you already know all the little details,” Silva dismissively waved.

As they took their designated seats aboard the aircraft, Bond glanced at his companion, who seemed to be regarding him with curiosity.

“You looked exhausted,” he remarked.

“I've been preoccupied.”

“I can imagine sorting out the particulars with MI-6 wasn't overly pleasant. Fortunately, my friend works with remarkable expedience so it shouldn't be more than half a day before he calls us.”

Silva peered over at his companion, “I thought we might dine at the Hesperia Finisterre before tucking in for the evening.”

Bond nodded mutely and watched as the plane rose into the clouds while Mother England gradually faded from view.

“So pensive, James. Penny for your thoughts?”

“Just a penny? Are you sure that is all you can afford?” The Agent quipped back.

The blonde smirked.
“Oh, I'm sure I can think of other forms of payment...”

Bond snorted at the rejoinder exasperated by the man's lewd insinuation before shaking his head.

“This. The--” The Agent paused to regroup, “the way this has all come together so precipitously...it seems almost like yesterday you were unloading rounds of ammunition at me, and now, for some utterly inexplicable reason you've decided to--”

“Save your pretty little arse?” Silva finished succinctly, his hands resting neatly in his lap.

Bond regarded the man soberly.

The blonde groaned, dragging a hand down his face, “Is it really so unimaginable that I have turned a new leaf?”

“Frankly, yes.”

Silva’s chuckle rumbled warmly in response before he turned away to gaze out the window, finishing their discussion with a measure of ambiguity in his silence.

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La Coruña, Spain, 20:30, as the evening wore on the two men moved to the bar and sat across from one another at a small table in the back of the crowded room.

“I know it's utterly tedious but that is why he's so invaluable. He'll like you I think.”

Bond raised an eyebrow, “Will he?”

“I can't see how anyone couldn't,” Silva stretched out his arm across the table and placed his hand over Bond’s own as it rested near his drink. Gently he caressed the skin noting with interest how it felt beneath his touch, just as calloused as his own.

Taken aback momentarily by his companion's sudden, forward display, he pulled his hand back away, depositing it into the safety of his lap and looked up to find Silva smirking at him with a strange glint in his eyes.

The blonde knew better than to call the Agent on it, but the man's reaction was revealing, and he'd always been quite perceptive.

Bond suppressed an urge to flee under that scrutinizing gaze, but held fast his cool.

The constant casual demonstration of affection unsettled him, not because his dalliances had been historically exclusive to a specific gender, nor because he was unaccustomed to people touching him with familiarity or sensuality. This was different. Silva was an anomaly. An exotic and entrancing enigma in all the right and wrong ways and denial of this salient fact was uneconomical.

The Agent was keenly aware the prescient bastard had figured him out as he stared at him calmly from across the table, and this discredited that essential invulnerability he had been so keen to rely upon.

It was very unnerving.

“Señores, Puedo obtener más a beber?” A server offered.

“Dos más de lo mismo,” Bond sighed, ignoring Silva's blinding grin from across the table.
14 hours later, they'd already met with their first contact, the very same associate whom Silva had referred to so fondly.

Gray hair and face lined with age, the man retained an enviable height and bearing, fastidiously groomed and urbane as Silva himself, though perhaps less flamboyant in mien. The mercenary went by the alias of Roger King.

“What can I do to make you at home, Mister Bond,” the tall American inquired, with the easy drawl of a Southern country gentleman, as he stood by the bar aboard his private jet.

“A scotch and soda if you please, Mister King.”

“Ahh, Commander of her Majesty's Royal Navy and Double-Agent James Bond, you English are awfully formal! We are all friends here, please, call me Roger.”

“Roger it is, in that case,” Bond conceded as the man poured the scotch into a crystal glencairn.

“I suppose I ought drop the prefix, irrelevant as it's become, according to Raoul here.”

“Indeed, I'd prefer it if you'd call me Bond, or James, if you'd rather.”

“I'd 'rather,'” the man laughed amiably, “I do hope we, too, can become good friends, James.”

“Thank you, Roger,” Bond said graciously as he accepted his drink. If one has the means to afford it, a friend-for-hire is always a most dedicated servant, and Silva's pockets ran deep. The Agent sipped his drink while he observed his fellow passengers as Cote De Pablo's "Temptation" was projected onto the wall behind him.

Excluding the pilot, the jet transported a total of four men and three women. Standing towards the back of the cabin, Bond noted the burly bodyguard to their Jack-of-all-Trades host; his watchful gaze steadfastly trained on the Agent.

Also seated within the sleek Hawker 400XP, that boasted a luxurious lounging cabin swathed in plush white leather seating, were three women who giggled, flirted, and entertained the men as they all sat together around a low table. He imagined their primary appeal to be their role as props, clad in the most perfunctory of vogue fashion.

Silva was seated directly across the table from Bond, a woman on each side, and at that moment was paying rapt attention to the vapidly verbose Polynesian beauty with glossy black hair and supple red lips.

“It was really quite miraculous if you can imagine. Here I am sitting in Milan, tossing back cocktails at Dio's with the girls, and in comes the man himself! Jupiter descendeth from his orbit, and he wanted my opinion, as if I'm suddenly an expert on fine lingerie!”

A bell-tinging laugh bubbled from the impeccably-coiffed blonde wedged beside Bond as she listened to her friend carry on. “And I said to myself, well, if Hugh Hefner is that interested in what I have to say then it's only right if I get my own feature,” bragged the aspiring editorialist.

As the self-absorbed ladies tittered in their seats King continued to engage Bond in a politically current conversation of their own.

“So, this ‘Corsenza’, you claim he's a front-man. Have you any insight on how we can convince him
to drop the front?” Bond asked King directing the conversation to a more relevant topic.

“Alfonso is not a man to be bought but to be won. He's a gambler. High-stakes. Earn his respect by taking his money and he'll talk.”

“How can we ensure such a feat? I can play a hand, or two, but this is his life's blood.”

“The owner of Casino Carmine is Maxwell Gordon,” King explained, “I've already made the arrangements and he's willing to negotiate.”

“He's currently under investigation for fraud and is quite troubled about it,” Silva added as his attention moved away from the women’s conversation.

“Yes,” King agreed, “and he's willing to rig the games if you can convince the prosecution to drop the investigation. You see Max is not overly concerned about the cost of a loss but of maintaining his reputation. No fool worth his weight in gold willingly gambles his fortune at a house of disrepute.”

“If he's willing to betray a loyal patron for personal gain, then the charges are valid, are they not?” Bond pointed out.

King laughed heartily, “An astute observation. Precisely how he got himself in this crux!”

“Will the investigators accept a pay-off?” Silva inquired, reclining lackadaisically, his arm draped heavily about the raven-haired seductress beside him, keeping herself occupied by busily reapplying lipstick. The buxom brunette on his other side reached over Silva’s lap and handed her friend a small bejewelled mirror before settling in again.

King leaned forward and poured the rest of the contents of the tumbler into his glass before downing it in one gulp. “That's just it, old boy, you hit the nail on the head! They won't settle…they see themselves as being above bribery. Lordy,” he huffed as he rose from his seat, “how I loathe incorruptible morality.”

King walked over to the bar. “You don't mind do you,” he asked as he clipped a cigar. Striking a wooden match to light it, he inhaled the acrid smoke into his mouth gleaning deep pleasure from the act.

“Old habits'...” he shrugged unapologetically as he moved back towards the table. The smoke dispersed and coalesced, filling the air with a hazy veil.

“What we need is dirt on the prosecution team’s head-attorney, Robert ‘Bob’ Godfrey. He's a highfalutin one, hasn't lost a case in two decades. Owns the wealthiest firm on the west coast and takes only high-profile cases. He’s a good church-going family-man, to boot!”

“It's been my experience that the morally incorruptible are usually the most corrupt,” Silva pointed out with a devious smile.

“Rumour has it, the man's interested in running for a seat in the Senate,” King continued with barely-concealed excitement.

“How convenient,” Bond intoned, leaning forward with interest, “Then he may have a price-tag after all.”

“What's more convenient is I've set a meeting with his mistress.”

Silva laughed with warm fervour, “My dear Roger! You are a marvel. How did you obtain that
cherry?"

“I have ears in every gossip mill,” Roger said with a chuckle and a wave towards the seated women, “and it also pays to have a few friends in low places here and there.”

“Paparazzo or starving journalist?”

“Stefanie, lovely gal, works for a little gossip rag. She amassed a bit of debt with a penchant for living above her means and couldn’t have been more eager to find the highest bidder to pay off her creditors.”

“I was anticipating you'd have fished some skeletons from the closets,” Silva flattered, “all this build-up of exposition, was it really necessary or are you just trying to impress my partner?”

“When you get to be my age, you'll relish drawing out this or that acquisition. You, young men, what do you need with braggadocio? Old men like me? We have to rely on spinning a good yarn once in awhile,” King retorted with a satisfied puff of smoke, “and you know I'm an old barnstormer at heart.”

“Old something or other,” Silva laughed again, “so does this mistress want to go public?”

“Unfortunately no,” King sighed, “I'd assumed Godfrey paid her a handsome retainer for her silence, but she's more terrified that it will ruin her own reputation and friendship with his wife. They're old family friends,” King said with raised eyebrows, “seems she's no pretty little kept-woman neither… gal's got a respectable name of her own.”

“Really,” Bond was intrigued. “How so?”

“She's a spokesperson for a major non-profit in Carson City.”

“A non-profit did you say? Gold heart, easy in bed, sounds delightful,” Silva mused winking at Bond flirtatiously.

“We need Godfrey to think she's willing to go public,” King explained, “a little bird told me your old friend here has a way with the lady-folk, perhaps he could convince her to reconsider?”

Silva's expression darkened momentarily before evolving into a cock-eyed grin as he turned to face his companion, “Well, James?”

“I'd be willing to try,” Bond consented.

“I think he's charming enough,” appraised the petite blonde while she caressed his cheek. King chuckled to himself taking another puff of his cigar.

“Do you, my dear?” Silva inquired with an ambiguously dangerous glint in his eye, and in one fell swoop he pulled the raven-haired beauty into his lap. She yelped playfully in surprise.

“I do,” the girl agreed, batting her heavy-lidded eyes at the Agent.

“Well, gentlemen, your amenities are in order in your compartments, feel free to enjoy the amusement at your leisure, I trust you will find your company stimulating, but alas, I'm off to retire for the evening, I reckon this ol’ bag of bones ain't what it used to be and Vegas is a long flight ahead of us.”

“Indeed, Roger, you've been a most gracious host,” Silva commended.
“It was entirely my pleasure. Charmed to meet you at last James. It’s good to see you again, Raoul, my old friend. Evenin’ Gents,” he bade, exiting into his private compartment.

The girl perched upon Silva's knee tittered, as he pulled back her curtain of ebony hair to whisper something in her ear. Bond could only imagine what he might have said as the darker woman glanced over to the voluptuous brunette who sat at Silva’s side, and slipped into her lap in a wordless invitation. Bond watched unsure whether to find this display titillating or embarrassingly gratuitous as the women sensually attached themselves to each other, tongue to tongue, lips to neck, mouth to the supple curve of a breast.

The blonde beside him, pressed in, ankle wrapping around his own as she kissed and nipped up the length of his neck.

Silva's now heavy-lidded gaze fixated on Bond. The rounds of drinks continued, warming and clouding his head, yet he remained always aware of his companion's continual, interested surveillance. The songs changed and he noted the lights progressively lowered as the evening waxed on, the girls exchanging the object of their interest every so often for the sake of variety. Silva entertained them all with loose anecdotes and the occasional witticism or salacious suggestion, nothing of any consequence, letting his silvery voice roll soothingly over the cabin.

It was easy to relax in the intimate setting, yet a small voice reminded Bond to maintain vigilance of his surroundings, it would be too easy to simply let down his guard with Silva's hypnotic voice flowing in and around his head.

“‘You don't mind, do you?’

The man himself spoke, interrupting Bond's relaxed position as he sat down unexpectedly beside him, “I wish to discuss a few points before we settle too far into trivialities.”

Bond ceded as his female companion perceptively arose to join her friends on the other side of the table.

“While you're taking care of business with Godfrey's little girlfriend, I will check into Carmine and introduce myself to our quarry. I presume we must make friends to be invited to play,” Silva explained. He draped an arm around the back of their shared seat, fingers sending a shiver down Bond's spine as he felt them just barely brushing the back of his neck, though whether the other man was aware of what he was doing was ambiguous.

“I believe I will start with the tables. I should be able to arrange VIP with Max.”

A small part of Bond was distractedly aware of Silva's warm body pressed along his side.

“Can you put on a good show?”

His companion tipped his head back and laughed, pressing a hand to his forehead, “My dear! Have we met?”

Bond smirked in response, “Do you just plan to squander your entire fortune in the hope that you'll eventually gain Corsenza's attention? I've yet to hear how you plan on winning.”

“Do you forget who I am?” Silva tutted.

“How can I?”

“You tell me,” the man retorted playfully bumping Bond's knee with his own.
“Godfrey and his mistress, have they terminated their relationship?”

“From what Roger’s revealed, they’ve not.”

Bond frowned, “That complicates things. I don’t suppose I could personally threaten her since we have to stay behind the curtains, but perhaps we could hire someone else to?”

“Not clean enough,” Silva mused, “we don’t want to back her into any corners or she’ll hire her own lawyer and partner jointly with Godfrey to sue for libel. His firm has enough influence that they can easily spin it off to the media as a ploy to harm Godfrey’s political aspirations.”

“That was my line of thought,” Bond said relaxing back in his seat with a puzzled expression, “I assume you have advice on the matter?”

Silva’s hand slipped down to caress the short hairs on the back of Bond’s neck, smiling with teasing affection, “I love it when you ask me for my assistance, James.”

The Agent realized he didn't have to explicitly admit to himself that he was attracted to the other man in this particular moment, he was more than aware. He just wasn't interested in over-thinking it just now.

“What if we look at this from a gentler perspective,” Silva mused thoughtfully, “I imagine, she is compassionate, working for a non-profit is not substantially profitable…perhaps you can approach this from an angle that, in essence, speaks to her heart. Remind her of who she is hurting.”

“Convince her to break it off,” Bond continued, inspired.

“She’ll go to Godfrey and weep and wring her hands and explain to him how she just must confess her betrayal to her dearest friend and whether or not we know if the wife would be willing to file for divorce or separation or what have you, even contemplating the potential for scandal prior to soliciting donors for campaign contributions will terrify him into submission.”

“That’s a solid plan,” Bond admitted.

“Do you think so? You're surprisingly more agreeable tonight, I wonder if it's me or the scotch.”

The Agent stiffened, “I mean your reasoning is sound.”

Silva chuckled warmly as he inched forward closely regarding his partner, his fingers stroking the back of his neck gently.

“Surprisingly, it usually is.”

Bond felt, suddenly, overwhelmingly hot with the alcohol in his system, the proximity of the man beside him, the sensual touch of the hand behind him, and the general shift in tone. Beads of sweat formed on his brow and he swallowed thickly, his mouth having gone quite dry.

“I think I could use another drink,” he smirked, struggling to infuse levity into the moment, in a feeble attempt to lessen the intensity and the heat rushing south.

“I feel I must pose to you a question I'm positive you're not accustomed to being asked: are you aware how shy you are of a little touch?” Silva inquired curiously.

“I hardly think you believe that,” Bond scoffed before downing the rest of his drink. He closed his eyes and settled back against Silva’s arm all the while pressing the cold glass, full of ice, against his
“It's fascinating to me how uncomfortable you seem to be-- I mean look at you, my dear,” Silva snorted, “You break a sweat with just the hint of suggestion. I'm really rather flattered.”

“I've had too much to drink.”

Silva narrowed his eyes shrewdly.

“That does not excuse how guarded you are in my presence.”

“What is it they always say in this situation?” Bond mused, tone laced with sarcasm, “Ah, that's right. *But, Mister Silva, I don't really know you that well, and I'm not that kind of girl.*”

Silva laughed, “Fair enough, but...I would argue that you do...perhaps better than you are presently aware.”

Bond raised his head and stoically watched as the girls arose, wisely cognizant that they were no longer required, and departed to a separate compartment.

Silva smiled at him sagaciously, “do you disagree?”

“I think you're projecting,” the Agent deduced after a moment of reflection, “for some, unfathomable reason you want me to understand you, you want to believe that we're one and the same.”

“*Hmm,*” Silva hummed while scrutinizing his companion through narrowed eyes, “that's where you're mistaken. You are, of course, entitled to your opinion, but I did not say we were *one in the same.* Inevitably our paths have prompted us to make different choices...”

“However you still do not deny what you really want is for me to understand you,” Bond stated condescendingly; terribly amused by his conclusion.

“How utterly boring, James! You assign to me such trivial and pathetic sentiment. I do not need your understanding,” he argued unable to suppress a tone of repugnance slipping out as he defended himself against the accusation.

Bond raised a challenging eyebrow.

“Understand this,” Silva said as his hand rose to cup Bond’s chin.

“I merely wished to illustrate, to emphasize, that to a degree...” he paused and tenderly stroked his thumb just below the Agent’s alluringly stubborn mouth, “You already do understand me, regardless of whether you choose to believe so or not.”

“Trust me when I say that I don't,” Bond stated with cruel impassivity.

Silva hummed and glanced down at their touching knees, his hand trailing away from the other man’s face with a measure of resignation.

No matter, the Agent would come when he was ready and willing...*literally.*

A smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth at the thought.

“Perhaps, you're afraid,” Silva remarked perceptively.

“I am not afraid,” Bond corrected, “I'm *cautious.* There's a difference.”
The blonde gaped at his companion with an open look of clear disbelief.

“Now that, is blatant misrepresentation, you are anything but!”

Bringing a hand down to the man's chest, he drew open the Agent’s shirt with ease revealing a myriad of old scars littering the expanse of pale skin. “One might even say you have a penchant for recklessness,” he whispered, gazing up at Bond with heavy-lidded eyes, his fingers trailing up the beautifully bared and vulnerable neck, “but…immaterial, I estimate you know all of this already.”

Lingering smoke from the long since doused cigar permeated the air and Bond's eyes fluttered shut, the electrical touch sparking warmth throughout his body. He could hear the rush of blood in his ears like the roar of a ocean and winced against the telltale sign of just how the man effected him with the sudden stutter of his heartbeat. Without meaning to, a small breathy sound escaped from his mouth, and Silva responded with a shiver of barely contained desire. His eyes hungrily roamed across his companion’s face; near enough to count the translucent blonde lashes of the other’s closed eyes…it took a good deal of self-restraint to keep himself from closing the small gap of distance between them and capturing that inviting mouth with his own.

Silva's hand stilled and curled around the back of Bond’s head, pulling him in until their foreheads rested against each other. The Agent was unable to conceal his flinch as the hot breath of the other man, laden with the intoxicating aroma of scotch, swept over his face.

“My friend, you've been running all your life,” he uttered softly, “and I know that feeling…that if you stop, even for a second, it will all end. Everything will be extinguished and you’ll fade into obscurity.”

Bond inhaled sharply as piercing recognition sliced through him.

Silva pulled away then, and stood up, straightening his jacket. He watched as the Agent opened his diaphanous blue eyes and gazed up at him curiously.

“Stopping is not an option, but...” he advised, words loaded with reflective bittersweet meaning, “you may want to consider that no man is an island. Not even you, James.”

Bond arose from his seat, sparing his companion one last, resistant, impassable glance to which Silva simply grinned in return.

Without final comment, the Agent retired to his compartment, falling into a fitful sleep; echoes of poignant words, ghost of touches and merciless mocking smiles haunting his dreams.

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Tailing Dana Francis was simple enough thanks to King's lovely informant. Everyday, like clockwork, Miss Francis would leave her desk for the afternoon and make her way down to the same coffee shop on the corner by her office. Bond sat in the corner of the small cafe, discreetly hidden behind his open newspaper, and observed, as she, oblivious to his watchful gaze, ordered what he assumed was her typical skim-latte.

As soon as she seated herself to enjoy the fruits of her purchase, the Agent arose from his seat and made his way over; pulling out a nearby chair he cavalierly situated himself across from her. Dana raised a single meticulously manicured eyebrow and pointedly stared at the bold interloper.

“I'm sorry, but...have we met?” She asked concisely, slightly bemused by the man's presumption. Bond smiled charmingly.
“We have not,” he replied, “but I’d say there’s no time like the present.”

In her late thirties, his target was tall, slender woman, projecting an air of confident professionalism all the while maintaining something softly feminine; Bond regarded the attractive woman with an easy confidence of his own. Intrigued by his British accent and erudite mannerisms, as all American women evidently are, she warmed to him immediately, “Hm. Is that so?”

“Indeed,” he grinned, offering her his hand which she took with pleasant surprise, “My name is David. David Somerset.” She looked up at him with a small, subtly flirtatious smile, “Well, Mister Somerset, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“The pleasure is all mine, Miss Francis.”

Dana's surprise turned quickly to suspicion, her eyes narrowing as she withdrew her hand, “Exactly how do you know who I am?”

“A mutual friend but that’s irrelevant. There’s something more important I’d like to discuss with you.”

Bond watched as her confused frown perceptibly darkened, “And what, precisely, would that be?”

“Your dear friend, Mary Godfrey,” Bond informed succinctly, “and by extension her children, and her husband, and his political ambitions.”

“Oh? And how does this relate to me?” She inquired, feigning ignorance.

'Good girl,' Bond thought.

“Certain slanderous accusations have the ability to ruin old friendships, tear apart the foundations of family, and more importantly,” he intoned with icy clarity, “they tend to have rather unpleasant ramifications in regards to election campaigns, Miss Francis.”

Dana sat stiffly in her chair and with a hint of trembling hands set down her latte on the table. She glanced down at the cold drink and steeled her gaze.

“I don't know what you mean.”

“Then allow me to clarify. I, as well as certain other parties, that shall of course remain nameless, know you are currently romantically involved with Mister Godfrey.”

She peered back up at him with barely disguised fury, her lips curled in disgust, “Are you attempting to blackmail me and by association Bob?”

“I can assure you that I have no interest in anyone's money, Miss Francis,” Bond said, lowering his head, “I believe, however, it would be in your best interest at this time, to sever your ties to Mister Godfrey.”

“Let me guess,” she accused viciously, “you're with some special-interest group, or no…you're a private investigator hired by his campaign team.”

What an interesting easy excuse she unknowingly provided for him. Bond smirked to himself, 'private investigator', indeed.'

“I suppose your name was simply an alias then? What was it,” she hissed quietly, aware of their public setting, “…David? David Somerset?”
Bond frowned. This was not going as well as he expected it would; in an effort to wrap up their conversation he switched focus in order to appeal to sentiment.

“Miss Francis, Dana, my intention was not to upset you. I am merely concerned about the welfare of Misses Godfrey and the relationship she has with her husband and that of his children with their father.”

Dana laughed miserably, shaking her head, “Of course you people would attempt to use emotional black-mail.” She crossed her arms in front of her chest and leaned back in her chair, “Why not tell Bob to break it off himself? Explain that, ‘Mister Somerset’.”

“It would be best if the decision came from you. We don't want you to be alienated from the family--it would seem suspicious to Mary,” Bond improvised.

“You are aware that's completely illogical?”

Miss Dana Francis was apparently a very shrewd woman; Bond began to appraise her with a growing sense of respect.

“Logic aside, this is our approach to the matter, I assume you can respect that and do as I say?”

“You want me to break up with Bob on the grounds that people know about it and can use it against us. Against him,” Dana amended, “If I go through with this, why can’t I make it seem as if I simply no longer wish to be involved with him?”

“Because if you don’t follow my instructions I'll make sure your position within your company is compromised. No one wants a morally suspect individual as the face of their organization.”

“Touché!” Dana bit out, clacking her ruby-red nails against the table, her latte going colder by the minute.

“I have a great track record for following through on my promises,” The Agent warned. Dana glared at him bitterly.

“Oh, well done, Mister Somerset. Threatening to ruin my career if I don't comply with your demands,” her expression shifted back to narrow-eyed suspicion as she stopped the hypnotic clacking of her fingernails and rested them against her temple, “You know, I'm not so sure you're who I think you are after all. Bob's team would've gone directly to him, but no, you essentially want me to warn him that ‘people know’. In fact, I doubt it matters to you one lick whether we actually break up so long as we're discreet and he's aware someone knows about us. Who do you really work for?”

Bond sat back, crossing his legs, intrigued as Dana's expression broadened with dawning revelation. “No wait, I've got it,” she spat caustically, “you're from Gordon Maxwell's litigation team. This is blackmail in order to make Bob settle.”

Not that she was anywhere near being correct, but given her information, this was a clever conclusion and easily convenient way for him to protect himself.

“I'm right, aren't I?” Dana persisted, pointing a lacquered fingernail in Bond’s direction. “Obviously, you can't say, but I am right.”

Bond raised an eyebrow, impressed, “Very perceptive, so you keep tabs on Godfrey's cases?”

“Well, I have to, don't I?”
“I believe our business here is finished, Miss Francis, I have made myself clear. Do we have an agreement?”

She huffed and grabbed her now cold drink from off the table, contemplating whether she should demand that her assailant at least buy her a fresh one, “It’s not like you’ve given me any other option, and they say you British are gentlemen.”

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Bond was amused. Silva's assumption that playing to Dana Francis’ sense of sentiment would be an effectual solution had proven to be entirely false. For all that he'd assumed the face of a charitable organization should be susceptible to empathy, the woman had shown herself to be entirely consumed by self-serving self-interest.

He could barely suppress his enthusiasm at pointing out this flaw in the man's otherwise impeccable psychological insight. As it happened, he would soon be able to do so.

Without so much as a hitch, Silva had succeeded in securing several wins at Casino Carmine’s tables thereby attracting the attention of several of Corsenza's friends.

“How did you manage?” Bond inquired with a gin martini in hand. Silva, who sat at one of the Casino’s bars enjoying his own cocktail, welcomed him with a fond grin, “Sufficient enough, I would say. We're to play the man himself in a few minutes; they should be arriving to collect us at any moment. I'll leave you out of the rest of the boring details.”

“An under the table pay-off to rig the tables, then,” Bond surmised.

The blonde feigned offense, “Can't I just have the requisite skill?”

“Unlikely,” the Agent smirked between sips of his drink.

“You won’t even concede that I have a way with Lady Luck,” his companion huffed, “not very generous, are you, my friend?”

With an insouciant shrug the Agent leaned against the Venetian marble bar.

“It seems you’ve been successful as well. Max informed me that Godfrey called and agreed to the settlement. He was exceptionally pleased, which means we've been assured our subsequent winnings this evening.”

The Agent leered mischievously at his companion, “Indeed, that is good news. Though, before you go congratulating yourself on how your plan of action panned out so successfully, I feel I must inform you, that really, you owe me for this one.”

Silva's eyes widened slightly with bemused bafflement, “Oh?”

“You quite seriously misjudged Miss Francis's character,” Bond informed, “I had to make a few adjustments to ensure her compliance.”

“Really? How interesting. And pray tell, just how did I fail here?”

“Miss Francis wasn't at all moved by empathy, she apparently thinks Gordon's prosecution hired me to blackmail her.”

“Ah, what an absolute shrew. Women can be quite unpredictable at the best of times. I suppose it
makes for a more fascinating dynamic in this battle of the sexes, hmm?” The blonde conceded, chuckling.

The Agent smirked, agreeing with the sentiment.

“So how did you handle this particular plot twist, my dear?”

“I decided to resist denying her accusations and allowed her to believe what she wanted. I led her to believe I would expose the whole elicit liaison to her company if she refused to comply.”

“Ah, and she feared her misconduct would cast her in a rather unfavourable light. Very clever of you, James, that's quick thinking on your feet! I'm impressed.”

Bond snorted.

“I'm thrilled I could live up to your expectations,” the Agent drawled sarcastically.

Silva grinned back at his companion devilishly in response, “You quite thrill me, my dear.”

At that moment, a Casino attendant appeared ending their conversation and led both men up to Corsenza's private parlour.

The high-ceilinged room was, if possible, even more decadent than the rest of the Casino. It featured refined marble flooring, intricate gold latticework down spiral columns, and furnishings of solid oak cushioned with chartreuse coloured Jacquard silk. The elegant ambiance of the room allowed for intimate conversation to occur around a central atrium with glass-panels that sparkled above a row of gaming tables.

The room teemed with Corsenza's associates and friends all hobnobbing and rubbing elbows, resplendently dressed and far too immersed in their cocktails and frivolity to pay any mind to the new arrivals. The service was seamlessly conducted by a crew of Carmine's finest, dressed in garish neckties and revealing one-pieces.

The whole effect was rather impressive, Bond considered gazing around. Casino Royale barely held a candle in comparison.

The man whom had led the undercover guests into the parlour tentatively approached a silver-haired debonair Italian standing near the center of the room. The Italian was flocked on either side by several attractive women and equally attractive men hanging off of him as if doing so somehow made them more important by association.

The attendant whispered something into the man's ear before turning to gesture toward Bond and Silva. The gentleman's gaze directed forward following the man's pointed finger and upon seeing the two men grinned widely. Excusing himself from his companions, the Italian streamlined a path towards his new arrivals; the crowd dispersing to allow his passage like the splitting of the Red Sea before the majesty of a god.

Corsenza approached his guests with arms spread wide, clasping both men in a familiar embrace. “Ah, benvenuto,” he greeted, placing a friendly peck on their cheeks.

“Welcome! Welcome my friends!”

Bond and Silva smiled congenially in return and provided Corsenza with their aliases.

“Signore Sandro,” he said directing his attention toward Silva, “I've heard the most fantastic rumours
of your successes this evening. Tell me, who is your fellow that has joined us tonight?"

"Who, John?" Silva responded with a playful gleam in his eye, "he is my partner of course."

"Ah, I see, 'partner', that term implies such a variety of meanings these days. Do you mean your compagno o il tuo amore?"

"Il mio amante, naturalmente," Silva replied ebulliently to his companion's unending chagrin, slipping a possessive arm around his waist.

"Si, buono! How metropolitano our times have become! Come, come, Signori!" He expressed with genuine warmth, gesturing for his two guests to follow him.

Silva winked at his companion impishly, clutching the Agent tightly to his side and Bond sighed inwardly as they were led to the tables in the center Atrium.

As the night wore on, both men sustained a high rate of wins in everything from blackjack to seven-card stud with the tacitly silent, compliant aide of Gordon's dealers.

"Sorprendente!" the Italian exclaimed with a mix of stupefaction and glee, "Signori, you've drained me! You must do me the honour of joining me for a celebrativo drink back at my humble abode!"

"Come, mio amici, mio amantes, and even you dogs and rapinatori," Corsenza announced, his jubilant rumbling tenor roaring over the din, "all of you come back to my place for drinks and divertimento!"

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'Humble abode', indeed, Bond snorted wryly as he glanced around at his surroundings.

The Mandarin Oriental Towers' penthouse was sleek in design with clean modern lines and dark sophisticated tastes. Overhead, dimmed track lights lit up the expansive condo; charcoal coloured rugs graciously covered the marble flooring bedecked with an eclectic assortment of artistic furnishings.

Corsenza's guests reclined on fashionable black leather sofas, resting their drinks atop delicate glass tables as they continued their conversations. The luminescent glow of the city below providing an elegant backdrop; visible thanks to the floor-to-ceiling windows accentuated by a long stretch of balcony, open to allow in the temperate Nevada air.

After several hours had passed, the desert sky shifted in colour from black and indigo to an entrancing array of soft slices of pink cutting through the orange horizon. The Agent observed the guests as the energy in the room slowly evolved into an easy, intoxicated air of sedation; a result of the endless supply of alcohol and the casual distribution of an ornate, silver tray upon which lay, neat, parallel lines of cocaine and a single gold-tipped, glass straw.

Silva was seated close beside Bond, overacting his role as paramour, much to the dismay of the Agent, ever the consummate actor, who suffered silently all the while playing his role with receptive acceptance. The weight of Silva’s arm around his shoulders shifted, forcing Bond to lean forward to accommodate a sliding hand behind him that intimately slithered around and glided up beneath his lapel. Splaying his hand, Silva stroked Bond's chest through the thin layer of his cotton wing tip shirt.

Across from the intimately connected men, Alfonso Corsenza sat beside Isabel De Luca and her lover Samuel Hutton who sat perched upon the sofa arm. The two were introduced as visiting friends hailing from San Antonio to see the sights of the sleepless city.
Isabel was absolutely delightful. Her stunning Dolce Swarovski sequined gown sparkled beautifully under the low lighting, rustling with her every move, while her short ebony hair framed her face with simple elegance, bobbing with her laughter. In contrast, the taciturn Hutton seemed unequivocally dull. It was clear he was merely an accentuating accessory to her notable presence. After one conversation gambit or another, Bond found himself quite enchanted with the woman.

To their host’s great amusement, Silva continued throughout the evening to become increasingly more demonstrative in his affections, and the Agent could only imagine it was in punitive retribution for displaying a rather clear preference for the dazzling De Luca.

A racket from across the room brought over a young attendant. He approached the seated group and leaned over to whisper something into Corsenza’s ear to which the Italian sighed with irritation.

“Scusami, Signori, Signora, but I must attend to a triviality that has arisen with one of my more, ah, how do I say, quarrelsome guests? Being a host can be such a chore!”

After the Italian had excused himself, Isabel smiled coyly up at Bond, leaning against Hutton’s knee, “So what brings you two gentleman across continent? Simply a laugh or work…?”

“A little of both,” Silva responded in lieu of his companion, “One ought never to miss an opportunity to mix business with a little pleasure.”

With exaggerated fondness the blonde leaned his head against the Agent's, “Wouldn't you agree, my dear?”

Tittering airily, Isabel regarded them with warmth.

“Well, you ‘lovebirds’, I must say, this has been an absolute treat. You English are every bit as lovely as they say you are,” she glanced pointedly at her companion on her left, “I only wish American men were as fascinating.”

Hutton glowered unhappily, uncomfortably jealous, “That's not a fair comparison.”

Silva eyed the pair’s matching pendants with a look of discerning admiration: one dark globe on the fellow’s tie pin, and one set in Isabel’s necklace. “May I just say, my dear, that your taste in jewelry is exquisite? How unique that the two of you share matching sets. May I ask who's the designer?”

“Oh, I splurged a little, they're custom made... what can I say? One must occasionally spoil their lover.”

“Indeed,” Silva concurred with a low purr and a wink, “mine is very spoiled.”

Isabel smiled demurely in return.

“You know, this may sound silly, but I have always had a certain preference that everyone should know exactly what's mine,” She explained, punctuating her words with added emphasis, leering at Hutton, “a girl gets bored with the same-old–same-old.”

“That's funny,” Hutton smirked, “I don't recall you being so bor–”

“Oh, don't be so full of yourself, Sammy, you hardly have much to brag about,” she interrupted chidingly, slapping his knee.

Ignoring her companion's dour, offended expression, Isabel leaned forward, cupping her hands around her mouth to stage whisper confidentially to her new friends, “My dears, if you've ever had
yourselves a romp with a boy cross continent, you know it's really nothing to write home about…”

“Is that so?” Bond asked with a hint of amusement.

“Oh yeah,” She snorted, with a dismissive twist of her wrist, “in my experience, every last one of them is rife with more complexes and insecurities than you can count-- and then they try to hide it with such silly machismo. The go about as if their cock is God’s gift to women when in reality they haven't the faintest idea how to really please a girl.”

“Ah, now, we don't want to impugn the poor lad's sense of pride, do we? He is very handsome after all,” Silva drawled with a flirtatious wink to unsettle the fuming man.

Isabel clapped her hands over her mouth in wicked delight.

“Darling! You are just fantastic!” she exclaimed, eyes sparkling as they regarded Silva, “I wish I could take you home with me instead.”

“I doubt your ‘flavour’ of the evening would have any inclination to take you up on that offer,” Hutton retorted, sneering as he crossed his arms defensively.

“So grumpy, my love! Can I take you nowhere?” Isabel teased with a hint of impatience, “I was just joking! I may be many things but I'm no home-wrecker.”

“I don't know, if you so fancy to, I'd welcome you to ‘wreck’ my home,” Bond smirked invitingly.

Isabel's fair cheeks coloured brightly, “My dears-- I just can't decide which of you is my new favourite!”

“Indeed, so witty you are, my darling, always a delight,” Silva remarked, vengefully nuzzling the juncture between Bond’s jaw and throat.

Isabel clicked her tongue in disappointment, “Tch, you two are just gorgeous! Such a waste!”

“I assure you, madame,” Silva slyly retorted, “It is not wasted.”

Nipping up the Agent's neck playfully, he darted a tongue into his companion's ear, “Would you not agree?”

Bond found his witty rejoinder suddenly lost as the man trailed his hand teasingly up the inner seam of his trousers coming perilously close to his groin.

“Cat got your tongue, love?” the blonde chuckled.

Subsequent responses sufficiently quelled under the onslaught of his partner's affectionate ministrations, the Agent groaned as he was forced to lean forward; crossing his legs in an attempt to conceal his growing arousal from the interested eyes of their audience.

Hutton muttered rudely under his breath and Isabel scowled at him.

“This is why I can't have nice things!” She spat out irritably, “Just when I'm having a little fun you spoil it for me with your provincial ignorance!”

“With them carrying on like–”

“Christ, Sam! Why don't you just get lost,” Isabel ordered in an irritated clipped tone as she lost all semblance of whatever patience remained with her partner.
The man stood from his perch, smoothing down his jacket coolly.

The pair shared a final, oddly silent, meaningful look in which the young woman seemed momentarily discomfited (perhaps apologetic?) before the young man, appearing decidedly offended, huffed loudly and stalked away.

Silva curiously watched the subtle exchange with a level of interest before Isabel recovered her composure and gazed back fondly at her friends; suddenly all glittering eyes and fervent warmth restored.

"'Good riddance to bad rubbish’ as you Brits say,” She remarked, rolling her eyes heavenward.

"Boys! All of them! And I always seem to wind up with one idiot or another. Are there any decent men out there anymore?” Isabel lamented

“One or two, I’d think,” Silva defended, grinning.

“Oh, I didn't mean, you two. You gentlemen are a wonderful exception,” She laughed holding out her hands, “But that's just my luck, isn’t it! All the best guys are either already taken or gay! Or both, I should know: I always fall for one type and find in the end I have to settle for the other.”

Isabel sighed with exasperation.

“Well, before I move on to the next one, at least,” She shrugged with a small laugh, “But, as they say, 'variety is the spice of life’.”

“You're well versed in adhering to quite a number of the old familiar maxims, aren't you,” Silva pointed out.

“It's true though,” Isabel defended, “I don't mean to come off as fickle or flaky, but really, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Guys always get away with playing the field and no one bats an eye; it seems rather unfair I shouldn't be afforded the same privilege. To men, we're all just another notch in their belt and they're congratulated by society. Women? We're called 'sluts'. They say we have equality, but I say that's a load of crap. I don't mean to sound cynical, but it is the truth.”

“Not that I have any room to argue on behalf of my own gender, but that is a rather broad generalization.”

“It is,” Isabel admitted simply, “But it can't vary that much in your culture-- I'm sure you've both seen your fair share of exactly what I'm talking about. You're lucky to have found each other amidst it all.

Silva chuckled, tightening his hold around his companion's shoulders, “I do count my blessings.”

“In my opinion,” She concluded, “I don't care where you go-- aside from a small minority-- by and large, men are mostly always either cads or morons.”

Bond sucked in a breath, wincing at their companion's adamant, cutting assessment.

“You must think I sound awfully bitter, but really, I'm rather a hopeless romantic,” Isabel sighed, “But... while I await my Prince Charming, I may as well have a bit of fun in between, yeah?”

“It seems you are a worldly woman,” Silva smiled, “I am sure you've grown quite accustomed to breaking many a mans’ heart in your time.”
“And why the hell shouldn't I? I don't mean to sound like a bitch, Sandro, but life is too short to worry about the little things. Why shouldn't I have fun while I can?”

“Love them and leave them, huh?” Silva laughed, “Quite a motto you live by, my dear.”

She grinned in response, and uncrossing her ankles, leaned forward as if sharing a secret for their ears only, “Answer me this: What's the use of living and breathing and carrying on in this endless monotony if you can't take pleasure where you find it?”

“It's the small things in life,” Bond responded with a charming smirk.

“Ah, she is a woman after your own heart, isn't she, my love?” Silva smiled, exposing a sliver of white teeth gleaming dangerously under the low light.

“Now, now, no need for jealousy,” Bond retorted with feigned affectation, “you know I only have eyes for you.”

Silva chuckled warmly in response against Bond's ear eliciting a shiver from his partner as the gentle motion rippled through him.

“Is that so? Why don't you remind me,” Silva whispered solicitously as he resumed his attentions, cunningly stroking a hand up the Agent’s thigh once more. Isabel's grin spread across her lovely face as she voyeuristically observed the intimate exchange; an intriguing flush settling on her high cheekbones.

Bond caught her eyes appraising him hungrily and with some amount of desperation he slid a hand down the length of the blonde's leg.

In an attempt to convey his annoyance, the Agent deliberately squeezed his amorous companion's knee with a sharp, firm amount of pressure; “Don't you think there are more, ah, appropriate places for this, darling?” he gritted out with a touch of desperation as Silva blatantly ignored his pointedly discouraging action, chuckling as he nuzzled his nose beneath the agitated man's tensed jaw.

“Oh, please, don't stop on my account,” replied Isabel, her girlish giggle ringing as light as a bell through the din.

Silva laughed, with wicked unapologetic amusement, caressing Bond’s upper thigh with a firm yet tender touch.

“Oh, you know I can't resist you, my dear.”

“I would rather you make an attempt,” Bond retorted, quite finished with Silva's exaggerated spectacle. The shortness in his tone instantly dropped any portrait of Bond as a permissive and indulgent lover, and by the sudden rigidity of the man attached to him, the Agent could sense immediate disapproval of his change in performance.

“Honestly, John, must you be such a killjoy? I had assumed we had discussed this, no?”

The Agent swallowed his irritation and quickly resumed the act by leaning deeply into Silva’s upright body.

“You know I only meant for us to save a little something for later,” he whispered, infusing flirtation and promise into his tone. Exacting his revenge, Bond brought a hand around back of his companion and combed his fingers through the other man’s surprisingly soft blonde locks, “...my dear.”
The spy had always possessed the capacity to deliver as well as he received.

Silva, with surprised pleasure, closed his eyes and nearly groaned at the sensation of those fingers dragging through his hair, nails grazing softly across his scalp, he sighed breathily, and to the Agent's unequivocal satisfaction fully surrendered to the moment.

Intrigued by the reaction, Bond experimentally allowed his fingers to trail downward and delicately skim past the man's neck. In response, Silva shivered with undeniable pleasure, his eyes shuttering closed.

"God, the things you do with those hands," he purred, barely audible, "the things I would do to you."

Unsurprisingly, Bond found himself stirred to a renewed arousal by this hinted, heated promise. His heart skipping a beat in his chest as he realized their role-playing; this act they played, had somehow explicitly evolved into something very real and very dangerous, very quickly.

"Is it getting warm in here?" Isabel slurred teasingly while fanning herself.

Discreetly, Bond leaned in and pressed his lips against his companion's ear whispering very quietly, "business."

Silva opened one eye and glared, "The moment our host returns you absolute bore."

Just then, Corsenza cleared his throat as he approached the seated group, alerting his companion's to his return.

"Am I interrupting something?" he inquired, raising an eyebrow as the two men composed themselves under his bemused scrutiny.

"Mm, I really don't know," Isabel replied distractedly, face yet flushed an alluring, rosy hue as the Italian settled himself back down in his seat beside her.

"Nothing of much consequence," Bond deflected dismissively.

"Ouch," Silva uttered; wounded to the core.

Isabel tittered nervously, eyeing her companion's speculatively before passing Corsenza a fresh drink delivered by a passing attendant. The blonde pouted at his partner, brushing his knuckle's beneath the man's chin and the aggravated Agent pulled away from the gesture, grieving him.

"Why must you hurt me this way, my love?"

The Agent huffed, leveling a glare at his exasperating companion to which the blonde merely rolled his eyes.

Detecting tension in the air between his two guests, the Italian furrowed his brow.

"What have I missed, mio amore?" He pressed insistently of his companion with an inflection of earnest curiosity, "Fill me, if you'd be so kind, Isabel. I hate being left out."

"I can't say for sure, Alfie," she mused, "but I think I've just played witness to a lovers spat."

Corsenza's laugh rolled from deep within his body, "Trouble in paradise? I remember those days. But alas, diamonds can only buy one so much."
Bond raised an eyebrow, “Your wife, Signore?”

“No, no,” Corsenza grinned, “an old amante. La mia sposa is over there.”

Corsenza gestured to a slender, poised and refined young woman flocked by a number of eager men. She appeared to hold her own with an imperial grace as she humoured her attentive audience, unheeding of her husband’s evaluative glare.

“She's a beauty, no? A real fox.”

“But, and I mean with exception to you, mia cara,” he continued with a nod to an amused Isabel, “the fairer sex are... as a whole? More of a hassle than equates to their overall value. I imagine it must be so much simpler to just do as you, Signori. If only men had le curve and le grandi tette della donna!”

“Well, apparently, it's not all sunshine and flowers all of the time for that crowd either,” Isabel argued, nodding over at Silva and Bond with an insinuating smirk, “As we've just observed.”

Silva shrugged at the mild, unoffensive denouncement, agreeing, “Men and women alike pose their own unique struggle.”

“I'll drink to that,” she conceded wryly, raising her drink in a toast.

From across the room, the gentlemen surrounding Corsenza's wife burst into laughter, the sound echoing across the vast hall, and the man himself seemed to relapse into gloomy thoughtfulness.

“L’amore is a false syndrome. Firing synapses, hormones, chemicals,” he spat bitterly, his cocktail sloshing carelessly in his hand, “it is all just a naïve and fanciful tema of the poets in fin dei conti, no?”

“At the end of the day,” Silva contended with calm and clear determination, “are we not all just slaves to the heart in one way or another? The world can't ever be enough for one whom lacks that essential motivo di esistenza.”

Bond stared curiously at his companion wondering how much of this statement was simply a part of the game and how much could be legitimately contributed to his own personal philosophy. Silva peered over at him with a small, sly smirk and winked, dispelling the Agent's burgeoning theory. A psychopath has no true conception of sentiment after all.

Bond sighed with a modicum of relief.

“My dear, Alfonso,” Isabel mollified softly, reaching over to pat the top of the agitated Italian's hand, “Love is the ultimate motivo di esistenza. It is just as Sandro says. Can you honestly say you've never been stirred by passion of the heart?”

 Corsenza chuckled kindly, tipped over into sentiment as all harsh old men are under the purview of sweet young women, “Ah, when we are young and our hearts are yet open books... love is such a 'many splendoured thing' as they say. You are yet still a little lamb, mia cara, and you do not yet know of true heart break. I pray you remain ignorant of it, lest it sour you as it has myself.”

“Oh, Alfie, you speak as though you're so unhappy,” Isabel huffed, “But look around you: You're surrounded by all of your devoted friends!”

“Devoted to the divertimento I am able to supply to them,” The Italian muttered darkly, “And I am
quite the provider."

“That's unworthy of you to say,” Isabel objected, frowning.

“And where is la mia sposa, hm?” he demanded, “Where is any woman that would prefer my company to that of those younger and more handsome?”

“For one such as yourself, Signore Corsenza, one would be inclined to think you should be able to afford that kind of luxury without going to any great lengths,” Bond remarked smartly. Silva fought back a cringe, inwardly groaning with dismal exasperation as he wondered what on earth had compelled his companion to speak so bluntly. Shooting a sharp, disgusted glare at his unperturbed companion, he turned back to face the Italian with an expression of deep remorse.

“John does not intend to be crass, Signore,” Silva apologetically explained, quickly attempting to patch over the insult with as much persuasive damage-control as he could muster, “You must excuse him. Once in a blue moon, the poor dear let's his mouth carry on without his head—”

“No, no!” Corsenza chuckled, holding up his hand to halt his guest's solicitous effort to diffuse the potentially volatile blunder made at his expense with a measure of good grace.

To Silva's astonished bafflement, instead of taking offense, the man in question grinned delightedly, regarding him with open amazement, “Your lover is quite succinct! Such cheek! No wonder you like him! In my day, I was always quite fond of the fiery ones.”

With a great deal of relief, the blonde turned back to his partner regarding him with a fond grin.

“Ahh, 'age cannot whither nor custom stale his infinite variety',” Silva purred indulgently, leaning in to kiss the Agent's cheek; rough with a shadow of early-morning stubble.

“To answer your question, Signore,” Corsenza replied peering over at the recalcitrant Agent, “Though I am richer than Midas and money can buy a man many things, it has been my experience that love is not among them.”

Bond bowed his head, listening quietly as the Italian explained himself.

“I would trade all of my material possessions to obtain a measure of what you have, il mio amico,” Corsenza intoned wistfully, “After all, when we take our final breath, wealth obtained, material goods— what does any of it matter?”

“I think it wouldn't, you can't take a house into the afterlife,” Isabel added thoughtfully.

“But who can assert with any true confidence what comes after, mia cara,” the Italian countered, latching onto the tangent, “Superstitious nonsense, the lot of it! What verifiable evidence do we have that there is anything at all?”

“Proof or no, I think it's depressing to imagine it's all, 'poof', gone,” she frowned, “I like to think there has to be something out there at the end.”

“I'll believe it when I see it.”

The Agent nodded, agreeing.

“Indeed, I would require a good deal of empirical data, myself,” he voiced before glancing back at Isabel, “You speak from a rather spiritual perspective, are you religious?”
“One doesn’t have to look to a book to feel like there must be something else outside of this existence,” She defended, “Don't you think all those documented cases made by those on the brink of death claiming to see a 'light at the end of the tunnel' could mean anything?”

Bond smirked, “We are encroaching upon rather sensitive territory I’m afraid, and I do not mean to discredit you, but I am fairly certain there have been a number of scientists that have already published articles detailing how that 'light' is simply a chemical process as the brain shuts down.”

“I think it's very limiting to keep yourself from allowing for alternative possibilities.”

“Well, this is all wading off into far too much murky existentialism for my taste,” Silva remarked drolly, “Anyone else care for another drink?”

“I can call for an attendant,” Corsenza suggested, “Could you use a top off?”

The blonde nodded, “That would be excellent.”

“My glass is looking a little sad,” Isabel chimed in, “I wouldn't refuse a refill.”

“Shall I order a fresh one for you as well, John?” The Italian offered.

“I could be convinced for another round,” Bond admitted, grateful for the change in subject.

“Now, John,” Silva chastised, “don't you think you've met your limit for the night? We really ought to keep that liver of yours intact for a few more years yet, hmm?”

Bond frowned, pulling away irritably as his companion recommenced his affectionate petting, “Please inform me when you've decided you're not my mother.”

Playfully, Silva yanked him back into his grasp, securing his arm around his defiant partner and sighed mournfully.

“I thought you enjoyed having me tell you what to do,” the blonde innocently defended before shrugging at their companions. “He usually does,” he explained grinning devilishly.

“Are you quite finished?”

“Alright, my dear, I'll stop embarrassing you in front of our friends,” Silva pacified, placing one last prolonged kiss at the side of his partner's scowling mouth before reluctantly releasing him.

“Young love,” the Italian laughed jovially with an air of underlying nostalgia, “you do make an old man reconsider his life's motivations. Ah, but what can you do?”

As the conversation progressed into the morning, lively repartee settled into comfortable comradery with easy effort and copious rounds of brandy. Eventually, Isabel grew weary of conversation and politely excused herself. Bond confessed he was sorry to see her go to which she laughed with kind apology and leaned over to kiss him on his cheek goodnight.

At long last, Corsenza leaned forward in his seat succumbing to curiosity, hands clasped beneath his chin, “So you must tell me, Signore Sandro, how is it you managed to steal all my money?”

Silva quirked a sly grin, “Do you want the long or the short of it?”

The older man, intrigued, replied carefully, “I will leave that to your discretion, Signore.”

Bond was aware his partner was, like himself, particularly innovative when it came to improvisation,
but they had not been spared a moment to discuss this segment of their evening’s itinerary in any detail. Collecting his momentary anxiety, the Agent leaned back in his seat, awaiting the eventual fabrication.

“Simply put: we rigged the games.”

Bond startled jarringly before quickly replacing his notable alarm with a facade of cool indifference. Apparently Silva intended to reveal the truth. *Odd move.*

“Lo sapevo! Scellerato! Oh, Buon Dio, sei un ladro! You devil!” Corsenza roared with delighted astonishment.

“You villain! I knew it! No one is that good. Not even me, Signore! Now tell me, to what end would a clever man, such as yourself, willingly take such a risk only to later reveal his evil deeds?”

“Signore, my utmost apology, but it was necessary. You possess something of vital significance to my partner and myself. I was under the advisement that the only way to procure your esteemed attention would be to impress you with a certain finesse on the tables.”

“Is that so? In that case, you've drained me, Signore!”

Silva peered at the man judiciously, “…I do not mean your money. I have little desire for a single penny from your respectable fortune.”

Corsenza narrowed his eyes suspiciously, “You would be the first, then, my friend.”

“You will find,” The blonde stated with casual irrelevance, “I have deposited my winnings back into your account.”

“I don't care a whit about the money, Sandro,” the Italian expressed with ambivalence, “You could keep your earnings and consider them well-won simply for having duped me!”

Silva grinned, abandoning his empty glass onto the table and folding his hands into his lap.

“What I want, is to know how you pulled off this grandiose feat,” the Italian demanded, “I hold considerable influence in Casino Carmine, I can't fathom it would have been so very simple.”

“Indeed,” Silva acknowledged, “I paid a favour to a friend for a mutual acquaintance in exchange for assistance.”

Corsenza snorted.

“Of course, that corrupt, conniving, piccolo bastardo!” He laughed fondly, “Good old Max, I should have figured he would have something up his sleeve to save his hide. I presume you somehow exacted a way to force that crackpot lawyer to settle.”

“Of course,” Silva drawled. Bond remained motionless, an impassive spectator, watching the scene unfold before him with interest.

“So what is it I could possibly have that would compel you to go to such lengths?”

“The name of a contact. You see, I'm in a certain line of business and I am available for hire.”

“Ahh, my slippery friend,” Corsenza smirked waving his finger, “now I understand. But precisely how are you qualified, Signore Sandro?”
The blonde smiled enigmatically. “Allow me to reintroduce myself.”

With dark eyes gleaming slyly, he offered his hand to the Italian, diamond cufflinks glimmering in the dimmed glow, “My name is Raoul Silva.”

Corsenza’s eyes widened perceptibly, gaping with mixed recognition and a healthy dose of fear, “My many apologies Signore Silva, had I known—”

“Of course you will think better than to partake in any…idle gossip of our dealings here, my friend,” Bond’s companion softly warned, a dangling threat, veiled in the subtext of his tone.

“I think my…” Corsenza swallowed thickly, “…associate knows certain parties that might benefit greatly from employing such a man of your notable talents. I assume you desire a reference from myself for introduction?”

“That is, indeed, a generous offer, Signore.”

Bond couldn’t help but wonder what purpose was achieved in wasting so much time if his partner only needed to utter his name to exact such efficient results. Then again, he had not been aware of Silva's considerable sphere of influence until this moment; the absolute thrall he held over the criminal underclass on such a vast, global scale.

With clutching anxiety, it occurred to him just how easily he was leading this dangerous mastermind to a veritable powerhouse of destruction, bent on, and more than capable of burning down the world from the inside out. Of course, Bond considered that, if Silva had been so inclined to find the heart of this obscure, malevolent terrorist organization, he hardly needed a guise to join them.

Somewhere, he figured he was missing something crucial, a vital clue that would shed some light on the criminal's mysterious agenda and he could only hope that it would reveal itself sooner rather than later.

“My dear,” Silva intoned with mild amusement, disrupting Bond from his reserved contemplation as they sat across from one another in the back of their limousine, “you seem distracted.”

“If you knew that your name would work as both password and resume, then why exactly,” Bond asked curiously, “did you withhold this from Corsenza up until the last possible moment?”

It was telling to Silva that this was an obfuscation and somewhere underneath lay a different question altogether, nevertheless, he would humour him, “My friend, this is why you do not make a very good spy.”

Bond regarded him patiently, absent of having taken any offense.

“The problem with you, James, is that you tend to seek out the path of least resistance. When always looking at the bigger picture one tends to miss the minutia, and that, my friend, is where one finds the most penetrating and volatile of secrets.”

“And what exactly is this secret?”

“Your little girlfriend was a particularly fascinating woman, was she not?”

Bond furrowed his brow, “Was she?”
“Don't feign stupidity, James, it doesn't flatter you. She charmed you. You were dazzled.”

The agent regarded his companion with unremitting dissidence, “I would say that I detect a tone of jealousy, but I'll spare you.”

“How quaint a supposition,” Silva drawled flatly, “Try, if you are able, ‘Double-Oh-Seven’, to follow along, then you will understand precisely why I had to wait until I was certain after gaining Corsenza's trust that we spoke business with him and him alone.”

“You have center stage, Silva, go ahead, impress me,” Bond snapped tiredly.

“I don’t suppose you noticed something particular about your lady friend’s necklace and her companion’s tie pin? They certainly weren’t onyx or opal or spinel…”

“Wired,” Bond concluded.

“Very good,” Silva mockingly commended.

“I ran a check on our way out and as it turns out Corsenza’s friends are Agent Marlena Simone and her partner Agent Dean Tyler of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They’ve been embedded in Carmine for some time investigating a racketeering case…something about counterfeit money, fraud, narcotics, etcetera, etcetera, ad infinitum, unimportant…It doesn't affect us in the least, however, I imagined it might be counterproductive for our purposes if I were to clue the FBI, and by extension the CIA, that I was in town with an ill-placed name drop.”

“I see.”

“Of course you do. In hindsight. Yet, I point all of this out for another reason. You see, James, for you to have missed all of this… It is irresponsible. You run about like a bulldog in a china shop! This is a clear example of how you miss crucial details, details that if overlooked can lead to mission failure and that’s not acceptable, my dear,” the blonde chastised.

Dear God, he’s worse than Mallory, the Agent groaned inwardly.

“You’ll have to excuse me, I was distracted by the giant squid wrapping its way around me all night,” Bond retorted sarcastically.

Silva smiled wanly, “I will try very hard not to take offense by the comparison.”

“I think, considering our objectives, there were more pressing matters–”

“You trivialized your surroundings taking everything at face value single-mindedly,” the blonde rebuked with a snort, “incredibly sloppy.”

“You can't possibly have expected me to make that jump in logic,” Bond defended, irritation clearly visible in his face, “in view of our mission, scrutinizing the finer details of a few pieces of jewelry did not seem especially significant.”

“There lies the problem! You see, but you do not observe.”

“I'm a spy, not a goddamned detective.”

“Excuses,” Silva rebuked with a wave of his hand. “A spy is always a detective. You know better than to believe otherwise. For you not to be ever suspicious, ever vigilant…what would our dear M have said?”
“There's no way of knowing, is there,” the Agent spat back, his knuckles white where he gripped the edge of the seat. The blonde noted his companion’s gradually dissolving composure and switched strategies.

“James,” Silva droned, heaving a world-weary sigh, “all of this? It’s so terribly dull. Your blame and anger? These non-verbalized accusations directed towards me? You need to let it go. I am not your enemy.”

Bond tensed, scowling at the man, “Then what are you?”

Silva glanced out the window, his reflection staring back at him against the whirring passage of the outside world.

“You ask so many questions,” Silva cryptically answered, “but never the right ones.”

“Then what are the questions I ought to be asking?” Bond pressed.

“Ask yourself, ‘what am I going to do when MI-6 has no more use for me? What will happen when they figure I am too high a risk? What will happen when I become irrelevant?’”

Bond listened quietly, a lead knot forming and twisting within his gut.

“You're a smart man with many gifts, James, and I know at the most fundamental thermal core of your self-conception you’ve already asked yourself these questions. You ask yourself every time you accept a new assignment, every morning you awake and take that first conscious breath reminding you that, for today, you're still alive and you wonder if this is the day that your purpose,” Silva's eyes closed, “…will become extraneous.”

“The most irreconcilable issue with all of this is you've allowed yourself, regardless of your intent, far too much notoriety, or rather among those you hunt; infamy.”

“Is that your professional opinion,” Bond inquired dryly.

“My opinion, as it stands, is that you are not so much an effectual spy as you are a licensed assassin on the side of the SIS,” he mused, “Always working for the angels.”

“And what side are you on?”

“My own.”

“That's ambiguous,” Bond pointed out. Silva peered at the Agent with deliberate intent; undeterred by the man's stubborn defensiveness.

“What would you do if you didn't work for MI-6? You can't even imagine an alternative, can you? And yet, you struggle with this fatalism, with these unsolvable questions…” Silva pressed.

“How much longer will you suffer the tedium of rigid order? Will you wait until you’ve lost all drive or sense of purpose? Don’t you wonder what will happen after it all comes crashing down around you? What will you do, James, at the very end, if you live? Will you wait that long? Or…”

Bond frowned, “…or will I defect? Is that what you're getting at? Honestly play the role of ‘Rogue Agent’?”

Silva smirked. “You’ve considered it though, haven’t you, my dear?”

Assuming an obscure, inscrutable expression, Bond peered at him with his cold blue eyes; mute and
impassable. Silva waited patiently…nothing.

“Well I suppose no answer at all is not really a rejection.”

Again, his companion was unresponsive. Clearly he had struck a cord for the man to have shut down so finitely.

Silva's smile was cheerless, an ominous promise. “Winter is coming, and when that inevitable day arrives and your world is upended, you will be forced to make a choice.”

The rest of their passage to the hotel was tensely silent, Bond frozen, Silva closed off, distracted by the passing bright neon lights of the city outside his window. When at last they arrived at their hotel and took to their separate accommodations, Bond collapsed down into a chair by the bed, profoundly exhausted.

He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes.

The man had not attempted to persuade or indoctrinate. They were, in essence, just questions…however stirring and unsettling, they were valid.

Not that long ago Raoul Silva…no, Tiago Rodriguez, had asked himself these very same questions. He had trusted blindly in his country, in MI-6, in…M. In the end he had been betrayed. Sacrificed.

Since the events at Skyfall, or maybe before that, when M had ordered the shot and he'd fallen into the great abyss…or if he was honest with himself even before that…Bond had with great strength of will, repressed these questions, these damning truths.

 Forced to face the end of his days Bond would be pressed to consider an alternative…to make the unavoidable choice. Leaning forward in his chair, he surrendered, collapsing his head into his hands at his knees.

00

“M is pissed,” Q emphasized, glaring pointedly at Bond over the rim of his black-framed glasses through the monitor, “and that’s without even knowing the half of it! You're going to owe me for this…I've been covering your arse, playing off that you've been compliant this entire time.”

“I appreciate your help, Q. I know I've put you in a rather precarious position,” Bond sighed with some amount of genuine apology, “how have you managed thus far?”

“I had to invent something believable from what little Intel you’ve given me. I weaved together a story about you being kidnapped or something like that in Las Vegas to explain why you've been incommunicado,” Q explained with a roll of his eyes, “but really, 007, this whole ‘losing touch’ act? This secrecy? Misdirecting our surveillance track…amputating our feeds? I cannot even fathom how you've been capable of doing so considering your utter technological incompetence, let alone for what reason.”

Q sighed loudly, “What game are you playing at?”

“This is not some simple cut and dry mission.”

With a relenting sigh, the Agent peered at the other man and decided to confess at least to a half-truth: “I've had to search for help on the outside and of course the... core issue of the matter is of a rather delicate nature,” Bond informed with sparing generalization.
“I need you to trust me Q. I need you to persuade M to be patient. Tell him I've obtained a sure lead, however, I need to remain deep undercover and cannot risk any exposure.”

Both men regarded each other silently through the computer monitor.

“That's it,” Q replied pausing to suppress the knot of irritation he felt in his stomach, “that's all you're going to reveal?”

There was no response.

“That's so bloody vague!” barked Q as he threw his hands up in frustration nearly upsetting the contents of his favourite mug. “And you want me to improvise details for the sake of pacification? I'm a coder not a goddamn raconteur!”

“You're quite imaginative, Q, don't underestimate yourself.”

The Quartermaster mutely studied the Double-Oh Agent, considering his options, and then groaned at his eventual decision.

“God, I hate you. I'm going to, without doubt, get fired for this. I sure hope to high hell you know what you're doing.”

Passively listening, hidden from view, Silva chuckled as Q blipped from the screen.

“I like him.”

Bond shook his head with exasperation and leaned back in the seat of their chartered plane, flying them to Beulk, Belgium, to meet up with Corsenza's associate.

“Do we know anything about this fellow?”

“Very little I’m afraid, Corsenza is a discreet business man. His associate goes by the name ‘Jakov’. We are to rendezvous with one of his men tomorrow at precisely 1400 hours just behind the Hotel Aldhem and from there we will be chauffeured to an undisclosed location for our meeting.”

“Doesn't the excessive secrecy of it all seem a bit foreboding?”

Silva's expressionless demeanour did nothing to reassure the Agent.

“Do we have any idea if Corsenza's recommendation will be enough payment to ensure his compliance?”

“If it’s not enough I’m sure he will inform us exactly what he requires as compensation,” Silva responded with cool detachment, “and regardless, we will pay it.”

Bond stared outside mutely, a knot twisting tensely within his chest, and watched the passage of wispy gray clouds as they travelled across the bleak sky.

Chapter End Notes
1. Señores, Puedo obtener más a beber: Gentlemen, can I get you another drink?

2. Dos más de lo mismo: Two more of the same.

3. compagno o il tuo amore: Companion or lover?

4. Il mio amante, naturalmente: My lover, naturally.

5. Sorprendente: Surprising

6. mio amici... mio amantes...rapinatori...divertimento: My friends, my lovers, robbers, diversion (in an entertaining context)

7. le grandi tette della donna: big tits of women.

8. fanciful tema of the poets in fin dei conti: fanciful notions of the poets at the end if the day.

9. motivo di esistenza: reason for existence

10. Lo sapevo! Scellerato! Oh, Buon Dio, sei un ladro: I knew it! Wicked! Oh, Good God, I knew you were a thief!
Chapter 3

From the moment their car pulled up in front of the seemingly deserted warehouse, Silva sensed this would not be a simple negotiation. There was more than just an arctic chill in the air; their every movement seemed to pluck at the invisible strings of tension that had gradually developed.

Both men exited the vehicle following their brute of a chauffeur and walked towards an ominous black doorway. Once inside the hollow building they were met by a coarse, louche Russian man who possessed a mean acuteness that made it immediately transparent that he would not be prone to easy compliance.

“Tovarisch, Silva,” Jakov greeted with a thick accent and a malevolent smile, he stroked his wiry black beard with his profusely scarred sinewy hand.

“You have some nerve, moi drug, you cannot just bluster your way into my operations and intimidate me as you've done with Corsenza, you marinovanny vethiy khuy.”

“Tut-tut! Such a vulgar way you have of addressing a friend!” Silva chided.

“Before you get ahead of yourself, Jakov, perhaps you ought to consider just what the 'marinated old dick' you're speaking to is capable of,” Bond's companion icily warned. The Agent cringed inwardly from behind his partner as the Russian roared with a hearty guffaw, slapping his thick thigh.

“Oh, tovarisch, I am so scared! Look, can you see me tremble?” Their irate host spat on the ground bitterly, “What can you do?”

“Everything has already been taken from me! Why do you think I have exiled my base to such a trivial country? You can take nothing from me but my life, and not even Mother Russia could do that, and I will say from past experience it's an awful business trying to extract information from a corpse…I have nothing you can use against me, nothing to lose.”

Silva flatly examined the bald, burly Russian, “Nothing you say…hmm?”

“What do I have left, tovarisch? What do you see,” Jakov questioned as he waved his arm around the empty building to emphasize his point.

“A decrepit building, some prispeshniki, a useless client or two? All I have left of true value is what resides in here,” Jakov smirked, tapping his skull with a gnarled stub of a finger.

“You know who I am and what I can offer you. You wish to rebuild the infrastructure of your network. You require a hefty sum of liquid currency to recoup your losses. I can supply you with all of this,” Silva informed with a wave of his hand, “I can write you a cheque or forward a sum into your accounts with a push of a button, you need merely say.”

Jakov narrowed his eyes speculatively though allowed the man to continue.

“So let us negotiate. You have what I need and I have what you need in vast quantities. A fair exchange.”

“Nyet! Nyet! Not so easy, comrade, I do not barter with strangers without a secure contract and I do not make contract if I do not have trust…” he explained his face twisting into a feral expression.
Asimov, would you kindly bring out our new friends?”

Bond watched in dawning horror as Jakov’s man came from the back of the crumbling warehouse parading in front of him two limping, bruised, and filthy men restrained by heavy chains and smeared with crusted blood.

He recognized them immediately as two MI-6 agents who had gone simultaneously MIA months prior, stationed in Belarus and Beirut respectively. Agents Donner and Troy were presumed dead; two more paltry casualties lost in the line of duty; auctioned to the enemy for the greater good. Donner was a young recruit whom Bond had only ever met in passing while the other he had once worked with in South Africa: Aiden Troy, 004.

Asimov pushed both men roughly to their knees.

“Tell me, Agent Troy, who exactly is this man here,” Jakov inquired, pointing at Bond. Gazing weakly up at the Agent, 004 blinked in recognition. It was obvious he had sustained the greater abuse of the two as he swayed in exhausted agony.

Attempting to loyally preserve Bond’s identity he looked down, “I– I don’t–”

Jakov paced over to where the man knelt, and bashed him in the mouth with his gleaming DD4 Dostovei.

“I will ask you nicely one more time, Double-Oh-Four, tell me who this man is,” the brutish Russian demanded in a clipped, impatient tone.

Troy looked up at Bond with grim defeat, from where he’d been forced to his elbows with the impact of the blow. His lip split and swelling, blood and spit dripped in a dark strand to the muddy earth below.

Maintaining his composure of dissimulate calm, Bond appraised the man coldly, “Do as he’s asked of you and tell him my name, Double-oh-four.”

Troy matched his gaze with questioning eyes, waiting for 007 to prompt him on whether he was to improvise.

“He already knows. Confirm it,” Bond commanded plainly.

“B–Bond. J–James Bond…Agent 007.”

“Agent Bond, secret service spy of MI-6, but of course, I didn’t need this man's confirmation. I admit, I was curious as to the mystery partner of tovarisch Silva, so I did a little research of my own by scanning the surveillance footage of my associate.”

“I couldn't help but think you looked vaguely familiar…” the Russian continued, “'Lo and behold', of course! You’re the very same Agent who originally took down my competitor in Moscow--which, to be fair, was really nice of you, I thought I should send you a thank-you note! But then you made a very, very poor decision and turned your sights on my organization! I knew it was you who hunted me like a dog through Volgograd, though you had no idea of my identity!”

Jakov laughed dryly and without humour.

“And now, here you are again! Though I scratch my head, Mister Bond, and I ask myself, just how does it come to be that comrade Silva finds himself in league with a Double-Oh Agent? Is it true what Corsenza tells me? That you've turned traitor? Tch! From the start I cannot believe it and I
hesitate to do so now. Is it all a farce? What is your game, I wonder. Understand, I do not doubt tovarisch Silva's allegiances, and he apparently buys this rubbish story you give. So I think, I trust one man, should I give the other the benefit of the doubt? Such a conundrum!”

“Having never been apart of Her Majesty's Royal Secret Service, Double-Oh-Division, I shall educate you on the reasons as to why I am in partnership with Raoul Silva,” Bond explained with curt irritation. “There is no retirement plan. No pension to collect. Well... of course there is, that's part of the attraction, but no one ever collects it. One either dies in service or is purposefully disposed of before retirement.”

“Is that so Mister Bond? How interesting, you argue that you’ve seen the light and are avoiding this fate by turning vengeful expatriate?”

“Our interests run parallel to those of your associates. I have bled for MI-6 and it is time for them to bleed in return.”

Agent Donner gritted his teeth as he listened, his eyes burning with a sense of betrayal. On the other hand, Troy had shifted upward and gazed thoughtfully at the other Agent; the old veteran growing wise to the ploy.

Jakov smiled malevolently as he regarded the blonde. “You don't mind if I organize a little demonstration to verify your partner's integrity?”

“By all means,” Silva levelly permitted.

“I will negotiate only if Bond complies with my little test. If he refuses then it is clear he is liar. I do not like liars, tovarisch Silva, and I am sure you feel likewise.”

Jakov turned to face the silent Agent.

“I leave you a choice, Mister Bond. Show MI-6 just how little you care for them. I want you to pick which agent you wish to live and which to die. You see I have always been fond of clarity and making one's position known. I will take video of you assassinating one while the other shall be your messenger. We will return him to MI-6 and he’ll give them this video.”

Bond steeled himself as the Russian circled him like a vulture. All eyes were on them.

“If you refuse to comply, I will invite your partner to break your knees to punish you for your sins and we will return all of you alive to MI-6. You will of course be maimed and your mission a failure, but at least you will have not killed a comrade…”

“Your friend, Silva and I will negotiate alone,” Jakov explained casually as he paced around the frozen Double-Oh. “He having lost only a deceitful cohort and having learned his lesson to be more conscientious when picking future partners. If you do comply, which I have considered you might anyway in order to ensure your mission's success, then you live with the guilt and return to your Queen and Country in dishonour. You see, I will have lost nothing, having secured in my arrangement with Silva certain protections from any inevitable consequence at having revealed my associate.”

“If it means nothing to you and you intend to negotiate with Silva regardless, then does this not seem needless,” Bond asked, narrowing his eyes.

“Are you implying sentiment toward these fellows? Are they still your brothers in arms or are they extensions of the machine you claim you wish to see burn? Your choice.”
Bond could sense Silva's searing gaze at the back of his head as he hesitated.

“Your men stripped us of our weapons before meeting with you. They are in possession of a M9 Beretta, a Walther PPK, as well as a small MOD Triton club knife. I will require the PPK.”

Agent Donner gaped in alarm, defiantly struggling against his bindings, as Bond approached the kneeling Agents in a calm and orderly fashion.

“Damn you, Bond, you traitor,” he cursed.

Troy trained his eyes on the Agent in order to subtly express his pity before lowering his head; accepting his fate with dignity.

The sun peaked through the heavy clouds overhead and cast a striking ray of sunshine over the field behind the warehouse, ensconcing Beulk in a moment of warm tranquility.

Bond coolly raised the PPK, leveling the glistening barrel just above 004's eyes before pulling the trigger.

Bond exchanged a few final messages with MI-6's Quartermaster before they disabled the transmission. M had assessed the situation bleakly. The only way in which to secure 007's assignment would be to inform the media of this footage thereby exposing him for treason. This was the only strategic stabilizer feasible at this juncture.

Bond was aware of M’s understanding of the situation, that it was a potential career-ending move…if he survived. Silva had accepted this decision from a tactical angle yet bemoaned the subsequent eye that would have to be dodged from this point on as his partner would be officially labelled as a traitor to all the most note-worthy international bureaus of intelligence.

Jakov's associate, the blonde learned, was the face of one of many money-laundering operations that connected to the central hub of the coders' network. The man's name was Henry Glasgow, an expat from California, the owner of the Glasgow-Vela Highrise Spa and Hotel in Brussels.

It was an unfortunate situation that required Silva to divest MI-6 of Agent Donner as well, but he had seen faces and heard names. Sending the video on anonymously was all that could be done. Bond would eventually put two and two together, but for the meantime, Silva shrugged, it didn't suit his purposes for the Agent to know.

Silva laughed to himself. The Russian had considered himself safe in Silva's association, but would soon find in less than 12 hours, somewhere in Fleurus, a knife would slice through his carotid artery and leave him to bleed out.

The following morning, Silva realized his companion was MIA and went to investigate.

It took very little time for him to discover Bond's whereabouts; not incredibly surprised to find the man had escaped up to the roof of their Hotel, and sat; perched on the ledge overlooking the city, a bottle of Macallan within arms length still covered in a brown paper bag. No glass. Casually, the blonde noted the man's same trousers and wrinkled oxford shirt from yesterday, unbuttoned half-way and hanging open. It was evident he'd either never changed or never slept.

“Are you just going to stand there,” Bond slurred, swaying ever so slightly, “or you going to have a
bloody drink?”

007’s sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, light gray jacket tossed carelessly over one shoulder, and his stainless steel Omega shone under the glaring sun. He stretched his aching limbs and watched with glassy eyes as the enshrouding silver sheets rolled in from the North.

With admiration and a certain measure of desire, Silva inhaled deeply, and slowly strolled over to sit beside his companion. James Bond was an art form unto himself, he mused.

Silva grabbed the neck of the bottle and brought it to his lips taking a generous mouthful of the alcohol, the oaky amber liquid burning wonderfully all the way down, it’s spreading a heat coursing throughout his body.

“Aged 12 Years?…very decent. I recognize the brand, of course. Feeling nostalgic, hmm?”

No response came from the man who seemed lost in thought and Silva continued quietly reflective, “She would have said you couldn’t have saved him. You can't save everybody, my friend.”

Bond looked up at him pointedly, drawn back to life, “I realize that.”

“Drinking away the hero-complex then, clearly,” Silva remarked following the other man’s gaze out at the skyline. Bond grabbed the bottle back, his hand dragging lazily across the top of the other man's knuckles.

Silva watched as the man cavalierly downed a sizable portion of the contents and rolled his head back, shutting his eyes; the blonde's gaze fixed to the bobbing of Bond’s bare throat as he swallowed.

“Either that or wallowing in remorse,” he mused before changing his mind, “No, but that's not quite you, is it?”

Bond reopened his glazed and bloodshot eyes to peer at the man beside him, slow on the uptake due to a decent amount of alcohol coursing through his veins, “What isn't?”

“You know as well as I, that MI-6 pulled that trigger.”

The Agent sighed tiredly without response and Silva reclined back, his arms supporting him from behind.

“But then of course why not…‘the end justifies the means’…as they say. It's their slogan. No apology. No remorse,” he intoned half to himself with a touch of crystal bitterness, “but then…‘the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few’…”

From the overcast sky, a gentle breeze picked up promising an oncoming cold front. Bond downed the rest of the bottle and pitched it outward, both men watching with satisfaction as it shattered in a sparkling explosion over the concrete below.

“…or the one,'” the Agent finished.

“Or the one,” Silva agreed.

00

The Glasgow-Vela Highrise Spa and Hotel had one hell of a private pool up on the penthouse level. The glowing LEDS, outlined the rectangular tiers of the ceiling, casting a blue hue over the vast
After hours of discreetly placing tracks in the system of their quarry, Silva decided it was more than time to have a drink. Holding two glasses, one in each hand, of vodka on the rocks he entered the swimming area. The warm air smelt strongly of chlorine and orchids as it was drawn out in a vacuum through the open glass doors.

He watched appreciatively those glistening muscles flex as Bond traversed fluidly, slicing through the aquamarine water and crouched near the ledge to offer his companion the drink and the warmed cotton towel draped over his forearm. At last, the man streamlined toward him slowing, and pulled himself up to the edge.

“Care for a post-workout nightcap, my dear?”

“Can't say I wouldn't,” Bond replied accepting the glass gratefully.

“Everything is set in case you’re wondering, no thanks to any help from you,” Silva informed, “Some 'partnership' we have.”

“Complaining?” Bond asked with a raised eyebrow as he pulled himself up easily onto the ledge, grabbing the towel from Silva and wrapping it around his neck.

Silva eyed his soaking wet companion in those snug sky-blue Orlebar Brown Setter Sky swimming shorts clinging in all the right places in the most appealing way, “...No complaints.”

Bond grinned smugly, “See something you like?”

“Are you flirting with me, James?” Silva exclaimed, charmed.

“Hm,” he responded noncommittally drinking down the vodka.

“There is more from where that came from up in our Suite, if you’re prepared to turn in for the evening,” Silva hummed with a hint of invitation.

“Enabler.”

The blonde laughed delightedly catching a drip of water from the tip of the man's nose, “Such a low opinion you have of me, James!”

“Have you met with Glasgow?”

“I have not. However, his partner, Andre Vela, has sent us an invitation to a little soiree tomorrow evening. I took the initiative of ordering us the appropriate apparel.”

Bond frowned, “Should I be worried?”

“Savile row, conduit cut, Sinclair-Mason.”

“Acceptable,” Bond said somewhat impressed.

“So pleased you approve,” Silva drawled, “Honestly, James, it's distressing how little faith you have in me.”

00

Of course the man looked tragically dashing in his masterfully tailored slate coloured suit, crisp and
elegant as ever. Silva couldn't help but watch his companion, with barely concealed appreciation, as he strolled across the ballroom arm in arm with Vela's breathtaking wife.

The Frenchman in question had been chatting Silva's ear off since the start of the evening about some obscure venture or another in Taiwan; something he really ought to be paying attention to but…

“It was a remarkable deal! I made off like a bandit…” Vela bragged, his speech trailing off once the attractive couple caught his attention, “I see my Charlotte is a bit taken with votre ami. Should I be worried, Monsieur Sandro?”

“I wouldn’t trouble yourself,” Silva shrugged, sipping his drink, his eyes drawn towards the Agent and his new found accessory.

“Didn't you know, Andre? John is Mister Sandro's lover,” quipped a bright young woman dressed in a sleek, red satin gown. She stepped confidently up to the two conversing men as if she had been there all along.

What was this she said? Turning to examine the stylish woman, Silva frowned, he'd been quite certain Vela-Glasgow and associates had zero connection to Corsenza once Jakov had been disposed of without delay. That particular gambit had only been utilized during their intimate evening at Casino Carmine and much to Silva’s unending woe Bond had been rather insistent in his refusal to use it again.

“John? Votre amant? Ah, well in that case, let them dance all night,” laughed the reassured Frenchman.

“That's more than I'm doing,” the brunette complained, her eyes sharp and full of wit.

“Oof,” Andre exclaimed, “I have been a most ungracious host. Monsieur Sandro, allow me to introduce to you a most stunning and elegant young woman! Cette reine du bal est Helena, la femme de Monsieur Torvald Montgomery, one of our investors from across continent. He is unfortunately away on business this evening and was unable to escort her so I have taken the liberty to do so in his stead.”

“And what a gentleman you are to have taken on such a task,” Helena remarked smirking up at the man with a playful bat of her lashes.

“Oui, because two lovely ladies on either arm is such a terrible hardship.”

“Charmed, Madame,” Silva grinned, placing a gallant kiss on her delicate gloved hand, “and how is it your knowledge of my relationship with my partner precedes my knowledge of you, my dear?”

“Hmm, I’d wager housekeeping gossip? The sheets never lie,” Vela offered with a suggestive waggle of his thick gray eyebrows.

Silva groaned inwardly, if only that were the case.

“Classy, Andre.”

“Oh, Helena, mon chéri, I do not mean to sound so crudely plebeian,” Vela defended, “Working in this industry, for as long as I have, one tends to learn society's many sales petits secrets.”

“Our relationship is neither sordid nor secret,” Silva clarified before turning his gaze upon the woman with studious, narrowed eyes. “Though it does seem remarkable to me, that in less than the two days we have been here, you should draw such a conclusion with so little evidence.”
“It's not exactly a blind stab in the dark is it? Mister Prada? Mister Dolce and Gabanna?” Helena teased, “And your lover, the epitome of Savile-Row?”

“An eye for style I see,” Silva remarked with caustic amusement, “are you an aspiring fashionista or do you fancy yourself the next Sherlock Holmes?”

The woman laughed, amused by the comparison.

“Both. A flare for the flamboyant high-fashion ensemble usually dictates how adventurous one is in the bedroom and I am blessed with glorious insight on such matters.”

“You are being facetious,” Silva smirked maliciously, “you know what they say about sarcasm; a desperate attempt to hide one's inner pain?”

“Then you must be in great agony,” she dead-panned.

“Bravo! Such rapier wit you wield-- and with the acuity of a true comedienne! Consider me impressed,” Silva exclaimed with mock deference, “I've truly been put in my place.”

“Hmm, well you know, ‘brevity is the soul of wit’, Mister Sandro.”

“Now, now, children,” Vela laughed, “play nice.”

“I will freely say, Madame, you have me baffled.”

“Are we still on that subject,” Helena droned with indifference while finishing her drink.

“I confess, I find it intolerable when someone knows something that I don't.”

“And I find insistent interrogation incredibly,” she yawned, “insufferable.”

“They haven’t been overtly demonstrative,” Vela pointed out, “I would not have made that connection. But then again…what is it they say about women's intuition…?”

“I have many friends, Mister Sandro,” she conceded at last with a sly grin, “and I appreciate being well informed.”

“You have me intrigued, Madame,” Silva approved turning to appraise the ravishing and clever beauty beside him, “perhaps you would consider doing me the honour of joining me on the floor?”

“I would be happy to oblige, only, Monsieur Vela…Andre?”

“Oh, mon chéri! This is a night to celebrate our continuing success amidst such uncertainty in the world!” Vela smiled pleasantly at the guests who stood about the room, “However, I have never been one for dancing, s'il vous plaît.”

“Yes, as I recall, you do seem to have two left feet, Andre,” Helena teased fondly, “I am still recovering from our last promenade.”

“And this is why I don't dance, Monsieur Sandro,” Vela chuckled, clapping a hand on Silva's back, “Les femmes sont beaucoup plusimpitoyable! So unforgiving!”

Wrapping an arm around Helena's waist, Silva led his companion to the dance floor through the neatly dressed, crowd. It was clear her intention all along had been to gain his attention, hence the ceaseless provocation. In the rare circumstances he found himself under the thrall of a female, they were typically of the same stock; self-assured and confident and always challenging. Silva was
particularly fond of breaking that out of them until they writhed in pain and pleasure beneath him; begging.

Begging for release, begging for their life, it was all the same.

Silva’s lithe companion allowed herself to be adeptly manoeuvred across the dance floor, smiling as he pulled her against his body.

“‘Success amidst such uncertainty’…” she laughed dryly as they found an easy physical intimacy in each other’s arms, “what a fool. He takes everything at face value. But then…a fool makes a better front than an actor, don't you think?”

Silva raised an eyebrow as he processed this new information.

“So the truth will out,” he mused aloud, “I imagine you have reason to speak so plainly?”

“I am going to speak very plainly, Mister Sandro,” Helena stated, dropping all pretense of sass from her earlier display, “and you will listen very carefully. I know you are personally responsible for the disposal of Jakov.”

The deep, melodic tones of a solo saxophonist flowed across the hall; a velvet curtain of rich sound and soul pervading the atmosphere.

Silva grinned with indifference at the brunette in his arms, “Not such a terrible loss.”

“Yes, that I will allow.” Helena quirked a small grin in return, “Do you recall Miss De Luca?”

“Quite,” Silva huffed a laugh, “I found her nearly just as fascinating as I find you, Madame…as well as her partner, Mister Hutton.”

“Then we understand each other.”

Without missing a beat he nodded affirmatively and the woman smiled with satisfaction.

“So the Yanks have deployed the Big Guns,” Silva hummed.

“You flatter me, Mister Sandro.”

“Of course I do,” Silva smoothly intoned, winking playfully at his companion before pulling her closer, “have you more to say on this subject?”

“You can probably guess that it didn’t take much for certain parties to recognize the Feds were out of their league with Mister Corsenza,” Helena intoned succinctly, “illegal gambling practices tend to be minimal in light of evidence connecting one’s quarry to that of a recently executed Russian gangster with potential ties to international terrorist cells.”

“Ahh. I assume post hearing of the untimely demise of his Russian friend he hastily withdrew from several connected accounts at once?”

Helena huffed a small laugh, “Not exactly a wise move when your ill-gotten gains are already under scrutiny.”

“The man was dense, I doubt he was even aware he was under any sort of serious investigation. Although, to his credit, Miss De Luca played her role flawlessly,” Silva defended, “Corsenza adored her. Just, as I think, Vela adores you.”
“You know, Mister Sandro, I had for some time, suspected Corsenza's association with Glasgow via Jakov. The sudden eradication of his entire outfit expedited the necessity that we get our man before he vanishes as well. He's our only lead. Because of you, we’ve been provided a chance to flush him out, also because of you we have to do so promptly. I was briefed less than 12 hours ago and consequently I haven’t had much time to prepare. You can understand the position I've been placed in.”

“I can. On a related note,” Silva hummed, “I imagine your friends as well as ‘John's’ have communicated with one another or you would not have sought us out.”

“Though you were quite the unexpected addition, you'd imagine correctly. It is both fortunate and unfortunate ‘John’ has been compromised. But…I can see how it will lend him certain credibility that he may have previously lacked. Though, from here on, it will prove somewhat inconvenient having to run beneath the purview of other Intel Admins outside the U.K. and U.S.”

“Fortunately most are rather incompetent.”

“Truer words have never been spoken,” Helena laughed, “Granted, you, my absolute riddle of a friend, somehow possess a particularly long arm of influence from what I can tell.”

“Not an inaccurate assessment.”

“I assume much of this influence is used for more nefarious purposes.”

“Nefarious? Such a biased term,” Silva shook his head, grinning, “it is quickly becoming apparent that you, Madame, are prone to baseless accusations! American's have never been keen on subtlety but this method of interrogation cannot possibly be effective.”

“Mister Sandro, I promise you that if you were really under my interrogation you would re-evaluate your opinion,” Helena smirked, “but that is neither here nor there. I am not here to question nor investigate you. To your good fortune, I am far too busy and since ‘John’ is our ally, his use of your services supersedes my interest in you.”

“You wound me.”

“Allow me to clarify, I am interested in temporarily borrowing you for a job if you're up for it.”

“I may consider it, but what concerns me is your silence thereafter.”

“Mister Sandro, I don't think that need be your concern at this juncture and anyway, I imagine a man, such as yourself, has ways of securing his invisibility.”

“It is in everyone’s best interest that I remain a ghost, Madame.”

“Hmm, that to me sounds like a warning,” Helena mused, “let me once again make myself clear. I will not make any moves against you for two reasons.”

“Go ahead,” Silva prompted, smirking with amusement.

“One, I've considered that a man, such as yourself, who can easily slip through any door and just as easily dispose of those who have displeased him would not find it overly troubling to find a means to preserve his privacy,” she raised an eyebrow, “…possibly rather finite means for one such as myself.”

“Two,” she continued in a more suggestive tone, “it would be counterproductive to work against you
considering our similar goals.”

“Do you propose a temporary marriage of convenience?”

“Precisely. My partner and I have managed to secure our position in this undercover operation and we've been diligent in maintaining discretion in our observations.”

Helena smirked, “Of course it’s obvious that Vela is Glasgow’s puppet, the gullible old fool, the man is too simple to even understand basic math! The numbers don’t add up...he lives in this carefully constructed illusion while lining his pockets without even questioning why, in a broken market, his Hotel, which by all means should be deep in debt, is thriving.”

She shook her head in dismay pursing her lips while Silva twirled her gracefully across the room.

“The man prances about, rubbing elbows, making nice, never aware that there’s something amiss, all while under the shadow of Glasgow, who knows very well what Vela's intrinsic value is and seems to happily use the idiot to his advantage.”

Silva waited patiently as his dance partner organized her thoughts.

“The trick is determining the identity of the mastermind behind all of these operations. There’s just enough money being channelled into these ventures in order to maintain their existence, their only purpose being to explain the funneling of money into other global accounts. It’s just legal enough to keep NATO from running an international revenue audit on the whole thing. We know what’s being funded but not how or by whom.”

Silva tilted his head to the side and knowingly smiled, “My dear, I do have some understanding of the principles behind running a large-scale front. IBAN does not have quite the level of proficiency to counter high-level hackers. Thus, security is ensured.”

“You make it sound like a walk in the park.”

“Not terribly dissimilar.”

Helena nodded, “I’m not at all surprised our friend over there has opted to work with you,” she expressed, acknowledging his expertise with a grin, “you offer a particularly useful array of talents.”

“Would you like me to demonstrate?” Silva smirked suggestively and pulled her lithe form against him. Diligently ignoring the blatant come-on, Helena frowned, furrowing her brow in contemplation.

“I have to admit, I’m curious about how he procured your services...”

“Ha!” Silva crowed, victorious, “I knew you wanted me!”

“Oh, I have my own...variety of ‘instruments’ that see to my needs already, Mister Sandro, though I do not doubt your superiority. What I mean is, I know I'm being bold to even suggest how curious I am but then, I've never been too concerned with self preservation...”

“In your line of work you can ill afford to have much of that,” Silva remarked.

“I just don't see what you gain from this,” she remarked, puzzlement visible in her eyes, “you seem like the kind of man who calculates all the infinite variables behind any major strategy. You assess your choice of actions based on the ratio of every known advantage and disadvantage. Your decision to partake in a partnership with ‘John’ should be centered in the expectation of some sizable recompense...”
“It’s evident you've laboured in an analysis of my motivations so I'll humour you, please, regale me with some of these delightful little theories you've developed,” Silva invited, sliding his hands ever so slightly further down her back.

“Perhaps you think you can claim some sort of immunity if you can demonstrate how effective you are in bringing down the enemy but then…there’s something about you that tells me that's not quite the ticket. Perhaps you seek to clear entry into the operation for power or money or both.”

She paused to reconsider, “But then, if the latter is the case, you could do so alone, so why would you require the Agent?”

For the barest fraction of a second Silva found himself glancing up at his partner across the room, still dancing with Vela's wife, before returning his companion's narrowed gaze. Whatever his momentary expression divulged, Helena cached it away, and slowly smiled with the satisfaction of a hunter whom had caught scent of their prey.

“You shouldn’t waste your time over-thinking whatever it is you think you've discovered,” Silva huffed, “I can predict where you’re going to take this next thought Madame, it's written all over your face, and I can assure you there’s no validity in it.”

“Hmm. Perhaps you're right, Mister Sandro. But, I’d wager that whatever your original reasoning is behind everything, at this point, has been so obscured by your own fluctuating machinations and layers of pretense that even you can't figure out what it is anymore.” She hummed, rethinking her weighted suspicions, “No…you have an idea of what you want, but you don't know why, or for what purpose. You have lost all sense of your initial goal. Or maybe you remember what the goal is but the reason for obtaining it has changed.”

“Hmm, is that so?” Silva's drawled, tone laced with irritation, “What an interesting deduction, although imprecise.”

“Imprecise but not wrong. It bothers you, doesn't it,” Helena enunciated slowly, every word carefully chosen for maximum impact, “You are so very self-assured, so very self-confident; your mind is a finely honed instrument, a refined weapon, and now it has been compromised. It’s been stifled by the torrent of lingering doubt that has flooded your consciousness.”

She peered up at him presciently, “Even now, you reign in that part of you which burns with murderous intent, cloaked behind a calm and cold facade. How dare I stir the beast from within its cave!”

“Very poetic,” Silva smiled coldly, tucking a stray lock of hair behind his companion's ear.

“At this moment, any spectator might look at you and believe you were unaffected by my summations, yet if you were presented with the opportunity you'd slit my throat in an instant.”

“And just why would I want to slit that pretty little throat of yours, pray tell?”

“Well, I had the audacity to suggest that somewhere inside of you exists a flickering shard of emotion, that, on occasion, breaks through to the surface. You’re superficially charming as well as narcissistic, you have a hunger for power fueled by self-purpose, and you appear to use and abuse others with detached regard. I wager I could ascribe a number of other Machiavellian, psychopathic traits to you, or so I surmise,” Helena grinned up at him, “However, all of this? It would not anger you if you were incapable of sentiment. That's revealing.”

Silva smirked unsettlingly, “Did you know that some patients fall deeply in love with their
psychiatrists?”

“It’s called transference, I doubt you’re experiencing it.”

“Oof, aren’t you rife with staggering presumptions,” Silva huffed with a shake of his head, “Such deep introspective analysis can sometimes be a mirror, Madame, perhaps you are confusing my reflection with your own.”

“So many veils and smoke screens, tell me, who are you hiding from?” Helena clicked her tongue before reconsidering her thoughts, “but then, you have a point, maybe I am projecting to some degree.”

“Self-sublimation is a necessity in your profession.”

“It is in yours as well, Mister Sandro, which is why I stick to my original diagnosis.”

“Shall I assume you’ll be sending my bill in the mail then?” Silva chided.

“I make a living out of hunting and catching people like you everyday. I know them. I understand them. As do you.”

“Undoubtedly,” Silva conceded.

“It’s why I can tell you’re different,” Helena concluded simply with a small shrug.

“Isn’t that the way of women,” Silva sighed despondently, “seeking any small glimmer of hope, forever convinced in spite of such pellucid utter futility, of this romantic notion that one can redeem the villain?”

“Every villain is convinced he is the hero of his story, but not you,” Helena pointed out, “I find that fascinating.”

“I find you fascinating, my dear,” Silva countered, “Perhaps we could speak further on your theories upstairs? You could tell me all about just what kind of villain ‘I’ think ‘I’ am.”

“Ah, equivocation by seduction,” Helena jarringly laughed in her companion’s arms, “You are such a sore loser.”

“On the contrary, I’m a generous one.”

“That may be so,” Helena humoured, “But I am not going to request a demonstration.”

“Your loss.”

“I have no doubt you’re every bit the bad boy you seem to be, Mister Sandro,” the brunette sighed with a smile, shaking her head “But I really wish I could be there the day you wake up and realize you’re not the villain you think you are.”

“It would be a cosmic stroke of irony, indeed,” Silva laughed.

“Even still, I can’t help wonder what motivates you.”

“Your insatiable thirst for truth will be your inevitable downfall, someday, my dear,” he informed, “I would hate to have it happen sooner rather than later.”

“As I have made you aware, Mister Sandro,” his companion expressed airily, “your threats are
needless."

“Of course, my dear. Besides, it would be terribly inconsiderate of you to force my hand when I've indulged you so thoroughly thus far.”

“You have and you haven't…”

“What a subtle double-entendre! Be careful or I might think you're soliciting me for a more lascivious purpose after all.”

“At least I can relish in the fact that, if nothing else I've said is true, I was right about one thing. You're a pathological narcissist. The type of man who thinks everyone wants him.”

“I’ve rarely been mistaken,” Silva grinned wolfishly, “you ought to take me up on my offer.”

Helena audibly sighed, rolling her eyes with impatience.

“This is beginning to sound repetitive, so I shall tell you plainly I’m not interested in any of your ‘offers’, you can save your flirting for your ‘lover’ over there. We have more pressing business,” she finished curtly.

“How can I be of assistance, my dear,” Silva replied congenially.

“We need you to gain entrance into Vela’s office. The finger scan is simple enough to bypass as we have replicated the print, I have that for you right here,” she causally slipped her hand into his coat pocket, depositing a small plastic leaf in its wake, “–the biometric lock is of military grade and has an access code we cannot crack at this time, we currently do not have a decryption to breach this level of security on such short notice.”

“You imagine I have such a decryption code? If I do not?”

Helena frowned considering this, “if you do not, we would have to convince Madame Vela that it would be in her best interest to assist us and I assure you she is not as dimwitted as her husband. That's our last option. Due to the more particular details of our objective it's imperative we retain our level of cover for some time and if the wife must be included, then eventually we’ll have–”

“To find a means to dispose of her,” Silva interjected.

“Or take her into protective custody and find a way to explain her mysterious absence.”

“My, this is a sticky situation for you…hmm?” Silva mused.

“It would expose exactly who were are the moment Glasgow is aware his position has been revealed. I am not keen, Mister Sandro, to die before I've completed my objectives.”

“No need for such fatalism, my dear, I have the sufficient means,” Silva explained assuaging, “Though, once I gain entry, what is it precisely that needs be obtained to fish our elusive friend from the depths of the murky waters he resides?”

“My partner has informed me that Vela keeps a phone locked in a drawer at his desk. We need you to do two things. One, I have a cache of micro surveillance monitors as well as an audio transmitter that needs to be wired. Two, on the phone, decrypt the password, lay a trace to the key and download the contact information.”

She peered up at him sternly.
“In order to guarantee you make good on your end, I will ensure any footage, recorded by our personal surveillance, that reveals your involvement is edited before my agency receives it. I can imagine that would be enough incentive.”

“Oh, I am disappointed in you, my dear, blackmail? Here I thought this was a mutually beneficial arrangement, I scratch your back while you scratch mine.”

“It seems so repetitious to backtrack to threats, no?” Silva chided the young woman as he narrowed his eyes, “if you even consider rescinding your promise on this agreement I will not be held responsible for the consequences. Quid pro quo.”

“Mister Sandro, my partner and I share differences of opinion in many ways. He would not hesitate, even at his own expense, to follow procedure in spite of your aide.”

“I see, and you are not above making off the record, under-the-table deals to achieve your ends. If I do you this favour, I assume I can be assured of your compliance and that you will expunge said evidence? It would, after all, be a terrible shame if I were to slip up and ‘tell-on-you’ to your friends here, *hmm*?”

“I have no doubt of your capacity to compromise my position, Mister Sandro, but do not doubt in my ability to do the same to yours.”

“Touché, Madame. I think we have come to an accord this evening, it has been an absolute pleasure.”

“I'll stick with calling it ‘productive’.”

“What allows you to sleep at night, my dear.”

“At 22:00 hours you will receive a delivery containing the equipment,” Helena informed Silva, effortlessly removing herself from his grasp, “go brief your partner and for God’s sake don't get caught.”

“Ha-ha! I like a woman who knows how to give an order! It has been quite an enlightening evening,” Silva bowed, “after tonight our paths shall diverge and I can promise you I will do my best to forget you.”

“I would be obliged if you would and I will endeavour to do the same.”

Silva watched as she walked away, consumed by the crowd of dancing couples, and grinned.

“Oh... but you won’t.”

“Talking to yourself now, *hmm*?” Bond interrupted upon having approached from behind, “Have you finally gone off in the head or is this just an isolated incident?”

“You're asking if I've gone mad? Been there, done that-”

“Sold the rights,” Bond finished.

“Is that what the kids say these day?” Silva hummed, “Anyway, I wasn't talking to myself. It was merely a strategically timed last word.”

“Obviously,” Bond drawled.

Ensconced within the crowd, couples continued to dance around them, the music swelling overhead.
Silva graced his companion with a beaming smile, “I have missed you, James! Care to dance?”

Bond hesitated, before confusion made way for dismay as that offer suddenly made sense.

“Long story short, we're lovers again.”

Seconds passed as the agent glared at his companion.

“Don't look at me with that face! I did not renege on our agreement,” he defended, solemnly pressing a hand over his heart, “I swear on my grave I didn't say a thing.”

“Dare I ask?”

“Ah, my lovely friend I danced with earlier did us the courtesy of proclaiming that particular detail.”

“I doubt you did much to discourage it.”

“I doubt I did much, either,” Silva conceded with a shrug, “Now dance with me.”

Bond sighed, surrendering, and accepted the proffered hand which Silva took immediate advantage of, sweeping the man close for the sake of appearances.

“Tell me everything,” Bond pressed, “You were with her for a long time.

"Supplying such specific reference to us was an obvious ploy for your attention. Who was she?”

Silva chuckled warmly, “You sound jealous, my pet.”

“Of course I am!” Bond glared, “You obviously happened upon something important and I've been saddled half the evening with the World's single most self-obsessed woman I have ever had the misfortune to entertain.”

“That,” Silva acknowledged with astonishment, “Is the most expressive I have seen you be...ever.”

“Talk.”

“So eager!” Silva teased, pulling his companion close, “I wonder what else could inspire such ardour...hmm?”

“You're stalling,” Bond accused. Silva pressed against the other man lining them up from hip to shoulder, nearly closing his eyes as he basked in the emanating warmth shared between them through the material of their finely tailored suits. Though, he considered longingly, he'd much rather dance sans the elegant garments.

“If you touch my arse I will end you,” Bond warned. Silva laughed, pressing his nose just below the man's jaw, the skin a perfect, erotic combination of silk and stubble. He inhaled deeply that intoxicating combination of cologne and unique underlying scent; a signature of salt and soap and spice.

“Are you... sniffing me?”

“Stop complaining, I'm trying to enjoy you after we've been parted for so long and you're making it very difficult,” Silva laughed.

Bond shivered, unable to suppress that thrill of lust burning through him as his companion buried his face into the crook of his neck, trailing hot kisses over the exposed skin.
“Well... you don't make it that difficult,” Silva amended. He temporarily paused his ministrations and fixated on that glorious mouth; that invitingly full lower lip. He grinned as an intriguing idea planted it's seed and sprouted to a fully formed, brilliant notion. “You should let me kiss you.”

“Don't even think about it.”

“For appearances?”

“Not if you want to live to see tomorrow.”

Silva stewed petulantly, “It's beginning to occur to me that this is a terribly unfair arrangement we have.”

“Tell me what happened,” Bond demanded pushing him back.

“If I do, then we can talk about it?” Silva grinned toothily, “This subject that you avoid at all costs?”

“I have no idea what you mean unless you're referring to all the times you've encroached upon my personal space in order to molest me,” Bond accused.

“If it's in public it doesn't count,” Silva defended.

“Unless you get off on exhibitionism,” The Agent retorted flippantly, “You probably do.”

“You live in a world of denial, my friend, you resist me in spite of yourself, doesn't it get tiresome?” the blonde sighed stroking a hand up his partner's back, “Aren't you ever tempted to just... give in?”

The Agent twitched, “I swear, if you delay one more second I will snap every bone in your body.”

“Bold threat! It'd be interesting to see you try,” Silva laughed before relenting, “I just had the most intriguing conversation and arranged a little 'help-me-help-you-help-me' with... you'll never guess.”

Bond raised an eyebrow and Silva leaned forward to press his lips against his companion's ear.

“The CIA,” he whispered. Bond could not contain his laugh.

“Working your way up the official food chain cross-continent now? You might possibly be the worst criminal I've ever heard of.”

“Ah, but you have heard of me,”

“Not anything that bears repeating,” Bond retorted.

“Come now, my brilliance is a universal truth.”

“When your delusions of grandeur have subsided I can only hope you'll get to the point.”

“All work and no play makes James a dull boy,” Silva rebuked. Bond narrowed his eyes suppressing a dangerously high level of annoyance.

“Our friend, 'Helena Montgomery' has gifted us half the access code to Vela's office, I'll decrypt the code to the other half. Then, I'll work on unlocking his mobile and stealing the contact info that will lead us straight to Glasgow, and in return you will toss a few bugs around we'll be supplied with.”

“That is... very convenient,” Bond approved, “I'm amazed you reigned yourself in enough to manage the necessary diplomacy.”
“Sometimes I think you do forget who I am and what I have been and done,” Silva laughed, “But allow me to clarify. You see, James, she came to me.”

Hm,” Bone acknowledged, “Pretty fortuitous timing considering.”

“I should say! And, James,” he whispered teasingly, “I have considered a few ways you might thank me for my indispensable service.”

The Agent sighed, “I think we can safely assume your ways differ from mine.”

The blonde grinned slowly, eyes raking down that elegant, cut figure, “I was merely going to suggest a drink... but if you have any better ideas then by all means.”

A tuxedo clad waiter passed with a platter containing camembert and wild mushrooms atop small toasts and the Agent found his gaze trailing after it.

“Actually, I'm famished,” Bond announced, “Isn't there anything more substantial than these fussy little hors d'oeuvres they keep passing around?”

Silva laughed, “A way to a mans heart... or pants... is through his stomach I suppose. Care to dine before we work?”

The Agent rolled his eyes, “I could be convinced.”

“I'm counting on it,” Silva smirked.
After a satisfying supper up in the clubhouse, the two men collected Helena's monitors and made their way to Vela's office.

Nearing the end of their task, the two men were startled by the uproarious laughter approaching from just beyond the door.

"Oui, unbelievable!"

"I should say!"

Bond shot an alarmed glance at his partner to which Silva darted quickly from behind the desk and seized the Agent's arm, pulling the man in after him into a narrow closet, carefully closing it behind them as Vela and his mystery companion entered.

With little room to spare, both men found themselves uncomfortably crowded against the back of the small space; wires and computers and shelving digging into their backs as they shifted as soundlessly as possible to situate around the obstacles.

“It is something, isn't it?” Vela guffawed, laugh muffled through the thick door, “I can't fathom how they managed!”

“What does it matter?” An unfamiliar voice sounded, “They've named their price and we've met it. C'est la vie! No?”

“I have the check here, if you could deliver it, mon ami?”

“Of course, of course!”

Listening intently, there was a click of the latch of the office door signaling an exit, yet before the two men could relax they heard a string of French curses irritably uttered, as well as the clicking of fingers upon a keyboard, conveying Vela had, to their misfortune, remained. The outside room sounded with a sudden dark, energetic burst of melody from Nicolaus Esterhazy's Sinfonia; the rich, deep vibrato of the two powerful tenors warring against each other movingly. Silva shifted against his companion, his chest pressed into the other man's back.

“How convenient,” Bond muttered acerbically, “How long do you imagine he'll stay?”

“Considering Helena will soon be awaiting our report, I imagine she'll figure out the reason behind our disappearance sooner rather than later,” Silva whispered, voice close to the Agent's ear.

“That won't matter if he decides he needs to fetch something from his closet before that happens.”

“Always so cynical,” Silva retorted, his soft laugh, breathy and warm against the back of his companion's neck.

The Agent shivered, thankful for the concealing dark within their temporary hideout as Silva's larger form pressed closer, fitting in snugly behind.

“At least he can't hear us under this racket,” Bond intoned dryly as the music crescendoed outside of their hideout.
“Blasphemer!” Silva accused, horrified, “What is this deplorable sacrilege? How can you scorn the classics in such a manner?”

“Ohmygod, I've offended him, whatever have I done,” Bond droned aloud, instantly regretting the careless aspersion and the following melodramatic reaction he'd unwittingly invited upon himself.

“I'm ashamed to know you,” the blonde lamented.

The Agent groaned, “What did I do to deserve getting trapped in a closet with you of all people?”

His companion laughed softly, the motion vibrating against him.

“There is a large degree of irony in this situation for you, wouldn't you say? ...Being... trapped 'in the closet'?” Silva prodded with barely concealed mirth. Taking advantage, the man slipped an arm around his companion, his hand sneaking it's way down along his shirt front. He fingered a button suggestively, sneaking a single digit beneath to touch the tantalizing strip of skin beneath, smiling to himself.

“We're not so much trapped in a closet as we are in a trope, evidently,” Bond muttered under his breath as the finger traced across his chest.

“Shh,” his companion hushed, bringing his other arm around to pull the Agent back into him. Bond's eyes slitted as he felt the hand untucking his shirt and stroking against the newly bared expanse of his hip. Silva chuckled, his hot breath cascading over the Agent's cheek, “You complain far too much.”

“Stop it,” Bond hissed as he felt a thumb easily unfasten his trousers with a single flick. There was little he could do to prevent the cavalier exploration as his arms were trapped against his sides, wedged as he was against the door.

“Hmm, how can I resist, you cut such a dashing figure in those lovely Shark Grays I've had so generously tailored for you-- though I think I might prefer you out of them.”

As the hand traveled teasingly lower, Bond bit back a groan behind his gritted teeth; a sharp flare of arousal slicing unwillingly through him, “Have you considered there's a time and place and we're not exactly-”

Silva bit the flesh just below the collar of the Agent's shirt cutting off the objection. Bond shuddered, gasping as the man tongued the newly tender spot, pressing his heavy erection against him.

Outside, Vela barely stirred, still obliviously tapping away at his computer, yet perilously close to his hidden guests.

To Silva, the delicious danger of the situation heightened the excitement. He rolled his hips forward grinding unrelentingly into that taut backside and cupped the man's arousal through the fabric, pressing against the head of that clothed cock, hot and insistent against his hand, “I could take you, just like this, right now,” he rasped, lips wet at the skin behind the Agent's ear.

“Christ,” Bond moaned breathlessly as the man unabashedly groped his clothed erection, “I really hate you.”

Silva shook with quiet laughter, glorying in his victory as the Agent surrendered pliantly, “He doth protest too much I think.”
“To a considerable degree,” Bond rasped throatily, “I'm beginning to think you've engineered this entire situation.”

Crushing in and rocking against him Silva pressed the man into the door, harsh gasps coming short, “You do me great credit to think-”

A sharp rap interrupted the thought mid-sentence and a heavy squeak of a chair against the marble flooring outside stilled them.

“Ah, just a moment,” The two men listened as Vela's shoes clicked across the floor and they pressed close with interest as they heard him apologetically chuckle upon opening his office door.

“Helena!” Vela exclaimed, “My dear, I am not at all surprised that you've come calling.”

“Andre! What on earth are you doing working, missing your own party?” Their rescuer accused, “Have you forgotten about us so soon?”

“I am ashamed of myself, mon ami, I lost track of time... I merely meant to step away briefly to attend to some business, which of course is no excuse to have abandoned you, my dear,” he explained, “Here, let us go forth and rejoin the merriment, Oui?”

The door clicked behind him, signaling their exoneration and Bond sagged against the door with mixed relief and stilted agony and likewise, was aware of his companion groaning with bitter disappointment as they pulled away to exit their enclosure.

Stifled as they'd been by the heat they'd generated in that small space, in contrast, the open air of the office seemed suddenly revitalizing and Bond inhaled deeply.

Adjusting himself, Silva leered over to gauge with pleasure his companion's still similar situation. The Agent, of course, ever vigilant, caught his evaluating gaze with the faintest shadow of ebbing lust, simmering around the edges of rigid control. “The CIA must be commended for their impeccable timing,” he smirked.

Silva grinned in response, “I would do terrible things to you right here, if their cameras weren't on.”

“I'm relatively surprised that should deter you,” Bond quipped laconically, smoothing a hand back over his hair with some amount of good humour.

Silva licked his lips and stalked forward toward his prey with gleaming promise written in his expression, “And I in turn, am surprised you're not playing the withering, blushing maiden act you're so keen to rely on.”

“Hm. In that case,” the Agent smirked, “You don't know me well at all.”

Silva hummed, “So you claim.”

“The trouble with you, is you always think you have the upper-hand.”

Suddenly overcome by a mix of impatience and impassioned fury the blonde snatched him by the collar forcibly dragging him forward.

“You try me again and again, my dear,” he sneered, “This pretense of coquettish deferral; so ever eluding and withholding? I can't tell whether you're denying yourself or denying me out of spite.”

“This is a bit of an overreaction,” Bond pointed out, amused. Silva narrowed his eyes releasing his
firm hold and loosened his collar.

“Are you enjoying yourself?”

The Agent shrugged with a lazy grin.

“What do you hope to gain with this little charade... this game you're playing?” he queried. “Who do you think is really losing?”

Bond laughed, “Game *I am playing*? Fascinating how you've managed to twist your own logic.”

“Sex is a weapon, James, I know very well you're practiced in using to your advantage, but you do yourself a disservice to imagine you're the only one to wield such skill.”

“Tell me, is this all a way to intimidate me into submission or do you actually want to fuck?”

“How crass, Mister Bond!” Silva stepped back, disgusted.

“I've been nothing if not clear. This hidden agenda you've attached to it?” He waved a hand in the air, “Unnecessary. You're a very desirable man, and I intend to bed you. It's not complicated.”

The Agent rubbed his chin and looked down, sighing, “The obvious is always a distortion of the truth.”

“Is it not the truth?” Silva chuckled dangerously.

“I can't think your motivations would ever be so mutually exclusive.”

“What are you attempting, here James?” Silva laughed, “Are you trying to elicit some confession of... ulterior motive?”

“Should I be?” Bond countered. Apparently changing his angle he shrugged, “Either way you play your cards, you have a tell. Everyone does.”

Silva snorted, “What is this 'tell' then? Hmm?.”

Bond paused as he studied his opponent, reconsidering.

“That's interesting,” he mused.

“Oh, what is it that's occurred to you, James?” Silva snapped impatiently.

“Is this the 'Tortoise and the Hare'? You think you'll win the race if you patiently push ever onward?”

“Subtlety is not my strong suit here, I never intended it to be,” Silva pointed out.

“Indeed,” the Agent replied with an unsettling, vicious grin, “Did you somewhere in all of this forget yourself and go soft?”

“If you fancy that perspective I'll play along.”

Bond had to grant the man, *he was good*.

“Going to hold to your story, then? Fine.”

“Is this your consent?”
“I doubt you require it.”

“You're gagging for it aren't you, darling?” Silva mused fondly, “Such a naughty boy.”

“All bark,” Bond taunted, “and no bite.”

Silva growled and threw his weight against the man, crashing them back painfully against Vela's desk, “Then let's give them a show they won't forget.”

Bond laughed cruelly, pushing him off. Smoothing down his jacket he turned to leer at his companion, leaning a hip against the desk, “Careful, Mister Silva, you do show your hand.”

“You're terrified and it's pathetic,” Silva retorted coolly, “You can't fathom what it might be like to relinquish that so carefully honed control you think you've mastered. You limit yourself and it's a shame.”

“I think we've can agree to disagree for the time being,” Bond drawled, “Shall we finish our business here and report to your friend now? She'll send the dogs in after us if we don't, I'd think.” Silva raised an eyebrow.

“Once again, you're the first to back down. Always an excuse ready at hand,” straightening a lapel, he sighed, relenting, “Of course, let us conclude our business.”

As Bond turned to exit the office Silva leaned in grabbing him from behind and whispered in his ear. “Don't think for one second, our business is finished. I always follow through with what I start, James. Always.”

Bond's pulse quickened with the promise and he kept his answer to himself.

Just as they closed the office door, at the end of the hall, a group of men came carousing down from around the corner laughing boisterously. Thinking quickly Bond crowded Silva against the wall and kissed him thoroughly.

Without any amount of surprise or hesitation, the blonde growled into his mouth pressing back enthusiastically to make a better show of it.

Feigning embarrassment at having been caught, Bond pushed a very reluctant Silva away and cleared his throat, “Messieur Vela-”

“Ah! It's Sandro and John!” Vela announced to his friends laughing uproariously, “I suppose you lads needed somewhere quiet to sneak away for a bit of privacy?”

Bond caught his companion's intent gaze and dazed, heated expression, lips wet and parted where they had just been attached to his own mere moments before.

Inhaling deeply, Silva crossed his arms and leaned against the wall, smirking lazily at 007 as he replied to the Frenchman, “What can I say, he can't help himself.”

“Indeed!” Vela laughed, “Well at any rate, perfect timing to run into you gentlemen, please, come and join me. We're off to my private party room.”

They followed Vela and his group down a flight of stairs opening to a long, high-ceiling hall, Silva strolling beside the Agent closely, shoulder to shoulder. The blonde leaned over brushing his mouth against his companion's ear, “That was incredibly quick thinking, it's almost like it had already been
on your mind.”

Bond pulled away with an impassive expression following the party into the room.

The drunken revelry was proving ineffective for providing Bond with anything to further the mission yet he could not find a way to extract himself due to Silva's frustrating attempts to thwart his excuses.

*He was clearly being punished.*

Silva leaned back and glanced over at his companion with a satisfied smirk from across the table pressed between several of Vela's amiable and more than soused friends.

To Bond's right, a chipper fellow Brit attempted to engage him in conversation about something or another and the Agent was pressed to carry on politely with the fellow.

From across the way he could hear Silva's newest companion laughing delightedly, entranced by the charismatic blonde. Bond barely suppressed an annoyed sigh.

“That is an inspiring way to put it,” the young man replied flirtatiously leaning in closer to Silva.

“I would love to hear your view on the subject,” he replied with a suggestive lilt to his tone.

Bond found himself heavily relying on all his training to studiously ignore the blatant display across the table as Silva's advances became more and more apparent.

His partner truly did have a way of twisting words just so to his advantage.

In very little time, under the thrall of the magnetic blonde and whatever combination of drugs or alcohol coursed through his system, the effete young man had grown pliant and leaned into Silva's seductive caresses; basking in the attention.

The Agent knew exactly what Silva was doing and was not in the least amused. Though he wore his mask of indifference well, Silva could read the smallest hint of displeasure in the faint crease between his eyes, the subtle down-turned line of the Agent's mouth.

Silva grinned with barely concealed triumph.

If anything, Bond's tell of determined avoidance seemed only to further spur the man on as he made a show of luring his prey ever nearer into his web of seduction, dragging a finger tip up the line of the man's neck. Shivering against his touch the young man tilted his head back ever so slightly giving access for further exploration as the blonde whispered lurid description in his ear.

Bond sighed shifting in his seat, and shot a disapproving glare across the table which Silva pretended to miss.

“You're not fooling anybody,” The Agent drawled, his voice carrying loudly across the table.

The young man jumped out of Silva's touch and glanced remorsefully over at the irked Agent as Vela's boisterous laugh rang out over the group amid the low din.

“John, your lover has our little Isaac here quite charmed,” he mused, “Charlotte likes to pull that trick with me far too often.”

Bond smirked at his companion's expression as Silva regarded the Agent with pointed
disappointment, “You never let me have any fun.

"Sandro, dear," tge Agent chastised with a small grin, "do try to behave yourself in company."

Laughing delightedly, Silva arose, abandoning the confused Isaac and made his way over, drink in hand, to squeeze in beside his companion.

“Have I been ignoring you?” Silva purred, slipping an arm behind the Agent, “My poor dear, no need to pine, I've returned.”

Bond rolled his eyes theatrically for show, “You're the most absurd man I've ever had the misfortune to meet.”

“Which is why you adore me,” Silva drawled, his hand wandering down to squeeze his companion's thigh.

“I think we ought to head back, darling,” Bond replied, tone dripping with invitation, “it is getting rather late.”

The blonde leered at him, “Yes, and we do have so much to do yet tonight.”

Cloaking his exasperation, the Agent gratefully took hold of the excuse, finally able to depart from this trivial merriment, “Quite.”

“I must say, gentlemen, it has been marvelous to make your acquaintance,” Vela expressed warmly, “Thank you for joining us this evening, and may you enjoy the rest of your stay here, my new friends. I would be most honoured if you would return to my Hotel again.”

Silva watched with amusement as his companion nearly fled back to their rooms determinedly, with barely a care as to whether he followed.

Quite an enlightening response if ever their was one; he'd made his point and slipping under the Agent's skin had been easier than he'd hoped.

*If only it would now allow him to slip between his sheets.*

00

Torrents of water cascaded downward immersing him, cleansing and hot.

Bond leaned back against the steamed glass wall of the shower and exhaled.

*He was free-falling backward and then sinking, helpless, the current dragging him beneath and his eyes closed, letting go.*

*The icy tendrils gripped him from within; piercing, decimating, a face, a beautiful face he had once been willing to do anything for.*

*’Can a leopard change it's spots?’* He'd been asked once.

Truth held, even for him, that there is diminishing return with age. He'd faltered, then ceded. Cynically pragmatic he'd inevitably accepted his lot after a time of brief denial; beguiling and intangible as it had been.

Half monk, half hitman he’d endured on into the fold, the unceasing battle.
Asking questions was redundant. He knew all the answers. He'd known them for sometime.

He laughed darkly, stepping into the spray once more before turning off the taps.

Stepping out of the bathroom, towel draped low around his hips he was unsurprised to find Silva had broken into his side of their conjoined suite and lay lackadaisically on his back across the bed feigning interest in some article on his tablet.

With shining, pale blonde hair loose across his forehead and stripped down to casual attire: loose slacks and an open shirt, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows displaying tanned and thickly toned forearms, Bond espied a pale ring around the man's wrist with the absence of his Rolex. Bare feet crossed at the ankles he looked at once, both lazily exotic and incredibly tempting.

He swallowed thickly at the sight.

“Did you know,” Silva informed with a smirk, “That as we speak, the DIA has just sent out a literal army of DCS? Global espionage dispersal in a massive kind of way, huh? What do we need MI-6 for? The Yanks never fail to impress with their ever in-disposable resources. It's like Cold War Russia in their hay-day. I love it.”

“Was there something you especially require at this very moment or...”

“Or.”

Silva's grin spread across his face as he casually perused the scenery.

“Nice towel.”

“Get off my bed,” the Agent ordered.

“Get off your bed or get off on your bed?”

“Really,” Bond sighed kneading the bridge of his nose with irritation, “I've had quite enough of you for one night.”

“I'd debate you've had practically none of me this evening, a matter that sorely needs to be redressed.”

“I'm being quite serious. Off.”

The man leaned his head in his hand with no intention to move and sighed theatrically, “I'm hurt. And here I came to provide you with the pleasure of my company and you spurn me once again.”

“I'm overwhelmed with gratitude, your generosity knows no bounds,” Bond dead-panned, “Please, try and find it in yourself to forgive such grave offense.”

“So full of such pawky wit! How charming,” Silva drawled, “And what's the flavour of gloomy self-penitence you've taken to now, dare I ask?”

The Agent scowled, “You're not going to leave are you.”

“And miss the show?” the blonde laughed raking his eyes down that alluring form.

After a long moment of consideration, he at last accepted the futility of resisting any further, deciding that it would be easier just this once, to give in. They'd been heading down this path for far too long anyway, he conceded. But it didn't mean he wouldn't have a little fun at his companion's expense.
Turning away without remark, Bond smirked to himself before unabashedly allowing the towel to drop from his waist to the floor at his feet. His back yet turned, he strolled over to his open case to pull out a change of clothes.

Setting the folded garments beside the mirror he casually turned back around observing his companion's heated expression as he took him in with a measure of surprised pleasure.

“Shameless,” Silva hissed, a tongue darting out to moisten his lips gone dry with lust.

Under that scrutinizing gaze, Bond’s cock filled and thickened. Silva accommodatingly shifted over making room on the bed with clear invitation.

The Agent lingered near the bureau, feigning indecision, impassive and calm as he poured two drinks.

Silva huffed impatiently, “Yes, of course, take your time.”

Bond watched with concealed amusement as his companion irritably shuffled up against the headboard, trousers tenting with interest.

“Do you prefer tonic or soda?”

“I prefer you forget the drinks.”

The Agent frowned, “Why ever would I do that?”

Silva groaned and rolled back his head, “You are a very cruel, very bad man and I hate you.”

“Really,” Bond smiled pleasantly, leaning back against the oak bureau, “Tell me just how 'bad' a man you think I am.”

Leaping gracefully to his feet in one swift move, Silva stalked over to his quarry and had him pressed against the wall before he could blink.

“How about I show you instead.”

At once, Silva leaned in and took those pliant lips against his own, devouring him with all consuming hunger, quenching that long withheld burning need. Their mouths chasing after each other greedily, sucking and biting, exploring and mingling the flavours within. Skimming a tongue over the satin, wet heat of the others', Silva moaned, aching and impossibly aroused.

“Too long,” he uttered, voice wrecked and broken, “I've had the goddamn patience of a Saint with you.” Bond's responding shuddered breath against his own, indicated his own reciprocating desire with wordless fluency.

“Let's abandon these drinks, hmm?” Silva suggested, running a hand across the back of his companion's neck.

“Bed,” the Agent directed forcefully. “Now.”

“Excellent idea.”

Latching onto Bond's mouth, those supple, receptive lips, he stripped off his shirt and hastily shed his slacks before laying heavily and possessively over the lithe, toned form of the other man.
Their heavy, rigid cocks pressing deliciously against each other, Bond canted his hips upward as Silva ground down, the glorious friction sending shooting flares of ecstasy through him. Taking to him like a starving man to a feast, he explored the man's bared throat, lathing down across his chest and back up again, ever drawn to capture those raw, uninhibited moans and swallow them down into his own.

In a moment of playfulness, Bond rolled them over, flipping the blonde onto his back and raked his fingers down the man's sculpted pectorals littered in old silvery scars, and Silva arched up into him, head tilting back into the pillow, starved for the touch. Kissing down the tapered torso into the indented lines of his thickly corded, muscular hips, Bond smirked knowingly up at the man, avoiding his pulsing, straining cock; a strand of pre-ejaculate shining on the tip connecting to his writhing abdomen.

"Tease," Silva accused, moaning the word.

Bond smirked, coming back up to kiss his companion and whispered against his lips, “If you're alright with it, I'd like to fuck you.”

“Yes,” Silva consented, eyes glazed with searing lust.

Sparing just enough effort into preparing his companion, the Agent tore the condom wrapper expediently with his teeth, rolling the rubber down over his throbbing cock.

Silva inhaled through his teeth at the sight, eyes slitted and grabbed the other man by his neck to pull him back down.

Bond tossed aside the lubricant and grabbed Silva's calves roughly shoving himself against him, pushing the head against the man's entrance.

“Tell me you want me inside you,” The Agent ordered.

Silva tilted his head up and quirked a sultry grin, “Is that what you want?”

Bond withdrew, leaning over him. “I said,” he repeated, “Tell me you want me inside you.”

The blonde smiled dangerously teeth sharp and white, his eyes glinting darkly, “I assumed you’d be a toppy little prick, you don’t disappoint.”

In response, Bond grinned cruelly pressing teasingly against him, “You want me to fuck you or not?”

“You want me to submit to you, like one of your bitches,” Silva surmised,

“Do I have to ask you again?”

Silva groaned shaking his head, laughing, “You perfect bastard! Fine. I want you inside me', happy? Now be a good boy and fuck me.”

“Where are your manners, Silva? Ask nicely and I'll consider it.”

The blonde rolled his eyes back relenting, bucking up wantonly, “Se não me fodes rápido, Eu juro que...”

Bond laughed as the man arched beneath him desperately.

“Fode-me o cú, cabrão!”
“What was that? That didn't sound very polite.”

“I said,” he stuttered out, wrecked, “Fuck me, James, you utter twat.”

“You're terrible at this,” The Agent remarked.

“James, meu querido, eu preciso de ti agora mesmo.”

“Beg.”

Suddenly, Bond felt his companion still, stiffening beneath him.

“No,” Silva refused, tone cold, “that... is not how I play.”

The Agent hesitated momentarily staring down at the tense blonde with a measure of confusion before barely suppressing a wince as he suddenly understood, his rigid cock softening slightly with the down-turn in mood. Filled with sympathy he stared down frozen; gripped by uncertainty

“I did not say stop, you idiot,” the blonde bit out through gritted teeth, “But I will not 'beg' you.”

*That was a line he would be sure not to cross again,* Bond considered, with some measure of discomfort before quickly tugging himself back to full hardness; an easy endeavour with the alluring sight of his companion gazng up at him with wanton hunger beneath him.

Ceding at last, the Agent pressed inward, invading that tight, searing heat and both men gasped. Desperately grabbing at the strong, muscled back of his partner, Silva rolled his hips upward and grabbed his leaking cock applying pressure to the base to waylay his fast approaching orgasm.

At the sight, Bond slowed their rhythm drawing out their pleasure and Silva pitched forward. “Harder,” he demanded.

Complying, the Agent took the other man, pounding into that clenching, demanding heat, white sparks shooting through him.

Filling him again and again with such utter perfection, Silva whined desperately, twisting frantically beneath the man. Just then, Bond reached out, sweeping a hand across the head of his companion's cock, and with a shuttering, ragged breath, the blonde tensed before spasms of ecstasy took him sailing over the edge. Spilling his release into the Agent's fist he trembled out the final throws of his pleasure, watching as with a strangled cry, Bond came shortly after.

Collapsing atop the other man, both gasping in recovery, Bond chuckled deeply, “Got what you came for after all then, haven't you.”

Silva laughed warmly, openly, and leaned forward to kiss the side of the Agent's mouth, “I usually get my way, meu querido.”

Drained of tension and energy, Bond sighed with repletion, “You're fortunate I'm so merciful.”

“Ah, such generosity,” Silva drawled, “I hardly imagine mercy had much to do with it. You've wanted me since the first moment I touched you. I think you thought about it. Dreamt of it. Brought yourself off to the memory... no?”

Bond peered over at the blonde noting his satisfied, cocksure expression with equanimity, “You live a rich fantasy life, don't you.”

“Shut up, you liar and cuddle me,” Silva complained, “You're making me feel cheap.”
Bond rolled his head back and laughed as his companion grabbed him pulling him back down beside him. Tucking the Agent in close, the blonde nuzzled into his neck, damp with sweat and drying spit.

“Tuck the Agent in close, the blonde nuzzled into his neck, damp with sweat and drying spit.

“I need another shower,” Bond informed with a yawn, wiping a hand across the mess over his stomach.

Silva smirked, “I'd be more than happy to assist you in that endeavor.”

“That's generous of you,” he retorted pulling them both up.

Grinning cheerily, Silva trailed after his companion into the bathroom and pressed against him once Bond turned on the cleansing spray.

“I imagine Helena will find her editing of our little display in Vela's office quite entertaining,” Silva mused as he soaped up his companion, caressing his fingers down along the man's back to grab that pert, toned arse. Slipping a teasing finger between the cleft, he trailed perilously close to the man's entrance and Bond's eyes slitted. Sagging against him bonelessly, his flaccid cock stirred once more with the decadent, idle attention.

“I think we have our work cut out for us tomorrow,” Bond muttered through his arousal, ever a mind to business, “You've placed the track on Glasgow I take it?”

“I have. We should be able to obtain a read-out on his precise location in a few hours time,” Silva informed, moving a hand between them, spreading it against the man's defined abdomen appreciatively.

Bond tilted back his head giving access to Silva's hungry mouth. “Insatiable,” the blonde purred, indulgently stroking his companion's cock with loose-fisted lazy motion as he kissed along his jawline.

Yielding, the Agent bucked forward and Silva knelt before him, a grazing hand coming up to dexterously fondle his balls as he slowly lapped at his shaft, bringing him to full hardness before swallowing him down in one sure movement.

Bond instinctively thread his fingers through his companion's drenched blonde locks, yanking just hard enough for the man to growl around him, causing the Agent to buck helplessly into the glorious wet heat of his mouth.

Not for his partner's lack of enthusiasm; the technical aspects were rendered into a sloppier delivery than he was typically accustomed to. Gracefully, Bond acknowledged Silva was probably hindered by his prosthesis. He could feel the unnatural ridge of the plastic plate bump against him as the man continued his efforts without regard for his own personal discomfort. There was a certain undeniable eroticism to this kind of impassioned determination; the end result being one of the most unusual and highly-charged experiences the Agent had ever had.

With a wet pop, Silva released him, working him with his talented hands, and Bond watched in captivation as the blonde again leaned forward, circling just under the head with the flat of his tongue, lathing down the shaft before coming back up to tease the slit.

Silva lustfully gazed up at Bond with heavy-lidded eyes before swallowing him down fully once more and the Agent groaned; breathless at the sight watching through shuttered eyes as the blonde took his own erection in hand, stroking with ever increasing synchronous rapidity.

His cheeks hallowed with a vacuum suck of pressure, pulling the Agent's orgasm from him;
gratefully swallowing every last bit of his bitter release.

Standing up from the floor, Silva crushed his mouth against his companion's before pulling away with a smirk.

“On your knees,” The blonde commanded imperiously.

The Agent grudgingly held fast, staring at him challengingly.

“You can give orders but can't take them? Very selfish,” Silva chastised, pushing him to the floor; the Agent's knees hitting the tile painfully.

Bond winced before glaring up at him, though admirably, he refrained from complaint. Silva sighed impatiently, his heavy cock twitching against his stomach, “Meu deus, James, do you need direction? Should I recommend a manual to you? It's really not so difficult.”

Spurred on by a desire to prove himself more than anything else, without further ado, the Agent complied, completely engulfing him in one quick motion. Silva yelped in delighted surprise, nearly buckling at the knees with the sudden encasing heat. Grabbing his companion's hips to steady him, Bond devoured him with astonishing, practiced aptitude.

Curious, Silva enviously wondered just whom had taught him such mastery of the art as he panted laboriously, falling to pieces, all defenses crumbling under this brilliantly conducted onslaught.

“Meu querido,” Silva uttered breathlessly, “Sim, sim!”

In short time, he sagged against the steamed glass wall behind as his pleasure took helm coiling within; undone and overwhelmed he came with a loud, throaty moan. Bond dropped back, abused lips swollen and pink; a more perfect sight, Silva could not imagine as he observed remnants of his release dripping from the man's chin, catching in the shadow of stubble before being washed down the drain.

The blonde huffed a happy laugh as he assisted the Agent to his feet and pulled him flush against him beneath the spray. “That was magnificent, I hadn't realized you possessed such finesse!”

Bond smirked, “As I've said before, you don't know me quite as well as you imagine.”

“What I am learning,” Silva grinned, “I find I like."
So far, James and Silva have met at a casino with an Italian guy, met a Russian that resulted in bad times for everyone and are currently at this hotel run by two men-- one is a silent partner. Silva flirted a bit with a CIA agent on the dance floor, and then James and Silva found themselves trapped in a closet together and eventually got busy in bed. And in a shower.

00

Squinting against the sharp rays of the morning sun pouring in, Bond awoke to find himself alone in his bed, the sheets gone cold where his companion had spent most of the night intimately wrapped around him. To Bond's amusement and irritation, the man was apparently very affectionate post-coitus.

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Bond glanced around evaluating the damage: clothes, towels and used tissues strewn haphazardly over the floor.

"Bom dia, meu querido!" Silva greeted entering the bedroom. Appearing to the Agent, far too alert and gregarious for the early hour, "I took the liberty of ordering us room-service." Wrapped in an elegant slate robe and carrying two mugs of steaming espresso he swaggered into the room, hip-checking the door behind him.

"You seem like the espresso type, though to be perfectly honest, I hadn't thought to check that particular detail," he explained, coming over to reclaim the space he'd vacated earlier.

"You'd be correct to assume so," Bond admitted somewhat gratefully, catching scent of the aromatic steam emanating from the java. Silva smiled, pleased, by this sudden air of easy, tranquil domesticity settling over them.

Bond ran a tongue over his gritty teeth as he accepted his drink, "I take it you've come to brief me."

The blonde inhaled appreciatively as he appraised his companion...(lover?), sheets tangled immodestly low across the man's narrow hips.

"I would if you were wearing any."

"Ha, nothing like old, recycled office humour," Bond snorted, "So witty."

"I like to think so."

The Agent pulled a pillow up behind him, leaning back against the headboard, "So? What's the update?"

"Helena sends her congratulations on our upcoming 'nuptials',' Silva drawled, "I suppose she obviously must have drawn her conclusion upon witnessing our little row from last night in Vela's office while editing the surveillance feeds."
Bond groaned, hiding his expression behind his mug.

"Why am I afraid you arranged that whole show on purpose?"

The blonde laughed mirthfully, "Isn't that a bit of stretch, James? I swear, you jump to some strange conclusions."

"I don't know." The Agent hummed thoughtfully through a sip of his brew, "You're prone to committing some strange actions."

"You think I'm unpredictable?" Silva snorted, "You should try looking in the mirror."

The blonde watched his companion raise an inquiring eyebrow and grinned.

"You have this extraordinary way of being either thoughtlessly blunt or strategically withholding, and I can rarely anticipate which version I'm going to see next," Silva explained perching himself on the edge of the bed, "I haven't yet decided whether I find this trait alarming or charming... but at least you never fail to entertain me which cannot be said for the other ninety-nine point nine percent of the populace."

He took a drink from his mug and sighed fondly, "You, my friend, are a rare bird."

"Coming from you, that's quite a statement," Bond droned ironically.

"So," Silva asked curiously, "what is this amusing new theory you've concocted about some show or another you think I've purposefully arranged?"

The Agent shrugged, "I can't help but think you overacted a bit to prove something to your CIA friend. You have a very abstruse sense of humour, I wouldn't put it past you."

"It was to some degree for her benefit, but mostly for my own," Silva conceded enigmatically. Bond raised his eyebrows, huffing a laugh.

"I don't think I want to know." Pulling the sheets up protectively, Bond straightened his back against the headboard, "What else did she relay?"

"She's requested we lay low for the next 48 hours until her partner checks in. It's of paramount import that we do so, or we'll all be compromised. I've arranged for us transport to Glasgow's coordinates at 09:00 the day after tomorrow where we'll pay him a discreet visit. If we can maneuver access into his compound, it'll be a literal walk in the park to shake out the hub."

"Our direct link then," Bond ascertained.

"This is true. I only need to gain entry into his database, if we can bypass his physical security."

"I figure you've a plan?"

"Helena has supplied us with an interior-site map of the facility's ducting, the clever, accommodating darling," Silva smirked, "Subtle infiltration by air vent ala Mission Impossible. Tom Cruise-style. It should be a simple feat to interfere with the electronic surveillance."

"You like her," Bond pointed out grinning.

"Hmm," Silva agreed, "She does has a certain tactical cunning and a real knack for minimalist methodology. Similar to yourself, she has this particularly disarming guilelessness which she skillfully uses to her advantage. She's as talented as any of the best double-oh's I've ever been
privileged to encounter in my day. A true professional in her field."

Bemused by the flattering portrayal, the Agent noted his companion trailing off with a distracted expression before redirecting his gaze at his hands, wrapped around his mug.

"Nevertheless, you are mistaken, my dear, if you think I like her," Silva chuckled grimacing, "She's quite awful, actually. Ugh."

"Is that so?" Bond smirked, "To elicit that type of reaction she really must be quite the force majeure. Even if you can't stand the woman I think it's safe to bet you respect her."

"Hmm," Silva hummed thoughtfully. "It sounds to me like someone is jealous."

The agent sighed with deep exasperation, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

"You are absurdly off target," he intoned wearily. The blonde raised an eyebrow.

"Please, Raoul, wax prosaic on whomever strikes your fancy. It makes little difference to me."

"Hm, is this permission you grant me?" Silva smirked with a lascivious glint in his eye. Leaning forward, he set aside his mug and stroked a hand across the Agent's chiseled abdomen, laying his palm flat over the ledge of his sternum. "Shouldn't be too much of a challenge."

Bond watched the blonde with calm curiosity, relaxing slowly beneath his inquisitive touch.

"I'll accept," Silva mused, gaze lingering on the rise and fall of his companion's chest with every inhalation and exhalation.

"I could... 'wax quite prosaic' on your many delectable attributes," he offered with a seductive lilt to his tone; tracing his finger in a circular motion around a nipple for good measure. "...Hmm?"

The Agent sighed, rolling his eyes, "Subtle."

"I swear to you, I never intend to be."

"Thank god, because you're dreadful at it."

Silva smiled with open fondness as he regarded his companion. Stroking back down over the rippling muscles, he paused just before arriving at the edge of the sheet draped low over his companion's hips.

"You know... we do, for once, have a bit of spare time on our hands, and I think I know of a way to spend it to our mutual advantage."

Bond quirked a grin at the blonde's suggestive tone.

"Is that so?"

Shifting up the bed, Silva brought his hand up around the back of the Agent's neck, coaxing him forward. Closing the gap, the blonde leaned in. With methodical deliberation he grazed his mouth over his companion's before finally connecting them together. Enveloping the man's succulent, pouting lower lip between his own, Silva savored the left-over flavour of the espresso; his tongue darting out to gather the last of the remaining essence.

Pressing forward, he drew the man into a slow, lazy and lengthy kiss. The Agent wrapped a hand up around behind his head, threading his fingers through his hair as their exploration deepened. With a
measure of reluctance, Silva pulled slightly away providing just enough distance to enable him to
gauge his conquest's shuttered, heated expression. Annoyed by the unanticipated separation, Bond
huffed a small, nearly inaudible sound of disappointment; the gust of his sigh caressing warmly over
the Blonde's lips.

Silva grinned, congratulated himself for successfully crumbling the man's composure, before
loosening the knot of his robe. Bond leaned back receptively, returning the grin with one of his own
as he peered up at the blonde beneath heavy-lidded eyes; pupils dilated with growing arousal as the
man continued his ministrations.

Crawling atop and balancing over the man, Silva stabilized himself with one hand pressed into the
mattress over Bond's head while using the other to provocatively traverse along the alluring
indentations of his hips. Smirking, the blonde let his hand drop over the outline of the impressive
bulge hidden beneath the sheet and chuckled warmly as the Agent gasped, exhaling hotly through

Bond quirked a wry grin, bucking up into his hand in response. "You provide exemplary room-
service."

Ah, then you will permit me to take a tip for my services... yes?"

The Agent found himself rendered speechless, twisting in pleasure; the muscles of his sculpted
abdomen clenching beneath the wet trail of Silva's talented, teasing tongue.

"Urnh," he groaned inarticulately in a lust-deepened rumble, "Holy Jesus."

Silva laughed, "Comparing me to a deity? I'll accept it."

"You would, you narcissist," Bond retorted.

"It's funny," the blonde mused, "That's the second time I've been called that in under 24 hours."

"I have noticed you do spend an incredibly long time primping. So yes, I think it's an accurate
assessment."

"Tch!" Silva snorted, "It takes one to know one, hmm?"

"Pitiful deflection, you flashy fop."

"Nice alliteration."

"Nice manicure," Bond retorted smartly, pointedly eyeing the man's fingers splayed over his chest.

"Meu deus," Silva huffed, exasperated by his companion's irksome cajoling, "Do I have to order a
muzzle for you?"

The Agent grunted as his companion straddled him, pressing down against him as he bit the juncture
between his shoulder and neck, worrying the flesh between his teeth.

"Is this how you plan to silence me?"

"...It's one way," Silva quipped back.

Shrugging off his robe completely, he shifted down the bed, lowering himself over his companion,
and with a teasing grin, the blonde suddenly buried his face into the the wrinkled folds bunched at
the Agent's groin. Bond nearly jumped back at the action and Silva laughed up at him with mirthful
vengeance. "...And that's another," he finished before leaning down once more.

Pressing his nose against the linens, he inhaled through the fabric the heady scent of masculine arousal; his own straining in full hardness, neglected as he tended to his companion.

Bond dragged his fingers through the blonde's mussed locks as he bit and nipped traveling along the length of his inner thigh, leaving wet bite marks over the sheets; pointedly ignoring his primary destination. With a level of irritated urgency, the Agent rolled his hips in a ploy for attention.

"Good things come to those who wait, yes?" Silva smirked before nudging his nose against the wet spot that had formed, saturating through the fabric over the head of his companion's cock.

"Shit," Bond moaned, sweat beading over his brow, as the blonde finally snatched away the sheet, allowing his erection to slap heavily against his stomach.

Grabbing the distracted Agent's narrow, muscular hips, Silva yanked him forward. With a surprised yelp, the man landed backward onto the mattress; the metal springs creaking beneath him with the sudden force.

"Was that really necessary," Bond mumbled with a small, cross little huff of indignation and wounded pride as he righted himself.

Only of course, to collapse back downward as the blonde's tongue flicked over his cock to collect the clear drop of fluid that had accumulated at the tip.

Before he could speak out in protest, Bond found himself being rolled over onto his stomach. Shoving a pillow under his hips to prop him up, Silva situated his companion with a very clear objective in mind.

Bond grunted in shock, jolting forward as Silva parted him and delved in, invading his entrance with the flat of his hot tongue. The blonde steadied his companion with strong, controlling hands relentlessly lathing the now hyper-sensitive, twitching muscle as the Agent bucked and shook beneath him, moaning with abandon as he lost himself in the onslaught of sensation.

Silva drew away with a small placating pat to his companion's bum before leaning over the edge of the bed to snag the wayward bottle of lubricant. He'd recalled it had had rolled somewhere near the nightstand after being tossed aside the night before.

"Fuck," Bond groaned; utterly undone as he lay in a limp sprawl.

"Yes, dear," Silva retorted with a shred of irritation as he fumbled in the dark between the furniture, "That's the idea."

As his companion's absence stretched, the few seconds felt like hours; The Agent frowned, feeling somewhat vulnerably exposed and a bit idiotic with his arse raised in the air.

To his relief, in a short time, Silva crawled back over him, soothing down his back with his warm hands before placing an apologetic kiss between his shoulder blades.

"Dear God, for a minute I thought you weren't coming back," the Agent muttered flinching, as his companion spread him open to apply a liberal amount of lubricating jelly with his somewhat cold
"That is one crime I would not commit," Silva laughed, breaching the tight entrance. Bond closed his eyes, his arms wrapped around the pillow under his head as his companion worked inward before inserting a second digit. Successful in this, he incorporated a third and the Agent suddenly winced, squirming in mild discomfort as he attempted to accustom himself to the intrusion. Feeling the rejecting clenching contraction the blonde suppressed an impatient sigh and withdrew.

"Have you not-"

"It's been awhile," Bond interjected with a defensive huff, "Give me a moment."

"*Mais... Boum...Quand notre coeur fait boum...*" Silva sang in a lazy mumble to distract himself from his nagging, insistent arousal as he worked his lover loose enough to receive him.

"*...Tout avec lui dit Boum...*"

This time, upon pushing inward, Bond nearly flew off the bed as his companion struck something inside of him that sent white stars shooting behind the Agent's eyes. With another deft twist of his dextrous fingers he had the man trembling with need, fucking himself on his hand; his unintelligible moaning music to Silva's ears.

"*...Et c'est l'amour qui s'éveille..*" he finished, humming the rest of the tune with a pleased smiled spreading across his face as he rolled on his condom. At last, Silva pressed in, sliding slowly into the encompassing, constricting heat of the Agent tightly gripping the sheets and panting face-down into the bedding beneath him.

Full to the hilt, Bond felt the man above him pause considerately to allow him a second to adjust. With a short jab downward the Agent was rendered into a sobbing, begging, mess.

"*Meu Deus!*" Silva expressed emphatically, "You are a beautiful creature, James."

Pulling out, the blonde assisted his companion to his back, the man's chest heaving as he stared up at him with a measure of glazed over mute confusion.

"I missed your face- your pretty blue eyes," he explained, peering down at the Agent, his dark eyes sparkling, shrouded beneath a mess of wild blonde fringe.

"Here now be a good boy and put your legs up, hmm?"

Bond hesitated at a sudden, rebellious thought; reminding him of just whom he was so voluntarily putting out for.

"Do you not want me to fuck you, after all, meu querido?" Silva asked catching his companion's expression with a look of concern. The Agent considered the question and after a short moment of deliberation, shook his head, granting his consent clearly. The blonde's returning smile shone as a slash of white, glinting against the sunlight. "Good choice," he approved, maneuvering himself against the other man.

Bond grunted audibly, as Silva thrust forward; impaling the man upon his blunt, unforgiving cock. Pounding into him with successively less care than he had prior to this moment the Agent found himself scrambling backward.

Seizing the man by his ankles with ruthless ferocity, Silva dragged him back into place and bore his weight down atop his companion, pinning him to the bed.
Easily, the Agent could have fought the man off if he had any mind to, but there was something incredibly, intoxicating about ceding control just then.

Biting and groaning gutturally into his lover's neck Silva drove inward with relentless force. Bond gritted his teeth trying to remember how to breathe as every thrust brought another burst of pleasure and even sharper pain.

"Sh, sh," Silva calmed as his lover struggled beneath him, "Sh, meu querido, tão bonito."

Bond insinuated an arm between them and grabbed his cock, pulling it fiercely in tempo as the man flayed him in two from the inside out. It had been nearly a decade since he'd been on the receiving end, and never had any previous lover taken him with such command, heedless of injury. A torrent of endorphins released into his system, the pain becoming indistinguishable from the pleasure, his cock weeping in his hand as he moaned into Silva's insistent mouth.

Silva fucked into him like a goddamn battering ram and Bond's defenses shattered against the unceasing assault and he gasped with a broken moan.

The bed groaned and creaked beneath them with the abuse, knocking in dull thuds against the wall behind. Sweat dripping down his face, Silva's head dropped backward with a heavy groan, strings of profanity borrowed from his mother-tongue rolling in entrancing silvery strands from him lips.

"Foda-se, sim, meu James."

Rocking forward, Bond uttered his name incoherently, repeating it several more times causing Silva to wonder with a degree of affection tightening into a knot beneath his ribcage, if the man realized what he was doing.

Or what effect it was having on him.

A barely tangible, only half-realized thought fleeting crossed his mind: Something about 'two parts to one whole'...

In a quick effort of self-preservation, Silva caged the sentimental musing and tossed it away to be looked at another day before staking his claim on his lover with unequivocal absolution.

Observing the breathless man beneath him, Silva considered that even objectively, the man was a masterpiece. Rays from the bright sun poured in from the window glimmering across his Agent's sweat-laden, athletic form, highlighting the contorting catch and release of muscles beneath.

It was gratifying to think he was responsible for such unyielding dismantlement, taking him a part bit by bit from the inside out.

Oh, you are in trouble.

"Meu deus," he muttered brokenly at the revelation and stricken with a sudden bout of irrational paranoia, he truly hoped James was not inclined to any sort of clairvoyance.

Clearing his mind, Silva refocused himself.

At last, Bond cried out in final surrender, his release wracked from him violently as he shuddered beneath his companion; shooting a jetting stream of cum between them; this action pulling Silva over the edge after him in it's wake.

Head buzzing, the blonde rolled off, flopping to the other side of the bed. At last having caught their
breath, the two recovering men lay beside each other in boneless, sated, sore-muscled exhaustion.

Rolling off the used condom, the blonde wrapped it in a tissue and discarded it with an easy toss into
the nearby rubbish bin.

"Meu Deus," Silva sighed, grinning as he peered over at his companion, "That was a magnificent
way to start the day, no?" Bond winced, shuffling upward to sit against the headboard with an
unhappy expression.

"I think," the Agent muttered, "it is certainly a way to start the day if you don't intend for me
to...walk anytime soon."

"I wouldn't dream of requesting you partake in such a strenuous activity," Silva smirked, bringing the
soiled sheet up to wipe his face, "Not used to a man so well endowed, I gather?"

"Don't flatter yourself."

"Haha, now, now, my dear, I hardly think we need to pretend you aren't awed by my considerable
assets," Silva laughed mirthfully, "I'm under no doubt I've left you with an ample impression."

"Literally."

The blonde frowned at his companion's strained expression, "Really James, try to be a man about it,
hm? A little temporary discomfort builds character."

The Agent leveled at his companion a pointed, wordless glare to which Silva simply shrugged in
reply. "I can make it up to you."

"Really."

The blonde smiled, bemused by his companion's petulance, "I don't mean like that. I may be in the
prime of my life but even I have my limits."

"The 'prime of your life' passed a few decades ago," Bond retorted smartly.

"Ha! Speak for yourself, old man."

Getting up from the bed Silva swept into the bathroom and came back out with a fresh towel and
dampened wash cloth. "I was thinking, after we get cleaned up, that perhaps you would accompany
me to breakfast. Then we could take a stroll through the city, see the sights... shop a bit, so on and so
forth." he suggested while chivalrously tending to his lover by wiping away the sticky, drying
ejaculate from his chest. Impatiently, Bond snatched the cloth from him with pointed intent to do so
himself.

Silva relented, and with a weary sigh, he collapsed down beside the other man, tossing the towel at
him testily, "So independent, aren't we?"

"I don't know what you think this is, Silva," Bond clipped out, "A good fuck is a good fuck. That's
it. A side benefit to the job." The blonde quirked an eyebrow, studying the Agent. With a sly grin, he
moved a hand around the back of the other man and stroked up his spine, massaging the tensed
muscles bunched at his neck.

"Such strict lines you draw," Silva drawled, "Trying to convince yourself of something, hmm?"

Bond moved away with a taciturn scowl, gingerly rising from the bed and winced at the sharp
twinge in his arse shooting up his spine; *a keen reminder.*

Irately grabbing the spare towel he tucked it around his waist and stiffly headed over to the folded clothes laying atop the bureau.

"You, my friend, need to relax," Silva remarked.

"I will relax," Bond informed slowly, "*when we are done here."

"That's rather vague. Care to specify?"

The Agent stared at him coldly, "I think you know what I mean."

"I swear James," Silva sighed, "you're the only man I've ever bedded to make such a fuss in the after-glow. Now I don't know what bee has buzzed its way inside your bonnet, my dear, but I'm sure you'll feel better after we tuck in for a bit of breakfast, hmm?"

Bond pursed his lips as he regarded the man coolly for a long moment.

"Fine," he caved, "Get out and let me change."

"Oh, also," the Agent added with an afterthought, catching the blonde in the doorway before he departed, "Since it's almost noon, I think I'd prefer to skip breakfast and go straight to the lunch menu. Wherever you take us make sure they serve roast beef, got it?"

"That's specific," Silva noted, bemused.

00

The entirety of the two day played out like a chapter from a book Bond had never read.

It was neither familiar nor scripted.

They shop and dine and then press repeat as the hours roll by and he feels more relaxed than he has in... along time.

It was a bit as if he'd unwittingly agreed to go off on holiday with the man.

And really, Bond could not help but feel a bit like the planet to Silva's sun, pulled to him by some remarkable force of gravity. In one moment, his companion would shift to a serious tone; taking an initiative here or there to educate or mull on about something or another, and in the next he was all effusive charm; entertaining and witty and teasing.

Observing the Agent's customary implacability transforming into something more receptive, Silva slyly tested his boundaries: everything done in passing with a touch to James' cuff as he brought him to attention, a short caress to the small of his back amid a crowd, his gaze lingering, holding perhaps a hair longer than necessary, the sweep of a hand against his own as they strolled beside each other.

Cleverly he scraped off just a few more layers, reveling in what lay beneath.

*Silva learned several things: James Bond had a pithy, dry and dark sense of humour for one. He liked golf- though wasn't terribly good at it. He was quite particular with sophisticated tastes, and clearly enjoyed to be provided with creature comforts which the blonde could certainly relate with. But most importantly he observed, aside from the Agent's rigid exterior, he had a softer side he cloaked with many vices; pills and booze and casual sex with strangers all a clear result of his severely limited ability to trust.*
Nevertheless, they fell into a kind of tacitly implied truce. There was something very organic about their dynamic; though both entirely dissimilar, they fitted each other with a curious ease.

Earlier in the afternoon Silva announced that he needed another outfit, thus, upon passing a haberdashery the blonde stopped before the storefront to appraise a sleek, handsome suit picturing how it would look on himself before pausing; narrowing his eyes as a sudden sense of deja-vu nagged at the corner of his brain.

A low chuckled sounded behind him. "If you're attempting to figure out why it looks familiar that's because it's a Tom Ford. The same one I had on when we met Roger King," Bond informed. Silva shook his head at himself in wonderment.

"I think you're rubbing off on me," he muttered drolly.

In response, the Agent raised an eyebrow, smirking ironically. "Hm. Not at the moment."

"Ugh," Silva cringed, huffing a short laugh, "I should have seen that coming."

"Well, at least your sense of taste is improving," Bond chided in good humour.

"I'd say I have quite excellent taste- look at you!" Silva pointed out wrapping an arm around the Agent's waist, fitting him snugly against his side as they companionably strolled down the street.

Later in the evening, as they lay together, sated and sleepy, Bond on his side and his companion on his stomach; the blonde's broad, tanned back exposed to view, the Agent found himself trailing a hand over the marred skin inspecting the countless scars, some shallow, superficial and silvery, nearly faded, others deeply mottled and disfiguring. Most, clearly a result of the torture the man had endured at the brutal hand of the Chinese all those years ago. Surface remnants of a still bleeding wound within. The most recent, was a clean, straight, pink and white line toward the center off to the right of his spine, below the shoulder blade.

"It had to have gone deep," Bond mused.

"Some things go deeper," Silva retorted darkly, shivering as the Agent traced the scar with a single tip of his finger.

"You know I didn't have much of a choice."

"I've never blamed you, James," Silva informed peering up at him under heavy-lidded eyes.

"Though I may have cast one or two curses at your name... Hurt like a son of a bitch. And I was terribly bored- it was such a very long recovery. Though... I've had longer."

"I can imagine there must have been a great deal of internal bleeding... Even if the blade somehow bypassed all vital organs, out in such isolation, ninety percent of your men dead or arrested..."

Silva laughed darkly, "As I said, life clings to me like a disease. I also had the advantage of an expedient rescue operation. Slipped me out right from under MI-6. One tends to be afforded such efforts when one writes the checks."

"That's some loyalty you've bought."

"Being on my payroll is enough of an incentive."

"Sounds like you're offering me employment."
Silva narrowed his eyes, studying the man before him.

"Would there be much difference? I imagine under your employ I'd be utilized in a very similar fashion as I am now within the law... so what would be the draw? Do you have a particularly generous benefits package and pension upon retirement? Do you offer a good dental plan or something? Because I highly doubt my life-expectancy would be much extended...if anything I'd think it would be shortened."

"I never would offer you anything of that sort in the first place," Silva sighed rubbing the bridge of his nose. "You're far too impor- valuable."

The blonde hesitated before finally coming to a decision. "Me casa, para casa," he explained, "this is what I offer."

Bond swallowed thickly as the meaning sunk in.

"You think on it. It is your choice."

Whatever defenses he'd constructed against the man crumble to oblivion (at least for the remainder of this two day interlude) as Silva archs beneath him that night, crying his name. It's too intimate and it's dangerous.

It's a brand of perfection he can't look at too closely.

Silva approaches sex like everything else; with a certain exacting, artistry of form; equal parts careful precision and unleashed chaos. Bond fucks him and he yields, allows himself to be taken yet masterfully conducts from the bottom up.

He speaks to him as no lover has before, with playful humour interspersed with a certain level of intensity; his evocative, visceral prose in the heat of passion often laced with that of his native tongue; done so when no other word will quite suffice to translate.

There is a certain enthralling, inexplicable eroticism to the man, a fluid sensuality in his every movement. His eyes sparkle darkly and his voice pours from him, quick-silver slick tenor that rolls over Bond, lulling him to eventual unconsciousness. The words slide through him, coalescing vibrantly. He dreams of intangible, abstractions: bolts of color slicing through foreign landscape, people laughing or drinking or dancing.

He awakens later in the night to a gentle motion against him, a form pulling him close. Bond turns his head, still half asleep with unspoken question written in his expression to which his companion licks his kiss-bitten lips and hushes him. He reminds him that they have a busy day tomorrow and tells him to go back to sleep.

The Agent complies, relaxing with the soft brush of a warm mouth trailing down his neck and his shoulders, the outline of a smile pressed against his back.

"Vá dormir, meu amor."

The edge of sleep pulling him back in, he accepts the endearment without examination. It can always be excused in the light of day as a figment or something without too much meaning, muttered because with boneless exhaustion comes easy intimacy.

For the second night in a row, he sleeps soundly.
'Beep- Beep- Beep-

A low-volume alarm sounded warningly, and Bond, trained to hair-trigger response at even the slightest invocation of danger jolted awake with a deep, silently indrawn breath grabbing instinctively for his Walther PPK beside him.

Silva, with matching intuitive guard was already sitting up, Steyr M9-A1 in hand, grim and intently focused, eyes narrowed in the dark at the monitor. The red glow blinking: '04:04 Yellow', signaling an intrusion past their discreetly placed security system in the hall just outside their suite.

With a brief silent exchange they rolled from the bed as the warning changed to orange, their trespassers having overridden Silva's entry authorization codes. Adrenaline charged through Bond, energizing him as he quickly donned the nearest article of clothing.

Silva's serious expression of stern professionalism faltered slightly, twitching with faint amusement as he recognized his partner's choice of garment. Clad in the blonde's wrinkled blue robe, Bond huffed a sigh and grabbed the sheet from off the bed, tossing it toward his naked companion.

Tying the linens around him in a makeshift toga, Silva grinned as the Agent passed him back his Steyr and using the bed as a convenient barricade, the two men knelt behind in preparation.

Hearing the click of a latch and the resulting quiet footfall denoting entry, Bond sucked in a calm breath, readying his aim; Silva's gun similarly trained beside him at the doorway.

"AUGH!"

Jarred by the sudden panicked, pained cry, they watched as the heavy mahogany door was flung open smacking against the wall behind, Helena being shoved violently inward, collapsed to the floor of the bedroom with a heavy thud.

Through the glow of the nightsky from behind, the dismayed men could see clearly, the woman's bloodied and broken form as she lay securely bound and manacled upon the floor; overcome by a ceaseless torrent of wracking, agonized, gurgling sobs.

"Greetings and felicitations, etcetera as so forth, boys!" Bellowed a voice from the other room.

"Afraid to come out and play?" Silva retorted, a malevolent grin spreading across his face.

"I am not altogether sure I care to see you gents 'inflagrante'," the voice intoned acerbically, "Not really high up there on my list of priorities."

"Your loss," Silva chided.

Moaning from the floor on the other side of the bed, the CIA Agent thickly coughed, incoherently lulling in and out of consciousness.

"Now what could this poor girl possibly have done to deserve such ungentlemanly treatment?" Silva chastised, "And for what purpose do you come uninvited at such an unconscionably early hour disrupting our beauty sleep?"
"I must say, you would offend my employer with such an inquiry, don't pretend to be naïve. Do you really think we wouldn't be alerted by your indiscreet blundering attempts at surveillance? The breach in access to Vela's mobile? 'Torvald Montgomery' or should I say Agent Stern, played his cards well enough, but you blokes were really careless."

Silva smirked at Bond, and the Agent caught the meaning directly.

_They think we're directly connected with the CIA, he said wordlessly with his pointed expression._

"No need for bluffing, Agents! We know everything already...but, I do have to say.. we sound like we all hail from the same country, so I suppose MI-6 is in line with the CIA on this one. I'm sure my employer will be interested to learn this when I report back to him. Your friend, Agent Beckett, or should I say 'Helena'- as you chaps know her, failed to mention this detail though she really was quite helpful. Cracked beautifully under the right amount of pressure..."

"I thought you Agents were made of sterner stuff, though to her credit, she was awfully reticent," the gravelly voice drawled, "eventually we convinced her to loosen those tight lips of hers..."

Squinting into the dark with dawning horror as the man's words became literally apparent, Bond observed the choking woman curled in on herself; her mouth bleeding profusely where a blade had nearly peeled her lips clean off her face, skin and flesh torn and dangling.

Steeling himself against the site, Bond could see Silva's form tremble with a new tension, though his face remained ever impassive, masked by cool disinterest.

"Gentlemen, you are only prolonging the inevitable, you have no back up. Resistance is futile, so why don't you do us all a favour and drop your weapons. Surrender and your death will be quick and painless."

"You mean unlike our associate?" Bond bit out crisply as he ruefully regarded the whimpering woman still writhing mindlessly on the floor.

"Apparently she did you at least one good turn before giving you away. Did some edits of you two in Vela's office. Found the footage, couldn't see the faces. She ID'd you soon enough after a little persuasion. I have to say, I'm more than pleased to rid the world of you," the man spat with disdain, "Two less amoral faggots cluttering up the commonwealth with all your putrid indecency. Disgusting."

Bond gritted his teeth while his companion shook with laughter beside him.

"You really think, my friend, _that is such an egregious_ insult?" Silva snorted, "Please, come and let me personally show you the error of your ways. If you think you're _man_ enough to take it."

"I have five men here to your team of two- you're outgunned," the man warned ignoring the barb, "How about I give you a demonstration of just how _merciful_ I can be."

A single shot muffled by the long barrel of a silencer ended the woman's tortured moans, Silva uttered a low, nearly inaudible snarl, taking her death more personally than the Agent who remained unflinching; coolly composed. Reaching out, Bond contained his companion with a single, small touch to his elbow.

"It's really that simple. We have all the information we need. Her partner has already been dispatched and soon shall you."

"Too cowardly for a good old-fashioned fire-fight- 'guns a' blazing'?'" Silva intoned, "How typical."
Several dark laughs emanated from the other room and another man barked out his amusement, "Give up and die with some honour, hey? Be a sport."

"Come on out, you filthy butt-buggering queers!"

Through the rowdy, demeaning name-calling and laughter beyond their bedroom, Silva smirked slyly at the Agent beside him and Bond raised a curious eyebrow.

"Remote mines," Silva whispered conspiratorially with a wink, reaching under the bed to retrieve a small gray box, "You never know just when you'll need them."

An enormous fiery, loud boom sounded as the explosion shook the suite and both men took cover from the ball of flame and flying shrapnel. Bits of wood and plaster shooting out against the panicked shouts from the other room.

Shrill Fire alarms sounded in a whirring, piercing siren, red and white lights flashing across the gloom. A dousing spray released from sprinklers installed in the ceiling mere seconds later and Silva grinning at his companion, his wet blonde hair sticking to his forehead, water dripping in rivulets down his face.

"And that is how one deals with narrow minded bigotry," Silva intoned, with an inflection of humour, "Just another of one of my many varied interests in the spectrum of politics."

Bond wiped a hand to clear the obscuring water from his lashes, peering through the dark at the other man, "restoring order against what you perceive as injustice does seem to be a rather favoured part of your repertoire. Is your plan to delve into social vigilantism?"

"I prefer the term 'activism'," Silva mused dryly as they carefully crept from their spot behind the bed, "Though I suppose it's just a matter of semantics."

Billowing black clouds cascaded overhead as the two rose from their spots darting to the wall behind the singed door hanging precariously from its hinges. In spite of the sprinklers, the inferno raged, catching the carpets and furnishings of the suite as strangled cries of those in the other room announced that a few of the men remained alive. Bond exchanged a calculated look with his companion as they ducked low, masking their faces against the acrid smoke.

Efficiently, the two men emptied their rounds into the last of Glasgow's men.

The ring-leader, the man whom had shot Helena lay on the floor writhing in agony, both legs in bloody ruin nearly severed at the knees.

"Do it, you fucking bastard, cock-sucking faggot."

Silva grinned and lowered his gun, instead kicking the man hard with the side of his foot. The man grunted loudly in pain as the blow connected sharply with an audible crack to his ribcage and proceeded to spew up a thick combination of vomit and blood.

"That is for my friend you killed."

Once more, his foot landed with a solid sick thud into the man's side, "And that is for being an ignorantrpedaço de merda. You deserve the courtesy of neither honour nor mercy in death as you had none in life, meu amigo."

He leaned forward over the dying man, a sinister pull to his smile, "Think. On. Your. Sins."
Bond inhaled sharply watching the scene, reminded just then of just why Sévérine had been so justifiably terrified of this man.

Yet, however sadistic, it was a fitting form of vengeance served cold he could not entirely disapprove of.

Grabbing only the necessities they fled into Silva's neglected side of their lodgings and expediently changed into the first most suitable clothing in the man's luggage before dashing back out, dodging the smoke and flames and bodies strewn throughout.

Alarmed shouting could be heard echoing from outside the suite down the hall as hotel-patrons and security swarmed outside.

"Wait," Silva warned, "we'll exit out the windows."

"We're twenty-seven stories up," Bond argued.

"I'm certain you're fit enough to scale a wall, James," Silva retorted briskly, "Besides, I was prepared for this eventuality."

Silva rifled through his bag and pulled out the requisite scaling gear.

"Christ, you have a lot in there! What are you, Mary Poppins?"

Silva grinned, tossing over several aluminum clips, some gloves and a rope.

"No time for harnesses, put on the gloves" he said shooting out the window, the glass shattering outward, "fasten the other grappling hook, and slide down, secure the line and I'll grab what I can and follow shortly."

Obeying orders, Bond slid down the rope, using both feet to thrust off the wall on the way down. Shots rang out as more of Glasgow's men invaded the suite, and Bond tied down the line at the base, hidden behind several bushes surrounding the foundation of the hotel.

Two bags of luggage flew from over the window's ledge and the Agent dodged out of the way, narrowly missing being smacked in the head by the final heavy silver case flung after.

His companion lunged out the window one handed, still gunning down his assailants. Shredding his bare hand along the rope as he slid, legs wrapped around the line he came to the bottom at last. Grabbing the cases, the two men darted away into the back parking lot, sirens blaring as patrol and firetrucks swarmed to the scene.

Under the cover of shadow, Silva whisked his companion into a many-tiered concrete parking garage adjacent to the Hotel.

Ever vigilant of the security cameras planted throughout, Bond opened his case and pulled out two ski masks tossing one to his partner.

Silva sighed and pulled it over his face, "I really hate these ones, they're so smothering. Why can't we at least have had the ones with the separate hole for the nose, is that so much to ask?"

Bond rolled his eyes as he pulled out a pair of wire strippers and a screwdriver.

"Don't forget the gloves, dear," Silva sighed taking out a roll of gauze to wrap his bleeding hand, "This is not so fun- this rope burn. I wish I'd had the damn things on before leaping out that
window."

Making short work of hot-wiring a nearby black BMW 7-Series, they peeled out of the garage, just as several of Glasgow’s men in slick silver Lotus Eternes' took pursuit from the top floor of the parking structure.

Racing down the ramps, two cars swerved to block them from outside narrowly dodging them with a sharp 180, Bond charged down the lot stomping down on the gas pedal, thrilled by the subsequent rush of adrenaline.

Once more, another Lotus sped down after them The silver sedan on his tail nearly colliding with the tall wrought-iron entry gates. Patrol vehicles arriving at the scene, high-tailed after the cars, the shrill of sirens wailing behind.

Maneuvering down the spiraling drive, Silva gripped the dash with a maniacal grin as he studied the navigation system, "turn and slam on your brakes, then cut through the alley to your left."

Bond complied, cars crashing behind with loud squeals of tires burning rubber against the concrete and shredding metal as several collided. Zooming down the alley, he made a sharp turn and cut across an intersection over the grass median and into the oncoming traffic of the early-morning commuters, horns blasting as cars swerved to avoid them.

"This is really quite exhilarating!" Silva declared, laughing gleefully.

"As you can clearly see," Bond boasted with a confident air, "I have a way with a good car'."

"You have a way with quite a bit more than that."

With a devious glint in his eye, the blonde turned on the radio, blasting Rihanna's 'Only Girl' and crossed his arms behind his head, reclining back in his leather seat, completely content to revel in the music with the gusto of a club-hopping party-girl- much to his companion's bemusement. The Agent glanced over at the man, cracking a grin before training his eyes back on the road as he faked out the last of their pursuers. Revving the engine full-throttle it roared alive and they swept down the highway at full speed, losing Glasgow’s men at the next exit.

"Keep thinkin' of me

Doin' what you like

So boy forget about the world

Cuz it's gon' be you and me tonight"

"I imagine by this point, Glasgow is well prepared for our eminent arrival, so no more of this covert ventilation system scheme we'd discussed," Silva mused.

"Do we have a plan B?"

"When do we not?" the blonde drawled, "We'll employ force to topple his castle and drag him out by his ear."

"That seems like it'd smart," the Agent winced; his ears twinging in sympathy as he commiserated with the image.

"Since he suspects we're CIA operatives we're quite safe from exposure to our quarry," Silva
continued, "We have him silenced while we stand looking on from the sidelines, and 'poof', like magic we're back undercover."

"Sound logic."

"Of course it is," Silva quipped back, "It did come from me, afterall."

The Agent stared out at the sky ahead, the dawn breaking across the horizon, and a thrill crackled through him, feeling more alive than he'd felt for many missions prior.

"Program in our destination," Bond directed, "and ring up some friends to join the party."

Silva laughed delightedly, the landscape whizzing past as they sped across Belgium, "Why James, darling, I do love it when you clip out orders at me. We should really do this more often."

*Like I'm the only one that's in command *

*'Cause I'm the only one who understands *

*Like I'm the only one who knows your heart*

The music pumping out from the powerful sub-woofers thrummed through the cabin of the sedan, and Bond considered in that moment that he could not disagree.

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Bond stretched lazily, leaning back in his chair and glanced out the window of the cafe at the pedestrians strolling past. He yawned deeply relaxed, his hand wrapped around his cool glass of orange juice.

Dressed in a casual ensemble of a fitted, sporty, royal-blue track jacket and light gray slacks, the Agent looked comfortably relaxed and youthful and terribly handsome and Silva couldn't help but feel some measure of pride that he was *tapping that.*

Catching his gaze at last Bond smirked.

"I could get used to these Belgian breakfasts," he exclaimed, eagerly tucking into the sizable feast before him, "Do we have the charter set for Greece?"

"Two hours before we need to arrive at the Liège Airport," Silva replied, "The trip will be around two and a half hours to Santorini, so we should be able to rest for a bit."

"Finally," Bond uttered through a wide yawn, "I have to admit, I am absolutely *knackered.*"

Silva smiled with amusement, he loved it when James, ever so impeccably posh, lazily resorted to informal vernacular. It was an intriguing trait he assumed the man had picked up during his time in the Navy.

"I can certainly say I sympathize," the blonde agreed as their server stopped over to refill their coffee, "Thank goodness for artificial stimulants, hmm?"

Earlier that morning, along with a veritable army of Silva's men pulled from surrounding areas and flown in with efficient speed, they'd arrived at Glasgow's compound and made quick work of storming the base.

Henry Glasgow has been diligently removed and in a stroke of sheer brilliance, Silva had taken over
the entire operation without a single hitch, transferring everything electronically into his ownership. In Glasgow's place he'd transplanted his own man, a savvy business professional who easily assumed the role and the man's identity as well as buying out Glasgow's closest associations with a combination of intimidation and generous pay-outs to maintain operations as smoothly as before and with the utmost discretion.

It had been the quickest in-house coup he'd ever achieved, and Silva was quite satisfied with his results.

Having salvaged the majority of their belongings from their hurried escape from the Hotel in Brussels, the two men had checked into a nearby Hotel right in the quaint heart of downtown Liège, near the private runway to change and wash up before heading out to breakfast. It had also provided Silva the necessary time to complete his business and secure their following arrangements with just enough time left over to express the remainder of their pumped up adrenaline. Really, Silva thought, *that had been the icing on the cake.*

"You are especially passionate after a bit of excitement, James," Silva informed his companion, playfully knocking his toe against the other man's shoe under the table.

With a quick, nearly imperceptible grin, Bond flashed his eyes up from the table at his companion, "A job well done is usually good incentive."

Silva tossed his head back and laughed heartily, "If that is your way of showing gratitude then I'll really look forward to our subsequent success at the end of this mission."

Too tired to pay that thought much consideration, Bond shrugged agreeably.

"While you were busy shaving, I reported in to HQ," the Agent informed, "MI-6 is as in the dark as the CIA now. They are not aware we had any part to play in the 'Glasgow-Vela Highrise Spa and Hotel incident' as they're calling it. Since Glasgow decimated the CIA's surveillance and took out their Agents, everything on that front has gone cold."

"We're in a remarkably liberated position then," Silva mused, "Very promising."

"Mm," Bond responded swallowing down his mouthful of pancakes.

Upon boarding their charter, Bond collapsed in his seat across from his companion, their knees pressed against each other.

"Close quarters," he mentioned observationally.

Silva grinned, "I rather like it. It's very cozy."

Propping his foot against the side of his companion's seat across from him, the Agent arched his back, cracking his aching spine with several audible 'pops' and released a small moan of relief. He glanced up and narrowed his eyes at the blonde's expression.

"If you say one thing about 'how I'm getting too old'..." he warned, trailing off as he lost sight of the end of his threat, too sleep deprived to be clever.

"I wouldn't dream of it, my dear," Silva smirked, running a hand soothingly up beneath his companion's trouser-leg from his ankle, leisurely massaging into the firm calf muscle. "Shall I call for a drink to ease your passage into 'a terra de morfeu'?"
"Mm-Hm," Bond nodded, closing his eyes and tilting his head back against the seat.

The single attendant aboard the small craft hustled in at the call, a bottle of Effen in hand and poured a generous amount in each glass before mixing in a small amount of seltzer and finishing it with a sliver of lime.

The Agent accepted his drink gratefully and Silva courteously dismissed the woman once again leaving the two men to their privacy.

Silva raised his glass in toast clinking against the Agents', "Here is to a job well done, our future continued successes, a fantastic business acquisition on my behalf."

"My impressive getaway driving," Bond interjected with a pointed smirk.

"Yes, that indeed," Silva continued, voice infused with warmth, "And, the pleasurable company I've been graced with."

The smooth vodka relaxing him to contentment, Bond sighed, reclining back in his seat.

"You flatter me."

Setting his glass on the small table to his side, Silva plucked off a wayward thread from his knee and smiled up at his companion indulgently, his eyes glittering with strange excitement, "Hold your arm out. The left one please."

Bond furrowed his brow with some measure of confusion, "Why."

"I want to give you something."

Complying, the Agent held out his arm to the man, providing an open fist to receive whatever it was. Instead of delivering the promised item, Silva unfastened Bond's signature black enamel and silver cufflink bearing his family coat-of-arms and studied it with interest.

The Agent lowered his arm and stared at the blonde feeling vaguely exposed.

"'Orbis Non Sufficit'," he read, "'The World is Not Enough'. So very apt."

"It's an heirloom," Bond explained, curious as to where this was going.

Leaning forward, the blonde tucked the removed piece of jewelry into his companion's breast pocket and glanced back up enigmatically meeting the man's inquisitive gaze, "Your arm again, por favor."

Making quick work of divesting his sleeve of one of his own glimmering diamond studded cufflinks he fastened it securely into the vacant spot upon his partner's wrist.

"This also is an heirloom. Consider it a token of my esteem," Silva smiled in a strangely quiet, affectionate manner.

"When my father was a young man he met my mother on holiday in the Canary Islands. She was very beautiful and he courted her. She was, as any spirited, rebellious young woman that is new to love and born to privilege, quite charmed by this confident, dashing, modern young proletário in spite of her parent's wishes. He proposed, and alas, she refused."

"Her parents interceded," Bond concluded.
"They did, and she reluctantly accepted courtship from her wealthier suitors more fitting of her class among the Bourgeois of the time."

"During all of this, Nazi Germany was quickly rising in power, sweeping across Europe. My father left Portugal and enlisted with a British Volunteer army. He was talented and thus, quickly rose in rank. They stationed his regiment in Germany in 1942."

"Every night he wrote to my mother of his suportar amor, his great undying passion, promising he'd return and wed her. Promised he'd find a way to convince her family of his worth."

"Of course, I'm sure you know your history well, so I won't bore you with further details of the war that year," Silva continued, "At any rate, he led his men forth in battle against a camp set outside Dachau. Being gifted with strategic insight, the siege of the barracks proved a successful feat."

"Of course, the Germans in turn sent a new battalion to sweep the area clean of invading Allied forces and they were hopelessly outnumbered proving it simple to slaughter my father's men and take him prisoner."

Silva leaned back in his seat and took a sip of his drink.

"My father was a persistent, pragmatic and clever man, whereas the Gauleitung, the senior command leader that held him captive under his own guard for purposes of interrogation, though ruthless, was an ultimately reckless, short-sighted and hedonistic fellow. He kept his mistress ever close at hand for his pleasure. Though he spoiled her, my father could see she was miserable and effectively garnered her trust."

"They plotted against her lover one night and she freed him. He assassinated the Gauleitung and they fled to safety. In return, she gifted him her precious, earrings, rare white diamonds of the Argyle mines."

"He held onto them for years and after the war, had come into a small fortune of his own. Eventually, in 1966, he returned to my mother. She had already been wed and widowed within this time, had several children from her previous marriage and her parents were both gone. My father proposed and soon after to their mutual surprise at such an age so late in life, she found herself pregnant with me. The labour was arduous and my father feared greatly for us both... she pulled through, though she was never very well afterward."

"When she returned from the hospital he gave her the earrings," Silva sighed wistfully, "I recall she wore them very often."

Bond listened on paying rapt attention.

"Persistence. Passion. Raison d' etre. All of this, he had in spades. Grand purpose driving him to achieve against all odds."

"My father died soon after I was born in an automobile accident, and as a child my mother spoke of him often. As I said, she was always quite frail and succumbed to illness at last when I was ten. When she passed away I lived with my grandmother on the island I told you we used to visit when I was young."

"A few years ago, I had her earrings reset into cufflinks," he explained regarding his companion with open kindness, "Their true value can only be measured in their symbolism, which I know you can appreciate, meu querido."

Suppressing his discomfort at such a grand gesture, Bond fell silent staring at the diamond sparkling
from his cuff.

"If you try to refuse my present I will be very insulted," Silva drawled, "please, try to not look so utterly put upon."

"Thank you," the Agent at last replied, at a loss for any other words.

Nodding in acknowledgment, Silva finished his drink and relaxed into his seat.

A short time after, both men drifted to sleep.
With a resounding thud, Bond gasped as his back hit the glass door of the enormous walk in shower in the bathroom of the Lagana Resort. His back slipping against the slick surface, he struggled to gain purchase grabbing at the soapy arms of his companion as the man hungrily attacked his neck and chest with fierce kisses and sharp, claiming bites, possessively leaving his mark. Bond stroked both of their cocks together rapidly in one hand and groaned throatily as they simultaneously reached climax, spurting hot white streaks between themselves.

Silva leaned his forehead against the Agent's shoulder gasping before kissing his lover's ear affectionately.

"James, meu querido," he whispered softly, "utterly sublime."

The Agent stepped back into the hot spray, washing down the evidence of their release and Silva moved behind the man wrapping his arms around him.

He smirked as he inspected the damage he'd inflicted across his lover's neck, the bruising marks and red, chafed stubble-burn forming noticeably against the pale expanse of skin, "I should probably shave."

"I should probably invest in a scarf," Bond retorted, passing the bar of soap back to his companion.

"Ah, but where we're going, no one will notice a few little love bits. It might even help us blend in, and we do have to blend in."

The Agent groaned dismally at his companion's lecherous expression.

"I can see you in some skin-tight little get-up," Silva grinned, gazing dreamily at his companion caught in some personal, tantalizing fantasy, "... how do you feel about leather?"

"I regret ever having anything to do with you. I am not your dress-up doll," Bond snorted shaking his head with disgust.

"My dear," Silva chuckled as he massaged a generous dollop of shampoo through his hair, "if you got it, flaunt it, no?"

The Agent turned around with a stern, disapproving frown and suspiciously raised an eyebrow at the bemused expression on his companion’s face.

"Are you sure this isn't more about you flaunting me?"

"That is all a part of the grand performance! And it has proven an excellent and most reliable obfuscation to those whom might have had reason to otherwise suspect our motives," Silva laughed, smoothing back his wet blonde locks, "Anyway, however much you object... I think you sort of like it."

"Believe me, when I initially agreed to our partnership, I did not think," Bond muttered ruefully, "that I would be signing up to spend the whole time prancing through Queerdom as a means to secure our agenda."
The blonde laughed, cringing at the expression, "That's an imaginative way to put it. Though, I would not have taken you to be so insecure about your-"

"No," Bond argued, "you misunderstand. Sexual preference is neither a consideration nor an issue-"

"Ah, aren't we all so conveniently flexible!" Silva snorted as he applied a heavy lather of moisturizing conditioner into his blonde locks.

Bond smirked, reading the label on the bottle, "Colour maintenance?"

"You hush," Silva clipped, "My beauty-regimen is not up for discussion."

"Don't be so touchy, passing remark and all that." The Agent defended, "Anyway, you know, all that I was trying to convey, is that you take everything to an extreme."

The blonde furrowed his brow, "I take everything to an extreme? What part of everything is that?"

Rinsing the last of the remaining suds from his blonde locks, Silva folded his arms across his chest and peered at his companion blankly, "I am unsure of what specifically is the cause of your discomfort, my dear. If you could clarify, are you referring to the part in which we engage in copious amounts of obviously homosexual intercourse or the part where you can't bear the thought of anyone considering you a homosexual?"

Bond paused to consider this and disagreed, but granted that it was a convenient cover for what truly had him unsettled; which of course, he had no desire whatsoever to ever mention. The gnawing, nagging problem which had been growing ever more evident and had increased exponentially since he'd received that gift earlier in the day.

"That's not the root of the issue," he attempted to explain, "it's more what's arisen in it's stead."

"I've to admit, I can't really grasp at your meaning here."

"It's that you changed the game mid-play. It's not your typical modus operandi."

"Defied all those carefully ordered preconceived notions you had of me, hmm? It was never really a game, was it? I think you had a pretty clear idea of what I wanted with you, my dear."

Silva smirked as he leveled the man before him with a knowing expression, "But your troubles lay deeper than all that, don't they?"

Bond staunchly stood his ground glaring at the man before him.

"I am merely saying when I agreed to working with you...I had no idea that this would be the resulting...thing," he finished lamely gesturing between them.

Silva narrowed his eyes suspiciously before letting it go, a subject to be dealt with at a later time and shrugged.

"I don't know," Silva teased with a lewd grin, stepping forward and reaching an arm behind the man to caress the curved slope of the his soap-slicked bottom, "I think you had some idea."

The Agent paused to consider this.

"Maybe a bit," he ceded coolly, "Side bonus in lieu of anything else."

"Harsh."
"Oh, you're not too terrible a lay," Bond allowed, smirking.

"Hah! I knew all along you were secretly pining away for me! After all, all those women of yours can't hold a candle to this," the blonde laughed smugly, grinning pointedly at his cock before leering back up at his lover.

The Agent snorted, "You really think highly of your prowess."

"You adore me," Silva quipped with a sound smack to his unimpressed companion's arse.

With a strained sigh, Bond turned off the faucets and pushed open the glass shower door stepping out into the bathroom, his amused companion in tow. Billowing steam poured out from the open stall in a fog around them and the Agent turned back around from where he'd paused by the sink to peer at Silva with a look of curiosity.

"Even if you deck us out in all the leather and raver accoutrements in the world, we'll still stick out like sore thumbs, seedy underground nightclubs are not exactly our 'scene'."

Silva nodded in acknowledgment, "This is, perhaps, where our age does not particularly work to our benefit."

"How do you expect us to covertly case out this place?" Bond asked, turning away to pull out his toiletries from his bag on the shelf.

"With all the lasers in the dark and the trance music and the patrons rolling on poppers and X, I highly doubt anyone will take much notice of us," Silva mused.

Coming up behind the Agent he casually wrapped a strong arm around the man's toned chest and nuzzled his nose into the short hairs at the back of his neck, inhaling the fresh scent of spiced soap and sighed, "either way, I am sure we'll figure out something. I do have an architectural floor plan of Soúroupo's layout I want to share with you."

Pressing into Bond's backside, effectively pinning him against the sink counter of the marble vanity, with a few flourishing strokes of his finger, he drew out an example into the heavy steam from their hot shower upon the mirror.

Beneath several greek letters spelling out: ΣΟΥΡΟΥΠΟ, reading as 'Soúroupos', the name of the establishment, which translated into 'Dusk' in English, the Agent watched patiently as Silva dragged several lines across the glass surface, illustrating the inner dance hall and the sub-corridors of the club's basement.

"I am betting, since Soúroupo is beneath one of Santorini's many ancient structures renovated for modern habitation, we have a tunnel or two leading to a few retrofitted, post-war bunkers added at some point in the first half of the 20th century when the Axis occupied Greece. Most likely the addition was deleted from historical government documentation by our elusive hacker network," Silva explained, "Infiltration will not be easy assuming they have undercover guards in place, which of course, they will in troves considering this is the hub of their money-laundering financial operations."

Bond freed himself from where he was trapped against the sink and reached for a towel off the rack, wrapping it loosely around his waist, "Do you have any reason to think they might have caught on to your take-over of Glasgow's operation? I mean, do you think they might be waiting for us and upped-alert around their facilities?"

Silva leaned a naked hip against the vanity and sighed distractedly looking down as he rummaged
through Bond's toiletries before pulling out a black case and an aluminum can of shaving cream, "On the contrary, I've bought us time with the maneuver."

Dispensing a generous amount of foam into his hand, Silva applied a thick coat over his chin, "Reid is one of my best men and has undoubtedly made expedient arrangements to ensure that his position is secure. Under my instruction he's purchased complicit silence within and those remaining as a security risk have been replaced."

Wiping the mirror clear of his drawings with the side of his hand, Silva leaned over the sink and carefully shaved down his cheek with his companion's straight-razor, the steel glinting in the dim glow of the steam-fogged bathroom.

"Even still, you said the security should be difficult to pass," Bond noted, "So what's our plan?"

Having effectively rid himself of more than a day's worth of stubble, the Agent watched as his companion splashed water over his face before putting on his ostentatiously expensive 'Ambre' brand aftershave.

"Have you any ideas?" Silva asked as he wiped clean the borrowed instrument and carefully replaced it into it's case, "Or shall we depend on your knack for improvisation and reliably good luck?"

The Agent smirked, "You're actually asking me for advice for once? I thought you had a plan 'B' through 'Z' for everything."

"I have had my hands quite full lately, no?" Silva retorted sharply, "I can't do everything for you all of the time, my dear."

Bond narrowed his eyes, "Because I clearly do nothing of any use."

Silva gazed over at his companion taking heed of his affronted tone and frowned.

"Your MI-6 profile conveys that you're a rather brilliant tactician. I assumed you preferred to maintain a certain level of equality in this arrangement of ours. Should you not then once in awhile do your part in using that brain of yours?" Silva remarked, "Or has all this fucking turned everything between those adorable pink ears of yours to mush?"

" Fucking you is hardly that spectacular," Bond smartly retorted with an air of nonchalance as he lazily leaned against the counter beside him.

"Uff. You are such a terrible liar! Whoever thought you'd make a good spy?"

"I call things as I see them," The Agent challenged.

With a playful, devilish glint in his eye, Silva dodged forward and tugged off his companion's towel. Scowling, Bond huffed in objection as the man lassoed him around the hips and tugged him forward. With an audible smack of flesh hitting flesh, pressed against the broad, bared torso of the other man, the Agent rolled his eyes.

"You're ridicu -"

Cutting off the Agent mid-insult, Silva effectively shut him up, capturing his lips with his own. Kissing him soundly before pulling back with a wicked, knowing smirk, the blonde observed his companion's look of stunned breathlessness and laughed, "You, my dear James, protest entirely too much."
Latching on once more to that alluring mouth, he rolled his hips forward against the gloriously
naked, taut form, cheering with inward triumph as Bond reciprocated in full.

With a light nip to his bottom lip, Bond chuckled quietly as Silva moaned into his mouth, the other
man's impressive swelling erection evident against his hip.

Before his companion could blink, the Agent snatched back his towel from the other man's clutches
and secured it back around his waist. A half-second later, with a flash of a scheming grin he seized
the last remaining dry towel from off the rack and bolted away like a bandit from the bathroom. The
door slamming shut in his face, Silva stood blinking with some amount of shock and wry amusement
as he processed what exactly had just occurred and threw back open the door.

"You terrible little sneak-thief, you get back here right now!" he bellowed, scampering after the
towel snatcher, one hand cupped protectively over his genitals to ward off the startling chill from the
sudden change in temperature of hot bathroom to their expansive hotel suite.

Bond darted around the desk, grinning with evil satisfaction as he glanced behind to witness his cold
and quite naked companion cursing as he clambered around the obstacles in his way.

Ducking between an upholstered chair and the bed, Bond hurled the spare pillows at his pursuant.

One of the fluffy projectiles hit the blonde square in the face and he sputtered irately.

"Agh! You are the worst!" he cried desperately, defensively bracing his arms over his head against
the siege as he dodged the follow up launch of flying missiles in his general direction.

"Hah! Missed me!" Silva crowed from behind his barricade of bedding before being clipped in the
chin by the last remaining pillow in the villain's arsenal.

"You horrible man!" Silva shouted warningly as he bounded after the Agent chasing him around to
the other side of the bed, "I will catch you, and when I do-"

Bond laughed, shaking with uncontainable mirth as he watched his wet, naked companion stumble
ungracefully over the pile of tangled blankets. For a fraction of a second, the blonde flailed
desperately outward, seeking purchase for anything to stop his descent before tumbling downward
and landing with a heavy thump to the carpeting below. From where he lay, sprawled haphazardly
over the floor in a pathetic heap, Silva uttered a pitiful moan.

"As you were saying? What will you do when you catch me?" Bond retorted with an antagonizing
smirk, tauntingly waving the towel like a victory flag.

"Wouldn't you like to find out."

Silva smirked up from the floor, marveling at the sight of his companion, this typically dry
professional gleefully immersed in his juvenile game.

*He'd happily trade his pride and receive all the carpet burn if it meant catching James like this more
often, he considered.*

Pulling himself upward and regaining his footing, he grinned broadly at the other man, his eyes
sparkling dangerously as he stalked forward with all the slow elegance and heady power of a lion
having cornered it's prey, trapping the Agent between the bed and the white stucco wall.

Bond winced upon recognition of his surroundings, realizing he had no other choice than to leap
sideways over the bed to avoid capture.
Launching forward, Silva lunged for his quarry and seized him by his ankle, hindering the man's attempt to scurry away and crawled over the struggling Agent, pinning him to the bed. Chest heaving from the excitement, he smirked down at his captive, "Do you surrender?"

Bond leered up at him slyly before grabbing a fist full of his companion's blonde locks and pulling the man down, seizing his mouth in a searing kiss. Breathlessly intoxicated by the man claiming him so thoroughly, Silva barely noticed the Agent rolling them over until he was on top, peering down at him with kiss-swollen lips and searching eyes, pupils blown, ringed by blue.

"Do you surrender?" Bond asked returning the question with an inexplicably mercurial shift from playful to sober.

Silva sucked in a deep breath as he found his immediate, instinctive retort suddenly caught in his throat along with his heart. For a long, tremulous moment he guardedly considered the Agent before exhaling a weary sigh. "Tell me the right answer. What would you have me say?"

Bond pressed his lips together in a firm line as he regarded the man beneath him, a crease forming between his eyes as he paused in deep consideration.

"I don't know."

Silva sat on this for a second before choosing his words carefully:

"Neither of us have to."

*Me casa para casa.*

"There are a million reasons why all of this is a terrible idea..." the Agent mused, muttering more to himself than in response to his companion; whatever epiphany he'd had suddenly causing him to retreat back into himself to Silva's dismay.

Then, as if for once the Cosmos decided to be merciful, Bond peered at him with an indecipherable look of easy capitulation and shrugged.

"Mm, at least," he grinned,"none of those reasons seem to come to mind at the moment."

Silva shook his head in disbelief, staring up at his companion.

"Has anyone ever told you how annoying you are?"

"I am pretty certain you've just done," Bond retorted rolling off of his lover to lay beside him. Leaning an elbow on the bed, he propped his head up on his hand and gazed at him with an expression of attentive curiosity.

Silva lay calmly, patient as his lover openly inspected him and let his eyes flutter closed as Bond's hand trailed up his chest and under his chin, tilting back his head.

"The scars here, beneath your jaw, I imagine that's from your surgery?"

"Surgeries. Plural. There were many," the blonde informed, inhaling sharply against the lingering, pleasant sensation of the stray finger grazing over collar bone to trace the thin silvery scar stretching along the concave dip of his throat.

Bond watched with unveiled fascination the man's adam's apple bob as he swallowed, making even more visible the line of the scar as well as exposing evidence of several other smaller incisions; long
since healed over into translucent indentations under the sturdy jaw.

"The damage was significant," a low chuckle emanated from him, infused with an edge of bitter self-deprecation, "As you have witnessed, it left me rather disfigured, hmm?"

"What did they have to do?"

"The hydrogen cyanide ate away the tissue of my soft palate, destroyed the cartilage and tendons surrounding my jaw and ruined the shelf of my lower orbital socket. They snipped the trigeminal nerve and reconnected the muscles to allow for facial movement on that side, but it's entirely numb. Of course, they also had to repair the damage to my throat in order to salvage my vocal chords but it took nearly a year of healing and voice retraining over the scarring before I was able to speak or even swallow sufficiently again."

"That plate- the plastic apparatus, how does that work?" Bond asked with cautious interest, sweeping a thumb over the prominent ridge of his companion's cheekbone.

"After months of recovery, my surgeons built for me a prosthesis consisting, as you have seen, of porcelain dentures with a stainless steel hinge that functions as my jaw; this is connected to a polyurethane mold sculpted to maintain the integrity of my facial structure," Silva sighed darkly, "It has taken a period of adjustment for it to feel comfortable and chafes something awful, but these are small indignities one is willing to suffer for the sake of vanity."

Stretching, he rolled over to face his companion and regarded him intently as he removed the man's wandering hand from his face. Threading together their fingers, he raised their intertwined hands to his lips, placing a gentle kiss over his lover's knuckles, "though to be fair, vanity was the least of the issue. Doors that were once open to me were closed. There is only so much one can do behind a computer before they must come out of the cave... by the way, do you still have a capsule implanted into your molar or did you have that taken out."

"It's gone. Mallory issued a directive last year to all of the Agents recruited prior to '94 to see to its removal."

Silva nodded in approval.

"Onto a more relevant topic; have you any thoughts regarding Soúroupos?"

Reaching down over the bed, Bond snagged a pillow from the floor and sat up, propping himself comfortably against the head rest.

"I have one idea that might work," he remarked,

Silva rolled over and deposited his head into the pillow on the man's lap, "Oh? Do tell."

"What if we draw out the guards?"

"How so?"

Silva nearly purred, slitting his eyes in contentment as his companion distractedly combed a hand through his hair, deep in thought.

"We could set off some strategically timed distraction, something that would alert them to a different kind of threat."

"Ah, yes," Silva replied catching on, "We could divert them with a small commotion of sorts while
simultaneously crashing their security surveillance and slip under the radar quite undetected."

Bond huffed a small laugh and stroked down to trace along the hollow of his companion's strong neck, "What kind of commotion?"

Silva shivering into the touch, luxuriating in his lover's rare display of affection and grinned, "How about we plant an explosive on the sound stage. I've always rather liked good pyrotechnics."

"That's actually not the worst idea you've ever had," Bond considered in earnest, "Though may we consider something that may result in less civilian casualties?"

"Tear gas it is then."

Bond snorted with amusement, "And we can acquire this on short notice? Do you already have some stashed away in that bag over there or do you have another convenient associate lurking about somewhere on this island?"

"No, but obtaining pelargonic acid and bromoacetone should not prove to be overly taxing. Nor should rigging up some cartridges with a few remote detonators."

The Agent peered down at his companion skeptically, "So now you're a chemist?"

"I've dabbled," Silva replied before frowning in consideration.

"On second thought, the bromoacetone might be a bit of an issue, since I doubt there are any pharmaceutical laboratories within the vicinity."

"We can still acquire the pelargonic acid. It's a bio-chemical agent found in most weed-repelents is it not?"

"Indeed," the blonde intoned, pleasantly surprised, "I'm amazed you know that. If you ever think of changing careers, perhaps I should hire you as my gardener."

The Agent pointedly ignored the comment and reached over to grab his abandoned trousers to dig out his mobile. Typing in his search he came up with a list of nearby gardening shops.

"Hm. I imagine you have the detonators," Bond mused, "So I just need to purchase the acid and a few canisters."

"Add to the shopping list a timer, a funnel, rubber gloves, two pairs of goggles and those lovely 3M respirator masks and don't forget to pick up some milk for the tea on your way home, darling." Silva supplied teasingly, "Oh, this is really quite delightfully domestic, no?"

"No."

The blonde chuckled, "Ah, the married life..."

Bond snorted, "Get off, you lumbering lout so I can get up and get dressed if his Lordship wants me to get everything he commands."

"I would say I'd be eagerly counting the seconds 'til your return, meu querido," Silva laughed rising from his comfortable spot with a measure of reluctance, "But I must be off to fetch our little ensembles for this evening."

"No leather."
"I wouldn't dream of it," the blonde assured, buttoning his shirt. The Agent narrowed his eyes distrustfully.

"I'm serious."

"You're a serious bore," Silva retorted donning his trousers.

Checking himself over in the mirror, Bond straightened his collar and retrieved Silva's money clip vindictively apportioning himself a healthy chunk of the man's cash.

Fastening his watch, Silva strolled over to his companion, grabbing him playfully by the waist-band of his trousers and pulled the man against him, "Give us a kiss then before we part, hmm?"

The Agent huffed with exasperation, pecking the blonde chastely, "Try not to get anything overly ridiculous?"

"My dear, James, always so rigidly demanding," Silva muttered, regarded his lover with a put-upon sigh as he released him.

Bond frowned with evident concern, "Seriously."

"I agreed to no leather, which I think was rather generous on my part, otherwise," he laughed, "No promises."

Silva rolled his hips against the taut, delicious form of his companion and leaned forward, pressing his lips against the man's ear.

"I couldn't be more thrilled by my selection. Meu Deus, but you look exquisitely fuckable!" he groaned, "I could take you right here, right now, James."

Bond smirked, "If I die tonight because these things cut off the circulation to my legs I will come back and haunt you."

The blonde's laugh carried across the din, "Meu querido, even your ghost would be a pleasing sight to my eyes."

Ignoring the retort, the Agent glanced around before nodding to his companion, silently mouthing their count down, three, two, one.

With one easy click of a button, Silva triggered the detonator.

Vivid strobing neon lights flickered through the sudden thick billowing haze of acrid fog released with multiple 'pops' muted by the pounding bass of the trance pounding throughout Souroupos. Amidst the sweaty swell of the writhing crowd, the two men simultaneously pulled down their goggles while covering their faces with black 3M respirator masks.

The blonde, clad entirely in form-fitting black typed in a code into his mobile, instantaneously shutting down the entire security surveillance system throughout the basement club. After doing so, he was unable to resist one final appreciative appraisal and scanned his eyes hungrily over the striking figure of his partner; devouring the flex of those muscular arms bared by a skin-tight black wife beater; the taut thighs revealed in detail by his sleek, silver-slate trousers.

Drawing his eyes back up to the face, he grinned; caught, as two narrowed blue eyes glared
impatiently back at him. Bond tapped the crystal face of his Omega and gestured to the left wall. Maneuvering toward the stage, Bond retrieved their discreetly stowed cache of arsenal.

The noxious fumes permeated the air ensuring the systematically timed distraction; a necessary employment enabling them to implement their plan accordingly.

With expediency from years of professional training, the two men donned their bullet proof vests and fastened the clips of the flexible holster belts strapped in a literal armory of weaponry around their waists. Bond smirked inwardly as he marveled at the convenient collection mysteriously provided by his industrious blonde partner and tossed over the man's Steyr before pointing to the door.

Dodging through and pushing aside the confused disarray of dazed, drugged and panicking patrons dropping like flies around them, the two men forced their path to the entryway, stepping over two beefy guards collapsed in agony, their hands pressed to their faces wet with streaming tears, scrubbing frantically at their red eyes burning from the chemical-agent penetrating the air.

With seamless synchronicity, the two men tore off their masks and sprinted down the hall, the clock ticking with less than ten seconds to spare until their intrusion would be revealed. Mounting a small black box atop a biometric scanner, Silva made short work of frying the circuitry.

The timer blinked 00:00 and the alarms blared throughout the hall signaling the security breach.

With two metal clicks of bolts being released, the pneumatic door slid open on it's track and and the two men bolted inside just as a crew of guards raced around the corner of the hall chasing after the intruders.

Gliding shut just in time, from outside the lift came several furious, muffled shouts; an audible pounding of fists and the clamber of guns knocking harshly against the hollow steel wall. Pulling his goggles down to hang around his neck, in one movement, Silva wired an electronic rerouting device to the circuit board forcing the elevator to bypass the operations framework of the lift's hydraulics system and they plummeted downward, a shrill metal screeching piercing from above as the metal hoist ropes scraped down through their sheaves.

The force of the gravity from the drop caused both men to nearly lose their footing, and they stumbled back into the wall, white knuckles gripping for purchase against the metal encasement before landing forcefully to their knees as the compartment crashed to the bottom of the shaft.

Tasering four guards scrambling into the car as the door slid open and elbowing a fifth square in the jaw, Bond darted out ahead, with the heavy footfall of steel toed army-grade boots pounding down the narrow corridor, his partner close in tow; taking down the bevvy of armed guards as they appeared from behind in pursuit.

The cold, sterile corridor led at last to a door guarded by more of the Soúroupo operatives both bearing bandoliers of gleaming ammunition strapped across their broad chests. Upon sighting the two, the uniformed guards charged after them exchanging out their handguns for the efficiency of heavy automatic assault rifles.

Narrowly dodging the bullets whistling past the two men under siege ducked for safety behind the row of metal lockers lined against the sides of the hall. The deafening release of rounds from their Famas F1’s shearing the metal into jagged shrapnel slicing through the cacophony of shrill alarm sirens and blinding blinkering of red and white lights flashing from above. Bond pressed against the wall, shoulder to shoulder with his partner and nodded once, signaling to take defensive combat formation.
Light flickered off a sea of ejected casings littered across the floor.

Darting across the rain of gun-fire, Bond lunged behind the lockers on the opposite wall and removed his PPK. Crouching low across the other side, ensconced within shadow, Silva deposited his Steyr back into the holster at his hip and drew from his back the heavy Heckler & Koch HK4 16 Assault rifle. Removing a spare cartridge clip, Silva slid the magazine into the chamber and gestured a signal.

The blazing shoot-out subsided into eery momentary silence. Squinting through the dispersing plumes of gun-fire smoke emanating throughout the passage Bond planted one knee against the floor, steadying himself and glanced across at Silva.

His partner patiently repeated his silent direction and the Agent nodded briefly in response. Peering cautiously around the lockers he blinked against the distracting silvery flickering of light against the sea of casings littered across the floor.

A flash of movement across the reflection of one of the disposed cylinders caught his eye and Bond sucked in a breath before angling his PPK around the edge and releasing one shot after the next at his exposed target.

Having made this move, the situation rapidly devolved into a hostile exchange of battling bullets. Silva joined his partner without deliberation firing off round after round at their aggressors; reverberating plings ringing out as spent shells ricocheted off the linoleum and split through the surrounding lockers.

With the pounding of heavy foot-fall from behind, the two men were alerted to the presence of the guard's arriving back up, and Silva diligently heeded his partner's prompt moving to take out the assailants.

Taking advantage of their quarry's solo position against them as their back up distracted his partner, one of the two guards by the door dauntlessly employed an offensive guerrilla strike, charging forward, gun blazing.

Easily, Bond took the man down shooting out his knee and he collapsed to the floor with a heavy thud bellowing out in anguish just as Bond was caught from behind by a stray bullet grazing across his right bicep, shredding through the surface flesh. With this fraction of a second of distraction, the Agent narrowly avoided being hit by the grenade hurtled in his direction and unable to dodge it, ducked down against the subsequent deafening roar of the explosion overhead; metal and plaster projectiles shooting outward from the blast.

Shrapnel sliced through muscle in the back of his thigh and Bond gasped audibly, tone inflected with pained surprise. Amidst the echoing din of ensuing chaos; with an ear vigilantly trained for his companion, Silva's heart lurched into his throat at the strangled exclamation and he downed one of his gunman before ducking for momentary cover.

Bond looked up and caught the man's glance registering the concerned frown and tried for a reassuring smirk, shrugging weakly. Shaking his head with a measure of disapproving exasperation, Silva peered intently at his partner and voicelessly inferred his intention to hold his cover so the man would be able to tend to himself.

Gratefully taking advantage of the fragile, scant seconds of granted relief, Bond crouched down within the smoky shadows to quickly survey the damage. Huffing a frustrated sigh, the Agent cringed, gritting his teeth as he dislodged the invasive scrap of metal and hatefully disposed of it, chucking it across the passage where it clattered loudly against the wall.
Adrenaline pumping though him, fueling his focus. Wasting no time, Bond stood back up coolly and with trained automatism drew out his gun, expediently dispatching the remaining guard by the door with a single bullet through the neck before turning around to aide his partner in finishing off the attackers from behind.

In the blessed silence and clearing smoke, Silva dropped his assault rifle letting it clatter to the floor and rushed over to his wounded companion, catching him as he stumbled forward and with one strong arm tucked him securely against his side.

"James," Silva demanded, his shaken expression betraying his crisp tone, "where are you hurt?"

Bond feebly pushed away, feigning an air of nonchalance, "Right, thank you, I'm fine, there's no need to hen-mother me to death."

"You're covered in your own blood," Silva argued, narrowing his eyes as he scowled at his companion, "Now is not quite the time to recall that independent streak of yours. What happened here?"

Bond winced as Silva drew a hand over the gash across his arm, "I've had worse. Far worse, stop-"

"You idiot, you're not expendable. Not to me. Let me-"

"Look, it's nothing. I took a bullet across my bicep," The Agent interjected peevishly, "just a superficial graze, nothing to-"

Grunting, the Agent's pacification cut-off mid-sentence, he surrendered, sagging heavily against the broad torso of his companion. Silva sighed, shaking his head as he lowered them to the floor, "And what did you do to your leg? Are we going to be able to proceed here?"

Bond glowered irately up at the man crouched over him, "Goddamned piece of aluminum. Give me something to wrap it with so we can hurry up and get on with it before they send out their next round of guns on us."

As Silva inspected the wound on the back of his leg, the Agent watched his companion, observing the tense line of his shoulders and haggard expression beneath the sweat soaked blonde hair plastered across his forehead, streaks of dirt across his chin and sighed. "Are you alright?"

"Fine," the blonde retorted shortly, tearing a scrap of fabric from a nearby guard strewn limply across the floor. Silva exhaled a weary sigh, changing his mind and looked away from his companion's face as he tied the makeshift bandage around the bloody graze marring the Agent's bicep.

"No, I am not fine. There was that blast and I couldn't see you properly and I thought-" Silva paused shaking his head, "Meu querido, I don't know what I would have done..."

The blonde trailed off morosely; falling into silence as he moved on to wrap his companion's leg. Bond monitored the blonde discreetly from beneath lowered lashes observing his grim expression.

"This is not exactly the most hygienic solution," Silva muttered finishing the dressing and pulling the Agent to his feet, "It would be wise to attend to it sooner rather than later."

Circling a steadying arm around his limping companion, he led them to the door, releasing the man just long enough to break through the entry. Using the blunt end of the Steyr to break the casing around the electronic lock, Silva sliced through the wiring with his blade disabling the security. Quickly reassembling the key pad he typed in the access code which deactivated the bolts and finally the door clicked open.
Entering into the dank chill of the dimly lit bunker, Silva removed a paper sketch of the map. Suppressing the agonizing pain throbbing in his leg, Bond tried for a small smirk, glancing at his companion.

"No fancy gadgetry?" he airily quipped casually nodding toward the drawing, in a humble attempt to lighten the gloomy mood that had seemingly cropped up between them.

The blonde huffed a weary sigh, staring irritably at his partner

"If you think you're capable of obtaining a signal this far below ground, be my guest," he retorted shortly.

The Agent glanced at him with confusion written across his expression and Silva groaned, "Really how did you get this far in life not knowing these things? It's a matter of common sense."

"I leave all that technical 'mumble-jumble' for Q-division to advise me on," Bond defensively retorted.

"James, we're nearly half a mile below sea level under all these dense layers of stratified igneous," Silva pointed out, "When was the last time you had decent operation of your mobile even in the subway?"

The Agent tried for a faint grin.

"Not my division," he shrugged.

Silva rolled his eyes heavenward, "Not the brightest bulb are you, my dear. Good thing you're pretty, hmm?"

Bond gingerly swallowed his pride, allowing his companion to bear the brunt of his weight as pain flared sharply from the throbbing wound in the back of his thigh.

Lines of retrofitted wiring spanning the length of the crumbling walls supplied an occasional flickering lantern to light their way down the winding narrow path of the claustrophobic tunnel carved deep below the surface of the volcanic island. The further they descended, the thicker the stale air became; pungent with the acrid reek of earthy decay and sulfur.

"This is pleasant," Bond muttered ironically.

Silva paused to reposition his arm around his disabled companion and glanced at the wires strung along the walls.

"These cables connect to their base controlling their entire network," the blonde informed slowly.

Bond furrowed his brow in confusion, "The Hacker's primary network?"

"Of course not!" Silva huffed with annoyance, "Please stop being stupid for one minute and let me finish."

The offended Agent glared at his companion.

"Fine. Elaborate," he bit out.

"The entire network of their financial operation. Thus, I have reason to believe we'll be expected."

"We're being watched," Bond concluded.
"Obviously," Silva drawled, "The minute they broke my security override the alarms went off and the cameras went back on."

The Agent frowned, hobbling against the sturdy form of his companion, "Why is no one coming after us then?"

"I have no clue," Silva muttered darkly.

Stumbling out of the blonde's secure hold, Bond sucked in a deep breath through gritted teeth and reached out to brace a hand against the cold stone wall.

"Maybe they're taking pity, Christ," he winced, back scraping down the wall as he collapsed to the dusty ground, "I might be forced to apply for one those handicap stickers after this...on the upside, I'll at least always get the good parking spots."

The blonde's expression softened in concern as he surveyed the sweat beading across his partner's pale face and knelt down before him mopping off the man's brow with his sleeve.

"Breathe, James," Silva directed calmly, "I promise you we'll figure something out, I'll carry you if I have to."

Bond peered up at his companion; horror-struck as he imagined the scenario played out.

"You will absolutely do no such thing."

"I basically am already, you pathetic sack of potatoes," Silva snorted.

Laughing weakly the Agent shook his head as he allowed himself to be hauled back up to his unsteady feet, "I've been called many things, but that's a new one."

"Ah, James, you are rare find," the blonde grinned fondly, caressing a hand across the man's bristly cheek before wrapping his arm securely around his back.

A crackling static from a hidden intercom system suddenly brought both men to full alert stopping them in their tracks.

"Hello, boys," an electronically distorted voice greeted, "Please, come on down. I promise I don't bite...much."

Bond exchanged a startled glance with his partner.

Coming to the end of the tunnel, a silhouette appeared cloaked within shadow.

"What brings you to my humble abode?" A female voice inquired, a curious lilt to her tone, "You've really caused quite the riot up there, I had to pull quite a few strings to keep my guards from racing down after you."

"And why would you do that, my dear?" Silva asked.

"Hmph," the woman huffed indignantly, "I think I earned the right to be asking the questions here. The way I figure it, the very least you owe me is an explanation."

"Ah, but where is your protection now, hmm?" Silva laughed drawing out his Steyr.

The woman stepped out the shadows leveling an impressive Patten PK470 at them.
"Right here," she informed.

Dragging a hand back through her short, cropped bangs, Bond looked on admiringly, taking in those sparkling dark, intelligent eyes set against her swarthy complexion. Her raven hair braided neatly down her back with functional utilitarianism; much in line with her ensemble of brown boots and a loose army-green button down blouse half untucked from her khakis.

Somehow the woman managed to look attractively feminine to the Agent in spite of her fashion.

"Ah," Silva sighed, glancing at her weapon, "I see."

"To your immense fortune, the only reason you're not dead already, is due to my curiosity. You went to a lot of trouble to get down here, bypassing a very difficult security code. I should know I designed it," she informed with a tone of arrogance.

Silva grinned, "Prone to being boastful aren't we? Us geniuses?"

"Yeah?" She laughed before narrowing her eyes in suspicion, "And who are you, anyway? How did you even know about me?"

"My! Full of so many questions! What would you care to know first, my dear, the 'why' the 'how' or the 'who'?"

"Start with why and I'll decide whether or not I'm willing to hear you out or put a bullet between your eyes."

Bond shifted in discomfort against his companion, and Silva frowned, "Look-" the blonde paused, "What is your name, my dear?"

"You can call me Nadi."

"Nadi, listen, my companion has been wounded and I worry for his health."

The paused considering before coming to a decision.

"Fine. We'll take this inside my office and you can tend to him. Put away your weapons and I want to see your hands," she directed, "I'll assist your friend. You walk in front of me."

Silva did as he was told, allowing the woman to lead them all into a dim room filled from top to bottom with computer and screens and wires and keyboards, and for a brief second the man thought he'd stepped back into his old thriving base of operations on Gunkanjima in its glory days.

"Impressive," he admitted.

"Yes, I know," Nadi confidently replied, lowering Bond into a leather computer chair, "Now before you turn back around, disarm yourself of all your weapons. Drop them to the floor where you stand and walk forward toward the other side of the room so I can collect them. Face the wall and hold your arms over your head. Try anything funny and I will not hesitate to incapacitate you."

Silva complied, scoffing softly, "Quite the professional."

Nadi glanced down and glared at Bond, "You. Lift your arms and I'll strip you myself."

The Agent appraised his stern captor with a wry smirk and raised an eyebrow, "I suppose I can't complain about the injuries I received at the hands of your associates with this kind of service."
"Ah, so you can speak after all," Nadi laughed, "You let your partner do all the talking for you usually?"

Bond shrugged grinning charmingly up at the woman.

"Between just the two of us," he confided in a staged whisper, "He really loves the sound of his own voice."

Silva audibly huffed from the other side of the room in response.

"My dear, I can hear you quite plainly from over here, and your sense of humour leaves much to be desired."

Bond chuckled softly at his companion's insulted tone and smiled warmly at the attractive woman as she divested him of his various equipment, "So where do you come from?"

"Pakistan originally," Nadi responded with honest simplicity, "I went to school in America and studied medicine and engineering, I took several degrees and within my field made some notable contributions to academia. I suppose a few important individuals took notice, and I was hired for an assortment of contract work before accepting a position within the CIA. They stationed me to administer a covert networking operation in Croatia. That's where I met the boys I work for now."

The Agent furrowed his brow, "If you don't mind my asking, what prompted you to abandon the CIA and accept employment with an illegal organization?"

"My, is that a tone of disapproval in your voice?" Nadi pondered aloud.

Bond backtracked, "Not at all, it would be hypocritical of me to do so considering."

"I see," she intoned, "You do have a faint trace of that regimented bearing about you- were you a soldier?"

"Royal Navy Commander," Bond informed sitting up to straighten his posture as he smiled at his bemused captor.

"I assume they tried to train that out of you when you became an operative" Nadi inferred, "But once a soldier always a soldier. what were you? National security like SIS? MI-5?"

"MI-6," the man drawled.

"And then what? They burned you out so you decided to play for the other team?"

Silva laughed at the woman's ironic euphemism from the other side of the room, "James 'bats for both teams', if you catch my drift."

Ignoring his companion's remark, Bond smiled easily at Nadi as she unbuckled his holster belt.

"We parted ways due to mutual disagreements in method you might say." The Agent enigmatically replied in response to her query before examining the woman curiously, "Was that the case for you as well?"

Nadi irresolutely shrugged.

"Am I being too personal with such a question?" He asked puzzled by the woman's odd lack of confirmation.
"Not in the least. To answer your question, you might say I was... recruited, so to speak. But I can always tell you more about myself some other time, alright, sweetie? I brought you two here to tell me about yourselves."

Standing up, Nadi trained her assault rifle on the two, glancing cautiously between them before strolling over to collect the last of Silva's weaponry which had been dutifully abandoned where she had directed upon the floor. Placing the assembled arms into the supply closet, she locked the door and sat down across from the Agent.

"Hey you! Blondie!" She barked out at Silva, "You can turn back around and come sit beside us now."

"You may provide me with either your names or aliases. I don't expect either of you to be honest with me, so why don't I let you tell me the story you've prepared."

Silva smiled as he took his seat, "I am Raoul Silva. Perhaps you have heard of me?"

Their captor openly gaped before laughing with clear amusement.

"You're claiming to be the Raoul Silva? Well, for your sake, I really hope you are. I can't imagine what that man would do to anyone claiming his identity after making such a bold assault on the bank of the big boy's up at HQ!"

"I can assure you, my dear, I am he."

"Alright. I'll buy it. You did some fancy code-breaking up there. So tell me. What brings Raoul Silva himself crashing through my gates? Don't you people sitting up on your gilded thrones have peasants do this sort of dirty work?"

Silva shrugged lazily.

"Foot work is great exercise," he offered.

Nadi shook her head, "You look like you're in pretty good shape to me."

The blonde laughed, "Thank you, my dear, I'll accept the compliment."

"Then what's the deal?" Nadi pressed insistently.

"To be quite honest, all of your organization is quite elusive. Your boys up top are marvelous at ensuring their privacy. It was not as if I could simply send them a fan letter."

"A fan letter?"

"Indeed, I admire their work, and I am sure you are aware I possess a similar variety of talents equivalent to- if not surpassing that of their finest programmers."

"You are claiming you want to work for their organization?"

"Hmm," Silva mused, "not so much for theirs as them for mine. You see, I am interested in taking on your boys as clients. On a contract basis of course."

"Why do you need them and what do you want them for?"

"The what for' is irrelevant as that is none of your business, my dear," Silva drawled, "'Why', you ask? Because our interests run parallel in certain regards to global politics. And they possess
connections to certain... 'operations' that deal in the particular industries which can achieve such goals- If you understand me."

"Let's speak plainly and clarify your vague explanation, Mister Silva. You basically want to take over the world, and will gladly offer your services because they deal with all the underground arms distributors and terrorist cells."

"A succinct and essentially accurate summation," Silva commended.

"And you latched onto the only kite tail you could catch to get to me so I could lead you upstairs?"

"Once again, you are correct."

"Once again I have to ask, why not send your lackeys and save yourself the hassle?"

"If you want a job done well sometimes you have to do it yourself."

"Hm, well I can certainly agree with that," Nadi agreed before narrowing her eyes at the blonde, "and what then? You think you can win their favour and sit down for a casual glass of wine over your negotiations by waltzing in like a blitzkrieg on steroids?"

"That's quite the exaggeration!" Silva laughed, shaking his head while raising a hand up in capitulation, "Perhaps I was a bit presumptuous in doing so, but truly, my dear, the further down that particular totem pole you go, the messier it was. Believe me, I saw it all first hand. I did them quite the favour with my clean-up."

"How did you manage that?"

"Quite simply, by transplanting far superior installations of my own."

"You replaced their people with your people?" Nadi surmised incredulously.

"I did, and they will appreciate my hard work in both the short and long term."

Nadi sighed.

"Alright, then. I think they'll buy your story, Mister Silva. Anyway, who is this poor sap you've dragged along with you?" She inquired gesturing at Bond, who for some time had been listening to the two of them with quiet patience and perked up at the mentioning of his existence.

Silva grinned over at his companion, "I don't know, what do you want to tell her, my dear? Would you care to make your own introduction as to your position here?"

The Agent narrowed his eyes at the blonde questioningly, "You mean you're not going to go with your typical story?"

"It ceases to be a story when it's true," Silva objected.

Nadi furrowed her brow in confusion, "Okay, so what am I missing?"

"Don't mind him," Bond bit out glaring at his companion, "He has an unusual sense of humour. He finds it terribly amusing to tell everyone we're lovers."

Silva stared at the other man in open amazement, lost for words.

Nadi laughed mirthfully.
“Alright, that is funny! I can’t see that at all,” She said gazing back at the Agent, “You seem like an absolute womanizer to me! Trust me I know the type, I don’t see how he can sell that one!”

Bond barely dared to glance over at his scowling lover stewing quietly beside him and grinned warmly at the attractive woman, introducing himself, "The name's Bond, James Bond. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

"Indeed, Mister Bond, you are charming," Nadi expressed, her smile spreading brightly across her face.

"As are you, my dear."

"He actually is my lover," Silva pointed out in protest, for the most part being entirely ignored as the two openly flirted in front of him.

"By any chance, you don't happen to have anything to drink do you?" Bond asked, wincing as he shifted in his chair, "It's just that I'm in a small amount of discomfort what with these little injuries from earlier."

"Oh!" Nadi exclaimed, "My goodness, that completely slipped my mind."

"Yes, with all the flirting I'm sure that wasn't your immediate concern, though how you could carry on while the man's covered in his own blood, I cannot fathom- unless you're into that sort of thing," Silva muttered dryly.

Missing the barb, the woman rushed out of her chair.

"Wait here, darling, let me go run and grab my med-kit and we'll get you fixed right up," she smiled before darting across the room, her braid flying out behind her.

"Already with the endearments and now she's going to play nurse-maid, shall I send for a wedding planner?" Silva drawled.

Bond glared disparagingly at his companion.

"Do you think you could manage to be polite?" the Agent whispered fiercely over at the glowering blonde.

"Do you think you could manage to keep it in your pants?"

"Do you have any shame?"

The blonde narrowed his eyes, leaning forward in his seat, "Do you?"

The Agent huffed defensively, "I'm being courteous."

"If courtesy is now defined as deliberate seduction then absolutely."

Bond held back delivering his retort upon Nadi's return, med kit in hand.

"Alright, now let's see those wounds of yours and we'll clean them up and get you back on the mend," she smiled kindly as she pulled her chair closer to the injured man before Silva snatched the box from out of her hands and made a clear move to insert himself in her place.

"He's my partner, I can tend to him myself," he announced sharply.
Nadi's dark eyebrows shot up in surprised amusement and she backed away with a grin, "Certainly, be my guest."

"James, be a dear and remove your trousers for me will you?" Silva grinned, delighting in his small victory over the situation.

Sighing with exasperation Bond complied and stripped himself without any care for modesty down to his revealing black sport-briefs. Setting the ruined article of clothing aside he sat back down, carefully conscious of the throbbing gash on the back of his leg and allowed his companion to clean his wounds.

"He's going to need sutures," Nadi remarked observing from the sidelines with casual bemusement.

"Thank you, I can see that myself and am more than capable," Silva clipped out in a short tone, brandishing the sterilized needle before him.

"Alright, but just so you are aware I am a licensed medic, so if you need any assistance..."

"As I've already said, I'm more than qualified," Silva irritably reiterated.

Bond raised an eyebrow at the revelation and grinned across at his beautiful captor, "A practitioner of medicine, an accountant, a computer whiz... quite a renaissance woman."

"More like glorified book-keeper, but... I'm also handy with a gun," Nadi drawled arrogantly.

"This little mating-dance is getting rather tiresome," Silva huffed coldly.

"He's rather possessive of you isn't he?" Nadi exclaimed winking at the Agent as she watched the blonde dab a topical anesthetic over his companion's bleeding wounds, "If I didn't know any better, Mister Silva, I'd think you rather fancy him."

"Not particularly at the moment," the man in question drawled as he pierced through the flesh of his companion's arm to apply the third stitch.

"Ow!" Bond yelped feigning injury.

Glaring across at his companion, Silva narrowed his eyes.

"Don't think I can't see what you're doing," he remarked sharply, "I know very well just how much pain your training allows for you to handle, my dear."

"You have a terrible bed side manner, Doctor," Bond retorted with a clever smirk, "I'd really prefer you fetch my nurse."

"Fine, have it your way, seu bebé chorão," Silva snarled relinquishing the project over to the adept hands of the woman who tenderly patted the Agent's knee consolingly before resuming the sutures.

With a particularly dark, stormy expression, Silva took a seat across to watch the two.

"So now that we've told you everything, perhaps you may care to share a bit more about yourself?" Bond asked softly as Nadi clipped the thread.

"Ah, you want to bring us back to your original question regarding my change of career," she acknowledged, "Put your foot up on the chair across from you so I have access to your other wound."
"Here's the deal," She explained while stitching up the jagged gash in the back of the Agent's thigh with trained finesse, "the boys are probably biting at the bit for my report and I don't feel like angering my superiors is very wise."

"Then what course of action do you intend to take?"

"Allow me sufficient time to explain the situation. You boys head back to your hotel and I'll meet you for supper tomorrow evening. Before I go and rile any feathers I need to be confident you two won't get me in any trouble.

If you can convince me of that, perhaps I'll consider negotiating an arrangement for you to meet with my employers. If you can manage to do so, perhaps afterward I'll answer a question or two, alright, sweetheart?"

Bond nodded in accordance and grinned warmly at his attending medic, "It's a date."

"What are you twelve?" Silva muttered, shaking his head at his irksome companion.

Having completed her task, Nadi passed her patient his blood-sodden trousers.

"In a minute, one of my boys will be down to help you take your partner back up through the tunnel, Mister Silva. I'll order a vehicle around front to have you escorted back to your hotel and I will be in touch."

The Agent grinned placing a gallant kiss upon Nadi's slender hand, "You've been a perfect host, my dear, thank you for tending to me with such care."

"And you, Blondie, look after this charge of yours. Make sure the dressings are changed in the morning and evening and insist that he get plenty of bed rest."

"I can assure you, madam, I will provide him with exceptional care and personally ensure he does not leave the bed," the blonde retorted with explicitly implied suggestion.

"Fair enough," she responded rolling her eyes heavenward.
Fresh from their shower and having redressed the bandages, Silva tossed aside the roll of gauze and crawled over the form of his naked lover laying prone across their bed.

Trailing teasing, feather-light kisses down his sternum, Bond shivered against him as the blonde licked a lazy path around his navel; his small needy noises going straight to Silva's cock.

"Tell me what you want, my dear."

"You bloody well know what I want," the Agent glared, his cock leaking where it throbbed against the tense muscles of his abdomen.

"Tell me whose mouth you want to have suck you down and drain you dry, meu querido, whose name will you shout as you're pleased to the breaking point before being tipped over the edge to your shattering petite mort?" Silva commanded as he vindictively licked a wet stripe down to those blonde curls at the base of his lover's cock purposefully avoiding the straining erection itself.

Bond swallowed thickly, gripping the sheets as he felt those full tantalizing lips hover over him.

"Tell me who you are fucking, James."

"Oh, sod off you overjealous prick" Bond spat from beneath the punitive blonde, "It's pretty apparent you're the only one in bed with me at the moment."

"At the 'moment'," Silva sneered blackly.

The Agent's over-boiling irritation momentarily overshadowed his pressing urge for release and he bolted upright, forcibly shoving his companion backward.

Firmly gripping the man's broad, muscular shoulders he looked him squarely in the eye, "Are you really that daft? Does it look to you like I've had any time to be philandering about searching for some new conquest?"

Silva dryly returned his companion's leveling look of scrutiny.

"Hold up," Bond demanded suspiciously, his arousal subsiding against budding indignation, "Why should I justify myself? Just what exactly do you think this is we're doing here?"

"Oh, James, you want to label it? How sentimental of you." the blonde retorted teasingly. "I thought you were above all that, huh?"

The agent regarded his companion with a twisting discomfort as he registered the subtext within man's acerbic remark.

"Alright," The Agent said, retreating coolly, "I see."

"Do you?" the blonde countered furrowing his brow, "Because I have cause to doubt that."

Pulling a frustrated hand through his disheveled locks he peered sharply at his companion, his eyes glittering challengingly.
"I'm a selfish man James," Silva informed pointedly, "I refuse to share."

Shifting back, Bond hesitated in consideration, never dropping his eyes from the other man's steady trained gaze.

"I refuse to share you," the blonde specified meaningfully.

His companion stared at him unresponsively and the moment stretched unbearably- far beyond Silva's limits of considerable patience.

"Ever," he sincerely admitted with crisp disarming finality.

The Agent's heart clenched in his throat, at the burgeoning realization that he'd somehow, inadvertently gotten himself into an unarguably exclusive and quite serious, nameless relationship with this clever, damaged and damaging man.

And yet, for reasons he could not immediately identify, his anxiety dissipated and with resolve he decided that none of it mattered one whit.

_In for a penny out for a pound:_ Bond impulsively lunged forward, capturing his companion's mouth against his own in a demanding, passionate kiss.

Silva responded with immediate, gratified exuberance, scrambling for purchase and pulling his lover's form flush against his own. Drawing his calloused hands up the sinewy strength of the man's smooth-skinned back he shuddered a throaty sigh, arousal coursing through him.

"Sim, meu James."

The blonde groaned and rolled his hips forward, trapping his swelling cock against the other man's as they explored each other with hungry desperation.

Without care for his sutures, the Agent forcefully rolled them over and pressed down upon his lover, clutching into the roped muscle of the blonde's hips with bruising possession before owning the man wholly in a crashing collision of tongues and clashing teeth.

Matching rhythm, they writhed and bucked frantically against each other with one single unified purpose, flesh smacking against flesh and Silva pressed upward; his eyes shuttering as he moaned at the glorious sensation caused by the hot friction of their swollen cocks sliding, crushed against each other leaking a clear slippery lubricant between them.

"Sim, sim meu querido," Silva grunted, "Mine, always, mine."

Humping frantically downward, riding against his lover with wild abandon; the ridges of their slick, throbbing cock heads rubbing back and forth together, Bond grunted, shaking apart as sparks of white hot pleasure shot through him.

Mouth clamping down into the straining tendons of his lover's neck, the Agent reached release, spurting thick, hot white cords across the blonde's chest and stomach. Gasping breathlessly, overcome by the erotic sight of his lover breaking to pieces in pleasure above him, Silva's eyes shut tightly closed as he arched upward shuddering his climax in response.

Collapsing spent beside his companion, his stitches punishing him with sharp twinges from the incurred abuse, Bond grimaced.

"Now I'm really going to be stuck in bed."
Silva rolled over and regarded his gloriously debauched companion with warm affection, stroking a hand across the stubble against his still flushed cheek, "Stay here and don't you move a single finger, meu querido, let me get us something to clean up with, hmm?"

Bond watched his naked lover from where he lay as the man stood in the bathroom, door ajar while holding a folded wash cloth beneath a steaming stream from the sink faucet.

"You're rather quiet," the blonde remarked, toweling himself off in the doorway.

"Just thinking."

"Hmm," Silva mused, crawling back into the bed alongside him, "Anything you care to share?"

The Agent closed his eyes, allowing his lover to wipe him clean of the remainder of their activities; the warmth of the cloth and Silva's dextrous, massaging hands both calming and reassuring.

"Not particularly, no."

Playfully, Silva flicked the nub of his nipple causing him to jerk, cracking one eye he frowned, batting the teasing hand away.

"You're so full of secrets," the blonde complained, "you never tell me anything."

"Shut up and come to bed will you? Such a bloody chatter-box," the Agent sighed grabbing the man's wrist and tugging him down to lay beside him.

"Boa noite e sonhos doces, James," Silva whispered softly against the back of his lover's shoulder, wrapping an arm securely around him as he tucked in, spooning him from behind.

"Hm...yes. You too." Bond replied, almost inaudibly in response, though for the first time in years, he felt truly wide awake.

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"I don't like this at all, Nadimah."

Beneath the dim glow of the moonlight in a small, yet luxurious condo set within the hills of Santorini upon an embankment overlooking Athinios Bay, Nadimah concluded her reprisal of the situation that had occurred within Soúroupo to her Boss, explaining the breach in their security system and clutching her drink nervously as he stalked irately to their bar to pour himself a full glass of E&J's.

The short, dark skinned man clad in a sleek, deep navy suit could have been a spitting image of Nadimah; her male doppleganger.

So similar, and so different: two sides of one coin: the chaos to her control. As the only children of an affluent, influentially relevant family within the Pakistani political sphere, Nadimah's entire insular world circuitously revolved around her fraternal twin: Naadir had always protected her, taught her and indulged her, and thus she was absolutely dependent and devoted to him; no other individual on earth could replace the utter supremacy of his position within her heart.

A rebel faction had attacked the Majilis-e-Shoora and executed the remainder of their supporters as well as the parliament's surviving family members.

She'd been in school in America when she'd received the news and her whole world had shifted to a
single new purpose: destroy those whom had wrought destruction down on her,

Maneuvering her way into the CIA, she'd thought she'd found a means and was sorely disappointed by their lack of interest. The terrorist cell escaped into the fold of the underworld and Nadimah was bitter.

On assignment in Croatia, while investigating a small contingency of technologically savvy insurgents she came across the mastermind carefully cloaked in the center of the web, finding him to be the very last man she'd ever hoped to see again.

Reunited, her fractured soul was healed and she stayed.

Naadir's path had led him similarly to seek revenge, though through means beneath the law as he'd allied with a group that promised him justice; employing his skills in return for their aide.

Herded as sheep to shepherd, swayed by his logic and masterful charismatic influence, she joined him once more, and without a last, single glance behind, together they vanished.

Their employers had provided as promised securing their loyalty and Naadir, hungry to reestablish their lost wealth and lured by the satisfying fulfillment of power, clung to his position, possessed by singular, fundamentalist intensity.

"This does not bode well for me, for us," Naadir amended as he downed his drink with shaking hands.

Nadimah worried her lip, sitting forward anxiously in her seat as she watched her twin pace across the room before her; radiating impassioned fury.

"He has already taken out several of my own operations and infiltrated, replacing them with men from his own. He seeks to take over," Naadir concluded angrily, "That man is a danger to us both Nadimah, my piyara behn, surely you recognize the inherent danger we are in?"

Regarding her brother with due respect, she bowed her head, "I can. Which is why I sought you immediately, bhai."

"If upstairs sees how effective Silva is, how profitable it could be working alongside such a powerhouse, they won't have use for us," Naadir spat, "And if we are of no use, we will be eliminated."

Nadimah narrowed her eyes, "I don't think my position is in jeopardy- they still would need a paymaster to manage their accounts, you could convince them that you could work with me, or under Silva temporarily, and failing that I-I would find a way to protect you."

"I don't want your protection, you feeble-minded cow!" Naadir roared with spitting rage, "I need to ensure my security. After everything I've worked for, I will not be taken down by some enterprising, slithering snake usurping himself into my hard-earned position."

"Silva informed me that he is not seeking permanent employment within the organization, his desire is to take them on as 'clients' to fulfill some vague ambition or another."

"So he claims! He has too much clout- he puts much on the table, and if you don't think they won't be greedy to ally with such a powerful satellite organization then you are mistaken. They're sure to make him an offer or two I'm sure he won't be able to refuse... Besides," Naadir countered circling in on his sister, "Do you not think, qeemti bhen, that once that serpent is installed he won't appoint his own associates into your place for his convenience? He's done so already at every turn and Upstairs
won't blink. Their loyalty to us extends as far as our use to them. This could potentially ruin everything I've worked so hard for. Everything I've done to take care of us, of you, in honour of our family's name!"

Naadir dragged a hand roughly through his slicked-back black hair and glared at his sister, "And however much you've attempted to insinuate yourself into the good graces of his companion, from how it sounds, you didn't particularly win any prizes with Raoul Silva, himself."

"He seemed extraordinarily possessive of the man," Nadimah intoned pointedly, "It's not my fault his partner flirted so openly with me."

"You certainly played on that, didn't you, which may work to our advantage," Naadir mused. "I imagined it might."

"The man- that ex MI-6 agent, he could be of value to our organization with his knowledge of the inner workings of the SIS. He'd definitely be an asset. He could be our asset. Put us back into their good graces," he sighed, "The head-honchos aren't particularly pleased with me over Jakov and Corsenza- and if they find out about Glasgow, or Allah-forbid what went down at Sóúroupo, heads will roll. Our heads. But if we can hand-deliver Bond in a tidy little package at their front door..."

Nadimah shook her head in disagreement, "But Bond is Silva's associate."

"Somehow we must find a way to sever their connection and deliver Bond with his tacit agreement to suppress knowledge of Silva's existence." "Raoul Silva poses an incredible threat to us and he must be removed from the equation."

"What do you propose? They appear to be loyal to each other. Bond is his partner he works directly alongside, if we take Silva out, I can't imagine Bond would be pleased, so how can we ensure his willing compliance?"

"Win his trust, secure his loyalty to you. To us. Seduce him if you have to. Plant seeds of doubt in his mind. Convince him Silva's not to be trusted. You're clever, I'm sure you can figure out someway to do so."

"Say he buys the deception. Then what?"

"I'll take care of the rest."

"You'll personally have Raoul Silva assassinated," Nadimah voiced with skepticism.

"You lure Bond away. I'll keep Silva distracted and then I'll take him down myself. I want no one else to be party to any of this."

"What of Silva's installed operatives?"

"I'll pay them to work for me and flush out the ones that can't be trusted," Naadir grinned with a malevolent glint sparkling in his dark eyes, "String them along for a bit. Pretend you're unsure of their qualifications or that they need to gain your trust before you work on their behalf to arrange for them to meet the boys. You do your part, and I'll do mine, mayra ishq.""

Nadimah concealed her doubt, smiling in concordance with her brother's plans; her heart sinking as she recognized how vague Naadir's plan seemed to be. But she would defer to his judgement as always, because at the end of all things, he was her first and last love, and she trusted him wholly; always.
Silva stirred awake to find his yet sleeping companion stretched along his side snoring softly through slightly parted lips. In the privacy lent by the quiet moment, he hardly dared to breathe as he let his eyes linger over his lover; the gentle rise and fall of his chest scattered with claiming bruises, the etched lines and tensed muscles of the man's face smoothed in repose. For once, the Agent seemed younger, relaxed and less rigid; it was humbling to Silva to think that he might have contributed in some small way to this.

*Perhaps,* he concluded, *that Helena, (R.I.P), had been onto something after all.*

**Good god,** the man was glorious. *How could he not adore him?*

Silva smirked as he perused the naked length of his lover's form before sighing quietly, "Ah, *meu amor,* what I would give to wake up like this cada manhã."

Carefully, he slid his numb arm out from beneath the dead weight of his companion yet lost in somnus. Shaking out his newly freed arm to get the blood flowing back through and flexing his fist until it tingled with that peculiar feeling of pins and needles reawakening at last, Silva arose from the bed.

"Is it that time already?"

Silva turned around, donning his robe and flashed a grin at his groggy companion, "Bom dia, meu querido, welcome back to the land of the living."

Regarding him with a small, contemplative, nearly microscopic smile Bond titled his head to the side questioningly, "No coffee?"

"I'm working on it. Very demanding, even first thing in the morning, aren't you."

The Agent grinned, amused, before patting the vacated bed beside him, "Come back here."

Silva raised an eyebrow.

"What for?"

"I want to talk about something that occurred to me last night."

"Ah, and here I thought you wanted me back for a kiss, *tu entristeces-me.*"

"I never said I didn't," Bond quipped with a sly, seductive glint that did far more to surprise the blonde than it did to arouse him.

"Hmm, you are certainly in an improved mood, are you quite well?" Silva teased joining his companion back down on the bed, "Should I be worried, my dear?"

"Ha, bloody ha," Bond retorted leaning in to quickly peck his companion on the lips.

"Actually, how are you feeling this morning, James?" Silva inquired seriously, "How is your arm, and more importantly, that poor leg of yours?"

Bond shook his head impatiently, "Fine. I could use a pill or two, but I'm fine."

"So whatever is this you care to talk of?"
Kicking off the sheets, the Agent stretched with a loud yawn, shaking off the rest of his sleepiness.

"I've had a thought about our dinner date with Nadi this evening."

"Oh, her," Silva frowned narrowing his eyes, "Alright, what about the little ladra de homem?"

"Is that...did you just call her a 'man-thief'?" Bond demanded staring at his companion incredulously.

"More or less."

The Agent laughed for a good, long moment.

"So much insecurity," Bond drawled, "Cannot be healthy."

"Hardly. I know you're not going anywhere."

"So sure of that are you?"

Laughing, Silva lunged forward rolling atop his infuriating lover, trapping him to the bed beneath, "Very."

Pushing him off with exasperation, Bond climbed out from under the man and strolled over to the dresser, wrapping himself in his own robe.

"I was thinking it might be wise to find out as much as we can about her considering she's our only link to our 'boys upstairs'."

Silva lackadaisically sprawled across their bed. "Obviously."

"You pull up as much intel on her as you can this afternoon," The Agent continued as if uninterrupted, "And then, this evening after supper, I'll attempt to extract more details over a drink or two."

Silva glared at his companion with a petulant pout, "Solo?"

"I have the feeling she doesn't particularly care for you much."

"The feeling is more than mutual. The hussy. I don't appreciate the way she looks at you like you're some succulent piece de carne fresca."

"Ha," Bond snorted, "Because you don't."

"The difference here is, I senti o teu sabor, meu doce querido, and she would not have the first idea what to do with such rara delicia."

"You have a disturbing way of putting things," The Agent cringed, "Brings to mind that whole analogy you made once about 'eating' each other. Not particularly arousing imagery when you state it like that."

"You have a very banal imagination, James," Silva huffed, "Why do I even like you?"

Bond raised an eyebrow and looked down at himself before looking back up at his companion with a wry smirk.

"Ah, there's a selling point," the blonde chuckled.
"In any case, I think she might be more amenable without your glowering presence lurking suspiciously in her periphery."

"I do not 'lurk suspiciously'."

"No, I suppose you have too much panache for that. You fashionably hover with incertitude."

"I resent what you're implying. I'll have you know I made Double-Oh before you were barely out of Academy."

"You're not that much older than me."

"Exactly," Silva bragged, "Just far more talented."

Smiling dangerously, Bond stalked back over to the bed, straddling the blonde beneath him, "I'll show you talent."

"Meu deus, sim," Silva sighed, pleasure rolling through him as his lover pressed down upon his not uninterested groin, "Por favor faz, seu maravilhoso, wicked man, show me just what this talent is you speak of."

"Oh, I plan to," the Agent replied, shutting his lover up with a sound kiss.

It was a long while before it occurred to either to place the order for room-service.

00

As the afternoon wore on, the two men sat in their shared room. The Agent cracked his neck boredly flipping through the stations on the television while the blonde sat at the desk fully engrossed with whatever it was he was staring at on his computer, his expression continuing to darken as the hours progressed.

Bond shifted back in the low sofa, propping his foot up onto the ottoman with a slight wince, hissing quietly in discomfort.

"Not that I advocate your tendency to liberally abuse pain medication, but I do have some in my case," Silva offered from the other side of the room.

"Oxys'?"

"Codeine," the blonde replied, "I can't stomach the other stuff."

Rifling through his companion's bag, the Agent came across the bottle and downed the pills with a swig from an open bottle of Maker's Mark.

"Your poor abused liver." Silva drawled with a pitying look at his partner, "Sometimes I wonder how you ever pass your health examinations."

"I was blessed with the iron constitution of a true Scotsman."

"Yes, Braveheart, that seems rather apparent," the blonde laughed shaking his head before focusing back on the computer. Bond lay back once again in his chair, propping up his leg while awaiting the medication to take effect as he browsed the television guide to find something worth distracting himself with.

After a long while of spacing out on some rather banal documentary, the sharp pain in his leg having
somewhat abated to a dull throb, the Agent was startled back into cognizance by Silva's small, irritable 'humph'.

"Still nothing?" Bond inquired with a measure of surprise as he peered at his companion whom had finally moved to settle upon the bed with the laptop perched upon a pillow in front of him.

Silva had the good sense to look shamed as he shook his head.

"There wasn't much to go on. I assume her name is short for Nadimah but there are millions of Nadimahs' and I can't seem to find anything of much interest in the CIA databases. We have a closed file on a missing Agent in Croatia and having hacked into that, either the CIA, the organization we are dealing with, or Nadi herself has very carefully managed to expunge any specifications from the files."

The blonde looked up, baffled by his partner's silence before frowning at the man's expression, "Don't pull that face at me."

"What face."

"That- whatever you're doing," Silva exclaimed, gesturing at the Agent with a disgruntled scowl.

Bond shook his head with bemusement, "I'm not doing anything, I think you're projecting your irritation, Mister Silva."

"I did come across something of some interest, Mister Bond."

"Do share," The Agent insisted, sitting forward.

"There was a rather incomplete attempt to terminate the records of 872346-A's case file, the one reported as MIA in Croatia that I believe roughly fits that story your girlfriend gave us in Souroupos. I managed to recover a ghost imprint and processed it through my system. The scan of the fragmented deletion pieces together like an old psych eval," Silva mused, "there is something here about some rather tragic affair regarding the death of her family."

"That is all you have?" Bond sighed, "That's not very specific."

"Nor is it very unusual for an Agent, is it, hmm?"

"I recall M having stated once that orphan's make excellent recruits," the Agent remarked with a touch of nostalgia infused with overriding bitterness, "She had a valid point: No one to worry about or have worry after you... no one that a foe could potentially use as fodder against you."

Silva inhaled slowly as he observed the change in his companion's mood.

"I'm accustomed to you speaking of her with more deference in your tone."

"She was brilliant at her job. That did not make her any less of a bitch."

Bond stared at him challengingly, pointedly glancing down at the copious scarring dispersed across his companion's chest exposed by the man's opened shirt before his eyes fell away.

"You weren't the first, nor were you the last of her crimes."

Silva stared at his partner in open contemplation.

"Thought of this often have you?"
"The subject has crossed my mind more often of late."

"Perhaps you're playing into your role as 'rogue agent' with too much vigor," Silva remarked.

"Or perhaps I'm merely pointing out the facts." Bond retorted crisply, "What she did to you, to me, to Ronson, to others before us... she had one job, and she did it effectively; without apology for sacrifice. She also did it without consideration of consequence."

The Agent lowered his head into his hands, "I don't blame you for any of it. I would have done the same."

For a long while, the blonde peered at his companion before coming to a decision.

"Two years ago, James, had I but one single reason to live other than for hope of her remorse- I would not have done," Silva articulated carefully, "There is no satisfactory palliative for the damage within; the external violence that has been wrought, what good does it do us? Eye for an eye? We are numb, you and I, in the end, our training prevents it."

Bond stared at his companion with a confused frown, "How do you figure that?"

"Emotion... what is it Corsenza said? All just chemicals. Do we even feel so deeply or are all our reactions just superficial shadows of the real thing? Are they masks we wear to assimilate and relate and operate functionally among our fellows? That's what we are trained to think. That's what they tried to make us into; automatons. The perfect soldiers."

Silva watched the Agent; observing the dawning revelation as he processed his last statement.

"You see, James, the sweetest revenge was when I was in the greatest physical pain at the hands of my interrogators, I was thrust beyond the breaking point and I forgot my training. It forced me to remember that I was human. Just a man. I was so angry, so betrayed and filled with hatred, so despairing, so resentful, so many things- the specifics didn't matter. It was the fact that the emotion was there and it existed and had the potential to be a full spectrum of anything at all," the blonde expressed emphatically, "I burned with so much feeling, I felt everything so deeply, and it was a mercy. It was liberating."

Silva glanced back up at his companion meaningfully and paused, hesitating before coming to his conclusion.

"Had I one single reason as I do now to channel everything differently, I think I may have thanked her instead."

The Agent looked down at his hands clutched tightly at his knees and said nothing and Silva chuckled softly, setting aside his computer.

Rising from the bed he came beside the Agent, moving a chair across from him and sat down before the man.

"Oh, but you are so afraid of that, aren't you? It terrifies you...hmm?" Silva asked softly, reaching forward to caress the stern line of his companion's tense jaw, "All of this talk of emotion? Of sentiment? Passion? Dare I say... affection? You felt a glimmer of something once, did you not... for Vesper Lynd?"

Bond sucked in a breath at the sharp twinge in his chest.

"For one or two before her perhaps?" Silva pressed on, "Or do you block the memory of it as you
think you ought?"

Still, the Agent trained his expression away from the piercing gaze of his companion, steeling himself against the invasive line of inquiry.

"You don't have to. Let it go, James. Strip yourself of the armour. Do yourself a kindness for once, and if nothing else, let yourself feel something."

Bond swallowed thickly as Silva peered at him intently.

"If not for me then for something. Anyone or anything is better than no one or nothing at all."

After a long moment of no reaction, Silva sighed wearily and stood up returning to the bed.

"There is one last thing that may be of some interest," Silva said at last, switching back from his tangent, "It occurred to me that post our meeting underground, we were quite conveniently supplied a face to our book-keeping friend, thus, I retrospectively considered it wise to take a peek back at their surveillance feeds I'd hacked yesterday. Lo and behold, I witnessed Nadi on several occasions passing through Soúroupo. Footage dated two nights prior, I witnessed our friend enter alongside a man bearing incredibly similar features."

Bond furrowed his brow, "Hadn't you just inferred that her family had been offed?"

Silva turned the laptop to point out the zoomed in image on the screen. Though the resolution was blurred, the Agent could see what his companion meant.

"I cannot, with absolute authority, resolutely claim this man is her kin..." Silva intoned trailing off, "But the resemblance is uncanny, no?"

"Mm," Bond replied thoughtfully.

"Tonight, James," the blonde decided, "After our supper, when it is just the two of you, try to find out what you can of him, yes? Ply her for whatever information you can get. Gain enough trust so that we may convince her to arrange for us a meeting. If you must, turn on that charm of yours."

Bond smirked, "That is an area I excel at."

Silva frowned as he appraised his companion, "Don't get carried away, hmm?"

To the blonde's chagrin, his companion shrugged noncommittally.

"Ends justify, right?"

"Sim, James," Silva sighed darkly, "Within reason."

A heavy silence fell between them as Bond regarded his companion's strange sullen expression. Compulsively, the Agent found himself reaching out to grab the man by his wrist and pulled him in, placing a brief kiss to the side of the blonde's frown.

"Within reason," he reassured, before the man tugged him down to the bed to lay alongside him.

00

Post supper, Silva had made up a vague, yet polite explanation to excuse himself, and Bond escorted his raven haired companion to the darkly-lit bar in the corner of the restaurant. Seating himself in a small secluded booth across from the paymaster, he smiled, toasting her.
"I would toast you to the beginning of a new era, but somehow I think you're still uncertain of me," Bond said, quirking a grin. "At the very least, I'll toast you to what I believe may be a potentially beautiful partnership, Nadi."

"Hm, we'll see," she replied noncommittally, clinking her glass with his own, "But in any case, I suppose I can appreciate the sentiment. Also... please call me Nadimah- I really cannot abide nicknames."

He raised an eyebrow, "It is all you provided."

"I didn't trust you not to snoop around for more information than I felt ready to divulge at the time."

"On that note-"

"Ha!" Nadimah interjected with a short laugh, sweeping her long, loose raven hair behind her neck, "I might have figured you two would try to pry into whatever you could go off of...what is it you think you know of me? Hm?"

The Agent looked down carefully considering his response.

"I don't wish to spoil the evening by bringing up old ghosts, but I must ask you..." he paused before looking back up, "What happened to your family?"

The woman narrowed her eyes.

"I thought I had done a pretty sufficient job deleting those files from the CIA database," she huffed, "But since you two are obviously so clever and already know, I suppose I'll explain. A band of violent insurgents attempted to lead a coup against the government in Islamabad when I was at University in the U.S. They killed my entire family."

Bond peered at her skeptically, "Your entire family?"

Nadimah gaped at her companion with an expression of dawning surprise, setting down her drink with a loud clink upon the table's surface.

"You do not believe me?" She demanded with an affronted tone, "No words of sympathy, huh, you just go in for the kill."

"I do not intend to offend you, and I do extend my condolences, however belated they may be, but what of your brother?" Bond inquired speculatively, "Is he not well?"

Piercing him with a scrutinizing, angry glare; twisting the beauty of her soft features, she leaned back in her seat, folding her arms defensively across her chest.

"You're guessing," she accused, "but yes. I do have a brother."

"It seems like a sore subject for you, I apologize."

Softening she seemed to come to a decision, "It is. Naadir is my twin, and I am thankful everyday that he survived... but he was never the same after. Looking after him was difficult, he was always so...sensitive. He works for me now within the organization. Very low-level of course in an administrative capacity- I barely imagine he knows what we are doing is not exactly legal."

"You sought vengeance against the terrorists, that's why you decided to join the CIA initially," Bond surmised, "I imagine they failed to apprehend them and you found yourself rather disappointed."
Naturally this compelled you to join with the men you work for now."

"That's the short of it."

"They promised you they'd bring them down in return for your services?" The Agent supposed with a satisfied prescience, "And they delivered."

"Precisely."

Nadimah leaned forward sipping her drink before gazing back up at her companion curiously, "What compelled you, James, to work with Raoul Silva?"

Bond smirked as he considered the question, "I supposed if one is going to 'break bad' then one ought to do so in earnest."

The paymaster laughed, amused by the reference, "You're an interesting man, Mister Bond-"

"James, please."

"James- I would not have taken you for the sort to be up on the latest pop-culture. You seem more of a classical sort of fellow, to me."

"One finds a bit of time between missions to turn on the television once in awhile."

Nadimah grinned, delighted and intrigued, "What else do you like to do in your spare time, James?"

"Wouldn't you like to know..."

00

Apprising Naadir of the story she had improvised earlier in the evening, her brother agreed to introduce himself to the two men the following night over supper.

Naadir played his role easily, feeling satisfied in his assumption that both men were convinced and pleasantly offered to challenge Silva in a game of cards, allowing for Nadimah to entertain the Agent in the suite she had checked into earlier in the day.

Several drinks in, both companions were quite relaxed; their conversation flowing casually between them. Bond's aim to gain her trust and eventually ease into alluding once again to his request.

"Is that all this is about?" Nadimah huffed irritably, "I thought we were really making progress toward something else, darling."

"Of course, you know that is the reason we're here," Bond replied slyly, "But...it does not have to be the only reason."

Having finished replenishing their drinks at the wet bar, she sauntered over to reclaim her seat beside the Agent, regarding him warmly as she passed him his glass, "Then what is the other reason?"

"You tell me."

Nadimah smiled; lowering her eyes coquettishly before gazing back up at her companion.

"Do you think I'm attractive, James?"

"Yes."
"Sleep with me."

A long silence stretched between the two as Bond hesitated; not with discomfort or indecision, but with some small measure of regret as he attempted to calculate his response.

"Huh," Nadimah at last intoned, examining him coolly, "Silva wasn't lying- you two are involved... intimately."

She frowned at her companion's impassable, mute reserve.

"It's funny, because even if you weren't attracted to me- which I know you are to some degree, I'd think you'd bed me anyway- in some endeavor to secure a sense of intimacy between us that might convince me to arrange that meeting you so desire," She determined, "Yet, you're willing to subvert your immediate goals out of some sense of... what is it: fear or loyalty?"

"It's complicated."

"It's romantic," Nadimah argued, "Isn't it? On either your end or his... although I think it's probably more likely on his."

"You are either unwilling to risk needlessly endangering yourself by sleeping with me... or you're being respectfully considerate of his wishes," she intuited, leveling her companion with a pointed look.

When Bond refrained from response, Nadimah leaned forward and stroked a hand affectionately across his cheek, "Are you in love with him?"

The Agent's eyes widened at the woman's blunt question, "Are you really asking me that?"

She shrugged, drawing her hand away and replacing it into her lap.

"I dont particularly expect an honest response," Nadimah remarked with an amused little grin as she observed the Agent's ears redden with either cloying embarrassment or indignation; Or a combination of both she considered.

"I cannot dignify such a ridiculous question with an answer."

"Oh?" she laughed teasingly, "So you are then."

"I think I am quite done humouring you," Bond retorted disdainfully, downing the last of his drink.

"You don't deny it," Nadimah pointed out as she helpfully removed the glass from her companion's tight grip and set it beside her on the table.

Bond stared blankly for several seconds before inhaling deeply and closing his eyes defaulting to silence; much to his companion's interest. Crossing her legs demurely, Nadimah leaned back, slowly sipping her cocktail as she regarded him.

"Are you fucking?" She inquired in a brazen, disarming manner watching with subtle interest as her companion froze. "I assume you must be."

"You are an unusually straightforward woman," Bond remarked, exasperated, "If you must know, then yes-we 'fuck'."

"Hm," Nadimah peered at her companion knowingly, "Even so, at the risk of sounding terribly full of myself, you would bed me in an second. And we certainly could without letting your boyfriend in
on it. I mean- I could certainly be discreet."

Bond smirked.

"It does make you sound terribly full of yourself, though I won't deny you are correct in this instance. I would be more than willing to take you to bed," the Agent informed with credence before leaning back to chuckle; sounding to Nadimah quite terribly amused. "Though, I must say, you are rather forward."

"Straightforward and forward? Redundant much?"

The Agent shrugged.

Nadimah tipped her head back and laughed mirthfully, kicking him playfully in the shin with the pointed toe of her black, high-heeled shoe, "Not accustomed to that, huh? Do your paramours typically play hard to get?"

"Mm," Bond mused, "Not lately, anyway."

"Now, darling, what I'm saying is this: While you would fuck me, you won't. And frankly, I won't either- I'm no home-wrecker."

The second woman in the past month to make such a claim; the Agent shook his head at the irony.

"I'm quite serious," Nadimah insisted.

"I appreciate the fact that you're taken. As I said, I've never been and I do not intend even now, in this case, to be a home-wrecker," She repeated adamantly, "And I suspect, in this particular situation, there may possibly very well be a home to wreck."

"Interesting evaluation," Bond drawled sarcastically.

"Don't you mean correct?"

Bond huffed a dark laugh before easily confiscating Nadimah's still half-full drink right from out of her possession and gulping down the last of it.

"Yes, darling," she intoned consolingly, "You go on ahead and suppress all those scary feelings of yours with a bit more brandy."

"I might be a little in love with you," he admitted, somewhat bemused and more than inebriated, "You are fantastic."

"You, my friend, are drunk," Nadimah snorted, slapping her companion's arm playfully before snatching back her stolen drink.

"Both could be possible."

"You're in love with yourself," Nadimah huffed, batting away the Agent's hand wandering provocatively up her thigh.

"Love and hate are not so dissimilar..." he mused, "Are they?"

"Do not be a maudlin drunk, sweetheart. I know better than to buy that you aren't completely in love with yourself- all men of your particular nature usually are."
"That's true," The Agent conceded, "But it hardly precludes me from having enough left over for you."

"You're not in love with me," Nadimah smirked, "I mean maybe you are with someone... your friend you claim you're just fucking...or perhaps the idea of it all."

She sighed her expression pensive, "But who knows really... do you even, James? Do you think you are even capable?"

Bond peered at her intensely.

"I've dabbled once or twice."

"Then what happened?"

"They usually die."

Nadimah raised an eyebrow, "Well that is certainly unsettling. Thank heavens you don't actually love me or I'd be scared for my life."

The Agent removed his hand from her knee and brought it up to tenderly cup her chin, "I am being completely serious when I say this, Nadimah, whomever it is you give away your heart to someday, will be a very lucky man, and I can only hope he truly appreciates you."

Her heart twinged within her chest before she pulled away feigning a smile; though Bond could see it did not reach her eyes, "I think I better turn in for the night, and you ought to as well. After all, I don't want your man to come storming in here looking for you."

The Agent let himself bypass the urge to point out her swift change in mood and resignedly smirked, playing into her desire to maintain the airiness, "Indeed, that would not be my preference. It was a pleasure, my dear. Until tomorrow?"

"Of course, good night, James."

00

Naadir tossed his glass into the recessed cavern of the electric fireplace where it shattered loudly against the slate tiling.

"How could you have failed to get him to sleep with you? For whatever you lack in looks surely I thought you could make up for in cleverness."

Nadimah winced at the insult, her fists tightening at her sides.

"Bond seems, for some reason or another, loyal to him, I'm not sure how exactly, but when I suggested he was in love with Silva, he hardly did much to dissuade me from thinking this was the case."

"That's disgusting," Naadir cringed, clearly revolted, "The very idea is abominable to me. I was unaware they were sodomites."

"From what I've observed," Nadimah argued, "Bond is not implicitly disinterested- I mean he seems genuinely attracted to me, and if Silva were not in the picture, he would have gladly taken me to bed."

"Raoul Silva is a perverse, despicable fiend and I am willing to bet he's extorting Bond in some
"way..." Naadir grimaced, "Upstairs is breathing down my neck, Nadimah, we need to work quickly."

"What would you have me do?"

"I have some information you may find prudent to impart to Bond tomorrow evening. Since you've befriended him, it would not appear so overly impertinent if you were to throw a jab or two at his partner. It is imperative we draw Bond to our side. We need him to believe us. Believe you."

Nadimah looked at her hands in her lap, unresponsive, and Naadir scowled.

"What is your problem, Nadimah?" He demanded stalking over to where she sat, regarding her strange desolate expression with increasing agitation, "Why do you not speak?"

"Are we doing the right thing, Bhai? By killing Silva? If the boys find out- then we may as well have signed our death warrant."

"You know very well I can make it so they don't. This is not about some fear of yours that they'll discover us, is it," Naadir intuited, "Do not tell me you would sacrifice our livelihood- our safety for the sake of your own sentimentality."

Shaking her head, Nadimah frowned, "I would not-"

"You would, you whore! Look at you- pathetic! One evening with some man you've known for all of a day, and suddenly you're stricken with guilt! You sicken me. I can hardly bear the sight of you," Naadir spat maliciously, "How could you be so selfish?"

Nadimah closed her eyes, swallowing thickly as Naadir sat down beside her, sweeping her hair back and tenderly pressing his lips to her face, "Do you not love me anymore, my piyarr bhen? Is that it? You would have me die? You would feel that is the right thing to do?"

She could not hold back a flood of hot tears escaping her eyes and her face crumpled as she shook her head, "No, no, Bhai, don't say such things to me, you know I love you more than anything in the world. I would never refuse you anything."

"Then you will do as I ask, my love?"

She nodded as he wrapped his arms consolingly around her; clutching her trembling form tightly against his chest, "Whatever you want."

"I want only you," he responded softly; sadly, "I want you to only want me."

"I do," Nadimah replied, her tone broken with anguish, "only ever you."

Through the cast of the dim luminescence cascading inward from the clear night sky outside their window, Naadir slowly stripped away his sister's dress. Pressing his lips against the pulse of her neck and then the shell of her ear, he whispered in their mother tongue his endearments before ridding himself of his own clothing to climb atop her.

She lay beneath him, staring up at the shift of shadows on the ceiling above; unresisting as he took his pleasure out on her body; in a grim parody of the love he claimed to profess for her. Though she recognized the action for what it was; Nadimah knew it would be a futility to deny him; she knew she was already lost.

At a punishing pace, he rutted against her nubile form and she whimpered softly a small pained cry
as he violently faceted onto her mouth with his own; his sharp teeth biting through her lip.

"I love you-"

Tears streamed down Nadimah's cheeks as she tasted the coppery blood upon her tongue and she closed her eyes tightly to shut out the world; transporting herself elsewhere as he unrelentingly drove into her body; consumed as he was by his desire to fill and take and stake his claim.

"I love you so much," he grunted into the crook of his sister's shivering shoulder; shuddering as he spent himself inside of her; she cringed as she felt the hot torrent of his release flood inside.

"With everything that I am."

Naadir lay beside his twin, stroking back the black strands of hair clinging to her damp forehead and leaned forward to place a tender kiss at her temple, "You owe it to me, piyarra bhen, to love me more."

Nadimah swallowed her initial response as she wiped away the fleck of blood welling from the sore upon her swollen bottom lip and squinted at him meaningfully through the dark.

"I do," she reassured him softly as he held her to him.

Hours ticked by as they lay side by side, until she observed his breathing ebbing to a gentle snore; the silhouetted outline of his chest rising and falling slowly enough to indicate he'd at last succumbed to sleep and carefully, so as not to disturb Naadir, Nadimah pulled herself from his arms and padded to the bathroom.

She stood beneath the hot cascade of the shower; allowing the blessedly scalding water to cleanse away all evidence of sin.

For a time, she wept openly, her wracking sobs safely muted by the din of the torrential spray hitting the tiles at her feet. Releasing outward her inward, keening agony until she wore herself ragged and it all slipped away; replaced by a sort of numb, fatigued acceptance and Nadimah weakly sunk against the steamed wall, collapsing her head between her knees. She watched as the water spiraled down the drain with renewed determination.

She would not disappoint her Bhai.

Crawling back into the bed, she slipped beneath the covers and folded herself around Naadir's peacefully slumbering frame.

At long last, cloaked within the warmth between them, Nadimah closed her eyes, surrendering to the welcoming and vast black void of unconsciousness.
The following morning, Bond irately kicked away the rumpled sheets tangled at his ankles and rolled out of bed. Shifting upward to lean against the headboard, Silva watched with a measure of impatience as his disheveled, hung-over companion stumbled around their room assembling his stray articles of clothing.

"Never one for much moderation, hmm?"

Cringing against the bright sunlight pouring in through the open window, Bond peered over at his companion with an unhappy squint as he donned his shirt.

"You know what they say," Bond retorted gesturing outward with a dismissive twist of his wrist, "Live fast and all."

"Viva rapidamente, morra jovem... deixe um cadáver belo," Silva finished with an air of nonchalance, folding his hands in his lap over the sheet tucked up around his waist.

The Blonde could not contain a smirk from spreading across his face as he observed his companion hopping lamely upon one foot and nearly hobbling over as he attempted to pull on his trousers.

"Se destrutivo... but such is your style."

"For once, can you do us both a favour and shut it?" Bond gritted out before catching his foot in the leg of his garment and falling backward.

The mattress springs creaked in sharp protest beneath his weight as he crashed gracelessly onto the bed causing Silva to chortle with vindictive bemusement.

"Oh, my poor, unfortunate, James," Silva snorted, before rolling from the bed and gathering his companion's thwarting trousers; deftly smoothing out the wrinkles before the aggravated Agent snagged them back, "You really need looking after."

"Or at least proper management," the blonde amended reseating himself as his companion donned a crisp, sky-blue oxford, "It's a wonder MI-6 ever gets anything accomplished from you, hmm?"

"What precisely is that supposed to imply?"

"All this is taking much longer than I had anticipated," Silva mused, "What exactly, James, may I ask, is the hold up?"

Having somewhat accomplished dressing himself for the day, with a weary sigh, Bond sat down across from the bed and regarded the blonde with a small terse frown, "If you believe we ought to utilize a different method to ply Nadimah into negotiating on our behalf, please, do not refrain from saying so."

"I have sought an alternative route via Naadir as a back up plan should you fail in your endeavor," Silva offered coolly.

Bond grimaced, massaging his throbbing skull before peering back up at the man.

"Very well then," the Agent bit out shortly, "perhaps you may consider cutting to the point?"
Silva shrugged.

"I have attempted to glean what I can of her brother's involvement, but it seems futile- Naadir has proved to be rather useless," the blonde intoned, "which is- in and of itself- rather peculiar. To all appearances, Nadimah attempts to convince us the organization affords her the luxury of keeping on this half-whit brother of hers as a sort of assistant."

The Agent furrowed his brow, "Perhaps they think they have a better chance of assuring her performance- that she remains adequately motivated if they allow him to remain at her side employed at a low enough level to not be considered high-risk."

"I believe this to be the case," the blonde agreed, "though, I would not allow such an arrangement under my management."

Bond scowled, "Thankfully, Nadimah won't have to worry about such a thing."

"You are showing your hand, meu querido," Silva retorted with an underlying note of accusation in his tone, "It concerns me that you may be becoming overly invested in her welfare."

"There is a part of me that worries that she is a pawn in some grander scheme, do you not suspect as much?"

"You do not do her much credit thinking she is some fragile damsel you need rescue from a burning tower," the blonde scowled, "She has placed herself willingly in the position she is in, full well knowing every last potential consequence to her actions."

"And I believe she has some notion of what your agenda would be, were you to take reigns Upstairs," the Agent pointed out argumentatively, "So, if you're seeking to lay blame on anyone here, you might consider pointing the finger back at yourself."

"Focus on the job, James," Silva bit out with a note of finality as he arose to dress for the day, "Try not to be swayed so by her manipulations, hmm?"

00

"James," Nadimah sighed watching her companion as he stood from the couch, "I do not say any of this to upset you. I have my reservations as to whether I should aide you, because, though I trust you- I find I cannot trust him. Not after the things I have heard. And I wonder to myself, if he is so deserving of you- of your loyalty."

"Everything you have mentioned is valid," Bond admitted frowning, "This, now with Donner... it's not acceptable."

"None of it seems acceptable to me, darling," Nadimah pressed, "The way he's presumptuously swept in to implant his operations within ours? It completely undermines everything I've done and I cannot but think he intends to replace me."

"I would not allow it."

"We will see, James. Just, do not let that man take you for a fool," she advised, "He has no right to lie to you."

Bond peered at his companion searchingly, "Nadimah, I promise you, if you consider helping us, I will reign him in. I will not allow any harm to befall you."
Nadimah shook her head with a small laugh, "I am sure of it, my dear, but I am more concerned with harm befalling you."

James stood up, his companion rising beside him.

"I hate to part from you so soon, darling, but I must have a talk with my partner."

"Of course, I understand. Are we still on for going out on the town tomorrow? There are some places here in Santorini you really must see."

"I wouldn't miss it for anything," Bond smiled warmly as Nadimah embraced him.

"Goodnight, James," she smiled, kissing him softly on the corner of his mouth, "I'll miss you every minute until tomorrow."

Silva glanced up from where he lay sprawled across the bed, as the door to their suite crashed open. Bond stormed in with a furious expression and the blonde raised an alarmed eyebrow.

"Should I be worried, James? You look very angry."

"Which I have every right to be," The Agent clipped out, "You owe me some explanations, Silva."

The blonde in question sighed wearily, "Alright, meu querido, what is it I have done?"

"You lied."

Silva sat up and pulled a hand through his hair as he stared at his irate companion, "Have I? I do not seem to recall doing so-

"Lying by omission is still lying," Bond spat out. Silva furrowed his brow in confusion.

"What, pray tell, do you accuse me of?"

"Donner."

Silva's eyes widened in recognition before looking away with a guilty wince, "Oh."

"Oh, is right," the Agent huffed, "What the hell were you thinking? You cannot just send out orders to have innocent men taken out-

"You are shouting, James, and while I accept you have every right to be upset with me, we cannot solve anything until you calm down," Silva sighed, "Come, meu querido, why don't you take a seat and we can speak civilly, hmm?"

"Do not take that patronizing tone with me, Silva," Bond gritted out taking a seat across from his companion, "Talk."

"James," The blonde requested entreatingly, "Try to look at the situation logically. From my perspective. Your Agent there put me in a very precarious position- he knew of my identity. He would have reported us. There was no feasible alternative solution."

The Agent shook his head skeptically, "Was there not?"

"I was not particularly afforded much time to consider another option, was I? I regret it, it was
unfortunate, but it was necessary," Silva defended, "In my defense I was planning to eventually tell you, I held back because I knew you would disapprove, and I did not think we needed more melodrama immediately proceeding that entire incident with Jakov."

"We're partners. You need to be forthright at all times with me, Raoul," Bond responded wearily, dragging a hand down over his face, "If you don't tell me things you can't expect me to trust you."

"What can I do, meu querido? What can I do to make it up to you?" Silva requested ruefully, reaching out to take his partner's hand. The Agent rebuffed the gesture, snatching his hand away and curling it into a fist protectively behind his back. Thwarted, the blonde gazed up at his companion with a dejected frown before the puzzle pieces snapped together.

"Ah, did your girlfriend tell you all this?"

"Nadimah brought it up in passing."

Silva scowled, "What else did she see fit to inform you of? What else has she been filling your head with, James? Hmm?"

"Nothing I haven't already been wondering."

"Oh? And just what is it you've been wondering?"

"As we've gone along here, you've been steadily taking out and taking over from the bottom up. What do you intend to gain here?"

"You think when all is said and done, that I'm just going to say, 'So sorry, 007, but I've been planning to take command of this operation all along' and send you home to MI-6 in a body bag? Is that what you truly think?" Silva demanded incredulously.

Bond stared at him with determined resistance, "Why wouldn't you?"

Silva openly gaped at his companion before leaning back on the bed with an exhausted sigh, "Where is the reasoning in that? What use for you would I have had in the first place... why not simply work alone or with my own men if this was my endgame?"

"What did you hope to gain by working with me?"

"You still don't..." Silva trailed off shaking his head, "If you think this is some sad form of revenge you are woefully mistaken, my dear."

Bond leveled his companion with a pointed glare, "There isn't much you can do to convince me otherwise, is there?"

"Mother made you one pitiful, disillusioned man, didn't she," Silva mused darkly, "It hurts me that you think so little of me. I've been nothing but good to you."

Bond glared at his companion with a pained expression, "What do you want from me?"

"If you don't know the answer to that already, James," Silva responded with clear frustration, "then I cannot help you."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Figure it out," The blonde snapped.
"I can figure," Bond retorted, "that there are one or two things you probably wouldn't want me to figure out."

"Oh? Is that so. I presume Nadimah could fill you in, since she seems to think she knows me so well," Silva irately bit out, "How else has that puta maligned me? What else did she say to turn you against me so, hmm?"

"This has nothing to do with her."

"It has everything to do with her, how can you not see this?"

"To what end?" Bond demanded.

"How can I possibly know?" Silva asked unhappily, collapsing back on the bed dramatically to stare at the ceiling, "Because she wants you? Wants me out of the picture? Because that much is becoming clearly evident."

The blonde rolled to his side as he came to a thought, "Does it not seem strange to you, meu querido, how she has been keeping us hidden away here, out of her boss's line of sight? How she yet resists making an appointment for us to meet them?"

"She's protecting herself," Bond argued, "It's understandable considering her situation."

"You are so quick to defend her, James, and you barely know who she is," Silva sniffed, "I don't see you come running to my defense like this. Why is that?"

Staring at his unmovable companion, the blonde let out a long-suffering sigh and rolled onto his back, folding his arms behind his head, "Meu Deus, do I miss the days before we ran into that contemptible little slut."

"She is not-"

"Ah, but perhaps you are, hmm?" Silva accused, "Tell me, tomorrow on this little excursion through town she's taking you on, do you plan on actually persuading la puta to do as we've asked, or is this all some prevarication so you can fuck her?"

Bond shook his head in amazement, "You should hear yourself."

"You're right, I'm mistaken, she's the whore, my dear," the blonde snorted acerbically, "how could I think to imply such a thing of you, huh?"

"I will not sit here and listen to you slander her. You don't know her."

"You really don't either," Silva scoffed, "But oof, has she certainly gotten you in her clutches!"

Hearing no response, the blonde looked up and heaved another weary sigh, gazing apologetically at his companion.

"This is becoming tiresome. Why don't we put all of this behind us and come to bed, hmm?" he requested, moving over to make room for his lover, patting the vacated spot beside him.

The Agent shook his head with a cold expression.

"I'll be using the other bedroom tonight."

Silva scowled darkly, "Fine, have it your way, moleque pentelho. Get out of my room, then."
Bond arose tiredly, abandoning his companion and stripped himself before climbing into the cold sheets of the previously unused bed in the adjacent room.

Tossing and turning, trying in vain to sleep, the Agent finally gave up and sullenly stared out through the dark and when an hour later the door clicked open and Silva climbed into the bed beside him, he did not protest.

"My bed is too cold," Silva explained, pressing up against his companion from behind and wrapping his arms around him, "I could not sleep."

With a long sigh, Bond caved.

"If you think you can refrain from being a complete tosser, I suppose you can stay."

"I'll do what I can, meu querido," the blonde replied, chuckling against his companion's shoulder.

Bond shivered at the warm breath cascading over him from behind; stirring the short sandy hairs on the back of his neck, causing them to stand on end as his skin prickled in response to the sensation. The Agent inhaled deeply with exasperation as he allowed his companion to affectionately nuzzle his face against him.

"You really have an oddly self-destructive tendency to test every last limit," the Agent muttered dryly, "I really can't think why I don't kick you back out on your arse."

"Because my posterior is a valued asset you would be remiss to abuse in such a fashion."

Bond snorted.

"Your point has some merit," he conceded, "to your good fortune."

Silva tightened his hold, insinuating his foot between his companion's ankles while securing the blankets around them.

"I hate fighting with you, James," the blonde sighed softly, tenderly kissing down the side of his lover's neck, "I am sorry if my words were harsh before and I am also sorry I was not truthful with you."

"Hm," Bond mused tiredly, "You are quick to apologize when it suits your purposes."

"I do not apologize because my actions were wrong, James," Silva explained, "I do not regret having taken the measures I've been obligated to take in order to ensure the security of our mission."

The blonde paused before he continued, taking a moment to prepare a suitably penitent reassurance before finding himself pulled in another direction by a stray, nagging grievance.

"You know, James, you cannot fault me for expressing contempt for that friend of yours when all she does is drag me through the mud."

"So you request my pardon for what you consider to be understandable trespasses," Bond mused, "Self serving."

"No, you are right," Silva chuckled, "that is not the direction I intended to go with this."

The Agent let out a small sardonic laugh as he untangled his feet from his companion's, "Then please illuminate me on whatever it is you are attempting to redress."
"It was wrong of me to offend you, knowing you bear some soft-spot- albeit entirely undeserved." Silva huffed indignantly, pulling his companion's suddenly tense form back against him, "-for this woman of yours, and more to the point: I was wrong to keep things concealed from you as I've done."

"I get it, you repent," Bond retorted, "I don't require a speech."

"That's not how it looks from my end, James," Silva sighed quietly as he soothingly worked at the knots across his lover's back; efficaciously kneading the flesh with a certain level of honed skill Bond could not help but appreciate, "Eu prometo-o, meu querido, I will always tell you everything, as much as I am able and maybe, you might think about giving me the benefit of the doubt sometimes, hmm?"

"I hesitate to risk sounding terribly churlish," the Agent forewarned before sounding to his companion- rather quite churlish, "but I'll grant you as much leniency in the future as you can prove you've earned."

"That's generous of you," Silva drawled, "Considering everything I do is for you anyway."

Bond relaxed into the comfortable familiarity of his companion's warm hands as they adroitly massaged his stiff muscles, moaning as he loosened a particularly tight spot beneath his shoulder blade.

"Not that that ever seems to occur to you," his lover mused as he completed his task and one again wrapped an arm up around the Agent.

Bond closed his eyes; unsettled as he contemplated the immense degree of sheer ease found within this physical co-dependency they shared. It had literally sprung up without his full knowledge or consent over this past month as they worked so seamlessly side by side: not without occasional dissension, but in spite of it.

He could not but acknowledge they made a formidable team both professionally and intimately and the Agent was quite justifiably both reluctant and unprepared to consider the eventual ramifications of this; of what should follow at the end... if, in fact, his companion was as genuine in all his intentions as he so claimed.

For a fleeting moment, he genuinely wished for nothing more than to crush this renewed doubt twisting inwardly and just let himself accept his partner's assurances as honest truth.

But when was anything so simple?

Bond scoffed inwardly with some amount of self-deprecating amusement for sounding so naïve: so unsure of himself inside his own head.

After a long, drawn out moment of introspection, Bond shoved an arm under his pillow and huffed with disgust.

Everything would run it's course. All of this was just temporary mutual gratification, and at most... though it revolted him to admit it: perhaps some small form of an infatuation he reciprocated to some excusably minute, negligible extent. It didn't mean anything. It very rarely did.

Tendrils of conflicting doubt curled through him and the Agent was suddenly extremely grateful he had his back to Silva so the man would be unable bear witness to the outward physical manifestation of his inner turmoil: the broadening fissure dividing apart his so fastidiously trained composure revealed by the widening of his eyes and the deepening of his frown.
Sure enough, the blonde seemed thankfully oblivious as his companion silently suppressed an overwhelming urge to hyperventilate; overcome by a veritable onslaught of painful self-awareness.

A small mercy, he thought bitterly.

Silva frowned at the rigid silhouette of his lover with concern as he spotted the Agent's hand clutching the pillow by his face in a firm, white-knuckled grip and curiously wondered if his lover was undergoing some kind of silent panic-attack. Gently, the blonde stroked his hands over the Agent's arms and threaded together their fingers in a subtle attempt to calm the man.

'Everything I do is for you anyway,' the words replayed inside Bond's head.

He gaped openly with a single, muted, breathless gasp; staring sightlessly inward- into the vast, whorling chasm of dawning revelation: His mind-self walked to the barrows; a condemned man.

How could he have let this happen?

It was imperative he re-secure his defenses without delay. This was an untenable situation he'd be damned if he'd endure another second of.

"It could be so simple...so simple, meu querido," Silva whispered softly, answering to the Agent's unvoiced thoughts as if they'd suddenly become transparent. He soothed a hand down the tensed line of his lover's back and sighed with a veiled, underlying wistfulness, "You could let it be, if you wanted."

Bond quietly laughed in a dark, off-putting and disjointed manner which the blonde could not decipher.

'I do want,' the Agent angrily thought to himself; but that would be the last he would admit to it before inexorably shutting it out of his mind.

Silva watched regretfully as his lover locked down beside him and resignedly rolled to face the other direction eventually succumbing to exhaustion. After awhile, Bond followed suit slipping into a restless sleep; his dreams plagued with a relentless slew of anxiety from within.

00

Having spent the majority of the day languidly strolling through the the town,

Nadimah excitedly pointing out this or that various attraction between darting in and out the small shops and boutiques. Bond watched as she bounded about, beaming with an air of unsuppressed vigour; it was entrancing how light-hearted she became, released of all inhibition as she laughed asking his opinion on this hat or that scarf; what he thought of the architecture, the people, the sights.

At last, when she expressed how utterly famished she was, his companion dragged him to a small cafe where they shared their lunch as she told him all about the fascinating history of the island.

Nadimah smiled up at him with a mischievous grin and Bond found a smile spreading across his own face in response to her playful ebullience.

"There is a place I go to, I've never brought anyone else, I think you'll see why when I show you," Nadimah informed with an air of mystery dancing in her sparkling dark eyes, "It's the one place I go when I need to be alone. It's a bit of a climb so you won't find many people often troubling themselves to bother. Will you come?"
"Of course."

With careless abandon she raced out in front of him, leading him across the bright green vineyards, over the hills and through the glades.

Nadimah enthusiastically grabbed her companion's hand and pulled him along behind her as they climbed up the rough rocky path of the jagged cliff overlooking the shore. When at last they reached their destination atop the hill, Nadimah came to a still, placing a hand over her chest as she caught her breath.

"It's worth it isn't it? Worth... everything..." She expressed as the warm breeze wrapped around them, billowing out the skirt of her sleeveless short white frock.

Bond watched his attractive companion appreciatively as she stood; framed by the romantic, dramatic backdrop of the island's landscape, gazing out at the shimmering crystalline blue water with a languid, dream-like expression.

She turned to face him taking both of his hands in her own; the sun glinting off the sheen upon her cheeks, glowing against the warm tone of her smooth brown skin.

"Isn't it perfect?" Nadimah breathed gesturing out at the waves crashing against the beach, smiling brilliantly at her companion, "I could stay here forever."

Bond looked out at the sun glinting off the water before gazing back at his companion.

"Beautiful," he intoned, meaningfully looking only at Nadimah as he threaded his fingers through her own.

"I like to come here when I can, to escape the fray- the everyday, you know? Get away from it all," she said with a strange, distantly sad look in her eyes, "There's a certain serenity in solitude."

She turned to look at him, placing her other hand over the top of their interlocked fingers, "Do you ever wonder what it would be like, James, to be someone else, anyone other than who we are? Live some other life?"

The Agent considered her question regarding her curiously. It seemed as if somewhere inside her expression; her far off, wistful smile, she carried the burden of some great secret which weighed heavily on her heart. Baring her vulnerability in such a way tugged at his own, and Bond could not help but feel compelled to protect her- though he knew not what from, or why.

"I think that is a universally shared feeling," he responded at last, glancing out at the horizon as the sun waned low in the sky with the approaching dusk.

"Will you meet me again, James? After supper this evening?" Nadimah asked quietly, tucking her long, flowing black hair behind her ears.

Bond smiled at her softly, "You know I will."

00

"We need to take advantage of the moment while the moment is hot, bhen," Naadir expressed with an impassioned gleam in his eye, "You've manipulated him into your thrall; he trusts you. Likes you. Everything is set in motion."

Nadimah gazed up at her brother tiredly, "Even after the other night, though he clearly is upset with
his partner- Bond still does not appear to be swayed against him."

A strange shift seemed to come over Naadir, his expression twisting him into something alien and disturbing before he turned around with a cool, chilling mask of decisiveness.

"I have an idea, piyaarah bhen."

"Yes, Naadir, I am listening." She sighed, "What is your plan?"

"Over supper you will inform them that you've arranged their meeting, I'll engage Silva in another game or two while you invite Bond back up to your rooms where you will seduce him-"

Nadimah shook her head with a small unhappy laugh, "No, it won't work. He may be amenable to sleeping with me, but he does not feel passion for me- not enough for that anyway-"

"That does not matter. At the right moment, at a set time I shall provide you with, not a minute sooner or a minute later, you will make it so that your position looks as compromising as possible," Naadir explained as his sister peered up at him with a confused frown, "I will announce to Silva that we ought to join the two of you for drinks, and just at the right moment we will walk in to stumble upon the two of you."

Pressing a hand over her mouth to hide her discontentment, Nadimah looked down at her drink.

"Silva will be furious and most likely make some sort of scene, further driving a rift between he and Bond. You convince Bond to remain at your side while his lover calms down- ply him with drinks, console him, tell him it's all really for the best, yes? At another specific time I will inform you of, after he is well and drunk, you will drop into his drink a temporary short-acting drug which will keep him sedated just long enough to keep him out of the way while I have Silva killed. Of course, I will arrange to have it appear an unfortunate accident."

"And what of Bond?"

"When he awakes, we inform of the tragedy, he will of course be distressed, I imagine, to some degree, but it won't take him long to move past it- after all, a large portion of his trust is now in you, Nadimah, and by extension, myself as well," Naadir explained, grinning malevolently as he revealed his scheme, "He will be ours to hand over, and he'll do so willingly and without regret or suspicion."

"It is flawless, piyaara bhen!" He proudly exclaimed sitting beside his sister and turning to grip her shoulders painfully in his excitement, "Do you not agree?"

"It is. You are very clever, bhai," Nadimah commended, feigning a smile, "I will do everything as you say."
"Nadimah, you have done me a great service, and I assure you and your brother will be compensated adequately for your assistance," Silva intoned fluidly, sipping his drink.

Slyly, she peered over at Bond, "Well, I have to say, it wasn't really for you at all."

The blonde snorted, "Yes, I am in no doubt of that."

"What say, now that we've finished our supper, we go for another round of cards, my friend?" Naadir suggested looking over at Silva, "I really would like another chance to win back what I lost to you last night."

"I would be amenable to that," the blonde agreed while accepting a new drink from their server.

"And Mister Bond, bhai- would you join us as well?" Naadir offered, turning to face his other companions.

*Of course, he knew just what she would say; as he had directed her to say it.*

Nadimah laughed shaking her head.

"You know I loathe gambling, my dear bhen." She expressed disdainfully before turning to smile sweetly at Bond, "Would you perhaps care to accompany me back to my rooms for a drink, my darling?"

"Certainly," The Agent replied easily, bestowing a charming grin upon his lovely, radiant companion in return.

Silva furrowed his brow with a small frown, peering sharply at his partner.

"Why don't you stay and show off a bit, my dear? You're better than I am at this game, are you not? Your friend can always stay and watch." He suggested with an aloof shrug in her direction.

"Watching is boring," she retorted shortly, glaring at him with a pointed challenging expression before turning to plead her case with her friend, "You won't leave me all alone, will you, James?"

"Of course I won't."

Looking over the Agent's shoulder she directed a brief, smug, triumphant little smirk in Silva's direction. The blonde narrowed his eyes in return, sneering.

"Such a clever girl, aren't you?" he bit out before rounding on his partner, "Abandoning me again, James? How typical."

Naadir concealed his pleasure at the exchange; everything working beautifully according to plan.

"I'm going to go fetch the cards I'll let you figure this out amongst yourselves," he informed with dry bemusement, excusing himself from the group.

"Raoul," Bond drawled, regarding his companion's petulance with a small wry, exasperated expression, "This is not an exclusive invitation, you can of course join us when you're finished, if
"Must he?" Nadimah complained under her breath.

"How gracious of you, my dear, but I highly doubt I'd be so inclined" Silva huffed before shaking his head and shooing them away, "Fine, go off with your little musaranho."

"I don't know what that means, but it sounded rude," Nadimah objected.

Bond irritably scowled, turning his back on his offensive, galling partner.

"Nadimah, my dear," the Agent intoned, taking her slender hand in his own in a conciliatory gesture, "Please accept my apologies on his behalf."

"Not at all, I'm sorry for you, you're the one who has to put up with him on a regular basis."

"I hope you are aware, my dear," Silva smiled coolly, "that my partner does not speak for me-"

"I'm quite aware," Nadimah replied before turning back to the Agent, "Honestly I couldn't care less. He's just being a sourpuss. But I'm sure he'll get over it over the course of a few games with Naadir."

"Hmm, and what makes you say that?" Silva inquired interestedly.

"Well, he is awful at poker, I'm sure you'll regain some of your losses at least in cash if nothing else."

"That is a fascinating perspective you have, my dear, do you always think in terms of monetary value? I suppose you would, considering all those numbers you crunch all day. Rather dehumanizing after awhile, one can imagine," Silva mused before circling in on her with a pointed look, "But let me make something very clear, I do not place a price on my partner."

"You do so with many things, Mister Silva, I wonder what would make him so unique," Nadimah shrugged before looking up to smile warmly at his lover, "I, on the other hand, get what makes him so great."

Bond groaned inwardly caught between as the two carried on oblivious to his growing irritation.

The blonde narrowed his eyes at the presumptuous cur, shaking his head in open wonderment, "One, this is a dangerous game you're getting yourself into with me, and I do not think you understand the rules well enough to play. Two, you clearly have little idea of whom I really am, and you are very, very lucky, my dear, that you have been of such great service to us, and that my partner for some reason or another seems so absurdly fond of you."

"Must we continue with this? Retract your claws and be done with this cat fight, Raoul," Bond remanded before offering his arm to Nadimah, "Let us go off then, shall we, my dear?"

Silva chuckled darkly, "James, you are really something else aren't you."

"Come up if you want, or don't, your choice, I could care less either way," the Agent replied coolly in parting before strolling away arm and arm with his gleefully satisfied friend. Silva watched, glaring daggers at the two as they departed before collecting himself and turning around to join Naadir for their game.

Clinging to his arm, Nadimah bumped her hip playfully into that of her companion's and laughed as they stepped out of the elevator, "Come on, James, perk up, let the guy mope. He'll get over it."

Bond stared questioningly at the woman and shook his head disapprovingly, "Why do you
"Tch," Nadimah huffed disgustedly as they walked down the hall passing rows of doors to other rooms, "It's not like he's been very nice tonight to either of us, huh? And I went out of my way to do you two such a favour only for him to turn around and spit it back in my face. I don't like him at all."

"You both seem to feel quite free to express your displeasure without reserve," Bond informed with a tone of irritation, "I don't particularly enjoy being caught in the middle."

"I don't particularly enjoy watching how unhappy it makes you, James. Not that he seems to care. But anyway, let's forget about that jerk for awhile and talk about other more pleasant subjects," she suggested. Sliding her key-card through the lock, the door clicked open and the two entered to take a seat in their usual spots.

"Let me fix you something to drink, darling, brandy or bourbon?"

"Have you any scotch?"

"But of course," Nadimah replied with a flirtatious grin.

Quickly darting a glance at his watch, Naadir grinned up at his companion.

"Well at least you've been so kind to allow me to win back a portion of my losses," He laughed, slapping his cards down on the table top with a heavy thump, rattling the chips against the surface, "What say we bring the party to our erstwhile companion's, yes?"

"That would probably be a good idea," Silva drawled as he carelessly pushed aside his winnings.

"You don't intend to collect?"

"That wouldn't be very courteous of me in light of recent events."

Naadir grinned, "I am more than happy to accept your gratitude in lieu of my sister."

Silva huffed darkly, refraining from voicing a scathing reply upon that subject.

"I mean, really, you do owe her, but I suppose by extension I will take what I can," Naadir mused, "You don't particularly like her much, do you?"

"I cannot comment as you are her kin and would not take pleasure in hearing my honest opinion, but I can promise you, you can rest assured that none of my ill-will could negatively impact you by proxy."

"Thank god, for that, I think," the Pakistani man chuckled with relief, "I've sort of grown rather fond of my hide, I don't believe I'd care to have in skinned from me."

Silva snorted, "I am constantly amused by the rumours I hear of myself recently."

Naadir's dark eyes widened in alarm.

"I didn't mean anything by it," he backtracked quickly, "Nadimah seems to have this idea that you're a relatively brutal sort of person and one ought to tread around you with the utmost care."

"Is that so?"
"From what she says, though she doesn't seem to care much," Naadir laughed, "My sister is a tenacious bull-dog of a woman. A bit scary really. Once she has her mind set on something, she rarely pays mind to the cost of obtaining it. She'll go to any lengths."

"I wonder if you realize you're doing her a disservice by saying all this, my friend," Silva pointed out, "What do you hope to gain by doing so?"

Naadir insistently shook his head, "No, nothing, Mister Silva! I do not mean to cast her into anymore of a poor light within your eyes as she's already placed herself. Or to do so with any intention to make myself look better in contrast, of course! I merely mean, her shortcomings are part of her charm! They aren't even shortcomings if you look at it from a business perspective. She has a very entrepreneurial spirit and it is my belief that I owe much of what we've gained from her ambition."

"But yet, she would carelessly gamble both of your positions in her pursuit to lay claim to what she thinks I possess?" the blonde asked, chuckling, "That is not respectable fortitude, Naadir, that's stupidity."

"She tends to covet what she can't have," Naadir shrugged, "She sometimes forgets to differentiate her enemies from her friends and makes enemies where she might make friends- which is to say, I am always happy to make friends in her stead."

Silva raised an eyebrow, smirking as he regarded the ingratiating fellow, "A worthwhile reason to keep you employed, I imagine."

"If it's any consolation, I'll be more than willing to make sure she stays in line under your employ- if that is how everything works out, Mister Silva. You can count on me."

"Hmm," the blonde responded slowly, "that shall await to be seen, I suppose."

Naadir cocked a grin, "Anyhow, my friend, shall we make sure those two aren't getting into too much trouble without us?"

"It would be wise," Silva agreed rising from his chair to follow his chipper companion.

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Nadimah darted a quick, nervous glance at the crystal quartz clock upon the wall before suppressing her anxiety and smiling warmly at her companion.

Immersed in mixing their drinks, Bond missed the action and turned back around setting the glasses upon the table before reseating himself beside her.

"I can't tell you how happy I am that you've come up with me, James," Nadimah expressed reaching forward to grasp the Agent's hand, "In so short a time I really believe I've found something in you. Something I've searched for all my life."

Bond regarded his friend with a small confused smile, "And what is that, my dear?"

Nadimah shook her head with a heavy sigh, "I don't know. I can't really say. I mean, I feel like you understand me like no one else ever has."

She turned fully to face him, clutching his other hand and brought them both together before her in a significant, symbolic gesture.

"I feel like we've made a connection. I can't explain it, but I can feel it. Inside of me- in my heart,
James," Nadimah stated with clear, sparkling eyes, "I really want for you to always, in some way, be a part of my life."

The Agent peered at his companion with a look of concern. The mood had gone from airy, playful frivolity to this sudden, meaningful intensity without any forewarning.

"You must think I am so stupid," she laughed darkly shaking her head with a tragic, unhappy expression, "And you wouldn't be wrong."

Extremely unnerved, Bond moved to face Nadimah squarely, "I do not think you're stupid in the least, darling, what on Earth would cause you to accuse me of such a thing? Why do you say this?"

"Because you're going to hate me," she sniffled letting tears roll unchecked down her face, "You'll never want to see me again when I tell you the truth."

"What truth? What is this about?" The Agent demanded appalled by his companion's sudden uncharacteristic behaviour, "What could you tell me that would make you think I would ever hate you or not want to ever see you again?"

While theatrically tossing her head back in an act of abandoned despair, Nadimah cast another discreet glance at the time before uttering an audible sob, "Because I am a horribly jealous woman and a terrible friend, when you've been so kind to me."

Bond huffed incredulously, "This is really rather an overreaction, my dear, and I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Don't you? How can you be so blind to what I've done," Nadimah accused unmercifully, her eye-makeup smeared into streaks down her flushed cheeks, her role becoming increasingly easier to fall into as she pulled her cues from the piercing guilt riddling her from within.

She hated herself for what she was going to do. What she was doing this very second.

"Can't you see? I mean of course, Silva does not deserve you. Of course he is a vile, despicable man whom I hate. But I hate him because he has you and I don't."

"I really think you overestimate what-"

"And it's not fair," Nadimah bit out, "because he can't give you what I can."

Shaking his head in dismay, Bond furrowed his brow, "What do you-"

"Isn't it obvious?" She asked her dark eyes glittering out at him beneath welling tears, "Don't you already know?"

Helpless to console her, the Agent sat back in his seat lamely, awaiting her inevitable confession with growing alarm.

The sentiment being purely genuine, though not precisely of the variety as she was about to make it sound, was simple enough to confess.

"I love you."

Bond inhaled and then exhaled staring at his companion mutely for a very long moment.

"Are you really that surprised?" Nadimah asked in a small, timid voice as she regarded him brokenly.
"I was under the impression you were fond of me in a more platonic sense," the Agent replied with a modicum of disbelief.

"A mistaken impression," the dark-eyed woman retorted caustically, "Not that you care."

Bond shook his head, and stroked down her thin, quaking arms soothingly, "You know I care about you, my dear, what would you have me do? How can I fix this?"

"Fix this?" Nadimah snorted, "Fix what? I'll tell you what you can do. You could leave him."

Swallowing thickly, the Agent attempted to carefully patch the tenuous situation with a small, charming grin. "I can't help but think it might be a good idea to perhaps drink our drinks and talk this through. You don't know me as well as you think you might, and we've barely known each other for more than a few days."

"You would try to disqualify me by talking of time and invalidate my love for you because you think I'm being rash?"

"No, no," Bond hurriedly backtracked, "Let me try to clarify what I mean, I can't help but think there must be something else here that's troubling you. That may have caused you to... incorrectly assign such passionate feelings for me. The other day, on the beach, you seemed..."

The Agent trailed off furrowing his brow before peering back at his distraught companion, "I suppose you seemed distressed, sad. Afraid of something."

Nadimah sucked in her bottom lip, worrying it nervously between her teeth as her friend hit too close to home.

"I am," she confessed dramatically, "I'm afraid of your lover. He hates me and I know he wants to kill me."

Bond shook his head, "That cannot possibly be what has you in such a state, Nadimah. Besides, even if any of that were remotely true, you know I'd prevent it."

"I know, you'd protect me. I want you to protect me, my darling," Nadimah expressed with impassioned candor as she clung to him desperately, "I would give anything to be yours, James. Ask me for anything and I would be yours forever."

Mixed with a combination of warring repulsion at this dramatic display, bafflement at whatever compelled it to occur and compassion for this apparently fragile woman, Bond sighed wearily and dragged her weeping, limp and pliant form into his arms.

"I don't know if there is much I can say that can do any good right now, my dear," he frowned, one arm wrapped around her waist and the other reaching up to stroke her face. He combed his fingers through her loose, silken hair unable to protest as she slyly maneuvered herself more into his lap.

Listening out for, and finally hearing the approach of her brother and his companion nearing the door, she peered coyly up at Bond from beneath thick, black wetly clumped together lashes and smiled, "Then don't say anything at all."

Lunging forward, Nadimah boldly seized her prey by his lapels pulling him into her in a fierce, demanding kiss.

Too distracted by the sudden, confusing, aggressive attack, and the fervent, audible moans of the woman writhing upon his lap, Bond missed the click of the latch and opening of the door and
everything went exactly according to schedule as Naadir entered the suite with the blonde in tow.

A throat cleared from behind the two, alerting them both of the untimely intrusion. Nadimah looked up with swollen lips feigning surprise, followed quickly by the Agent whipping his head around to glance behind at their visitors.

Naadir stepped off to the side and blew an uneasy laugh as Silva hovered expressionlessly in the doorway.

"Ah, this was not expected," the dark-haired man proclaimed, darting a worried glance over at the grim figure of his blonde companion.

Bond covered his annoyed grimace, pressing both hands to his face as Nadimah remained perched upon him.

"I don't suppose saying it's not what it looks like would do any good," he offered tiredly.

"My dear bhai, you should not take such liberties with our friend's partner," Naadir chastised with a pleased sparkle glinting in his eye as he regarded his sister, "Come now, perhaps it would be prudent to peal yourself from off our guest, yes?"

"Not if he doesn't want me to," Nadimah shrugged with a satisfied smirk, reciting her lines as prompted, before looking down at the man she sat atop with an open look of warm ardour, "You don't want me to, do you?"

"It would be wise if you would," Bond clipped out in a strained tone through gritted teeth. Daring to glance up, he sighed as he observed his partner's strange, coldly reserved expression.

"Raoul," the Agent feebly attempted, "I am speaking the truth."

Silva flashed a pointed, disgusted look in his lover's direction before turning his back on the whole unpalatable scene and storming out.

"Ugh," Nadimah groaned with a guilty look at her friend as she extracted herself from his lap, "I suppose you better go see to that."

Irritably, Bond shook his head and took off in pursuit of his clearly irate partner. As he passed out the door, Naadir shared a silent exchange with his twin, directing her to follow.

"Look," The Agent called out down the hall at the retreating figure of the blonde, "If you would just pause and listen, as I said, it really was not what it looked like."

Silva paused at the end of the hall and turned back around, leveling his partner with a black, murderous glower, "Really, James, and just what exactly should it have looked like?"

Bond swallowed thickly as the blonde stalked back toward him until he stopped, barely a hairs-length away, "What exactly should it have looked like? The two of you naked? Lost in throws of passion?"

Shaking his head, the Agent laughed darkly, "Not even slightly."

"What business is it of yours?" Nadimah interjected defensively, appearing from the doorway to stand behind her friend.

"It is my business, you miserable whore," Silva spat, "And none of yours, do yourself a favour and
depart immediately before I consider removing you myself."

"Are you threatening me, Mister Silva?" Nadimah demanded indignantly, "How dare you! I should ring up our friends and call off your whole meeting!"

Bond gazed up at the ceiling incredulously, cursing his poor luck at being caught once more between the two. "This is really not a good time to interfere, Nadimah."

"Please, James, do not insert yourself in this," Silva huffed, "This tramp has done nothing other than provoke me since we first met, it is high time she is properly reprimanded."

"Oh? And what are you going to do? Have me shot? Do it yourself? Why? Because I stole away your lover? Because he never loved you at all?" Nadimah cruelly accused, lost in the act, "So you'd punish me instead, huh?"

"He will not," Bond assured, his chin set firmly in determination as he challengingly glared his partner, "You will not."

Silva paused, furrowing his brow as he stared in disbelief at the agent.

"How well you know me, meu querido."

"He doesn't know you at all," Nadimah retorted, "Not the real you. I know all about the evil things you've done."

Shaking his head with revulsion, the blonde rolled his eyes, "I cannot waste my time with this."

Squarely facing his partner standing between the two protectively blocking him from Nadimah as if he would at any moment lunge forward and attack the cowering woman, he snorted tiredly, "James, go see to your slut and come back when you've had your fill, hmm? Get it out of your system and then we'll talk."

Bond frowned at the blonde's back as he walked away, "And where will you be?"

"You'll know where to find me," Silva drawled crisply without turning back around as he departed, "Be a good boy and at the very least try to find yourself a prophylactic, God only knows where your whore's been."

"That horrid Son of a Bitch!" Nadimah fumed once Silva turned the corner.

"I should go talk to him now before he starts planning our joint execution," Bond mused dryly.

Nadimah folded her arms across her chest, "That is the worst idea I've ever heard, he is far too angry to deal with right now. Please, come back to my room and we'll have a drink while he cools down."

The Agent peered at his companion with narrowed eyes, "That does not sound like a good plan."

"Oh, please, I'm not going to molest you, James," Nadimah huffed, "Look, I am sorry things have gone the way they have. I didn't mean for all of this to get so out of hand. Please, darling. Please, come back to my room and let me at least pour you a drink and apologize. Maybe we can find a way to fix this mess, hm? I at least owe that to you."

Bond eyed her skeptically, taking in Nadimah's changed disposition; clearly back to a semblance of normality and ceded, allowing himself to be pulled back into the suite.

"I think perhaps I ought to retire, this has been quite the little drama, Nadimah," Naadir exclaimed,
excusing himself, "Good night you two, try not to do anything I wouldn't."

Leaning in to kiss his sister before parting, he discreetly slipped into her hand the sedative, "Watch the time, my dear."

Bond furrowed his brow at the cryptic remark and Nadimah shook her head with a small shrug as her brother left, closing the door with a gentle click behind him.

Strolling over to the wet-bar Nadimah watched as her companion sat down back upon the sofa with an edgy expression.

"So, what can I make you to drink, James?"

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Back in his room, Silva sat in the chair at the desk, liquor in hand, no glass, and stared blankly at the wall.

There was nothing like being a sore loser in the company of a fine brandy.

His mobile vibrated for the second time within his pocket, and he ignored it taking a long pull from the bottle.

Finally, at the fifth call, Silva pulled the accursed object out from his coat and glared at the screen squinting through his drunken haze to read the text:

**Today 20:10**

**Hello, friend, this is Naadir, just wanted to apologize on my sister's behalf and wanted to know if you'd come join me downstairs for a drink.**

**I have some information that might interest you.**

Silva frowned, his fingers hovering over the touch key-pad hesitating to type out his reply and took another generous pull of the brandy; closing his eyes as the liquid burned through him.

At last he decided on his response and yawning stood up, depositing the mobile back into his pocket.

His curiosity often got the better of him.

As he stepped out of his door and the tranquilizer dart pierced into his neck, Silva collapsed to the floor and wondered if perhaps he ought to have predicted this turn of events before the world faded black.

00

A muted roaring rush like a far off ocean trapped in a tunnel stirred him at last from his unconscious state back into a semblance of lucidity. His head still an addled mush from the heavy drug, Silva swallowed thickly, his throat bone dry. Blinking several times, he attempted to adjust to the surrounding blinding light and finally, squinting around through the hazy blur of bright colours, his eyes faceted upon the figure of an unfamiliar man peering back at him, a gun leveled at him warningly.

Immediately, it occurred to him that though he was handcuffed, strangely, his captors had left him unbound to the chair he was placed upon. Had he not been so perturbed to find himself so carelessly
caught in such a situation, Silva might have been offended. Surely, they didn't think a little sedation would be enough to detain him.

"Now that you're awake, Mister Silva, my employer has a message he'd like to share with you via transmission," The guard announced opening the laptop and turning it around to face his prisoner.

Naadir's smiling face appeared onto the screen and Silva groaned dismally.

So obvious.

"Hello," Naadir greeted, "I hope this evening finds you well, though I suspect it has not. Tsk, tsk, see what love does to a man? You were so distracted by heart-break you barely could see what was right in front of you all this time! By now I suspect you've gleaned the truth. Neither my sister nor I are exactly who we have portrayed ourselves to be. You see, our roles are really quite reversed. Nadimah works for me and I manage all the operations within this organization. You, Raoul Silva are a vile, meddling snake, and I cannot abide your presumption! It sickness me to think of you slithering in and taking over and ruining all of my hard work. Therefore, to my immense satisfaction, and your misfortune, soon you shall be a dead snake."

Naadir chuckled at his joke, grinning broadly through the screen at his (literally) captive audience.

"Now, of course, we cannot have your prurient little catamite running amok causing a fuss as he attempts to avenge you, so as we speak, my darling sister has already provided him with his own unique cocktail infused with a tasteless poison that shall conveniently, and I assure you, quite painlessly, expose of him within... oh, say, about a few minutes, give or take. When I've concluded that bit of disposal I will come down and kill you myself. An easy day's work and then my sister and I will celebrate, freed from the looming threat of your tyranny once and for all.

"Until then, relax and try to accept your fate with honour. I'll be down soon, bye-bye!"

The screen blipped black and Silva gritted his teeth with barely suppressed fury as he glared at the open cavern of the Ruger's barrel fixed between his eyes.

"Untethered and left with only one measly lackey with a shit gun? That's poor planning. Can your boss not afford a bit of rope? A fellow to keep you company?" Silva laughed as the guard frowned, "I do hope you are paid well, sir."

In the blink of an eye, the blonde propelled himself from his seat, and threw the entire weight of his body into that of the other man. The gun hit the floor with an audible thud, triggering a bullet which zoomed past the two tussling men and ricocheted off the wall behind them.

Using the chain of his manacles, Silva grappled his way behind the guard and choked him into unconsciousness. Quickly he rifled through the man's belt and procured a key to unlock the cuffs. At last, grabbing the abandoned gun he opened the chamber and quickly loaded in a new magazine before making his escape- barely considering how very easy it had been to do so.

Racing down the hall, choked with blind panic, Silva crashed through the door of Nadimah's suite.

The woman jumped, startled by the calamitous intrusion as Bond lay spread in a prone position across the sofa in a drugged coma, his breathing suppressed by the strong narcotic; for all intensive purposes appearing dead or on the brink thereof.

"How are you here?" Nadimah demanded with alarm, "I don't understand!"
"Of course, you thought I'd be dead by now, hmm? You deceitful traitorous puta!"

"No, no, this is all wrong, this was not supposed to happen like this!" Nadimah muttered to herself in confused panic as the blonde cornered her with a crazed, malicious, predatorial gleam in his eye; a lion closing in on the kill.

"What did you do to him."

"I didn't do anything! He's only sedated, he'll wake up any moment, I swear, don't kill me!"

Nadimah cried in terror, vases and glasses crashing to the floor as she fumbled about over the surfaces of the surrounding furniture for anything she could use in self-defense.

"How long ago did you put the poison in his drink?"

"Only just a few minutes, but I promise you-" Nadimah pled, "It's not poison, please!"

"What was it! What did you put it in it?" Silva shouted stalking toward her with the cocked and loaded Ruger he'd taken off the guard, "There still might be time to counteract the effects if I can purge it from his system."

"Purge what? It's not poison, it's a drug! You have to listen to me! You have to believe me! I swear I would never hurt-"

"Shut up!" He roared, blind with rage at the woman for sticking to her story he could not for one second believe. Lunging forward he wrestled the petite woman to the ground, shaking her fiercely with desperate, demented, frothing fury, "What did you do! Tell me! What have you given him?"

With another crash of a lamp being pulled from a table, and the loud shouts of an argument taking place, Bond came to, dazed from what he could only imagine to be a severely inebriated stupor, his head throbbing painfully. Yet caught between waking and unconsciousness, Bond squinted, trying to make sense of the chaotic scene unfolding before his eyes.

"What did you do! Conte-me!" Silva demanded pinning Nadimah to the floor beneath him as he pressed the Ruger at her temple. Struggling to free herself, she lurched forward and bit down hard into the blonde's wrist, tearing the flesh with her teeth. Bond watched in mute, helpless horror as Silva struck her with the back of his hand momentarily containing her. Uttering out in incoherent protest, the Agent tried to move his leaden limbs to no effect.

F freeing an arm, Nadimah desperately grabbed for the gun, and the two wrestled for it's possession before a shot exploded from the barrel with a sickening piercing sound of metal driving through flesh; Bond heard both of his companions simultaneously gasp in surprise.

"No. No, você puta, você vaca estúpida, you better not die, you wretched musaranho," Silva rasped hoarsely, collecting the convulsing woman in his arms and propping her up to keep her from aspirating on the blood foaming from her lips, "Conte-me- tell me what you've done!"

The door crashed open once more as Naadir's armed men flooded into the room, cocking their weapons at the distraught blonde clutching the dying woman in his arms. With one, final, raspy breath, Nadimah slumped over dead in his arms, succumbing to her fatal wound.

Another tranquilizer dart shot beneath his ribs, and as Silva collapsed over Nadimah's lifeless corpse, his gaze settled on the waking form of his companion before all once again went black.

Bond rolled from the couch and pulled himself feebly over to Nadimah, cradling her in his arms; his heart cold as he stared at the paralyzed form of his partner, cursing the day they had ever met. How
had things spiraled so out of control? How had everything led to this tragic, horrific conclusion?

With precisely planned timing, Naadir sprinted into the room and uttered a pitiful cry as he sank to the floor beside his sister.

"I will see he's hanged for this!" The man sobbed furiously, clinging with wretched despair to Nadimah, her glassy eyes staring sightlessly beyond, "That despicable bastard stole away the only family I had left! Oh, piyaarah bhen, my precious darling, how could anyone have taken you from me."

"Sir, what do we do with the prisoner."

"I don't care," Naadir moaned choking on his tears, "toss him into the sea, let him drown. Take him a part limb by limb and feed him his heart."

The guards bound Silva up and carried him away and Bond sagged against the wall, watching a brother mourn the loss of his sister with a heavy heart.
"She confessed to me how terrified she was of him," Naadir moaned staring into his drink, "I should have listened to her. I should have protected her."

"If I could," Bond assured, face lined with stress and exhaustion, "I would do anything to change the last 12 hours. I couldn't do anything to stop it, I watched him attack her and it was like I'd been drugged-"

Naadir laughed with a pained tone of nostalgia, "She always had a way, my bhen, of fixing the strongest drinks. Naimah always was quite a favourite at parties."

The Agent frowned shaking his head, "It took me out cold, Naadir. I couldn't move to save her. Silva- it was not like him. He's mad, but he always knows exactly what he's doing ten steps before anyone else. I could not have predicted-"

"I don't blame you, Mister Bond, you could not have known what kind of evil lurked in that man's heart. He deceived you. He deceived me. The only one who saw what he truly was is dead now. To think, to be so deranged with jealousy you could take another's life. In the blink of an eye, he snuffed out her existence as one might do a candle flame. So easy he took her from me. From you. I cannot understand how one could commit such a heinous act of hate. I cannot understand... but what does any of it matter." Naadir grimly sighed. "It is such a waste."

The Agent peered up at him thoughtfully from across the small desk, "The day before last night, Naadir, I stood beside your sister on a cliff overlooking the sea-

"Yes, she went there often I think, she used to always talk of our family. Always, she grieved their loss. It has always been my hope to bring to her some small measure of happiness, but now, it is all meaningless. What can I do? She is gone from me forever. I just hope that she has found her peace."

Bond downed his drink and poured them another round.

"What has become of him?"

"Who? Silva? He's locked away in containment. Restrained, heavily sedated. He poses no more danger to anyone. I've seen to it." Naadir informed, "Later this afternoon, he'll be transported to HQ. Upstairs wants to interrogate him before they put him down like the dog he is."

"That is fitting," Bond callously replied before looking down with a reflective expression, "Perhaps he does deserve to die."

Naadir tilted his head regarding his companion curiously, "How do you mean?"

"I think he died long ago and was replaced by someone else, the man he was once I believe was honourable. Good," the Agent quietly sighed, lost in reverie, "But that man became a shadow; a ghost. Silva is a haunted damaged, empty shell of his former self."

"Do you believe that?"

"I thought maybe that ghost could be resurrected. Enough times, I thought-" Bond snorted darkly and shook his head dismissing the thought, "Never mind, it doesn't matter. I've clearly had too much
to drink."

Naadir watched the Agent coolly before changing the subject.

"With regard to my employers, your meeting is still on. I thought you might like to know that."

Bond glanced up and frowned, "What use could they have for me without Silva?"

"They have discussed the situation amongst themselves and seem to have come to a unanimous decision that they might benefit from your particularly unique brand of service," Naadir explained, "Being that you're an ex operative, they believe you possess a set of skills and knowledge of the inner-workings of the SIS. Tomorrow morning, I have arranged to have you meet for negotiations."

The man sighed as he regarded the Agent and shrugged, "At the end of the day, no matter what tragedy or another may befall us, life goes on, with or without us."

"Indeed," Bond agreed contemplatively. It seemed, even if Silva was no longer in the picture, his mission was still on target for potential success.

00

Once again waking up in containment, Silva scowled unhappily as he appraised his situation. Upon testing the integrity of his bindings, he realized, this time, they were more than adequately secure and he knew precisely the reason why as all the puzzle pieces fell into place.

Silva groaned, furious at himself for being so stupid. Before he'd been contained so he could easily escape and fill his end of Naadir's impeccably designed master plan. The bastard had arranged everything down to the last letter to make him look as culpable as possible. He wanted Bond for himself, obviously to turn over to his employers as a tidy little present to put himself back in their good graces. He needed Silva disposed of in order to ensure his position would not be compromised, and all along the way he used his sister to complete his agenda.

Breathing in deeply, he tried to console himself with the fact that Bond was alive and counting back from ten, placed himself into a calming, meditative trance.

When he reopened his eyes he looked around with renewed clarity and observed the details: Small, dim, air-tight room, completely alone, tied securely to a chair, the binding nearly cutting off his circulation, disallowing him any freedom of movement.

Finding his breathing come short on the verge of panic he shut his eyes again and started over the process, counting down from ten.

Ten: he was not in Hong Kong.

Nine: he had not been tortured (yet).

Eight: he was in full possession of his mental faculties.

Seven: James was not dead...

But, Silva cringed, the man would think he'd murdered Nadimah in cold blood.

Silva huffed and started over the process, repeating Ten through Eight before he recited the rest adding an amendment to Seven.

Seven: James was not dead and could be convinced to see the truth with the evidence laid out before
him.

Six: there was a camera installed in the corner of the holding cell, he but need to make it known he was awake and draw them to him.

Five: Though he was not particularly as quick with improvisation as James, he wasn't terrible. He'd been a field-agent long before he'd ever taken a position behind the monitors, and was more than capable of managing an exit strategy.

Four: He would exact his revenge upon Naadir, and it would be wonderfully gratifying.

Three: He would find a solution that would allow he and James to successfully complete their mission.

Two: Having completed Three, at the very end, he would have James.

And finally...

One: Silva opened his eyes and grinned with determination.

00

Congregating within a small grove outside of Mesaria, Nadimah was laid to rest.

The funeral was a brief and very private affair consisting of only Bond, Naadir and a few guards watching respectfully from behind. As custom to tradition, Nadimah was lowered into the earth without delay, her burial plot pointing toward Mecca. Though, as Naadir has explained to him, neither of the two had actively practiced their religion, he had still ensured the ceremony be held according to their family's heritage.

The Agent watched solemnly as the bereaved man placed a stone and branch upon the mound of dirt over his buried sister and bowed his head, reciting quietly a few short verses from the Koran.

As the sun set low across the horizon, at last Naadir decided proper respects had been paid and they returned to the Lagana. Offering his condolences once more, Bond excused himself, retiring to his room.

Sans Silva the spacious suite seemed cold and sterile in spite of it's superficial charm. The bleak atmosphere was fitting for the Agent- he felt bleak.

Wandering over to the dresser he pulled out a small case from his luggage and unclasping his watch, he replaced it within the box.

Silva's single diamond cufflink gleamed out at him under the dim glow; sparkling a full spectrum of colours in a domed, radiant prism and Bond found himself strangely drawn to it.

In the palm of his hand it seemed to possess a strange weight; a metaphoric and literal pull of gravity. Curling his fingers into a fist around the small bejeweled accessory, the Agent decisively concluded he'd need a copious amount of liquor.

Having espied a half-consumed bottle of brandy sitting abandoned atop the bureau when he'd initially reentered the suite, Bond finally made his way over to retrieve it with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for it's mere existence. Taking down a long pull of the amber liquid from within, he divested himself of his coat and stripped off the vest beneath. Removing his tie, he unfastened several buttons at his neck, loosening the stiff, restrictive collar and once liberated from his confining
garments; inhaled deeply.

Carefully he hung everything in the closet, beside several characteristically ostentatious, designer suits belonging to his former companion. At once, Bond observed how dull; how **drab** his clothing seemed in comparison. Closing shut the door, he leaned forward, pressing his forehead against it's surface suddenly stricken by an overwhelmingly blacker mood than he'd been prior to this moment.

Meandering aimlessly about, the Agent distractedly tidied up, continuing to take deep swigs of the warming brandy in an attempt to quell that keen, indeterminate discomfort twisting him from within. At last, Bond glanced around, discovering he'd wandered into the main bedroom. Kicking off his shoes, he collapsed backward over the top of the large, vacant bed in boneless exhaustion.

Staring up at the stucco ceiling, he heaved a weary sigh; one hand gripping the neck of the bottle while the other lay loosely at his side holding that damned diamond cufflink.

Quietly, he began to chuckle without reason or purpose; the disturbingly unfamiliar sound foreign to his ears as it filled the eerie silence of the room. Increasing in decibel the laugh devolved into a terrible cacophony echoing off the walls around him, and the Agent found he could barely catch a breath; wracked by a tortuous onslaught of short, sharp gasps, tears collecting in the corners of his eyes with the force of his mirth.

The Brandy and the cufflink rolled out of his grasp abandoned in the wake of his unremitting torment.

Like a man possessed by some violent entity, Bond, choked, suffocating; consumed by the torrential flood of shattering madness bursting outward from within as he hated himself with blinding, soul-fracturing vehemence for breaking that vow he'd sworn to himself he'd keep until his dying breath.

*It was Vesper all over again and yet a thousand times worse.*

Rolling upon his side, tears streamed down the Agent's feverish, searing hot face and mustering up any last shred of coherence he retained, he desperately attempted to summon back his errant sense of self-constraint.

*Where was his training now when he needed it most?*

Eyes shut tight and head bowed into the palms of his hands, Bond walked himself step-by-step through the process of relearning how to breathe, and finally, after several long seconds, at last the gripping mania subsided.

With a final, ragged wheeze, Bond wretchedly collapsed face down upon the blankets, recovering from the high-drop nose-dive into the deep-end of insanity and he lay still; his chest aching with the residual aftershocks.

Sluggishly rolling off the bed, he wandered into the bathroom to splash his face with cold water. Looking up with resignation, he glanced into the mirror at his haggard reflection: the bruised, bloodshot eyes staring back at him cold; emptied of all remaining emotion.

He'd always known his existence would be a solitary one.
Jarred from his sleep by a sudden clattering at the window, Bond jolted upward and grabbed the PPK out from under his pillow before rolling out of his sheets to duck behind the bed.

Crouching low, the Agent trained his weapon over the edge of the mattress, as the glass panel was shoved upward. Watching with wary determination he leveled his aim at the silhouetted figure athletically pulling himself through the opening. With practiced agility, the intruder landed on both feet with a soft thud upon the rug, and arose to full height, concealed within the shadows.

"Cristo," Silva huffed irately as he stepped outward into the muted glow of the cloudy night sky, "Agradeça deus for gloves, this place is a death trap."

Bond peered at the man in shock, keeping a steady aim as he rose from behind his last minute, make-shift barricade.

"Look at all the splinters caught in the mesh!" The blonde exclaimed distractedly as he peeled off the gloves and shook them out over the floor before examining his hands for damage, "I'm considering writing the owners of this resort a very tersely worded note about their lack of upkeep."

Silva finally looked up at his companion and regarded the gun pointed in his direction with a disapprovingly frown.

"Really, James, put down that blasted thing before you put someone's eye out."

"No."

"Really, I did predict you might be difficult, but there is no need for this, meu querido-"

"Don't-" Bond demanded, trembling with barely contained fury, ", -call me that."

Silva sighed with exasperation, rubbing the bridge of his nose, "In any way, shape or form, James, do you see me aiming any sort of weapon at you?"

The man impatiently huffed as he regarded the silent form of his perturbed companion, "I really don't have time to explain everything to your satisfaction at the moment. There will be adequate time for that later. Right now, I need you to give me the benefit of the doubt and trust me."

"No," Bond interjected, "Don't make any sudden moves or I will shoot."

"And shoot to kill I imagine," Silva muttered dryly, holding his hands in the air above his head in surrender, "It would not be very ethical of you to shoot an unarmed man."

Bond laughed darkly, "I'm not feeling particularly ethical at the moment."

"So I've observed," Silva drawled sardonically as he squinted through the dark, cautiously stepping forward, "Now look, my dear, I have every intention of supplying you with the answers you seek, and all of it will acquit me of any charges you'd-"

"I don't want to hear whatever excuses you've imagined up, you sick bastard, I'm warning you: back down now."
The blonde laughed with amusement as he continued to steadily approach the Agent.

"I'm fairly sure if you check into my birth records you will find my mother was wed before I was ever conceived... as for the 'sick' part, well-" he conceded with a careless shrug, "we all have our own closets of skeletons, hmm?"

"Down! On the ground, right now," Bond fumed, "On your knees, hands behind your head!"

"So insistent, James," Silva snorted, "if you wanted me on my knees you simply need ask politely-"

"Enough with the games, Silva! Stop playing and do as I say!"

"If you keep backing away as you're doing, you're going to cause me to develop a complex, Don't tell me you're afraid of me?" Silva sighed with disappointment, "Honestly, as if I would ever harm a hair on your head-"

"Cease the incessant chatter," The Agent spat, eyes gleaming dangerously in the dark, "I will put a bullet through your skull right here and now if you don't do exactly as I say."

Silva rolled his eyes heavenward, gesturing up in supplication, "Meu deus! All this is so excessive, is it really necessary?"

"I won't warn you again," Bond hissed cocking the barrel. Obligingly, Silva knelt to the ground.

"Arms up and place them behind your head."

Compliantly, Silva did so, blandly staring at the outline of his companion still cloaked within shadow.

"What are you doing here?"

"I thought that would be obvious," the blonde huffed irritably, "Look, James, not more than twenty minutes ago, I escaped from the Lagana's basement, and surely by now, Naadir has already heard the bad news and released his hounds after me. Time is ticking, and if we don't act fast enough-"

"What do you mean, 'Naadir's men'," Bond questioned, scowling, "and why would you think I'd be willing to consider running with you?"

"Meu Deus em céu, James, can you be any more dense?" Silva bemoaned, "Let's keep this short, hmm? Naadir's the one in charge, he used his sister and planned to frame me in your eyes as her murderer in order to lure you into his fold."

The Agent shook his head, "I don't believe you-

"What, about Naadir?" Silva snorted, "The man is a good actor, I'll grant him that much-"

"No. I was awake, I know what I heard- what I saw-"

"No, what you thought you saw was a set-up," Silva interjected, "I know what you think you saw, James, but I did not kill her. The idiot grabbed for my gun and her fumbling thumb tripped the trigger. She shot herself."

"You attacked her!" Bond accused furiously, "I saw you- that whole deranged fit of-"

"Tch, please spare me," the blonde spat out disgustedly, 'jealous rage?' Is that where you were going with that?"
The Agent's mobile vibrated loudly, buzzing against the surface of the nightstand. And Silva groaned inwardly as Bond darted a glance between his captive and his method of calling Naadir for backup.

"Don't do anything you might regret, James. Believe me, you have not allied yourself with a friend. That man is the one-"

"Shut up," Bond snapped, "I'm thinking-"

"Don't think too hard, my dear you might break something," Silva chuckled.

"I'm thinking," The Agent bit out ignoring the jab, "If I should let the brother of the woman you murdered deal with you or if I should take you out myself."

"Why are you so impossible?" Silva complained, "What does Naadir have to offer you that I don't? Why believe him?"

"One, because earlier this evening, I witnessed first hand that man deliver Nadimah's service and no one is that skilled an actor. There is no way you can convince me that he arranged the death of his own sister when you had the motive."

"Back to the accusations of jealousy! Didn't I tell you to 'go fuck the whore'?" Silva demanded incredulously, "I mean of course I wouldn't want you to, but it seemed a better solution than the alternative- at the time I didn't think I had much of a choice. But you do realize by now, she was playing you all along? I mean I know it's quite the insult to your pride, but she really was just following orders."

"Two," Bond continued through gritted teeth, "Naadir is my last remaining avenue to the top. The whole mission is at stake if I lose him. But most importantly, I don't have any reason to trust anything you say."

Silva scowled darkly, "You're trusting circumstantial evidence and the lies of a criminal, Meu Deus, James, how can you be so utterly illogical? So naïve?"

"Do I really have to point out I've already been working alongside a criminal?"

"That's petty of you," the blonde huffed, "You clearly have left no room for reasonable doubt, huh? Absolutely convinced I'm either prone to 'jealous fits of rage' or I'm out to exact my revenge on you by using you to get to the top, because we all know my real aim is to take over the world like some sort of self-inflated super-villain, hmm? You live in a crazy, fucked up fantasy my friend, and I feel sorry for you."

Once again, the mobile vibrated and this time, Bond lunged forward to grab it.

"Hello," Bond greeted into the receiver, "Yes, he's up here. I've him unarmed and detained."

Silva glared at his companion angrily, "You keep making one mistake after the next, James. I try everything with you, and still you remain a lost cause."

"Naadir and his men will be up here shortly to collect you," Bond informed with cold, ruthless, self-satisfaction, "He deserves his justice."

The blonde shook his head as he regarded his companion.

"You try me, James, you do. I came here to you in good faith and you've disappointed me greatly. You're just so stubborn and so convinced I'm your enemy when it couldn't be further from the truth."
Silva shrugged resignedly, "I really hate that we've come to this, but you've left me no other option."

Before the Agent could blink, Silva had already swiftly removed a tranq-gun strapped behind him and shot a dart straight into the right side of his chest.

Bond's legs gave out from under him and he collapsed, the gun clattering to the floor beside him. Struggling to combat the effects of the sedative coursing through his system, at last he surrendered, laying upon the rug in a vulnerable, paralyzed sprawl. His facial muscles having gone lax, mutely, he glared at the man strolling over to collect and deposit his gun into the lining of his leather coat.

"Oh, my dear James, look at what you've made me do to you."

Silva crouched beside his companion tutting sadly as he stroked a calloused, soothing hand over the Agent's sweaty brow.

"Mea culpa, my dear, but they always say it's better to rip off the bandaid fast," he remarked while removing the dart with one quick tug. Through the haze of the drug, Bond sluggishly winced.

"Oof, it stings, doesn't it? I know. Struck twice- wouldn't care to repeat the experience," Silva mused, "Now, I must say, I'm surprised you're not out yet, I would say you must've built up some tolerance with that drug Nadimah popped into your drink-"

The blonde feigned surprise, "Oh, but you didn't know about that one, did you."

"I assume this must be of a lower efficacy, both times I was hit I was down for the count," Caressing the stubble of his lover's chin with the back of hand he sighed, "You know, I really was holding out hope that you might come with me willingly, but I guess I really will have to drag you out like a sack of potatoes after all. You're a lot of trouble, my dear."

Silva laughed pulling his limp companion upward like a heavy rag doll, "You're staring at me with so much animosity, James, I really should take a picture. What can I say of this all, hmm? I had to have a back up plan, you haven't proven to be too reliable. Is it that you're angry that I've succeeded here? Sim, sim. It's all about survival of the fittest."

"On that note, you're lucky I've grown so terribly fond of you," Silva intoned, heaving the man over his shoulder with an audible grunt at the effort, "We are the last two rats, meu querido, and I have to look out for you since you do such a piss poor job doing so for yourself. For all you vilify me, I'm really not such a bad guy, you know?"

Bond managed a strangled huff that sounded rather skeptical in tone and the blonde snorted, "You don't believe that? Alright, that's fine. You'll see this is all for your own good."

Silva secured his boneless, mute companion in a harness and lowered him to the ground before landing down to join him. By the time he'd crouched down to once again toss the man over his back, he realized the Agent had at last succumbed to the tranquilizer and lay, face slack, snoring unattractively into the lawn. Collecting him into his arms instead, he slipped through the shadows and deposited the man into the back of his temporary new automobile. Before closing the door, he leaned over and smirked, deciding to take advantage of the situation: kissing the man soundly on his wet and pliant though regretfully unresponsive lips.

"Mm," Silva frowned shaking his head, "I've had better. Maybe when you're awake, hmm? At any rate, you'll be sad to learn that old adage about awaking the princess with a kiss doesn't quite work as well as one might think..."

He laughed to himself, fastening the limply inert form of his companion into the seat. "I suppose it
was worth a try anyway."

Bond snored in reply, lost to his drug-induced stupor and the blonde hopped into the driver's seat, peeling away into the dark; and not a minute too soon, as Naadir's crew arrived to the scene.

Rolling down his window, Silva grinned triumphantly; the man's enraged, frustrated shouts bursting through the night: *music to his ears.*

"You are really entertaining when you're out cold, my dear," Silva confided, as Bond came to. Though the room was considerably dimmed, the blonde watched as his companion blinked in discomfort; his dilated pupils enormous black disks; eclipsing the blue.

"I think I still prefer you awake- not by much though, *not by much.* At least when you're a zombie you're not a complete idiot," Silva teased affectionately, perching upon the narrow bed beside the Agent. Propping the man up he assisted him in drinking down enough water to re-lubricate his parched mouth. Thirst abated, Bond stared with resigned indifference at his captor.

"What do you remember, my dear?" the blonde inquired curiously.

"Mm, not much. You being a twat and kidnapping me, mostly," the Agent drawled, "I recall a bit about you climbing through my window. I pointed a gun at you. You insisted I believe a few hardly believable excuses, which led me to come to a rather convincing conclusion that not only are you a homicidal psychopath, but you're also unfortunately afflicted with a terrible persecution complex."

"Mm, but we're not going to broach the sensitive topic of your own maladjusted psyche are we? Because, really, it's better off we don't get started," Silva laughed, "Anything else then, or was that it?"

"You shot me, I dropped to the ground and you abducted me, I think that about sums it up," Bond shrugged, "Oh, right, and you prattled on rather excessively which basically bored me to sleep. Anyway, I have to point out, I'm not exactly here willingly."

"You're not my prisoner, James."

The Agent raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"I can go then?"

"After you hear what I have to say, then yes," Silva agreed reluctantly, "You can make your decision from there."

Bond glanced around at his surroundings with a baffled expression, "So, where exactly have you stowed us?"

"We're in a hostel I've been forced to check into since I've now been thrust into hiding," Silva supplied, "It's nothing posh or glamorous but it could be worse. It seems Naadir has rather taken over the resort. I don't recall if I've said, but he actually tossed me a holding cell he's had fashioned in the basement. Basically, the man runs Santorini like a modern-day mob Don. You can see evidence of this nearly every place you go if you know just what to look for."

"You have quite the unhealthy fixation with this man," Bond mused coolly, "First Nadimah and now her brother, I'm started to suspect a pattern here."
"James, do you realize how far you've fallen that you would even utter such a statement let alone believe it? These are criminals you defend, and you know this. And uh-uh," Silva interrupted shaking his head unpermissibly, holding out his hand, "Let me finish, yes, I know it would be terribly hypocritical of me to deny that I've lived a good deal of my life committing sin after sin both for and beneath the letter of the law, and though you yet play martyr for Queen and Country, it would be remiss of you to forget you have your own crimes to answer for. No one is truly guiltless here."

Silva sighed tiredly, "James, thus far, you have none of the facts I have. You only see what Naadir wants you to see. What he's allowed you to see. I don't exactly possess concrete proof- yet, anyway,- but perhaps you can do me the small courtesy of temporarily suspending all this doubt you have for everything I say?"

"It doesn't look like I'm going anywhere, does it?"

"I know you were... fond of Nadimah, and to her credit, I was unaware that she had been directed to play a role. But does it not all seem rather incongruous? Their stories were strangely suspicious, no? In my estimation, her brother wielded a great deal of power over her and regularly manipulated her into attending to his agenda. He forced her to drug you to make it seem to me, as if they'd effectively managed your murder. Of course, Naadir counted on me to avenge you and murder his sister, knowing the intricacies of our relationship through his sister's feedback, he predicted this would turn you against me and secure you to him enough, so that when he had me killed, you would not react too negatively."

Silva paused to consider this last statement. "Actually, rather generous assumption he made, no?" he remarked bitterly, "after all, we were only just fucking."

"Right," Bond intoned expressionlessly, "Anyway, then what happened?"

"When you were with Nadimah, I was forced into a chair to watch Naadir brag to me his plan in which he informed me he would have us both disposed of- mind you, this was all part of a grander scheme. I admit, I was duped. Here I thought Nadimah had actually poisoned you, when in fact she had only dropped a mild temporary sedative into your drink. I demanded she inform me of the poison so I could—if yet possible- find a way to save you. Regrettably, things got out of hand."

Silva looked down at his folded his hands in his lap before looking back up. "James, trust me when I say, it was an unfortunate accident."

The Agent found himself catching a small glimpse of the white bandage wrapped beneath the man's wrist, mostly concealed by his sleeve, and this for some peculiar reason, more than anything else, set his mind against his companion.

"Alright," Bond nodded peering up enigmatically at the blonde, "I'll buy it."

Silva narrowed his eyes with a measure of skepticism.

"Will you? So simple as that? After all this-" he waved his hand in the air in a gesture of emphasis before snorting, "You've certainly been quite resistant up until now... and what? You suddenly just accept my version of the facts?"

"I'm not going to lie and say I think your story doesn't sound ridiculously farfetched, but then," the Agent shrugged, "I've... been around for awhile."

The best way to ambiguously conceal dissimulation is to mask it with truth, Bond had learned in training. In his many seasons of professional employ as one of MI-6's most successful double-oh's,
he'd utilized this simple fact to his advantage many times over—though of course he considered, so had Silva. In essence, it was like playing chess: A game of careful strategy, out-maneuvering and out-thinking your opponent.

Even if chess was a style of game more suited to Silva, the Agent was a true gambler by nature, and in this instance, there was no other choice than to take the risk.

Betting on a solid history of typically reliable good-fortune, he only hoped the man would not call his bluff.

"All things considered," Bond sighed quietly, "I find I prefer to believe you."

"James, meu querido, to hear such a thing from you brings me ease," Silva expressed, relief softening the tense lines of his face, "Thank you."

The blonde dove forward, gathering his companion into his arms in a warm embrace. Caught off guard by the sudden action, Bond stiffened minutely before quickly attempting to relax in order to appear receptive; though a small, nagging part of him wondered if it was too late, if he'd accidentally already shown his hand as he felt his partner's form tense in response for a brief, fleeting second.

"These past few days have been hell for me—ever since we first met that woman and her brother, I cannot tell you how terrible it was thinking you—" Silva withdrew the rest of that thought and nuzzled his face into lover's shoulder, "No, it doesn't matter, you're here now, you know the truth, that's all that counts."

With an inward sigh of relief, Bond was temporarily satisfied that the blonde had not caught on to his charade as he'd momentarily feared.

Silva kissed him and he reciprocated, allowing the man to maneuver him back down upon the bed; their bodies entwining together beneath the concealing shadows of the rising sun. Bond had always been skilled at going through the motions with enough passion to convince his lovers throughout the years that it was all genuine, but it took very little to fall back into the intoxicating, easy thrall he had found within Silva's arms.

This was potentially the most tenuous and challenging game he'd ever played and he had past the point of being able to deny any longer that a very significant part of him warred against it.

Particularly at this moment, always infused with bitter-sweet tenderness as they lay together restfully, all external stressors melting away for a short, precious time. Aside from the one he tried not to think about; he'd rarely known such peace could be found in a lover; let alone one whom he found himself so often in constant contentious conflict with.

It had been a strange, eye-opening month in many ways; an enlightening and transforming chapter in the book of his life, but there was always another to follow he knew, and it was time to disentangle himself and move on.

All men needed to answer at some point for their crimes, and Raoul Silva was no exception.

As the blonde lay sleeping tranquilly against him, the Agent ruefully watched the emerging dawn begin a new day outside the window, and with a good deal of bitterness at the decision he'd regretfully been forced to come to: considered it all may as well give up and slink back into night.

00

Bond awoke to the gentle sensation of fingers stroking idly down the side of his face.
Bleary eyed, he stared up at the visage of the blonde peering down at him with a strangely cool, examining expression, his hand falling away.

"Good morning, my dear, I trust you slept well enough?"

"What time is it?" The Agent asked sitting up.

"Oh-five. Time enough for you to be on your way back."

Bond yawned, stretching, the muscles in his shoulders tight and furrowed his brow, "What?"

"Surely you haven't forgotten you must return for your meeting today?"

"Ah."

"The only way to get the information that will lead you to the terrorist organization this syndicate is working with is if you follow through and meet with Naadir's employers," Silva intoned, "I assume you still intend to follow through with that?"

"Of course, but if you haven't noticed," Bond drawled irritably, "I'm not exactly at the Lagana."

"Indeed, and you shall return. Of course Naadir may be suspicious that I've swayed you to my side by this point."

"What's your plan to negate this potential hiccup?"

Silva sat up and drew a hand through his hair.

"You must make it evident that although I had abduced you, there was no time for an exchange of information. Lead him to think that you fought me off- say you shot me and I fell over a parapet and was pulled away by the current- washed away, lost to sea-- it doesn't matter. Make up something. Whatever you think sounds best. I trust your judgment."

Bond smirked, "That's a rather theatrical ending you've imagined."

"Whatever it takes to excuse a lack of physical evidence he'll most likely crave for validation," Silva shrugged, "Make it so he believes you. Then after the two of you rendezvous with Upstairs, you and I will connect back up."

The Agent nodded.

"That seems satisfactory."

The blonde peered at his companion hesitantly; gauging his drop into taciturn pensiveness. After a long moment he spoke.

"If all goes well, we should be able to acquire the requisite intel to access their database," Silva intoned, "Try not to brood overly much on what has happened, hmm? The past is the past and cannot be undone. Don't allow yourself to become distracted."

The Agent all but scoffed and shook his head before leveling at the man a haughty smirk, "It will not be an issue."

The blonde bowed his head.

"Live and let die," he muttered with dark irony laced in his tone before arising from the bed and
tossing on his robe. Rummaging through his bag he pulled Bond's PPK and relinquished it over to the Agent with a serious expression.

"Well, time to wrap things up, yes?"
Seated across the small desk in Naadir's suite, Bond apprised his companion of the events exactly as they had occurred down to Silva's implausible story and subsequent plan. The man shook his head in disbelief.

"What a sick obsession he has with you- that he'd concoct such an elaborate fabrication! What a sad attempt to win you back, it's shameful," Naadir remarked pitifully, "The measures he goes to, trying to convince you that I'd be capable of such a hideous action- that I should be able to plan the death of my own sister! It's unthinkable."

Bond sat quietly observing the Pakistani quietly as the man wrung together his hands angrily.

"Tonight, you will lure him to a designated spot and I shall send some men to see to his assassination. This man is a cancer, and he must be purged without delay," Naadir decided, "I am sorry if you should regret the action, my friend, but it is a necessity."

"I understand."

Bond lowered his eyes with a frown thoughtfully considering his own plan. His immediate ire had subsided into a calm, logical acceptance. He'd concluded that Raoul Silva should answer to his crimes in a court of law. It was the only just solution. Death was far too merciful.

Of course, he'd inevitably be forced to conceal his former partner's absence somehow, but he'd deal with that later.

In the interim, he'd steeled himself to continuing on without Silva; at this juncture, he felt more than capable of completing his mission successfully without any additional aide.

Returning to his rooms to clean up and change into a fresh suit in preparation of the meeting, Bond first pulled out his mobile to make the call.

Regaling M of how his path had crossed in Santorini quite by chance with the surprisingly alive convict, he informed his superior of the man's coordinates. Not an hour before he'd meet with Naadir's employers, MI-6 would sweep in to collect the unprepared man in his hideout like a sitting duck. He darkly mused at what Silva's reaction would be at such a betrayal. He would, of course, immediately suss out exactly what his partner had done.

Sitting on the ledge by the window, Bond gazed out at the clear blue sky and the serene, slow roll of waves of the sea far off in the distance. It was selfish to regret the course he had chosen to take, and really, he knew there was no alternative.

Rolling the diamond cufflink between his fingers, he wondered if the man would hate him as much as he hated himself.

Silva replayed the audio from the bug implanted in the cufflink for the third time, gritting his teeth as he once again forced himself to listen to Bond make that accursed call ordering for his capture.

He had so wanted to give the man the benefit of the doubt but underneath the lies and careful
pacifications he could see the Agent was concealing something and he had suspected exactly what that something would lead to. He loathed being right. Rigging his room within the hostel to detonate upon entry several small explosives (nothing too lethal but enough to make a statement); he'd expediently removed himself to yet another location and finished the last step of his plan.

The game wasn't over until he said it was over and Raoul Silva always had the last laugh; as painful a laugh as it would be in this case. The knife of the Agent's betrayal twisted in him painfully. Once before James Bond, there had been another in his life whom he'd cared about with an unrestrained intensity; whom he'd trusted with his life and she had turned away from him in his most dire hour of need, and then, had done so once again at the very end with her stubborn, remorseless refusal to accept responsibility for her actions. He'd held out a small thread of hope that this time would be different and yet, once again, found himself sorely disappointed.

To be twice scorned was a piercing embarrassment he would not endure without some form of resolution or closure. He would force his wayward traitorous lover to face his sins.

Raoul Silva was an old-hand at exacting revenge, after all.

Sitting back with a glass of bourbon, Silva watched as MI-6 sent in their SWAT team to evacuate the hostel. The unit of operatives geared heavily in bullet-proof armour, helmets and masks, crept down the hallway before directing through the narrow, decrepit corridor several officers to investigate the level of threat. Triggering the explosions, the squad teemed into the ruined room to find it quite uninhabited. Silva laughed at the resulting reports as the News channels caught on to the failed venture and opened his laptop in order to implement the last part of his new vendetta.

Knowing full well by now his identity would be displayed loud and clear- at least for now nationally, on nearly every channel across Greece, he imagined Naadir's employers would be rather curious as to what such a big name was doing so close to home, and he was more than ready to introduce himself personally.

Hacking into Naadir's accounts in order to forward the men his message was easily achieved. He grinned as he formulated his explanations upon the screen; really, this would be like killing two birds with one stone: Make his presence known thereby incriminating Naadir- allowing Silva to enact his vengeance on that particular front while simultaneously ensnaring his very own Benedict Arnold in the same breath.

Greetings,

As you have probably heard by now, MI-6 has attempted to apprehend me. Of course, having anticipated such an event for reasons I shall soon elucidate, I was able to take the necessary precautions to ensure I would evade capture.

Allow me to disclose to you several pertinent facts.

Throughout the course of 4 weeks, I have infiltrated Naadir's operations and installed in place members from within my own organization. I did so not to undermine you, or attempt to profit or arrest command in any manner. You see, I am a veteran in the industry and I couldn't help but witness how woefully insufficient your associate had been managing your affairs. I hope you do not think this was presumptuous of me; I did so as necessity dictated with a mind to assist. In good faith, I came to your associate with the desire to have him arrange for us an introduction so that I may offer my services. Having observed Naadir's inadequacies on more than one occasion, I believe he feared for the security of his position and
thus withheld from you the knowledge of my existence while planning to dispatch me forthwith.

You may be interested to note, that in your associates attempt to secure from me my partner, Mister Bond, the man he claims to be an ex MI-6 operative, he arranged for the death of your esteemed Paymaster. A desperate and disturbing measure taken by a very desperate man and horrendous waste of a talented employee.

James Bond is yet loyal to MI-6 and remains Agent 007. I aligned myself with the Agent, offering my services to assist him in taking down your organization in the hope that I would at last be able to meet you while of course, conveniently obtaining valuable intel on the SIS. I mislead him into believing my intentions were of a more personal nature and subsequently found him a quite willing companion in my bed, icing on the cake, yes? A true win-win. Of course, your associate's plan worked: Bond suspected me and turned me in- hence the helicopters and upheaval so close to your home, please accept my apologies for the inconvenience.

If you are amenable, I still wish to negotiate. My organization has much to offer your own, as you well know. If you will allow it, I would like to meet with you in an hour to discuss with you the details. It would bring me great pleasure to see the surprise on the face of Mister Bond, and if it would be not too much to ask, I would like to be provided the opportunity to see to his execution personally.

Yours,

Raoul Silva.

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After a short car ride across the island, Naadir and Bond at last arrived at innocuous looking office building. The two men were rounded on by a team of security personnel and stripped of their weapons before being escorted through the entry and into an elevator.

The Agent trained his gaze forward calmly as they rose several levels and when at last the doors slid open allowed himself to be led down the hall. One of the guards pressed a buzzer and with a signaling beep, the electronic locks were deactivated and the two men were prompted by the guard to enter the room.

Upon entry, Bond's breath caught in his throat as he noted two chairs side by side across a long table. Beneath the chairs and ominously pinned up against the wall behind was a large tarp: An efficient clean-up method for any assassination. Clearly, Naadir had also picked up on what this implicated. Out of the corner of his eye, the Agent observed his companion's nervous, fearful expression with a terrible feeling settling heavily in his gut.

From the other side of the table, two men pushed out their chairs and stood to greet them. The one standing furthest away was lean and tall, bald and bespectacled in a crisp suit looking every bit the unassuming business-class, white-collar professional. The other, had a friendlier bearing, dressed casually in a colourfully patterned open necked button down and khakis; a compactly built younger man with a thick head of slicked back, black hair and a grinning face. Bond decided immediately the man's overtly congenial demeanor seemed suspect.

"Welcome gentlemen, allow me to introduce myself," the younger partner greeted holding out his
hand to the Agent, "You may call me Greg."

The other fellow likewise, offered out his hand.

"And I am Laurence. Please, be seated," he directed, gesturing across the table.

"Before we get started here, let me just say, Naadir," Greg intoned glancing at the Agent's companion, "That I am quite disappointed you failed to extend us an invitation to your sister's funeral. I really was quite displeased to hear of her sudden, untimely passing."

"Nevertheless," Laurence added, clearing his throat, "We extend our condolences. Nadimah was an admirable individual and a highly-valued addition to our team. She will be sorely missed."

The man swallowed thickly beside him and refrained from comment staring ahead with a tight expression. Beneath the table, Bond espied the Naadir's hands trembling in his lap, clasped together in a white knuckled grip between his knees.

"On another note, certain events have come into focus recently I must address. You will pardon me if I express a certain dissatisfaction at having come to learn of a few matters that you've been remiss with informing us of," Laurence continued leaning forward in his seat. Steepling his hands beneath his chin he peered at Naadir with a look of cool detachment.

"Corsenza, Jakov, Glasgow, the breach at Soúroupo... in which you nearly compromised the security of our entire operation and lost dozens of your own men. You've failed to report all of this and went to great measures to conceal the subsequent takeover of this entire branch by a whole other organization."

As all of this was revealed, with cold horror, everything began to slip into place within the Agent's mind as he realized Naadir- and not his sister, as he had been led to believe- was the one truly in charge. Just as Silva had attempted to impress upon him. Bond curled his hands into fists at his sides beneath the table as he wondered what else his partner had claimed about Naadir was true.

"On top of everything, you decided to keep from us the man behind the takeover. The individual whose services we may have benefited from had he been allowed to offer them," Laurence accused levelly, "I cannot think what would compel you to do so."

Suddenly, with great anxiety, Bond realized what had happened, and knew, without a certainty of a doubt, that the only way he'd be leaving this room, was wrapped up in the tarp.

"Do you have anything to say in defense of yourself, Naadir?"

"That man wanted to usurp my position," Naadir explained hotly, "I only did what I could to preserve my position."

"At the expense of our potential to gain an important ally," Laurence remarked shaking his head.

"And at the expense of your sister's life," Greg added smiling wanly, "do you deny that?"

"I had to do it," Naadir defended, confessing, "I had no choice!"

Bond sucked in a breath through gritted teeth, closing his eyes to prevent himself from leaping out of his seat at the man with murderous intent.

"Interesting how he thought bringing us his friend here would make up for all this, huh?" Greg laughed, sharing a glance with his associate.
"Consider yourself terminated from employment, Naadir," Laurence informed coolly regarding the shaking man.

"Or more aptly put," The black-haired man smirked, "simply- terminated."

"No, please," Naadir sputtered, begging desperately, leaping up from his chair toppling it backward as Greg leveled a Beretta between his eyes. "No! I swear, I'll do anything, don't do this!"

"Marco," Laurence ordered one of the two guards standing by the doorway, "Restrain him."

In vain, the unarmed man fought, struggling against the burly, stoic guard and shouting in protest as he subdued him, tying him down to the chair.

"Please, please, don't kill me," Naadir whimpered, tears strolling down his face.

"Now isn't that a detestable sight. A grown man crying like a coward," Greg chided with disgust. "Is that how you wish to die, Naadir? Like a coward? So be it."

The man pulled at his restraints sobbing incoherently for the man to spare him, and with a resounding gun-shot, was finally silenced. Bond barely winced as he was splattered with the spray of blood as Naadir's skull was pierced through with a single bullet.

The man sagged, slack-jawed and glassy-eyed in the chair yet held up by his bindings, slumped over unnaturally to the side. The back of his head a gory mess from where the bullet had exited, blood pooling down, staining the back of his white jacket red.

Greg replaced the Beretta and looked up, cocking a grin at the Agent.

"No need to fear, Mister Bond, your fate will be dealt by my hand. No. We've reserved that for a more deserving individual. Marco, tie him up, if you will, we really do not need him trying anything rash."

The guard complied, Bond allowing the man to fasten him to his chair with resigned acceptance.

"You see, Agent," Laurence informed, "In this past hour, we've made a recent acquisition to replace our friend, Naadir. Under the terms of our agreement, he insisted we allow him the honour."

"And how timely his arrival," Greg mentioned with a glance at his mobile before nodding to Marco, "please show in our newest partner."

Bond groaned inwardly as Silva entered looking polished and immaculately coifed for the occasion, bearing an expression one might deem to be pleased as punch.

He watched as the blonde firmly shook the hands of his new partners, before taking a seat beside them across the table from the grim Agent. Silva glanced slowly up at him with a dangerous smile spreading across his face.

"I must say, James," he intoned teasingly, "you've always looked quite fetching tied to a chair."

Greg laughed sharing in on the joke at the Agent's expense, clapping Silva heartily on the back.

"Mister Silva informs us that you think he fancies you," the man remarked peering with amusement over at the Agent, "He attempted to convince you that his motives were of a more personal nature-charming you literally out of your pants and into his bed in order to keep you from suspecting his intention to join with us- so of course you would continue to work with him."
Bond scowled but withheld his retort, training his gaze coolly at the tinted glass window behind his captors.

"Tit-for-tat, hmm?" Silva drawled regarding the Agent fondly, "You stab me in the back, my dear, I'll stab you in return."

"Why don't we cut out the grandiose victory speech and be done with it." The Agent clipped out coldly.

Laurence nodded, "Indeed, your 'lover' has a point, we really should press on and work out the contract, Mister Silva."

The blonde shrugged cavalierly, drawing out his Steyr and bringing it up to aim it at his pale, stony-faced former partner. Bond trained his gaze steadfast at the man with a blank, inscrutable expression.

"Well, shall we conclude our business once and for all, James?" Silva inquired, "Now, where would you like the bullet, head or... heart?"

Bond raised an eyebrow, "I suppose whatever you deem fits the crime, Tiago."

Silva smirked shaking his head with dark bemusement before cocking the gun and steadily training his aim at the bound man across from him.

Before anyone could react, Silva whipped his arm around and shot Greg point blank in the face. Laurence cried out in panicked alarm reaching for his own weapon, nearly falling out of his chair as the guard beside Marco raised his Glock and shot down the other uniformed official. Before the older man obtained his gun, Silva efficiently shot him in the head and he fell back to the ground with a cracking thump.

Everything happening so fast, Bond could barely process the drastic change in events, gaping mutely in his chair. A confusing clambering commotion from outside alerted the Agent indicating that some kind of coup was afoot. Several large explosions were followed by a rapid exchange of gunfire. Before he could blink, Silva had dashed around the table and with one not so very apologetic look, shrugged with an amused utterance of, "Sorry about this, my dear," before whacking him across the skull with the blunt end of his gun, effectively knocking him out cold.
As he came to, Bond's head throbbed painfully, his vision blurry as he squinted against the eerie, dimly cast, sickly yellow haze of his surroundings. Within a dingy cavernous bunker lit by a few dusty fluorescent bulbs, the Agent noted he was once again bound, restrained to a metal folding chair. It was eerily reminiscent of that basement he's been tortured in years ago by Le Chiffre, and he couldn't help but consider that this was the intent of his captor: To evoke terror in a subtle, psychological form of revenge.

Though stripped of his jacket, at least this time he wasn't naked, he granted as he peered down at his soiled shirt, stained with dark, dried blood splatter from when Naadir had been shot beside him earlier.

He burned with rage as he recalled how he'd been so adeptly duped; heartsick at the subsequent betrayal he'd been led to so blindly. Whatever his fate, it would be deserved he considered resignedly.

"Well, James, back to where we started, hmm?" Silva's low voice drawled from somewhere behind him, "I see you've finally stirred. For a minute I thought I might have hit you a bit too hard. But then, you have a pretty thick skull, don't you?"

Bond listened to the clack of footsteps echoing from against the concrete floor as his captor approached. Rounding to the front of the captive Agent, Silva dropped another metal folding chair before him and took a seat.

Bringing up a gloved hand, the blonde stroked across the man's head, pressing gently against the raised swollen, bruised bump that had formed above the hairline from where he'd soundly clocked him with the Steyr.

"You should thank me for sparing that pretty face of yours, my dear. I couldn't bring myself to mar such beauty. Though, I suppose it won't make such a difference soon," Silva mused, leveling at him a cool grin; the humour failing to reflect itself within his eyes.

"I thought it best to keep you tied down in case you found yourself tempted to escape. Though, even if you would be able to overcome me, outside of this room, my dear, you will find my men have quite adequately secured the perimeter. I've decided you are far too predictably reckless to allow for such a potential occurrence, and really, we can't have you fleeing before we have a little chat, yes?"

With a measure of self-preservation, Bond suppressed a wry smirk as he observed his companion: Blonde hair slicked back from his face, clad in a long black leather trench coat, sleek matching gloves and heavy, pointed, metal-toed boots, Silva looked every bit the cliché super-villain he had during their confrontation in Scotland.

"I must confess, I am very disappointed in you right now, James. MI-6 knowing I'm alive is very inconvenient and I do have you to blame for that. Might you not have let Naadir simply send out his assassins instead? I could have easily subdued that threat, and it would have had far less lasting impact considering I am now in control of the entire organization."

Silva sat back folding his hands in his lap.

"Just what you had feared all along, hmm?" Silva chuckled with a degree of self-deprecation, "It had
not been my initial intention, but here we are, hmm?

You only have yourself to blame for that particular occurrence. It's quite insulting how you underestimated me, my dear. Did you really think I would let myself lose so easily? One must always find a way to mitigate one's losses and turn them to their advantage, no?

The blonde's expression darkened menacingly as he removed a sharp, gleaming knife, "And, my dear James, one does not defy me and come away unscathed. Even you... especially you."

The man leaned forward and traced the knife down the side of his face, trailing it's pointed tip under his throat and Bond knew there would be no compromise. Feeling the pressure of the knife against his carotid artery, he reluctantly grasped the terrifying force of nature he'd stirred from within the beast- a force not to be reckoned with.

"Hard to argue that logic when there's a knife at your throat, hmm?"

As the Agent registered the predatorial gleam in Silva's eyes, he realized the man had become wholly unhinged; possessed by a dangerous, unmatched brand of chilling, unequivocal madness.

*But then, the distance between insanity and genius is measured only by success.*

*And success was a currency Raoul Silva had no trouble procuring,* Bond considered uneasily.

"I should carve the heart out of you," Silva muttered, his expression cloaked and poignantly sinister as he dragged the blade down Bond's chest, slicing open his shirt, "It would be an even trade."

"Do you remember this toy of yours? I kept it as a memento. Fitting to use it now, yes?" Bond frowned at the gleaming weapon, warily recognizing it at last as the seven-inch fixed blade Damascus bowie knife he had once lodged into the man's back.

"Undoubtedly, at this juncture you've realized the error of your ways, James, yes? You witnessed Naadir's confession and now know you were wrong to distrust me. *How unfortunate for you.*"

The knife pressed into him and Bond inhaled sharply, pressing himself back into his seat.

"Such a pity we've come to this. I had rather hoped things might've been different..." Silva intoned trailing off.

"But I did try. Over and over with you. And you remained so tiresomely dense- so stubborn, *meu querido,*" he continued, digging the sharp point into the unresisting flesh beneath Bond's ribcage, "You've brought this on yourself, hmm?"

The Agent winced as the blade cut into him, feeling a warm trickle of blood run down his stomach.

"I would not hesitate to mention that I regret my actions," Bond supplied darkly, "But I presume we've come to an impasse."

Silva glared icily at his companion, retracting the blade and depositing it back into his lap with an unpleasant scowl, "You forfeited the right to defend yourself the moment you chose to betray me and you will reap the consequences of your actions."

Agitated, the blonde arose from his seat and stormed away in a huff to a low table on the other side of their cavernous enclosure. His back turned to the Agent as he wiped clean his blade, he deposited it upon the table's surface and sighed, "You ought to know, I detest what must be done, James, I
Bond swallowed thickly, subtly testing the adequacy of the ropes that held him down before an idea came to mind that held a slim potential to defuse the situation.

"You don't have to go through with it," he suggested quietly, "It was an honest mistake-"

"An honest mistake?" The blonde snorted, "More like a sad miscalculation."

"It was to a degree, rather understandable considering the circumstances," Bond pressed on, "Given time, we could move past this. If you're inclined, we could discuss other avenues-"

"We've quite passed those avenues, my dear."

Bond sighed, "We've worked together quite sufficiently up until now, should we just throw that away?"

Silva shook his head where he stood, back still turned away as he gripped the edge of the table. "Without prior consultation or reasonable examination, you made your own choice, James. Everything was in your court. You will not lay the responsibility on my head for throwing anything away, that was entirely you."

"If you could just stop, and pause long enough to consider an alternative," Bond replied calmly, "All need not be lost, Tiago-"

"Do not call me by that name!" Silva spat furiously turning back around, shoulder's trembling with barely suppressed rage, "You call me by the name of a dead man. He was buried long ago, my friend, I replaced him the second she abandoned me."

Picking back up the blade, he stalking back over to the cowed Agent, shaking his head in disgust, "Liberation in a new name: new face, new look, new career... new path. You talk of forgiving and forgetting like it's nothing! And with you, I did try. God only knows, that I've tried. I did. I forgave you one knife in my back, my dear, but two is twice too many!"

Looming over his captive with an intimidating, threatening air, knife in hand, his face twisted in rage.

"For such a long time, James, I was fed by my own hatred: revenge was all that sustained me and in turn it consumed me. I was it's servant, and it- my only master."

Bringing his hands to his mouth, Silva removed his prosthesis, his lower eyelid sagging as he peered down at the Agent; skin hallowed over the ruined cavity where the structural plate had previously reformed it. He smiled in a grotesque parody of good humour.

"Look at me. Feast your eyes, my dear, on what remains of Tiago Rodriguez," he slurred, "See it again, for yourself, what they have done, the monster they created of that man, and do not mistake me for him again."

Bond unflinchingly stared back without any measure of repulsion before the blonde replaced the appliance. Seating himself back down across from the Agent, he leveled at him a piercing look as he folded his arms across his chest.

"Hate begets hate as I've said before, but it remains, does it not? You can flush it back, keep it sated for a time, but it marks you. Leaves it's scar on the inside."

"You would deny it, but the same fire burns within your veins- the same drive to be free of the
chains that bind you— you're every bit the slave I was, my friend, and for a time, I thought, if I could offer you the key... release you from your own prison... save you from what they will eventually do to you..." Silva sighed, regretfully shaking his head.

"What I would have given you..."

Bond stared back at the man with determined resistance, as Silva turned the blade over in his fingers thoughtfully.

"Continually, you deny yourself and by extension, me: The only one willing to save you from the end you're quickly spiraling toward," he intoned smoothly, "I can understand your hang-ups, my dear, that whole unfortunate business with Vesper Lynd? The others preceding her? Perhaps, somewhere along the way you've lost your ability to accept that there might yet be one out there who would not betray you in the end. But whatever lingering trust that remains within you, you've wrongly placed in your 'Queen and Country', James."

"But then again," he shrugged, stretching out his legs before him until they were toe to toe, "She has given you quite the bed of roses, hmm? Free-reign to unleash that inward, innate violence you hide within your soul- but under the righteous guise of the law, of course!"

"You and I are fundamentally similar men, my dear, and the idea is an alluring one, yes? You taste the feeling of pulling back the trigger, putting a bullet through an eye and you feel like God- there is a part of you that thrills at this power over life and death- it is a seductive mistress."

Silva paused, sighing deeply.

"I guess we are all slaves to our heart in one sense or another... hmm?"

"All of this being said," Bond remarked calmly steeling himself beneath that cuttingly cruel, fixed look, "though we may bear some similar grievances against those we've been employed by- when it comes down to it, we are not at all alike."

Silva laughed blackly, "Are we not? You are a selfish, self-serving man, James. More so than even myself, perhaps, always so cold- so ruthless. It is what allows you to excel at your job, no?"

The Agent shrugged in admission, because of course the man made a valid point.

"As I've said before, my dear, we are the last two rats, and rat eats rat, yes? You cannot be incapable of admitting that you're a genuine proponent of the old belief that only the fittest survives?" Silva inquired, glaring at him accusingly, "So tell me, is there any reason I don't deserve to drive this blade of mine through you where you sit?"

Sagging in his bindings, Bond shook his head mutely.

"Nothing?" Silva demanded, "You have no final words?"

"It doesn't mean anything to you at this point," the Agent replied quietly, "But I'll say to you what she failed to. I am sorry."

The blonde laughed wretchedly, shaking with mirth as he skeptically regarded the man with a despairing expression, "Oh! And so am I! But If you think your remorse will stay my hand you are sorely mistaken, my dear."

"If my death will bring you some semblance of satisfaction, then it is not my place to deny you that justice."
Clenching shut his eyes with a pained groan, Silva stripped off his gloves and bowed his head into his hands. After a long, silent moment, he looked back up at the Agent with a falteringingly open, decimated expression.

"I would have given you everything, meu querido," he darkly uttered in a raw, strained tone as he arose once again from his chair and rounded behind the Agent, knife in hand, "You had only to trust me. It wasn't so much I asked."

Bond closed his eyes and exhaled slowly, preparing for the blade to stab him through. To die with the calm acceptance of the soldier he'd been trained to be, would be the last thing he would ever accomplish, and he meant to do so with dignity- which was why his breath caught in his throat in surprise as he felt Silva instead, slicing through rope securing him to the chair, thereby releasing him from captivity.

Massaging his sore wrists, Bond remained in his seat and glanced up as the blonde came before him, depositing the blade back into it's sheath before replacing it into his belt. With a strange, unreadable expression, Silva retrieved from his coat the Agent's PPK and upon removing the clip, passed it back to him along with a small silver jump-drive which Bond accepted with a conflicting mess of confusion and mute gratitude.

"I doubt you have any idea where we are. I will have my men escort you back, and you will be released. Go to your lodgings, and upload the contents of this jump-drive. You will find I've supplied you with everything I've managed to gain thus far," he informed, defeated, "From here we will part ways, and you will remember how I never reneged on fulfilling my side of our arrangement. You will have to live in my debt, and that will have to suffice."

Bond could not for the life of him understand what had prompted the man to change his mind so dramatically, but he resolutely decided it would be best to refrain from inquiry as he tucked the drive neatly away into his trouser pocket.

Silva held out his hand and assisted the mildly dazed Agent up from the chair with a resigned expression, handing him his coat-jacket. Placing his unloaded weapon into the inner pocket, he smoothed down his lapel and looked up at the man with a measure of wary, questioning hesitance.

"Complete your mission and go on home, James," the blonde directed, "And hope our paths never cross again. Next time, I promise you I will not be so merciful."

"Raoul," Bond spoke quietly, reaching out for a moment before changing his mind and dropping his hand back at his side, "...Thank you."

"Don't thank me, Double-oh-Seven," Silva responded coolly, turning to face his companion squarely, "You will see in time the gravity of your mistake. And when you do, I will not be there to help you."

Reaching out, Silva grasped the man firmly by his chin.

"That will be something to think about, hmm?" he darkly chuckled, raising an eyebrow, "Something for you to mull upon when the world closes in on you at last, James."

Pulling him in roughly by his shirt collar, Silva seized the Agent in a final, demanding kiss; unmerciful and fierce and without any lingering warmth.

"You and I have had a good run, hmm?" He voiced quietly against his companion's lips, "Tenha uma vida boa, meu querido, whatever is left of it."
Swiping a thumb over Bond's tender, swollen bottom lip, collecting the drop of blood from where the man's mouth had split beneath his assault, he wiped it on his trousers and sighed, "Take care of yourself, James, it is a cold world I return you to."

Hesitantly, Bond moved forward, placing a slow, soft and very careful kiss upon Silva's unresisting yet tacitly unyielding mouth.

"Thank you," he whispered meaningfully in return. Before pulling away, covertly, Bond unfastened from his sleeve one of his own signature cufflinks and slipped it discreetly into the pocket of his companion's trench coat.

None the wiser to the addition, Silva drew back with a closed off expression and called out for his guards to escort the Agent out.

Darting a last, quick glance behind, Bond watched Silva turn away to retreat back into the shadows and finally, allowed himself to be led away.
Chapter 15

00

Forwarding on the information Silva had supplied him with, MI-6 quickly hashed out a plan to take down the headquarters of the formidable terrorist organization; the primary syndicate managing the dissemination of lethal weaponry across the international black market.

Mallory instructed Bond to fly out immediately to Istanbul, where he'd arranged for the Agent to be met with a back-up ops team to infiltrate their well-concealed and highly defended facility. It was a dangerous finale, Bond considered as he reviewed his orders.

But it meant his mission would be completed, and he was ready to return home to lick his wounds in peace.

00

Establishing himself at a new location, safely secreted away in order to avoid further ado; Santorini having been overrun by a flustered slew of MI-6 and Grecian authorities attempting to piece together the aftermath of the destruction wrought upon the island, Silva idly wasted away the hours with drink and other trivialities.

Checking the news bulletins between a lazy, drunken game of solitaire, hashing out a few notes on a new code formula, surfing through a few discussion boards on the subject, ordering in lunch, reorganizing his inventory, etcetera; the occupations proved only feebly distracting at best.

Annoyed by his lack of focus, Silva reclined back in the floral eye-sore of the hotel's lumpy, worn divan, propping his feet up on the nearby rustic pine table as he slowly, sipped his scotch.

Finally succumbing to curiosity, he rest his laptop across his knees and easily extracted the newly updated, classified MI-6 files. Dismally perusing the added amendments to Bond's mission, he refilled his glass, huffing a small, grim sigh.

The whole haphazard operation was designed to fail from it's onset, and Agent 007 would be an inevitable casualty if he did not intercede. Which he would not.

Though, with his new acquisitions, he surely had the means to do so.

Having taken helm of Laurence and Greg's entire administration, incorporating it into his own, he now commanded a literal army with which he could utilize at a whim to his advantage- even if that entailed aiding their enemy.

And they would follow his orders, of course, because the man who writes the checks is King.

Since this was the leading organization from which all other groups looked to employ for various technological pursuits, it alone, comprised of the small group of masterfully trained individuals which adeptly handled the coding, hacking and ability to manage any and all input and output of information.

Thus, it would be a simple enough endeavor to ensure the gun-runners abstain from learning of their eventual infiltration by MI-6 while securing the safety of his own operation. Though, if he were to do so, it would essentially mean his own newly acquired industry would be left quite bereft without it's primary employers for a long interim. No income meant no paychecks which would mean no
employees.

Which didn't matter much in the long run, he'd successfully run a sufficient organization according to his own interests prior to the merger, and would again if it disintegrated.

But, the blonde considered, setting the glass down on the table beside him, he owed Bond nothing and MI-6 even less. It was a simple decision.

After a rigorous month of footwork, Silva was exhausted in more ways than one and sorely missed the comforts of his penthouse lodgings in Paris, or perhaps he'd take a well deserved holiday at his summer house in Catabria. Either way, it was more than time to return home. With a weary yawn, he arose from his chair to pack up his meager belongings. Removing his clothing from the drawers he folded them neatly and deposited the garments into his case before moving to the closet to take out the remainder of his wardrobe.

Folding the black leather trench coat over his arm, a small, glimmering object tumbled out from the pocket and rolled to the floor at his feet.

Frowning, Silva knelt down to pick it up and holding the jewel between two fingers, examined it with dawning recognition. Observing the black and silver enamel; the coat-of-arms family emblem, he huffed a breath in wonderment.

Collapsing back into the divan with an anguished grimace, he shut his eyes muttering a long string of angry invectives; cursing the godforsaken imbecile and his goddamned, poignantly meaningful gesture.

He had the whole world; a world teeming with nearly seven billion occupants and it had to provide him with the one man whom would ultimately prove to be both his ruin and redemption.

Silva bowed his head, capitulating. With the sly delivery of one, sentimental token, James Bond had completely undermined the entirety of his resolve.

With a significant burst of irritation, he flipped back open the laptop and quickly removed his own cufflink. Unscrewing the diamond bezel from it's setting, he removed the tiny implanted GPS tracking microchip designed to match signals with it's twin, and slid it into a plastic encasement. Inserting the make-shift chip into his computer, Silva uploaded the coordinates.

As the information was relayed onto his screen, he grabbed for his mobile and hurriedly made arrangements for an immediate flight out to Istanbul before making a call to his associates to round up the troops.

He'd turn the world for that man, and he'd better damn well appreciate it.

00

The sprawling cathedral like headquarters teemed with a veritable slew of armed guards, and in spite of Q remotely disabling their surveillance network as he crawled through the tightly claustrophobic, narrow and dusty ducting of the building in an attempt to locate their control room, the breach had been discovered.

"How do they have my location?" Bond demanded over his headset.

"Heat sensors."

"I've come to a fork, here, it splits in two directions" The Agent informed, it's quieter to the left, can
you get an angle on whatever is under there?"

"Yes, hold up one moment, let me run a scan," Q responded, "It looks like a corridor with maybe eight- no- maybe ten or eleven men."

"That's fantastic," Bond drawled as gun-fire exploded through the tunnel, "Get my men here, now."

"Just, try to stay calm, 007," Q directed, "We're sending out helicopters as we speak, they should arrive within twenty minutes-"

"I don't have twenty minutes!" The Agent spat out as bullets pierced through the ventilation shaft ricocheting loudly around his head.

"Get out of there and head to your right, there should be an opening into the main atrium."

"Oh, that's excellent. Right into the open," Bond clipped out through gritted teeth, "Clearly, you've no issue with me committing voluntary suicide."

Having no other option, Bond snaked his way to the vent, and peering down through the metal slats, noted the area appeared momentarily clear.

"I cased the perimeter, 007, get out of there immediately and find cover."

Following the order, the Agent unhinged the cap and dropped from the vent into a crouch upon the floor, his knees aching with the impact. Darting across the second story balcony of the open atrium, Bond concealed himself behind the wall of a doorway and quickly switched out his PPK for his assault rifle, watching with dismay as endless hordes of guards filled in from multiple entrances.

"Bit overkill, isn't it?" Q remarked ironically.

Having been spotted, Bond dashed across the balcony taking out the throngs of assailants cluttering his path. Through the deafening roar of ceaseless gun-fire raining down from above, he dodged behind a column to avoid being hit by the blasting plaster debris and ejected casings spiraling violently through the air. Torrents of sparks from the ruined wiring crackled overhead, lighting a blaze across the ceiling and he sagged against the wall cringing as the world exploded into mayhem.

"007, report, what is your status?"

The Agent inhaled painfully, his ribs aching beneath his bullet-proof vest where he'd already been shot multiple times. He glanced down scowling at his arm where he'd been grazed superficially, his ruined shirtsleeve hanging in tattered shreds around his bicep, blood oozing from the gash.

"007 are you still with me?"

"Alive and kicking," Bond retorted crouching low into the shadows.

"I can't hear you, 007, repeat," Q replied with a measure of alarm in his voice, "I think they're running interference, all I'm hearing is static on your end."

"I can hear you, I said I'm alive-"

"007, over, repeat? Can you hear me? Repeat-"

"Phenomenal," The Agent drawled as he lost transmission, "Really...spectacular."

Just then, with a massive, earth-shattering explosion heralding in a new and unexpected chaos, an
unquantifiable legion of unidentifiable, armed men stormed in through the blasted open entry-way.

In the tumultuous confusion, Bond was momentarily reprieved and slunk low beneath the banisters until he could take cover beneath the stairwell.

A spare shot echoed out audibly behind him, and the Agent whipped around in alarm as a guard dropped dead to the ground. Defensively, Bond aimed his weapon and squinted through the smoky haze to identify his rescuer.

"What is this, you're suddenly some fucking venerable saint martyring yourself for the cause, huh?" Drawled a familiar voice, "What did I say about 'taking care'?"

Bond gaped in shock as the silhouette of the last man he'd expected to ever see stepped toward him out from the haze.

"Were you really thinking you could just walk right on in and take down the place single-handed?"

"I wasn't alone until a few minutes ago, but I lost my feed and my backup is taking their damned time," The Agent defended as Silva ducked beneath the low ceiling of the stairwell.

"In that case, good thing I brought some of my friends along, hmm?"

Bond stared at his companion with open astonishment, "How are you here?"

Smirking, Silva tapped the diamond adorning his sleeve and Bond noticed his own cufflink fastened to the man's other wrist; perfectly mirroring his own arrangements.

"Ah, it's a tracker."

"Audio recorder, too," Silva informed smugly, "I'm very innovative."

The man peered at him warmly.

"Sans one of your own, I took a wild stab in the dark and assumed you'd be wearing the one I'd given you."

Bond shook his head, still attempting to process this surprising turn of events.

"Why did you come back?"

"Please, James," Silva drawled, rolling his eyes, "As if it isn't obvious. It seems as if my timing was rather fortuitous all things considered. Are you not glad to see me? Should I go?"

"Don't be an idiot," The Agent chided, bumping his good shoulder against his partner companionably.

Crouched beside his companion shielded from the pandemonium, Silva reached around back of the Agent and pulled him in close.

"You can be a very blind and often cruel man, meu querido," He whispered, lips pressed against his companion's ear, "But I find... I can't stay away from you."

Bond peered over at his partner lost for response when a sudden, enormous explosion shook the atrium sending large chunks of debris sailing through the air. Amidst rapid gun-fire surrounding them, covering their mouths with their arms, Silva pulled the Agent along behind him through the thick haze.
"Follow me," the blonde ordered, coughing, dragging him by the wrist across the balcony, "Quickly."

Tripping over an obstacle shrouded by the filmy atmosphere, Bond found himself suddenly detached from his companion's grip. Lost in the ensuing panic, was unable to recover his bearings before Silva shouted through the cacophony to, 'get down!'

Gun-fire ripped across, slicing through the smoke, and before the Agent could react, he was heavily tackled to the ground.

Shifting out from under the man pinning him down with the full-weight of his limp form, Bond quickly aimed his gun through the dispersing haze of settling dust and efficiently dispatched the gunman.

Silva groaned in agony as the Agent quickly hoisted him over his shoulder and maneuvered them to safety within a vacated room beyond the collapsed staircase. Setting him down carefully upon the floor, Bond tore open his shirt as he lay gasping, and as gingerly as possible, unfastened the man's confining bullet-proof vest to assess the damage.

"How- bad?" the blonde rasped.

The Agent frowned as he observed the profusely bleeding wound. Somehow the bullet had lodged above the armour of the vest beneath the man's collar bone and for all he knew about anatomy, if he wasn't aided soon, he'd bleed out in a manner of minutes. Quickly, he tore off his jacket and pressed it to the man's chest, while keeping him elevated, propped against his knee.

"You're fine," Bond promised more to himself than his companion, "You'll be fine, it's not bad."

Silva shook his head, gasping a short laugh, "You're a- terrible liar, James."

"Help will be here shortly," the Agent informed tilting him upward to keep the man from aspirating on his own blood, "If I can find something to keep you up, I'll go get help."

"No!" Silva coughed hoarsely in desperation, "No. Don't- They'll come. Stay."

Bond furrowed his brow in concern before surrendering, "Okay. Okay, I won't leave you."

From somewhere overhead, outside the half caved-in ceiling, the Agent listened as helicopters neared, signifying the approach of MI-6.

Stroking back the clumped blonde locks stuck against the man's damp forehead, he cradled the man in his arms, grimacing as Silva's breathing came in short, rattling wheezes; his lungs filling with pooling blood.

"You came back," he sighed remorsefully, "You took my bullet. Why?"

"You are so dense- meu querido," Silva gasped through shallow breaths, "How do you- not- know?"

Bond stared at his partner in confusion and the man quirked a pained grin up at him.

"Give- me- a moment here- I don't often do this- " Silva intoned, through a struggling exhale, "these- dying- confessions-"

"You're not dying," The Agent snorted, shaking his head, "Hear the helicopters? Just, don't talk. Try to relax."
"Don't-" the blonde grimaced, "Interrupt me. I'm- not going- to be able- to say this- otherwise."

Frowning, Bond sighed, "Okay. Say what you will and try to be still until they arrive."

Silva snorted irritably.

"I doubt- I'll last that long. But- let me just say- before I can't- that you're an idiot, James-. And I- I-" With a ragged breath he peered up at his companion with a fond, tired look of exasperation, "If it isn't obvious- and if men- such as we, are able- I quite unfortunately love you."

Huffing a hushed, warm laugh of amusement, the Agent shook his head, "I shouldn't have let you say anything. Come this time tomorrow you'll be retracting that statement with terrible embarrassment."

"Come- this- time tomorrow, if- I'm not- deposited away- in the morgue down in the basement- at MI-6," Silva objected with a wry grin, "Then I'll- ask you to- marry me."

"I'll hold you to it," Bond quipped back quietly, as the man's eyes shuttered closed.

The door flying open, several of Silva's men clambered in through the entrance, just as the blonde's head fell slack in the Agent's arms, and demanded he vacate.

"Your fellows are out hunting for you, Agent," one of the guards informed, "leave him now, and go see to them before you get us all arrested."

Unwillingly, Bond complied, relinquishing his companion's unmoving form into the arms of the other men and hurried away from the room with a gut full of lead; his chest aching with unspent emotion welling inside.
"Long time no see," Eve Moneypenny greeted, entering into Bond's office.

The exhausted Agent glanced up at his friend, attempting for a warm welcoming grin but could immediately sense this was in vain upon observing her chastising frown.

"I'm not happy with you," she informed sharply, "I'm your immediate supervisor, Bond, and you've kept me in the dark from square one."

"I had to take certain measures to-"

"No, you went over my head. Ignoring my calls and all of my messages. How is that acceptable? How long did you think you could conspire with Q to hide from me? Did you really think I wouldn't suss out how you were managing to do this?"

The Agent winced, regretting placing his Quartermaster in such a situation.

"Is Q...?"

"No, he hasn't been terminated, but he has been reprimanded. M has been a literal horrorshow this whole time because of you and the office has had to pay dearly in expense. You may have saved that pretty white arse of yours by taking down the bad guys, Bond, but I really hope you don't expect any sort of celebration. You're not quite the man of the hour at the moment."

"Damn it, James," Eve sighed in frustration, taking a seat across the desk, "It's as if you've forgotten I even exist. What the hell happened out there?"

Bond furrowed his brow with some measure of confusion, "How do you mean? You were in the debriefing."

"Yes, I know all the particulars of the mission, but what I don't understand is all the secrecy. I interrogated Q, I know you were having him conceal certain details. You had him lie to me, pacify me with all sorts of stories, and thus, because I trusted the two of you, by extension I became your accomplice. If M had discovered just exactly what you had been up to... you put all of our jobs on the line."

The secretary frowned in disappointment. "You're lucky I'm not going to retroactively report you."

"I am sorry, Eve."

"As am I, James. I don't know if I can trust you anymore."

Sadly, she gazed down at her clasped hands in her lap. "I've issued my request to be reassigned. I just thought you should know."

"Is that really necessary?" Bond asked with a pull of remorse, "We've been friends for a long time, Eve..."

"Friends don't betray each other," she retorted, "friends trust each other. Tell each other the truth. You let me down on all accounts."
Softening, she looked back up at the Agent, "Look, James, I'll be your friend again, maybe eventually, but I stand by my decision. In this business, I need to be able to know and implicitly trust those I work with. I'm sorry."

"I really am too, Eve," Bond replied quietly as the secretary arose, standing up courteously in response.

"Yes, well," she sighed regretfully with a last look at the Agent, "Don't be a stranger. I'll still be around if you need me."

"I mean, no more favours, Mister, I've done quite enough on that end," she amended before departing, "But, you know, if you ever need to talk, yeah?"

"That's more than you owe me, Eve," Bond replied fondly, "You've always been far too generous to me."

Eve's eyes twinkled warmly as she regarded her tired looking friend.

"I sure have," She agreed with a smirk, "Take it easy."

After two months, Bond had carried on tirelessly taking on new missions one after the next without pause, denying all of M's pointed suggestions to take a short leave. With unceasing, limitless determination, the Agent fiercely drove himself. If he'd been a brilliant Agent before, then surely, he'd risen to the best by now.

Non stop action meant no time to think. Thinking would be destructive, so he pressed himself on at a severe, self-punishing pace, internalizing his regrets, suppressing his doubts; all the while running from a ghost nipping at his heels.

"Good work on the job in Uzbekistan, 007," Q commended, "You've really been a machine out there."

"Mm," Bond accepted indifferently, "I do what I'm sent out to, nothing more, nothing less."

"That's a very moderate perspective."

The Agent shrugged noncommittally as the Quartermaster sipped his hot coffee.

"You've been chasing case after case like a bat out of hell since Istanbul, I can't tell whether you're trying to prove something or run from something."

"Or someone," he amended.

Bond stared up at the bespectacled man expressionlessly.

"Leave your cryptic remarks for someone who cares, Q," he coolly drawled.

"Most of the time, if you're not out and about, you cloister yourself away into self-seclusion," Q pointed out, "All you do is pour over this or that mission file, taking on stacks of paperwork- which is extremely unusual for you considering you've announced your loathing for desk work on more than one occasion- and when you're not doing that, you're off getting sauced."

"Say what you're going to say," the Agent demanded, pinching the bridge of his nose with irritation, "I don't have the patience for your accusations."
"Or your condescension," he added.

"I haven't said anything to anyone else about this, 007, but I'm almost entirely, one-hundred percent certain I know who you outsourced for assistance on your mission a couple months back."

"Please, inform me of what you've concluded," Bond requested dryly, pulling out a chair and seating himself across from the computer desk. Q narrowed his eyes, studying the man across from him carefully.

"I'm sure I don't have to mention this, but all I say here is off record. It occurred to me, that you managed to accomplish a great deal of endeavors requiring advanced technological skill—successfully I might add—without my assistance. On top of this, I know you required an associate with necessary leverage in the underworld."

The Agent raised an impatient eyebrow and leaned back in his seat, crossing his arms.

"Of course, you went to great measures to conceal this individual's identity. And even still, for some reason or another, even upon conclusion of the case have neglected to inform MI-6 of this person's contribution," Q explained in a hushed tone, "Learning of Raoul Silva's presence in Greece—in Santorini no less, very near to where you were at the time, and considering he died in Istanbul, again, conveniently in exactly the same place as yourself..."

"No need to build up the suspense, Q, you can feel free, at any time, to get to your point."

"Right, don't let me waste your precious time, 007," Q huffed before continuing on, "Who else but Silva could have been involved in that mass counter-attack? Why else would he have been there? Now at first I considered, that all of this might very well be just coincidental—of course, why wouldn't Silva seek to supplant himself in such a massive, sprawling and influential powerhouse? But then I realized, he obviously knew of your involvement, so would he not lay low, wait out whatever MI-6 intends to do and clean up afterward? Why take such an unnecessary risk?"

Q sighed, shaking his head.

"He wouldn't. He'd never be so careless," he concluded with a great deal of confidence "Thus, it only leads me to believe that he was your man, 007."

Bond shrugged dismissively taking a sip from his mug.

"There doesn't seem to be much use in confirming or denying, does there."

"Of course, because I'm unerringly accurate on this," Q retorted conceitedly, "If nothing else, your subsequent change in attitude is revealing enough."

"Is that so?"

Combing a hand through his overgrown mass of dark hair, Q uncomfortably paused, considering how to relay his assumption without inviting too much backlash. But then, he'd never excelled at phrasing things tactfully.

"You miss him."

Calmly and impassively, the Agent returned his Quartermaster's leveling gaze, abstaining from reply.

"I don't think I'm incorrect, 007, but regardless, that mission took a toll on you" the man suggested "And you are certainly a different man than you were prior. Don't misunderstand me, you're a
talented Agent, but for how much longer can you keep up at your current rate? Speaking as a friend, at some point, don't you think it'd be smart to cut your losses and get out while you can?"

Bond narrowed his eyes, with a poorly disguised frown and huffed a short, dark laugh before downing the rest of his coffee.

"Please, tell me. What exactly are you inferring?"

"I'm not implying that you haven't the adequate stamina, but you're hardly very stable. What I am saying," Q intoned with a formidable wisdom beyond his years, "is that I've been here long enough to see what happens when an Agent in no longer fit for the demands of his job, 007, personally, I don't see any shame in resigning and getting the hell out while you still can."

"Ah," The Agent snorted, "You're telling me to quit? I tried that once- before you were here. I was denied. Even our new management would not consider me safe to release out into the wild, Q."

"Precisely why I say, quit and run."

00

Bond mulled over his discourse from earlier, dousing the lingering bitterness the Quartermaster's words had provoked in a heavy supply of liquor; ordering round after round from the increasingly wary bartender. At his side, sat Eve, who quietly sat contemplating her fourth drink with a slightly nauseated expression.

At last he caught her staring at him with pointed concern written across her face.

"Are you alright, James?"

"Of course, why wouldn't I be?" he replied finishing his vodka tonic, "I'm having a drink among good company, what more could a man ask for?"

She gazed at him sympathetically and he caved, dropping his head into his hands.

"Do you think I'm old?" he asked, waving an unspecific hand out in the air, "Too old for all of this?"

"I'm not clear on how you mean, but old or not, I'm certainly not slumming it with you, honey."

The Agent chuckled softly with amusement.

"I'm not speaking from vanity," Bond explained, "what I'm asking is, do you think I should retire?"

"You let M run you into the ground, and you'll retire one way or another I imagine," Eve responded honestly.

In response to this, bitterly, the Agent ordered another drink. The Bartender cautiously hesitated, and he coldly glared at the man prompting him to deliver on the order without further delay.

"I lost my out," he muttered darkly into his glass.

"I don't know what 'out' you're referring to, but if you still had it, would you take it?"

Contemplating this, Bond found he had no immediate response he was willing to voice.

00
Falling into a cycle that consisted of relentlessly pounding the pavement for Mother England, followed by an attempt to mitigate the looming black clouds hanging heavily overhead by relying unapologetically on the mitigating crutch of his admittedly destructive vices; Bond would climb crawling into whatever new bed he was temporarily calling home at the end of every day and crash into a deep, comatose, yet still unsatisfactory sleep and then summarily start again the next day.

This routine continued without interruption for nearly another three months, each hour of each day harsher and darker than the next until finally, he returned back to his apartment one night to find his world turned over by an unfamiliar set of keys resting atop a small, neatly folded piece of stationary perched centrally upon his empty table.

Barely daring to breathe, stricken with shock and a small measure of hope bubbling up to the surface, the Agent recognized the miniature, glittering, silver, iconic shape of an Aston Martin; attached to this was a single ignition key and remote. With shaking hands he unfolded the letter and instantly, nearly dropped it as he gasped overcome, collapsing into the kitchen chair.

Drawing a hand down his face, Bond swallowed thickly, choked up by a torrent of unleashed relief followed quickly by a combination of suspicion and doubt. But no, there was no denying who this was truly from. Awash with fury he crumpled the paper in his hands, sagging tiredly over the table.

Why had he been subjugated to this agonizing torture of months running to escape his grief? Because, he could no longer deny, that that is what had been haunting him since Istanbul.

Uncrumpling the note and smoothing it back down, his anger ebbed as he was claimed by a thrill of excitement; an emotion he hadn't truly felt for far too long.

Here is your other option.

Rushing down and out through the apartment's lobby into the cool, foggy night, Bond pressed unlock and instantly located the gleaming brand new Aston Martin Gauntlet. Residing on the dash was another carefully folded message. Taking a seat within, he couldn't help but admire the luxurious interior of the cabin; the sleek leather seats and the sophisticated design of the dash bearing all the latest advancements.

Consider this a belated apology for destroying the first one, though it is not your priceless vintage, I imagined you'd at least appreciate the gesture. I've had this specially customed for you, so I think you should find some enjoyment in exploring it's features.

If you turn on the navigation system, you will find I've programmed in a route for you. If you follow this path, know, there is no going back. Your days as slave to England will be behind you.

If you choose to remain, then you have the car and my regret. I can only hope every so often you might think of me fondly.

From the time you unlocked your new vehicle, a timer was set. You have 24 hours to arrange your affairs and say your farewells and come to me. After this allotted time is up, the route will delete itself. Do not take too long to decide, my dear. Me casa para casa, and it is empty here without you.

For a long while, Bond sat, hands braced on the steering column, staring out at the night sky and parked cars lined up down the length of the empty street.
Though the man had come to his aide in Istanbul and had, upon what he'd assumed was his deathbed, confessed to him such profound sentiment, Bond still considered that to grant him this opportunity once more, after everything, was still, extremely generous. Leaving coordinates leading directly back to him into the hands of a yet still active MI-6 Agent was a high-risk move, and a very bold statement. It conveyed that he trusted him implicitly and did not expect to be disappointed.

Which was, both exasperatingly presumptuous and forgivably endearing. Laughing quietly to himself, Bond knew there was little logic in denying his decision had already been made. In a sense, it had been made for him long ago.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

The end is nighhhhh

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

00

I have decided after some amount of thought on the matter, that I will be retiring after all. For obvious reasons, I regret to say this is the last time we will communicate, I've sent on my resignation and will not be returning.

Unexpectedly, I found my out and I am taking it. Best wishes. Stay well.

JB

Forwarding the message to Q and Eve, Bond closed his laptop and tucked it away on top of the last of his packed away belongings. With a last glance around the emptied apartment, he locked the door and strolled to his Aston Martin with a sense of freedom. After depositing his cases into the trunk he sat down into the driver's seat and revved the engine; it purred beneath him beautifully as he took off, following the programmed route.

The trip from his latest digs in La Rochelle to the expansive acres of green groves and sprawling beaches along the coastal city of San Vicente de la Barquera flew by, and in under 6 hours, Bond had arrived at his destination.

Raoul Silva stood, hands clasped, amid the sandy shore, a broad grin spreading across his face as the silver vehicle pulled in the long drive and came to a stop before his vast, bright home.

"Nice place you have," Bond announced, stepping out of his car.

"Nice place we have, meu amor," Silva amended, coming up to take take his lover in his arms. "Meu Deus, but you're a sight for sore eyes, James."

Smiling warmly, the now happily ex-Agent examined the blonde, holding him an arm's length away.

"I assume at some point you must have made a pact with the devil for immortality."

"I've been considering the possibility that I am the devil."

Bond laughed, "I'm alright with that."

Bringing him close once more, Silva nuzzled his face into the crook of his lover's neck, holding him tightly before coaxing him forward into a soft, undemanding kiss; something far more tender than expected.

"'Journey's end in lover's meetings', is that not what they say?" Silva mused, "Come, come inside me casa, let me fix you some lunch, meu amor and tell me how you've been."
Entering into the open, airy estate, Bond took a seat across a white marble counter as Silva busied himself in the kitchen. Marveling at the man's easy comfort; apparently more in his element than he'd ever been.

"Do you like paella? It's one of my best," the blonde asked passing his amused companion a spoon to taste.

"I was unaware you cooked."

"Tch, so much you do not know. Ah, but you'll learn," Silva affirmed before noticing the man's hesitation, "If you don't care for it I won't be offended, I can always prepare something more to your taste."

"It's not that. The dish is, actually, quite excellent."

"Obrigado, meu amor, it is a pleasure to me to have you here. Whatever I can do for you, simply ask."

"Why did you wait so long to tell me you were still alive?"

Silva frowned, "I thought so much this would be obvious, James."

"I thought you were dead, Raoul," Bond expressed tiredly, "I mourned you. I spent months-"

"Sh, sh," the blonde interjected coming around the counter to take a seat beside his companion, "I had to, you understand. It was paramount that I should be thought dead. Even if it meant, that for a little while, I had to let you think so. It truly upset me to think that you might suffer, James, but, at the same time, I... I didn't know if you would. Everything always seemed rather one sided between us, hmm?"

Taking his lover's hand, Silva threaded together their fingers and sighed.

"Knowing you as I do, I don't think that I can expect you to feel quite the same way as I do for you, but I will admit, as much as I regret bringing you any pain, it relieves me that you admit to having missed me as you have- I missed you terribly, meu amor, and I am relieved you are here."

Huffing a soft laugh, Bond shook his head.

"I've always said you didn't know me too well, I suppose that holds true," he informed his companion, "Between the two of us, I don't think we have many more lives to spare, and for whatever remains of it, I'd like to spend the rest of it here."

Silva blinked drawing in a breath, tightly clutching his lover's hand, "Here."

"Here, yes," Bond confirmed with a small smile, "with you."

"Then you will stay?"

"I will."

A wide grin spread across Raoul Silva's face as he regarded the one man he'd chosen to share the rest of his days with, "For better or for worse?"

"Or something to that end."

"Ah, the married life, hmm?" he laughed happily, "Now get up and make yourself useful, that pot's
not going to stir itself, meu amor."

00

Chapter End Notes

It's been fun, folks. C and C is appreciated. Thank you for sticking it out with me.

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