No Rest for the Wingless

by Only_1_Truth

Summary

The top agents in MI6 are Angels - there's nothing angelic about them, but they sure are dangerous. And not always good with taking orders from bespectacled, stringy Quartermasters.

MI6 has decided that a new strategy is needed to ensure the success of their missions, and for that, they hired Q: with his genius mind and [mostly] cool head, it became his job to coordinate the 00-missions.

Now the double-o's have a voice in their ear telling them what to do, where to go on missions.

Do the double-o's take well to this?

No. And the worst ones are 006, 7, and 8...

In which Q's got a spine and is willing to beat double-o's over the head with it.

Notes

It was mentioned a few times that the Q in my other fic (possibly fics, plural) is a damsel in distress.

So I did this :3 I can't promise that my new Q is anything like the one from Skyfall, but I love him. If you do not, please find another fic.
Because I'm having a blast writing this one.
Q slammed his hands down on the table, and the double-ohs fell silent at the sudden show of temper, unsure if they scented a threat or merely blood in the water – either one was a cause for interest, and the three agents tensed readily, the faint quiver in their bodies like the hum of a drawn bowstring as they watched the young Quartermaster stand up. They’d respected other Quartermasters in the past – other Mundanes – but other Quartermasters hadn’t been put above them in the food chain before…

At this moment, that carefully constructed mask of calm that Q had been wearing in front of them had finally vanished, replaced by a level of temper that was nothing short of impressive. Bond raised an eyebrow even as 006 smirked a little, 008 shifting his impressive wings in reflexive readiness. All 00-agents were hair-trigger men, and this new show of spine by this Mundane only served to prick their killer instincts. Still, at least Bond had to admit that it was amusing to see the infuriatingly calm Quartermaster finally showing that he had a belly of fire beneath it all.

“I’m not just some bloody Mundane you can push around,” Q said in a voice that was still steady but had dropped an octave into a seething threat, and the green-hazel eyes flashed behind his spectacles and unkempt hair. Hands braced on the table, as if still feeling the vibration from hitting it, Q met the eyes of 006, 7, and 8 in turn in a fashion that very few people did and survived long after. The three Angels might have taught him that lesson then and there if the original show of temper hadn’t set the stage. Q was so very rarely angry – barely at all until now, despite egregious efforts by the 00-agents – that the sight of it now was nothing short of thrilling, or at the least rather fulfilling to see.

Before any of the double-ohs could speak up and say that he was (and they were more than ready to, the ever-mouthy Alec already parting his lips to start the ball rolling), the tousle-haired Quartermaster cut them off, “I was given this job for a reason, and that reason was because I could run circles around all of you.”

“Maybe you can,” Alec – still the fastest with his tongue, no matter whom you talked to – conceded, finishing with his usual acidic touch, “on a computer, but so could old Boothroyd, and he wasn’t put in charge of what we did.” There was a thin layer of ice coating his words by the end, the numbing poison on a snake’s bite, and the other double-ohs echoed the feeling. Wings shuffled, Bond’s dark blue-grey standing out stark and sleekly against 006’s satin-black and 008’s more generic speckled brown. The power they were radiating filled the whole floor, it seemed, making the other little tech-minions cower back – but not Q.

The new Quartermaster continued to stare down the powerful Angels he’d been unilaterally handed the leashes of, not a speck of fear on his face but quite a bit of anger. Apparently, he’d decided to quit fooling around, regardless of what M had told him to do. Leaning forward over his desk, apparently oblivious to how his delicate frame was ridiculously dwarfed by the winged muscle standing opposite, he stated with flat, burning-hot factualness, “That’s because Boothroyd wouldn’t have known what he was doing, shouting orders to a species than Mundanes can never completely understand. But I am not a Mundane.” A tremor went through him, seeming to start at his splayed hands and dancing up his arms to catch his ribs in the barest of shaky breaths; he clamped down on the emotion quickly, however, transferring everything over to that controlling, burning temper that was like coals behind his bespectacled eyes. The rest of the facts were laid out succinctly and frankly, “M would not put a Mundane in charge of the 00-section, and, therefore, I am not a Mundane. I’m as much Angel as anyone of you, minus the wings.”

Rumor and popular belief led people to think that 00-agents were never startled just as they never died – both accounts, however, were wrong, and the former was being proven right now as
dangerous, catty amusement was transmuted instantly to various shades of surprise on the double-ohs faces. “What?” Alec finally shot back, his teeth now showing in less of a smile and more of a disbelieving grimace.

Bond simply stood, watching, silent – although his brows had immediately dropped low over his eyes in caution as the words hit him. So far as he could tell, Q was not lying, and the only thing harder than surprising a 00-agent was lying to one.

008 was making his voice known, darting to take steps forward until he was standing in front of Bond and Alec and only about a hand’s-width from the desk, meaning that Q – still leaning forward – had to crane his neck up to look at him. Not that that seemed to phase the lanky Quartermaster, as he simply continued to glare unflinchingly in a feat that was nothing short of wildly suicidal. If Bond hadn’t already been convinced that Q was telling the truth about being an Angel, he would have suspected the idea now.

Either that, or Q was as mad as a hatter and interested in dying today.

“You’ve got about as much Angel in you as my mother does,” 008 spat out at the Quartermaster, all tact having finally been thrown out the window.

Q returned the favor, replying in his silky, deceptively mild voice, “I’d be surprised if she is your mother at all.”

008 just barely restrained himself from strangling their new boss, and only because Bond reached out quickly and grabbed him – one hand on his upper arm, the other clenched in the feathers of his wing. Alec just looked amused by all of his, the glint of wonderment in his eyes saying he wanted to know just where Q had found the gall and idiocy to say a line like that. For his part, Q was showing a touch of the commonsense inherent behind the recklessness: his eyes subtly darted over to Bond, as if making sure he had hold of 008. If he was at all surprised by the intervention, he made no show of it, and likewise didn’t comment on Bond saving his neck. Still not moving from where he was leaning forward with his hands braced on his desk, the Quartermaster finally deigned to address the obvious topic that 008 had brought up. “I know I don’t look it, but the fact remains that I did have wings, at one point. It’s not just feathered appendages that make an Angel, I assure you, and although I have lost mine, I am quite capable of not only understanding you but matching you.” The last was said with just the faintest edge of barbed wire, a threat.

Double-ohs rarely handled threats well – that is to say, they handled threats in about the same violent, mismanaged way, often with guns involved. Bond realized at that point that this conversation and its revelations would soon be entering similarly dangerous territory. “All right, that’s enough,” he stated in a soft but low tone, giving another tug on 008’s arm and wing, a movement that was firm enough to prove that he had the muscle to back it if he decided to just drag Brant out of there. It made 008 jerk his head around to look at him, as if startled to recall his presence.

Equally aware of Alec and his sneakier tendencies, Bond snaked out a wing as inconspicuously as possible, predictably brushing jetty feathers as 006 moved closer. Bond didn’t look back at the other man, because he was well aware that Alec was likely grinning like a cat honing in on a laser beam. Cooler-headed at the moment, Bond decided that this had to end before any of them really crossed the line. “We believe you, Q. We do,” he went on with as much sincerity as strained urgency, thinking of how M would turn him inside out if she heard that he and his fellows had attacked their Quartermaster. Turning his attention back to 008 and 006, he said in a gruffer voice less likely to encourage argument, “Come on.”

Using some of the brute force he was known for, Bond got 008 turned around, managing to catch
Alec behind his wing before the other man could bypass him. Perhaps they didn’t fear M and her wrath, but he’d been at the receiving end of her temper often enough to realize that old wings didn’t necessarily correlate with lax punishments. M’s feathers may have long-since turned silver-white with age, but only a fool would think she didn’t have enough lectures behind her tongue to stripe paint off a building.

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“You told them? Q, we discussed this – the double-ohs-”

Q tuned out the sound of M’s piqued voice, knowing full well how foolish that was when the woman was as sharp as a tack if not sharper. Still, his mind was too quick not to know what she was already going to say. ‘The double-ohs don’t need to know about your conditions, your position in the ranks is precarious enough as it is, their knowing that you lost your wings in an unfortunate run-in with a raging psychopath will only worsen their attitude towards you...etcetera.’ Q tried and knew that he failed to keep the mutinous look of boredom off his face, a look that was really due more to childishness that anything else. He’d finally made a decision on his own, and he was being ridiculed, and he didn’t like it. That it had probably been a very, very foolish decision even in his own mind had nothing to do with it.

“Are you listening to me, Q?” M’s tone and the lifting of one brow said she already knew he wasn’t. Her wings hadn’t budged an inch, but Q could feel the hum of energy coming off her to indicate just how close she was to becoming actively dangerous. He didn’t think she’d hurt him, however, so he remained slouched back in his chair, cheek leaned against one loose fist. As an Angel (albeit a sadly wingless one), Q could sense the inherent, supernatural energy in other Angels, although he himself didn’t express energy of his own very much. He could, but like a muscle fallen into disuse, it atrophied. He regretted that often, but since his job description rarely called for that supernatural energy, there was little he could do.

M blinked, the equivalent of a guillotine snapping down before you knew it. Fortunately, she just continued logically if tartly, “I’m just going to assume that you agree with me. Does this have to do with the double-ohs behavior up until now?”

“The double-ohs behavior up until now has been atrocious, but only 006, 7, and 8 warranted drastic action to curb their behavior,” Q defended himself immediately and without regret. He was not going to admit that they’d been acting so obnoxious that he’d lost his temper. Quartermasters, even remarkably young ones, did not lose their temper. “It was, in my estimation, the least problematic course to simply inform them of my Angel status rather than waiting for things to escalate.”

Immune to the hot spike of temper in Q’s keen, bespectacled eyes but not oblivious to it, M sighed deeply, barely resisting the urge to roll her eyes and settling instead for a tight-lipped look of disapproval. However, she backed off a bit and visibly gave in to Q’s opinion on the matter. “I was aware that you were having trouble procuring the respect of the double-ohs, and perhaps I should have considered that 006, 7, and 8 would naturally be more belligerent than others. However, I would have greatly appreciated it if you had just brought this matter to me, Q.”

Somehow, this still felt like a lecture of a mother-hen to a chick, but Q kept a firm grip on his temper and schooled his expression into something resembling patient neutrality. He’d had a lot of practice at it, fortunately – much more of late with James Bond, Alec Trevelyan, and Brant Sims breathing down his neck. “It made no sense for me to come crying to you, pardon the colloquialism,” he
maintained steadily, “You gave me a job that includes monitoring and controlling key aspects of double-oh missions, and for that, it needs to be clear that I can not only control them but handle myself in an argument with them.” Remembering 008 towering over him, close enough to touch – close enough to have snapped Q’s neck – and the hums of predatory energy radiating from Bond and 006 as well made Q want to shiver, but he suppressed the instinct. These weren’t the biggest men he’d ever squared off against, but they sure were the most dangerous, and since he’d had his wings torn off, Q’s own strength was a far cry from theirs.

Fortunately, he still had enough supernatural skills to bluff with.

“If I had just sent them scurrying to you, the problem would not have been solved,” Q maintained.

“Well, all right then,” M sighed tightly, the lines bracketing her mouth all the sharper as her disquiet showed through. Her wings twitched, a faint shiver, and Q had to hold back a faint start at this breach in her iron-strong armor of detachment. Honestly, she may as well have pulled a shotgun out from under the table and tapped her finger on the trigger, although Q was still on the fence as to whom she’d been aiming the barrel at. M, in his short experience with her, was not a woman who was often shaken. Maybe he’d been risking his neck a little more than he’d realized by getting into an argument with three 00-agents.

Fortunately, that flicker of the real M beneath the statue of stone was quickly tucked away again, the silver wings stilling. “So long as you understand the risk you took, and make an effort not to do it again.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Q dipped his chin in a formal, respectful nod.

M wasn’t done, however, and turned her head in that way that expressed supreme, upcoming exasperation as she changed topics slightly, “As for Bond, Trevelyan, and Sims, I’ll have to have a talk with them, and make it clear that they are not to spread this information around. There’s a reason we didn’t let it be known that you are an Angel, just without wings: the double-ohs will see it as an invitation to cut their teeth on you. Goodness knows it’ll be hard enough keeping 008 and 006 off you.”

“And Bond?” Q couldn’t help but ask, noticing the discrepancy in the list.

M eyed him with a look that reminded him that she was not a woman that people trifled with lightly. “Bond is smart enough to know that I’ve declared him dead once, and I can do it again.” Then she betrayed a flicker of nervousness, and as a second though she added, “I’ll have a talk with him, too.”

From there, the meeting was basically over. Showing her efficient and diplomatic side all in one, M turned to topics more solidly concerned with Q’s job: the projects in Q-branch, the improvements on missions now that Q was using technology to keep an eye on them and direct their actions more closely. It served to smooth over the ruffled feathers that Q didn’t have, and M seemed pleased with how this new form of management was benefiting MI6.

When Q finally stood up to leave, however, M caught him at the door with a very human tone to her voice: “I hired you for a reason, Q.” She paused, letting her words sink in. There was no uncertainty in them, but more understanding than people usually gave her credit for behind her cold mask of a face. “Regardless of the opinion of the double-ohs – and I make it a habit never to listen too closely to the opinions of double-ohs; goodness knows they have too many of them – you were hired because the world is changing, and you were needed.”

Half turned towards the door, still, Q felt the urge to say, ‘I know that,’ offended that she could think otherwise. He knew that he was needed here. Why did everyone think he didn’t? It was just an
intense bother, making him wish that he had some of the usual Angel bulk to make people stop treating him like he was going to break or something.

The declaration hovered on the tip of his tongue, but never came out. Double-ohs he’d look down his nose at and backtalk, but he outranked them. M was his boss.

Plus, she was scary.

So instead, he just turned and left without saying something that could get on her nerves.

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“An Angel…without wings? That’s just-” 008’s incredulous musings were cut off by Alec, who reveled in interrupting people, it seemed.

“Ludicrously strange? Dazzlingly unbelievably?”

“Cut it out, Alec. You’d think we’d fed you a thesaurus,” 008 retorted.

Alec just grinned his roguish – or wolfish, depending on your tolerance for teeth – smile, fiercely unrepentant. Things were a little slow at MI6, and no missions were presently demanding their presence. This was generally a dangerous thing, because an unoccupied Angel was generally a bored Angel, and few people tolerated boredom as poorly as double-ohs.

006, 7, and 8 were in the break-room, although they’d at least gone up a few floor to the break-room used mostly by agents. If they’d decided to occupy the break-room at Q-branch, they likely would have scared off all of its usual denizens. As it was, the agents (some double-ohs, some not) came, got their coffee, and left as soon as possible.

Alec could talk a person to death (literally), but at the moment, 008 was the one leading the conversation on their strange new boss in Q-branch, and his speckled-brown wings twitching constantly as if he couldn’t settled them properly. “Dodgy little prat,” he grumbled, straddling a chair and crossing burly arms over the back of it. His eyes flicked to Alec and Bond – both lounging somehow gracefully on the break-rooms much-abused excuse for a couch – as he went on, “I haven’t even felt any energy signature from him.”

Bond entered the conversation for the first time, expression never flickering from polite disinterest, “Have you been looking for it?” He hadn’t, but had decided that he would from now on, since such an oversight was not only rare for 007 but downright unforgivable. Then again, he wondered how much of that supernatural energy was tied to an Angel’s wings. And could Q actually function as an Angel and call himself by that title without the inherent, deadly energy that other Angel’s held at their core?

Brant looked up and Alec raised an eyebrow, the former looking both interested and irritated, the latter looking impressed that Bond could speak. It was the usual interaction. Brant talked a bit too much, Bond was very good at living without talking much at all, and Alec knew perfectly well that he was dangerous enough to laugh at the whole world and get away with it.

“Yes, you have to admit it’s odd, though,” Alec pressed in turn, taking advantage of the fact that their blue-eyed comrade had finally opened his mouth to enter the conversation. He gestured with a hand and an ink-black wing both, as if to encompass the situation philosophically. “Without any wings, I
imagine that he’s about as easy to break as a wishbone,” he concluded with another predatory smile usually led to trouble. Since he wasn’t entirely suicidal, however, he lost the smile a little bit to add, “Although I imagine that M would frown upon that idea.”

Silence descended. Word had already gone around that M wanted to talk to them, but hadn’t called them in yet. The wait was probably intentional torture.

008 was only too happy to oblige Alec’s interest in causing trouble, though, since the three of them had made it a habit to bother the new Quartermaster since the first moment they’d realized that he would be running their field operations from his computer. 00-agents rarely took well to instructions, and finding out that a bespectacled stripling a fraction of their size was their new boss had quite efficiently turned on their belligerent side. “I hear that the new Quartermaster has taken to using the rec-room to train the little Q-branch minions,” 008 said with a conspiratorial smile.

Never slow to catch on to a truly troublesome idea, 006’s smile returned, his keen eyes glinting. “And we weren’t invited?” With a flick of his wings that just barely missed Bond next to him on the couch, Alec made his intentions known by standing up and rubbing his hands together in visible readiness. “I imagine that these training sessions are usually held right around now?” he asked, again reading 008’s expression.

“Yep,” Brant grinned. “What say you to a little friendly intervention? It only makes sense that we investigate just how far Q’s skills actually go.”

Bond was a little bit slower to get onboard with the idea. He had a very well-known record for many things, including dying, seducing women, and destroying flagrant amounts of equipment and property, but less known was the regularity with which he got on M’s nerves. It wasn’t a pleasant thing to be known for, and he winced at the thought of M catching wind of this. After their last run-in with Q, in which the man had revealed himself to be more than capable of standing up to 00-agents, Bond knew that he, Alec, and Brant were on M’s radar. Usually, they were allowed to cause trouble within reason, but Bond didn’t relish the idea of M calling him into her office for crossing the line with their new Quartermaster.

But Alec was looking at him with that eager face, knowing that Bond had a weakness for a good spot of adventure, and the energy he could feel humming off the other two was contagious. Sighing as he made his decision, Bond stood up, too, lightly shaking out his wings from where they’d been pressed against the couch. With any luck, they’d manage to cause just enough trouble to show Q who was really in charge without actually going so far as to attract M’s infamous wrath.

Seeing the moment that Bond gave in to their plan, Alec’s grin widened, and he clapped the other blond agent on the shoulder. “All right!” he crowed, looking entirely too eager, “I haven’t stretched my legs in days. This should be fun.”

Brant amended Alec’s statement as they began walking towards the underground rec-room, “And educational. Who’s ever heard of a Quartermaster teaching self-defense?” He sounded sincerely mystified by the idea, and perhaps a little incredulous – based on historical data, he had every right to be. Then again, no historical data included an Angel as a Quartermaster.

So many unprecedented events. Bond was wondering if he could keep up, even though he could already feel himself hanging back: on a job, he reacted fast and on the fly and was called reckless beyond all reason, but when he could, he preferred to hang back and take in a situation fully. That was how he’d survived this long, irresponsible decisions aside. Right now…

Well, right now, he was reserving judgment, because even if it was a pain to have a skinny little
string-bean in his ear telling him what to do, there was a chance that even a wingless Angel could be
dangerous. And if something was dangerous, Bond would take it seriously.

Walking with the smooth gait that only the most dangerous of predators had, the three double-ohs
walked down the hall with every intention of making nuisances of themselves.

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Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Bond, Alec, and 008 decide to crash Q's party and show him how to really spar.

Chapter Notes

A slightly longer chapter! I wasn't going to post until tomorrow, but it was too tempting XD So here it is - ACTION SCENE!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Q sighed when he heard the door open, because a few seconds before, he’d felt the familiar incoming energy of other Angels, and even if he wasn’t a genius, he could have taken a wild guess on which ones. Hearing them come in instead of just walking past just proved it.

After taking over Q-branch, Q had made an executive decision and decided that even lowly techies needed to at least be able to fight off a determined mugger. As an Angel and their Quartermaster, he was uniquely qualified to give them instructions in this matter, where everyone else in MI6 had either chosen to ignore the laughable fighting skills of the techies, or just given them up for dead in a conflict.

“You’re holding lessons and didn’t think to invite us?” Alec’s belligerent, cheery tone rolled over the room, naturally making the poor minions quail even if the obvious entrance of wings didn’t. For most everyone in MI6, wings meant double-ohs, and double-ohs meant a level of dangerousness that was best avoided if you wanted to live a long happy life. Holding back a sigh by an effort of will, Q finally gave in and turned around, knowing what to expect: three bigheaded, easily riled, bored double-ohs intent on throwing their weight around to prove that Q couldn’t control them. Typical. Q felt tension coil in his belly but refused to show it, knowing that acting anxious would only trigger a predatory response in the Angels. “Considering your mixture of flammable tempers and the fact that you scare the wits out of my techs, I came to the conclusion that your presence would be, if anything, counterproductive,” Q deadpanned unhesitantly. He was aware of said techs quietly slipping out of the room via the second door, and held his position like a sentinel, guarding their quick and quiet retreat. The thing that made a 00-agent so good at his or her job was an innate deadliness that was something close to a prey-drive, and although this was helpful in hunting down suspects, it made them menaces in most other situations. Q released a tight, barely noticeable breath through his nose, resigning himself to dealing with 006, 7, and 8 as he slowly became the only other person in the room for them to latch their attention onto.

“But you said you were an Angel,” 008 pointed out, tilting his head of short-cropped brown hair. In all of their past encounters (none of which had been violent, but all of which had been unbelievably vexing, from Alec’s verbal disrespect to Bond’s continual destruction of equipment), Q had
categorized 008 as being the most volatile, but 006 had a level of cunning usually found only in sharks, so he bore watching, too. Bond was a no-brainer, with his track-record as the most dangerous 00-agent in MI6, possibly in MI6 history. He was standing back and to 008’s right at the moment, night-and-smoke wings folded behind him in a genteel manner that totally hid how prepared they were for explosive motion, just as his calm expression did a lot to hide perpetual readiness and watchfulness. Joy, this was going to be fun…

008 was still talking, even if Q’s brain was far ahead of the conversation and working on at least a dozen different things – a foolish state of distraction, really, since he was now dealing with recalcitrant agents instead of wires, circuitry, and his beloved minions. “If you’re an Angel, why don’t you scare them, too?” 008 shot back in a teasing tone, arms folded over his broad chest.

Barely deigning to raise an eyebrow, Q deigned to reply in his usual, mild voice, likewise pasting on the faint smile he usually wore when faced with particularly idiotic people. “Maybe it’s because I do not radiate the same aura of basic ass-holery that has become the norm for most other Angels.”

008 very nearly went for him, and Q let his limbs become relaxed and loose even as he shifted his weight, more than ready to take him – bloody hell but Q was ready to take him on. By this point, as embarrassed as Q was to admit it, he was spoiling for a fight, because he’d had just about enough disrespect from the people under him. In fact, he felt a vicious little flash of disappointment as Bond stepped in 008’s way and Alec laughingly grabbed a fistful of brown-banded feathers to hold their comrade back. “Easy, Sims,” 006, even though he was known for being at his most dangerous when in a good mood, honestly. Right now, his black wings were snapping out, great shards of night that even a Mundane would be jealous of, they were so gorgeous. At that moment, though, the last Mundane slipped out of the room and to the safety of the hallway beyond.

“I want to go a round with him,” 008 growled, clearly deciding to forget that such base violence should be beneath him. After all, Q was about the size of a scarecrow, and it would probably just be considered sad if anyone had seen a double-oh attack him seriously. Fortunately, 008 had enough sense as an agent to be able to word his desire for conflict in a socially acceptable way: “If he’s supposed to be in charge of us, he should be tougher than us, eh? And if he’s giving lessons, and he’s an Angel, it would only be polite to give him a few pointers.”

Before anyone else could add to that – or, god forbid, shoot the idea down – Q replied loudly enough to get their attention from across the room, “By all means, give me a few pointers.”

A smirk still curling up one side of his mouth like a demon’s grin, Alec let go of Brant’s feathers with a slightly-unnecessary jerk, making the other agent growl again. Alec put on an innocent face that wouldn’t have fooled a toddler. Bond, for his part, looked back over his shoulder at Q calculatingly. Fuck, but that man’s blue eyes were sharp, feeling as calculating and keen as the sight on a gun as they tried to glean extra information from Q’s expression. Q pressed the topic, knowing logically that the more he talked, the less they did, and therefore the more control over the situation he had. And besides: by this point, he just wanted to pound them a bit. And even though they likely didn’t believe it, Q could. When Q had lost his wings, he’d been devastated, but that had just taught him that he needed to learn how to deal with it. Subsequently, he’d learned how he couldn’t fight, and how he could. That meant he was now the smartest brain around as well as just about as deadly as he could be for a cripple.

Crossing his arms, Q narrowed his eyes at 008 and continued to lay out the challenge in a purposefully mild tone, “I’m perfectly all right with a friendly spar with you. Agreeing, of course, that we just fight one-on-one. I can hold my own against a fellow Angel, but I have no illusions about what would happen if three trained ones decided to gang up on me.” By the fine lace of acid he put on the last amendment, Q made it clear just how embarrassing that situation would be –
beating Q one-on-one would probably be a victory, but beating him up in a three-on-one situation would be tantamount to thrashing a child. Not something you could brag about. He saw the glints of embarrassment flicker through the double-ohs eyes, and that sign of discomfort relaxed a bit of the tension in Q’s belly. If they all attacked him, he was as good as dead – he knew that without an ounce of doubt. In fact, even in a ‘friendly’ sparring match against one, he could feel his heart rate picking up and anxiety flooding in. Still, he was determined to prove his point, and if his show of temper the day before hadn’t done the trick, then maybe a bit of unorthodox violence would prove to these egotistical bastards that Q really was in charge. Besides, he’d been a full-blown Angel at one point, and that kind of training you didn’t just up and forget.

“A sparring match sounds grand,” was Alec’s opinion, although he looked to Bond. A lot of times, Alec could be impulsive, but he was smart – smart enough to recognize the level head in Bond’s taciturn nature. For his part, Bond had been watching Q and trying to sense his energy, now that he knew it was there. Sure enough, although soft and quiet, there was the familiar hum of Angel energy coiling at the wingless Quartermaster’s core, and Bond felt a flicker of curiosity at just how many Angel skills a man could possess when he’d been dispossessed of his wings.

007 stepped aside, leonine grace in his step, basically giving permission for Brant to do what he wanted. “We’ll watch,” he commented with a faint smile that didn’t reach his eyes, his attention solely focused on the impending actions around him, “I imagine that we can all learn something from this, eh?”

Q had always disliked quiet people. He didn’t read social situations particularly well to begin with, preferring computers and numbers, but quiet people were the worst because they gave so few verbal cues. He narrowed his eyes at Bond and tried to figure out what he was up to, if anything. So far, Bond had been the most annoying of the three, with his flippant, lopsided smiles and casual disregard for ridicule every time he dropped off a destroyed piece of equipment and Q berated him for it.

Still, Q was in the rec-room with all three of them now, and he couldn’t really see any way out of this without throwing a few punches. At least he’d held the line until the poor techies could flee. He took in a deep breath without obviously showing it, and nodded his head formally to show that he accepted the challenge. He focused his attention solely on 008, because he didn’t have much choice if he wanted to beat an Angel not only bigger and stronger than him but in possession of wings. It had been a while since Q had fought another Angel. “Whenever you are ready,” he said with calm politeness.

008 grinned and almost immediately settled into that deceptively loose stance that all 00-agents had when they stepped into a fight. It was breathtaking if you could see the difference, the way that all of the muscles loosened and at the same time seemed to fill with liquid energy. What was more breathtaking, and for Q distinctly heart-wrenching, was the way the double-oh’s wings half-extended and relaxed, a fighting pose for an Angel. For any Angel but Q. “You’d better remove those glasses. I don’t want to accidentally break them,” 008 joked, also adding, “Or do you have to keep them on? To see who you’re fighting, I mean.”

Q was already taking them off and placing them on a small table at the side of the room. “I can sense you by energy. It won’t be a problem,” he informed 008 carelessly, letting the barb sink in. It wouldn’t do to admit that he was actually a pile of nerves, and that it took an effort of will that was colossal to put down his glasses and turn back around, facing an Angel that he could no longer see except for a vague blob of color and a more detailed mass of supernatural energy. Technically, he could fight this way, but Brant Sims was also a 00-agent, and therefore had a lot more practical application of his training than Q did.

Well, Q was trained, too, and because of his disability, he’d pushed himself a lot harder than most
people to learn the tricks that kept you alive. So he hid his fear and nerves, found that core of steel inside of himself, and repeated steadily, “Whenever you are ready.”

“Maybe this will knock some sense into him,” Bond said as an aside to Alec as 008 dove into motion, speed and control all in one. In the next few seconds, Bond expected their new Quartermaster to finally understand that he was in over his head, dealing with double-ohs.

And then, to everyone’s shock, the smaller man moved, too, ducking his head down and somehow swaying out of the way of 008’s hands as if Brant were just a charging lummox. Shoulder to 008’s middle, Q flipped him over his back. Wings in a tangle and a bark of surprise turning into a grunt as he lost his air, 008 unceremoniously impacted the ground a few meters behind the miniscule Quartermaster.

Now Bond raised an eyebrow, straightening and paying strict attention. Q had moved a lot faster than he should have been able to. In fact, he’d moved with an Angel’s speed. Looking at how Q straightened, not even breathing quickly and his slight, wiry frame barely tense, it was clear that he would have to have possessed an Angel’s strength as well.

Alec also looked as though he were taking this a little bit more seriously – but only a little. Part of him was clearly more interested in laughing at 008, who actually looked a little hurt. “How are you doing there, Brant?” Alec crowed, and then his voice grew low and dangerous and his wings slung out, that half-spread posture that heralded trouble. “Let’s give this a try.” And with no more ceremony than that, the black-winged agent waded into the center of the room, approaching Q with the grace and hungry intent of a leopard.

He had the decency to announce himself – “Brant’s out of practice. I’m much more of a handful.” – but other than that, Alec had no respect for formality, honor, or rules. It made him a monster in the field, and it was no different now, except that perhaps he was a little more playful than deadly at the moment. Q was just so small that it was hard to take this all seriously, and Alec came in to swipe at him, chuckling when (almost a fraction of a second too late) the nearsighted, wingless Angel ducked out of the way of the blow. By Alec’s standards, it was a lazy blow, but it still would have hurt if it had connected. Still watching the fight and shaking his head a little at his friend’s antics, Bond strolled over to where Brand was picking himself up and urged him out of the way. It took a lot of work to toss a double-oh, and Brant looked thoroughly shaken, having hit the mat-covered floor hard enough to lose his breath. “That bloody little-!” Brant panted gruffly to hide his shock, but Bond was already turning back to watch how Alec handled the situation.

This was harder, but then Q had expected it to be. He’d gotten lucky that 008 had so spectacularly underestimated him. Usually, 00-agents were much more wary, and Alec Trevelyan hadn’t disappointed him in that respect.

There were still openings, however. Q focused on the man’s energy, his eyes a little bit less than useful as they catalogued simple colors and motion. Alec wore black sweaters a lot (and was doing so now), so his wings blended in, and it was only by sensing the supernatural energy inside of him and paying attention to its nuances that Q could get a good picture of how his opponent was fighting and moving. Having watched Alec on missions a few times, Q also knew what to expected for the most part: quick, efficient, mercilessly brutal, something a little bit less of the efficient and more of the brutal. Right now, though, Q was taking advantage of the fact that Alec obviously didn’t suspect that a Quartermaster could fight an Angel, even after seeing Brant’s fall.

‘Well, I’m an Angel, too. Get that in your head, or choke on it.’ Feeling some of his own energy wind up like an electric cord in his gut, Q surged into motion, dodging a flashing fist and twisting around to the side, lashing out with a kick that nearly took out Alec’s knee. Q had lifted Brant with
the help of Angel-energy, and he could keep up with Alec’s inhuman speed by the same token.

Since he had a good eye for fights, Bond could see that Alec was holding his own – but he could also see that Q was a lot more formidable than anyone had given a hint to, by an order of magnitude. All of that wiry frame was coiling with energy, the feel of it burning into Bond’s alert senses like a hot coal held too near tender skin. With his glasses off, it was easier to distinguish the Quartermaster’s expression, and right now his face was set in cold, hard, calm determination like a mask. Alec had come into this fight thinking he was a cat going to play with a mouse, but Q was dead-serious, and he was putting his all into this fight.

And, to everyone’s blatant surprise, it was working.

Under other circumstances, it would have been hilarious to see the look of disgruntled surprise on Alec’s face, because it was so rare. Now, though, it was nearly disturbing, as a determined, stormy-faced little Quartermaster began backing him right into a metaphorical corner. Belatedly realizing that he wasn’t fighting an amateur, Alec snapped his dark wings out to full extension - an intimidation tactic.

It didn’t work. Q frowned tightly as he registered the appearance of wings, his poor eyesight more than enough to notice the sudden span of oiled black, and then snapped out a few quick kicks that had Alec off-balance. He had to move quickly, he knew, or he’d lose what little advantage he had, so he quickly came in with a jump that aimed him at one of those wings. An Angel’s wings were invaluable in a fight, but Q knew that they were also vulnerable, and he’d learned over the years how to target them when you yourself had none.

The ways that Q could move and the speed with which he could be impressive, and he bobbed, ducked, and weaved like an adder. As soon as Alec would try to turn and face him, he’d be making use of his smaller size and either getting in close or keeping his distance, either keeping inside of Alec’s range or far outside of it. Clearly he was reading the man’s energy like a book, using it to know where the double-oh was focusing his strength before he released a punch. And whenever Alec tried to use flight to gain some altitude, Q unapologetically attacked his wings, startling the Angel enough that he usually ended up back on the ground again after a flap or two.

Bond watched it all, slowly growing fascinated and impressed. The Quartermaster was a hurricane: clearly, even without wings, he had all of an Angel’s other supernatural abilities at his beck and call, because he matched Alec’s strength and speed despite not having the physical bulk to warrant it. And as for his complete lack of feathered appendages, Q appeared to be making up for it beautifully. He was using a fighting style that Bond could honestly say he’d never seen before: where Alec used his wings to add reach and gain altitude, Q actually sprung off the ground or contorted in moves that reflected a heavy background in parkour, feet landing solidly on the ground without even the faintest loss of balance. Paying more attention to the lean Quartermaster’s energy, visualizing it in his head like a Q-shaped cloud of color, Bond ultimately determined that Q was funneling most of his supernatural power into speed, sacrificing strength in order to run circles around the stronger 006.

And it was working surprisingly well. Alec was finding out quite quickly that fighting their new Quartermaster was very much like fighting another Angel, despite what they’d expected.

Almost contemptuously, it seemed, Q drove Alec back four times. Very few blows actually landed, but the few that connected were usually from Q, and generally they hit the broad surface area provided by Alec’s jetty wings. Angels, Bond had to admit, sometimes grew too used to the idea that their wings were tools for intimidation: right now, Q was stripping Alec of his notion by showing no signs of intimidation whatsoever as he moved like a mongoose to Alec’s snake, rolling under a brood wing to come up behind it with a swiping punch.
Alec, being Alec, always looked vaguely… well, vaguely murderous… whenever he realized just how far he’d allowed himself to retreat, and then his eyes would glint dangerously and he’d stride right back in again. Q, face taut and eyes like chips of green-tinted glass, watched him come with a professional air that only made it more obvious that he was winning.

The three double-ohs had come in here with plans of proving their dominance to a half-pint, upstart Quartermaster, but it looked more like they were being taught a lesson instead.

Then, with a sudden flurry of motion, Q dodged Alec’s latest punch and twisted right in past his guard, snapping out a fist that caught the bigger man squarely across the mouth before Alec could react to the inhuman speed.

While 008 watched slack-jawed and Bond cocked an eyebrow, Alec stumbled back in surprise, hand rising to his lip. When it came away bloody, he looked down at his fingers in interest. Q had backed off, Alec’s sudden retreat serving as a truce of sorts for the moment, although the Quartermaster was breathing swiftly through his nose and still had his hands in fists, his weight on the pads of his bare feet.

Testing his lip gingerly with the tip of his tongue, Alec suddenly gave a rueful, wincing smile and a barked chuckle. “Well now. That’s a surprise, isn’t it?” Everyone expected Alec to charge right back into the fight with real murder on his mind now, but the man lived to keep everyone off-balance. Instead he unexpectedly raised his head to look at Bond, giving everyone a clear look at his split lip, “Why don’t you give it a go, Jamesy? No use in Sims and me having all the fun.”

So this was how it was going to go. Bond flicked his eyes between Alec and Q, the former looking a little temperamental and peeved and the latter looking as tense and ready as a small dog in a big fight. He was still radiating tightly controlled, vibrating energy, even if that energy flickered from time to time like a poorly fed, sputtering fire. Still… the challenge still present in those large hazel eyes was just too much to ignore…

Bond began walking forward, straight towards Q – no subterfuge. He came forward slowly, too, taking the time to toss a question Alec’s way calmly, “So you just don’t feel like playing anymore? Not very sporting of you.”

“I’m always a poor sport, you know that,” Alec replied with ease, still licking at his lip as if unable to completely accept the idea that he was bleeding, or at least was disturbingly fascinated by the condition. “Plus, I figure that if our Quartermaster is strutting his stuff, he may as well show it off against a bloke like you. Now give it a go, James. Do play nice, will you?”

“I always play nice,” grumped 007, used to this side of Alec’s nature. The man was as changeable as a cat, and what annoyed most people sometimes had the effect of making him strangely amicable.

Q was less amused, but he was also the one fighting three 00-agents. “Well, I’m not playing, so let’s get down to this, shall we? I’ve got coding I have to get done by noon.”

“I’ll see if I can get you out of Medical by then,” Bond said with a cheery smile that was less toothy than Alec’s trademark grin but somehow no less dangerous.

The Quartermaster’s eyes flashed, his frown deepening, and he replied tartly, “Was that a threat, 007?”

It probably was, but when dealing with 00-agents of the Angel persuasion, threats were an unavoidable part of the language. Still, Bond had made up his mind that he only wanted to beat Q, not beat him up, so he relaxed the smile and shrugged as disarmingly as he could. “No harm meant.
Now—” He swept his hand out, indicating the space between them and the general spread of mats around them lightly. “Do you want to begin?”

Obviously unable to see him clearly (although his eyes weren’t so much squinting as they were narrowed in seriousness and maybe annoyance), the wiry little Angel nonetheless kept his head turned in Bond’s direction but began to circle hesitantly. “I think it should be obvious that I’m ready, since you’re only just now entering while I’ve been on the mats with your cohorts for the past thirty minutes.”

“Getting tired?” Bond joked gently, used to running his mouth idly while his senses all focused on taking apart the situation.

By now they were quite close, and Bond’s words seemed to be enough to set off the hair-trigger of Q’s nerves. Going from near-stillness into lightning fast motion in a millisecond, Q’s bony fist shot out. Bond swayed out of the way without lifting his arms and barely twisting his wings, and Q backed off to continue circling, the new tilt to his frown and the points of color delicately blooming on his cheeks showing his embarrassment into being goading into moving first. Bond just kept up his polite smile, letting it settle, curled, at one corner of his mouth. He wished that Q could see it, to let the Quartermaster know that Bond considered that first punch—a miss, too—a small victory.

However, when Bond threw the next punch, it was treated in kind: quite miraculously, the undersized Quartermaster simply wasn’t there. Bond narrowed his eyes, beginning to feel the fine, bristling edges of frustration settling in.

Q couldn’t see anything more than a blur for Bond’s face, but he must have made an educated guess as to 007’s darkening expression. “The great 007,” he said with perfect, even gentlemanly, aplomb, even though his words were as sarcastic as they came, “can’t touch one lowly Quartermaster. Pity.”

“If I were less levelheaded, I’d give you a bloody lip to match Alec’s,” Bond smoothly cut back, ignoring the chortle that Alec gave as a response in the background.

Still supremely unruffled, and moving like a mink just outside of Bond’s reach, Q just raised his brows a fraction and mused, “I’d like to validate that with a frightened response, but I just find it too hard to believe.”

Bond moved then, fast and mean, combining control with a level of swiftness that made him the legend he was.

008 had barged in, rather embarrassingly; Alec had relied on punches, probably just wishing he had a gun; Bond, though, knew that size alone could be an advantage, and saw no reason to limit himself to just fists. Remembering Q’s first move, he came in with his shoulder, center of gravity low, but then feinted with a fist. His right fist was dominant, but Q was already slithering to the left, so Bond switched to a left jab without needing to think. When Q contorted impossibly backwards, 007 snapped out his wing with rush of shadowy feathers.

Instead of being knocked on his back by the flurry of hits, Q kept his calm and dropped down onto his haunches, letting the powerful wing unfurl over his head. An almost absentminded—yet surgically precise—upward punch of Q’s right fist sent splinters of pain shooting right up to Bond’s back as knuckles solidly connected with his wing from underneath.

Growling, Bond snapped his wing back as quickly as possible, feeling the sting of bruised muscles. Q had put a full Angel’s strength behind the blow, a little bit less than what would have been needed to break or dislocate something.
"I can go easier on you," Q commented, his tone still detachedly calm and deceptively pleasant.

By now, Alec was unhelpfully howling with laughter, although it was hard to say whether Brant Sims was any better, growling out hints on how best to take Q apart into small pieces. Bond’s temper was already flashing close to the surface in a way that usual ended with things spontaneously exploding when he was on missions. 007 pushed the pain back with a grunt, flicking his wing out and back in like a street-fighter shaking out aches in abused knuckles. “Oh, I think it’s a little late for playing nice,” he took the time to reply to Q’s taunt, and then he was attacking again.

It was the most frustrating thing Bond could imagine: instead of folding up like the piece of straw he was, Q kept sliding out of the way of his strikes or would suddenly come up with explosions of strength that reminded Bond – painfully – that despite being wingless, Q was still very much an Angel. Frustration was clawing at the inside of Bond’s stomach like the points of fiery claws as he collected at least three more bruises, all without doing the same back. He’d managed a few glancing blows to Q’s person, but they were all negligible, and Bond was more than smart enough to realize that that Q had accepted those blows as tactical necessities in order to better line himself up for better attacks of his own.

Bond was not used to losing, but he was definitely realizing that he and Alec and Brant had made a mistake in thinking that their new boss was an oblivious pansy. Q didn’t fight like any fighter he’d met: he used moves that no Mundane would use, being notably faster and stronger in turn, yet he also had modified Angel techniques to a point that they were useful only to Q himself, and to another Angel…

Suddenly, it all clicked in Bond’s head.

He was an idiot.

He smiled just a little bit, and perhaps his energy shifted in turn, because beneath the tousled fall of that bird’s-nest hair, Q’s eyes narrowed.

Bond backed off only for a moment, easily pushing aside the various aches and pains from the blows his Quartermaster had managed to get in. The brief respite served to sort of reset his mind a little, as he firmly accepted a fact that he should have accepted a long time ago: their scarecrow Quartermaster was an Angel. It was bloody past time that one of the double-ohs started fighting like they realized that.

Suddenly it was like a leash had been taken off 007. He swept in confidently, fluidly, and with moves that suddenly made even 008 and 006 widen their eyes a bit in impressed surprise. The change was the difference between an impressive striped cat and a tiger, and had anyone looked in on them at that moment, there would have been no doubt that 007 was the best agent of MI6.

Q held his own for as long as he could, but the tables had truly been turned as Bond stepped it up a notch without warning. It had seemed that Bond had already been fighting at his best – as had Q – but suddenly a whole new 007 stepped up to the plate, his supernatural energy thrumming and vibrating with steady control and power. He didn’t go overboard and he showed no signs of intense anger or desperation; in fact, he was calmly silent, and Q wished he had his glasses so that he could see the man’s face. Somehow, he imagined that it would be as calm as a glacier to match those ice-blue eyes. Breath coming fast in something near panic now, Q called up more of his latent supernatural traits and tried to fight back on the level Bond was suddenly working at.

But it was no use. With a second of warning that had Q snapping, “Shit” viciously under his breath, Q felt his tricksome powers sputter and blink out. They’d been threatening to do that for ages, flickering like a bad light-bulb, and a few times while sparring with Alec, they had turned off and
back on. It was just a split-second weakness, but only now with Bond did Q pay for it.

Bond had been watching Q’s energy by now as closely as Q had been watching theirs for weeks, and charged straight in the second he sensed the change. It surprised him just a little, to suddenly sense a void where he’d sensed shaky energy up until now, but part of Bond had been banking on this happening. In sparring with other Angels in the past, he’d learned that it was useful to sense weaknesses on the energy-level – Q’s weakness was just more pronounced, and Bond pounced on it.

With Alec and Brant – who, thanks to much experience at such things, had seen this outcome coming a half-minute prior to the actual event – cheering now from the sidelines, Q felt Bond’s grip fall on him inexorably, and this time he couldn’t shake it. Before another curse could cross his lips, Q felt himself flipped skillfully and tossed across the room.

“Bloody nice throw, James,” Brant called, relaxed now and pleased.

Alec, too, had his wings out and flicking in relaxed shuffles, temper lost in the post-thrill of having watched a good fight. “I thought you were going to end up on your back there for a second,” 006 teased.

As an unexpected result of all of this, the three 00-agents had relaxed. Their attention was no longer predatory, was no longer focused on Q, although the Quartermaster wasn’t exactly in the condition or temperament to notice. He was picking himself up off the floor, in a state of high bad temper as he registered the array of aches from landing hard and unceremoniously on the mats. He wasn’t injured or anything, but to say he was rather irritable at the turn of events would be an understatement.

Therefore, he fumed inwardly and awaited the verbal ridicule to follow, more than ready to fight dirty by this point if it meant bloodying the agents’ noses.

But, to Q’s unending surprise, he instead heard 006, 7, and 8 talking with lightness and levity that they never usually voiced in his presence, and he turned to see their blurry forms clapping James on the shoulder. Besides a few half-hearted comments tossed in Q’s general direction, they ignored him. In fact, as if the belligerence and dominance had been drained right out of them to leave only pleasant calmness in its wake, 006 and 008 teased and congratulated Bond a few times more before actually leaving the room without further complaint.

Flustered by this to say the least – part of Q had been preparing for a whole new string of fights, likely much bloodier ones – Q blinked shortsightedly a few times and then made himself walk over to get his glasses.

Bond was still in the room. Q had expected him to leave with his comrades, but 007 was standing unthreateningly in the center of the room, weight on his heels in a fighter’s subliminal declaration that he wasn’t going to attack anymore. “You really fight very well,” he said, watching as the Quartermaster slipped his glasses back on with economical, professional movements of his elegant hands.

Judging that there was at least an 80% chance that that compliment was actually a precursor to an argument he didn’t need to have, Q ignored 007 and flexed his hands to make sure he hadn’t pulled anything. He needed his hands. Coding didn’t just do itself, after all, and keys would be a pain to type if he’d damaged a finger joint.

Bond knew that Q had heard him, but didn’t take offense. They still didn’t like each other. Nonetheless, Bond was pleasantly riding out the final waves of adrenalin and the burn of well-worked muscles, and therefore pressed the effort at conversation. “I just pretended you were Alec,” Bond replied candidly with one of his infamous, impish, faint smirks. There was no malice in it, but
there was also no doubt that 007 was a bit proud of himself, and felt that his new Quartermaster should know.

Brushing himself off and tugging at his shirt to straighten it, Q commented with stiff wryness without actually turning his attention to Bond, “Well, at least someone is giving me some of the respect I am due.” Maybe he sounded a bit rueful, but it was hard to tell. “I am an Angel, after all, and it was frankly ridiculous that you three let me beat you as much as I did before realizing that you had more training than me.”

Bond’s crooked smile turned somewhat wry: he had to agree, although he didn’t have to admit it. “I trust that you’re all right, then? I did toss you quite a ways,” he couldn’t help but comment.

Abruptly, Q lifted his head, stopping his efforts to straighten out his crinkled button-down shirt. Eyes as flat as a snake’s – the same look that he’d leveled before at the 00-agents, a look that was as impenetrable as it was cold and unreadable – Q stalked right up to Bond and into his personal space without the slightest pause or hesitation. Bond felt his fighting instincts turning on again, the feathers at the base of his wings rising like the hackles on a dog as he found the shorter, slimmer man quite suddenly standing almost right on his toes like an impertinent cat. A breath that sounded just a touch like an uncertain growl rasped up Bond’s throat, and his brows lowered stormily over his pale-blue eyes as he looked back at Q.

“If you're thinking that I am so easy to damage, 007, then obviously we are not communicating very well yet,” Q tipped his head up just a little to look Bond in the eye and inform him succinctly, seeming not to notice how dwarfed he was by the broad-shouldered 00-agent. The difference in size was made even more obvious by the fact that Bond’s wings had spread a bit, casting them both in shadow as he reacted to the hint of a threat Q was presenting. Q either didn’t notice or didn’t mind. He continued to meet 007’s gaze fearlessly. “For future reference, if we continue to have this form of miscommunication, I am far from breakable and more than capable of handling the job M has given me – namely, you. It would be lamentable if you, or any other 00-agent, should forget this in the near future.” Q seemed to deflate a bit, moving a half-step back, as if belatedly realizing that he’d just been ranting. Granted, he’d been ranting in a low tone as controlled and sharp as the honed edge of a knife, but it was quite a string of words nonetheless. Eyes going from flat and cold to merely flat and neutral, he stepped back a bit more so that they now had some space between them again. Verbally, he backed up a bit as well, a shadow flickering over his vision, “Although I do not deny that you would probably best me in a fight if we were ever to spar again. I am not a weak Mundane, but neither—” His eyes twitched up to Bond’s magnificent wings, paused on them briefly, unreadably, and then returned to Bond’s eyes. “-Am I a 00-agent. Good day, 007.”

And with that, Q left, leaving a very silent and very flustered Bond in his wake. James couldn’t tell if he’d just been insulted, told off, or complimented, and doubted that he’d unpuzzle that conversation any time soon.

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Chapter End Notes

Again, I have chapters pre-written, so I should be able to post regularly until those run out. So...expect regular posts until I say otherwise!
Comments are very much loved (I have been blessed with very nice readers, and thank you).
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

M finds out about Q’s impromptu sparring session with the 00-agents, and a bomb gets into MI6.

Or the chapter where Q and 006 get along a little bit under stressful circumstances.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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‘Good going, Q,’ Q berated himself wearily, looking up at the fluorescent ceiling lights as he sat behind his desk with a strained sigh, ‘You’re the king of burnt bridges. Nice idea there, insulting and taunting 007 at the end.’ His whole back was going to be a bit of a bruise thanks to that fall. Bond had made Q’s throwing of 008 looked like child’s play. Then again, Q had been flipping a person roughly three times his size, whereas Bond may as well have been tossing a moderately sized dog. And Bond would probably do it again, after the telling-off Q had spontaneously given him, all in the name of denying all weakness.

Q knew that he had a bit of a touchy personality sometimes, especially when it came to proving that he was tough enough to do his job, but he’d definitely taken it a bit too far today. He needed to work on that.

“Q?” The moment that Q opened up his laptop, M was there, an angry face on the screen. Q could have locked her out, but he figured that would get him fired, or maybe just shot. He resisted the urge to groan and bang his head against the table, instead putting on a mostly-calm, mostly-polite expression that hopefully didn’t hint at how much of an idiot he felt like right now. A bruised idiot. Who’d probably just made permanent enemies of some of the 00-agents.

There was no telling what M read on his face, but she’d obviously heard what was going on from other sources. “A disturbingly large number of your underlings in Q-branch are concerned about your well-being and skittering around like an upset nest of ants. I assume you are still alive, as I am talking to you?” M rapped off in a notably stroppy tone.

Q had forgotten about the minions that had escaped the rec-room, leaving their admittedly undersized boss standing alone against three threatening Angels. They’d probably been in a tizzy of fear for his health ever since, and he hadn’t even considered sending out a memo to them afterwards. Feeling suddenly guilty, Q looked down and fiddled with his fingers, telling himself that at least some of the technies must have seen him walk in – very much alive, obviously – and would have begun to spread the news. “I had an…impromptu sparring session with 006, 7, an 8, but it went without incident. No need for you to get involved.”

“My 00-agents moving around like menaces is reason enough for me to get involved,” M retorted. Her mood clearly was not about to improve any time soon. “Now, tell me, what happened after the last of your subordinates fled the scene after three Angels arrived?”
Clearly, there was no escaping this, and it was either tell it to her face on his computer or coming down to the Bat-cave of her office and relaying his story in person. Taking in a deep, fortifying breath that hopefully wasn’t all that noticeable, Q drummed his fingers on the desk alongside his keyboard and began to report the incident as carefully as possible.

He could have strung 006, 7, and 8 out to dry, but didn’t see the point in it, not when he still had to work with them and had already gotten off to a rocky start with them…and then made that rocky start worse instead of better. M was well aware of Q’s atrocious people skills, and would probably forgive him. However, out of either guilt or a sense of diplomacy, Q played down the events enough so that M would hopefully not crucify their best 00-agents. “…No harm was done, besides what would be considered the usual hazards of sparring.”

M, no one’s fool, caught onto that and pressed, “And what hazards would those be?”

As per usual, Q was two steps ahead in the conversation – it was really just too easy to do. He laid out his prepared answer while making M think that she’d weaseled it out of him: “Alec Trevelyan has a split lip, for which I take full responsibility. I believe that the tally beyond that is merely a few light bruises that will doubtlessly be gone by tomorrow.” ‘Thanks to the fast healing of an Angel, an advantage that I thankfully didn’t lose along with my wings.’

In his calculations, Q had been correct in guessing M’s reaction: she was too amused by the idea of him splitting 006’s lip to take much notice of the other injuries, or press for clarification. “And how did Alec take this?”

“I believe that that point he sicced Bond on me,” Q said automatically, and then wanted to slap himself: he could plan a speech down to the letter, and then suddenly say something totally, disastrously unplanned. Short of time travel, however, he couldn’t undo it, so he just went on and tried to ignore the sudden dangerous spark that had come to M’s eyes. “Again, nothing untoward happened. If you pull the security footage-” Which Q had been planning to erase, but now decided to use in his favor…minus the final few minutes of his ranting in Bond’s face…maybe minus the verbal component entirely, thanks to some carefully created technical difficulties. “-You’ll see that I lost in the end, but no more dramatically than if any of your other employees had been sparring with one another.”

“Q, I shall tell you here and now that I frown upon this sort of thing. You may have more combat training than any Quartermaster in MI6 history, but that does not give you leave to recklessly fight 00-agents.” M’s eyes, so catlike and sharp, showed a level of warning at this moment that was nothing short of terrifying despite the fact that her expression hadn’t actually budged. Q resisted the urge to sink down in his chair. “If this is some sign of growing idiotic tendencies, I will be most displeased, because I do not want to lose my Quartermaster. Now, have I made myself clear?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Q mumbled quietly, eyes firmly fixed down on his desktop.

“Good. Now, with any luck, we can return to business as usual. Tanner will be sending you the mission specs for the upcoming assignment for 004.”

Q nodded enthusiastically, all but stumbling over himself to assure her, “I’ll get right to that and look them over.”

“Good.” M’s silver wings gave a little pleased twitch, the closest she came to showing satisfaction. “That should free me up to finally have a talk with three particular 00-agents who are overdue for a chat.”

As M terminated the connection and Q’s screen returned to the fractal pattern that dominated the
desktop, he slumped back in his chair, feeling that he’d dodged a bullet of some sort. That bullet was
now aimed, it seemed, at a certain three other Angels. Perhaps 006, 7, and 8 were stronger than Q,
but right now, their Quartermaster couldn’t think of anyone he pitied more.
~^~

Q woke up to the beep of his phone alarm, perfectly aware that he’d hit snooze twice on his clock
alarm to reach his point. Stretching his hand out blindly from the safe, cozy warmth of his bed, he
grabbed the trilling phone and brought it close enough to look at it shortsightedly, discovering that
he’d hit the snooze once on the phone, too. Oh well: that was why he had so many alarms, wasn’t it?
For the pure pleasure of hitting ‘snooze’ three times and still knowing that he wouldn’t be late for
work.

He was tempted to hit it again… As Quartermaster, it was his prerogative to set his own schedule,
wasn’t it?

With a groan, Q remembered some of the projects he’d put on hold overnight when sleep-exhaustion
combined with the annoyingly worried looks of nearly every employee in Q-branch had driven him
home. He’d let it be known that this Quartermaster was lord of his own sleep schedule: what he
meant by that was that he could stay awake for a week if he wanted to. What people usually
understood in the end was that, after said week of feverish wakefulness, their Quartermaster was
more than welcome to sleep for two days afterwards. The first time Q had gone home, collapsed, and
then missed a day of work because he was sleeping, he’d come rushing back into MI6 the next day
flushed and rushed and terrified that M was going to tan his hide. He’d been pleasantly surprised
when M had simply given him a look of lingering concern and asked – no yelling involved –
whether he was ready to work. He’d said he was, and then left with his back straight, wondering
with embarrassment just how fatigued he’d looked when he’d finally stumbled out of Q-branch.

Q would have preferred to just sleep at Q-branch near his work, to save him the trouble (and danger)
of trudging back and forth to his flat in various states of exhausted catatonia, but he figured that that
would totally ruin any façade of professionalism he might still have. Besides, the idea of collapsing
on the couch in his office suddenly grew less appealing when he thought of one of the double-o’s
walking in on him. Q wasn’t afraid of the Angel agents, but he bloody well sure didn’t want to be
caught off-guard by one, so that meant sleeping at home.

Some of his work was at home. Right now, though, Q’s groggy mind had calculated that he had at
least three projects back at MI6 that couldn’t wait. Growling now under his breath (a sound strongly
resembling the sound of a disgruntled, somewhat threatening cat), Q rolled out of bed, somehow
making it to his feet without just tumbling to a pile on the floor. Ever since losing his wings,
mornings were not his thing. Or maybe he’d hated mornings before. Didn’t remember.

Q was still technically ‘late’ to work according to generally accepted time-schedules. If he was aware
of this and therefore slightly touseld and flustered by the time he reached his desk, no one
commented. It was a fact of life by now in Q-branch that their new Quartermaster was an eccentric
being, and it was best to just go with it. It was also a fact that Q was a veritable wiry, cardigan-
wearing force of nature after one of his fabled sleeps, so everyone was on the alert and ready to do
his bidding when he came in.

The day was already well underway and Q was leaning over a table strewn with mechanical parts
from three different objects that Bond had brought in three days ago before leaving again on another
mission. Sadly, said three objects were now in about a million pieces, and Q was sure he’d go nuts
and pull out all of his hair before he managed to separate out what went to what piece of equipment.
Q and Bond had been more or less getting along after that impromptu sparring match, but at times like this, Q was very certain that Bond was still testing his limits. Mostly, Q and the double-o’s survived and thrived by avoiding each other when missions did not necessitate Q murmuring orders in their ear.

At that moment, the pager at Q’s hip gave an insistent beep, making him jump. Immediately, however, he felt a slither of adrenalin down his veins and stepped away from the table, growing serious. The instant he reached a computer (not his, he noted distractedly, but the techy had the good sense to give it over to him), Q punched a few keys and found himself looking at M. “I got your page,” he said without preamble, waiting for further information.

Although Q generally wandered about wherever, whenever, he wanted (he worked best that way, and was sharply protective of his independence), the pager on his belt ensured that MI6 could reach him if needed. It was an emergency measure, and always meant that something needed his attention immediately.

“We have a situation down at Medical. Report there immediately,” M said, matching Q if not surpassing him in her desire to get to the point at all times. However, after a half-beat pause and a distinctly uncomfortable twitch of her wings, she added, “You had best bring tools to defuse a bomb, although I think 007 might have already helped you out a bit in that respect.”

As the image of M blinked off the screen again, Q straightened, feeling more than a bit dazed. ‘Tools to defuse a bomb?!’ his brain repeated incredulously, but by then he was already moving to gather his tools.

It wasn’t that he was terrified of the presence of a possible bomb inside MI6 – it was that he was down-right ashamed that a 00-agent had blithely dragged one in here.

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As it turned out, Q’s assessment was rather harsh: Alec actually had had little choice in where or how he dragged a bomb around, as it was rather attached to him.

“Sit still,” one of the personnel in Medical growled, failing spectacularly at getting the large, blond 00-agent to behave like a normal person. Striding in with his usual clipped, economical step, Q just sighed through his teeth and shook his head, knowing that the people at Medical may as well give up trying.

It looked like they were trying to get bits and pieces of shrapnel out of Alec’s torso, and since he was still sitting upright and grumbling, he’d avoided all attempts to put him under. Back to Q with the tense lines of his muscular back visible past his twitching, ink-dark wings, Alec turned his head at the sound of approaching footsteps. For a brief second, he was still in mission-mode, and his cold eyes sharpened.

Then, unexpectedly, they relaxed into their usual, roguish – but still moderately dangerous – smile. “Quartermaster!” he greeted, but then yelped as one of the nurses jabbed at him. Still, Alec Trevelyan wasn’t one to easily be put off his game. The too-toothy smile was slanted Q’s way again a second later. “Nice of you to join us!”

“I hear you’ve got a bomb on your person,” Q commented detachedly, not giving in to the playful
tone because Heaven-knew Alec could start wars with it. Bond was the lady-killer, but Alec was insufferable with his twisted sense of humor. Ignoring how he had to duck one of those powerful black wings as he approached the metal table, Q set his case of supplies down next to Alec and focused on the job. Nonetheless, he also added, because it bore saying, “Didn’t they cover not bringing incendiary devices into MI6 buildings in early training?”

Fortunately, while 006’s eyes flashed menacingly for a moment, he decided not to take offense at the snipe. Brushing Q’s words off, Alec braced himself for another attempt to clean up a gash on his collarbone while still managing to reply jovially, “Bond diffused it. Or at least mostly diffused it. He said that it shouldn’t do anything unless I really messed with it, so I just came back.”

Ah, yes, Bond and Alec had been sharing a mission. Q went over files in his head, reviewing as well the extra information that M had been sending him on the way to Medical – information to add onto the quick orders she’d given him over the computer. Bond was apparently still on-site, making sure the mission didn’t go to pieces in 006’s absence. Precisely what had led up to that absence, Q wasn’t clear on yet. “What happened?” he asked, already frowning up at Alec’s neck.

Sitting on the stainless-steel exam table, Alec was somehow still a bit taller than Q, but the level was just right to get a look at the mechanism wired around his neck like some vicious imitation of a dog-collar. To the inexperienced eye, it just looked like a conglomeration of wires and metal casings and a box not unlike a large pedometer latched onto one side, but Q could see the artistry and skill in the work.

Now Alec’s grimace turned more stormy, a threatening look that had nothing to do with the nurses and doctors that kept fluttering around him and yanking bits of metal and grit from his skin. For a moment, Q thought he’d have to resort to baser measures to get 006 to cooperate and answer him, but then the 00-agent relented. “Enemy operatives got the jump on me. I’m only guessing at the plural because it generally takes more than one to get me.” If Alec was troubled by his lack of modesty, he sure didn’t show it. His gaze was fixed on the far wall as he recalled events, as little as they were. “I actually don’t remember a bloody thing until yesterday afternoon.”

“So you just woke up with this?” Q couldn’t help but sound incredulous as he asked, finally making eye-contact with 006 as he raised both eyebrows. Alec looked pretty beaten up, even by double-o or Angel standards: he was bruised and bloody, with only superficial wounds that Q could see, but a lot of them, and the fact that he’d been overpowered was nothing short of unsettling. “You were drugged?”

Sometimes 006 was a prideful man with a hair-trigger temper; sometimes, like now, he had moods so mercurial that you didn’t know what you’d get. At the moment he had apparently decided not to be bothered and to just let the rest of MI6 handle the mess he’d gotten into. Typical double-o. “I woke up with this and to James slapping me. Yeah, chances were I was drugged, but all the moving about after I woke up probably burned it out of my system.” He looked at Q as if noticing him for the first time. “You’d know about that. Angel metabolism?”

Q scowled at the tangent, but was secretly impressed that at least one of the 00-agents still remembered that Q was an Angel. “Yes, the little tricks of my own physiology do sometimes stick in my memory. Doctor – did you run blood tests?” Q turned to ask without warning. When the doctor nodded, Q dropped it. He was the first Quartermaster in history to have so much control over 00-agents, but that didn’t mean he knew the slightest thing about medicine. He’d leave that to the pros. Right now, he was ignoring the fact that Alec was a trained killer as best he could while leaning in to get a look at the supposedly-diffused bomb around his neck.

Alec’s muscles gave that faint, smooth twitch that could easily become the precursor to an attack, but
Q doubted that most people would notice. Q pretended that he didn’t either, and absolutely refused to sigh with relief when the tension faded and Alec went back to being relaxed and more-or-less docile. “Bond doesn’t know anything either about what happened, but he managed to track me down and got the two of us in the clear again. A bit of…destruction…was involved.”

Now Q growled, resisting the urge to clench his hands around the woven wire collar. “What happened to my tech?”

“Some of it we’re pulling out of him right now, Quartermaster,” a nurse at his elbow told him unhelpfully. Q’s eyes flicked over and saw, out of the corner of his glasses, a shard of metal still glistening red with Alec’s blood. If Q weren’t afraid of the lethal repercussions, he would have bodily attacked 006 right then and pounded him. Instead, he let the flash of homicidal temper vibrate through him and dissipate unsatisfactorily like a wave down his spine. He refused to look up at 006’s face, because he was fairly sure the man would be grinning.

“You said that Bond diffused this?” Q asked tightly in an effort to change the subject before he did something that would ultimately be suicidal, since prodding double-o’s generally was.

“He said he did.” Alec kept his shoulders still, but lifted and dropped his black wings in a shrug instead. He sounded supremely unconcerned for a man wearing an explosive device for a bowtie.

“Bloody Bond said he did,” Q parroted with a sarcastic growl. His attention was already narrowing and focusing in on the mechanics at hand, however, shoving his disbelieving frustration into the background. It did, indeed, appear that Bond had done a serviceable job at disarming the device, although it would be more accurate, to Q’s eyes, to say that he’d hacked at it with the proficiency of a five-year-old. Still, Q’s opinion was biased, and the bomb truly appeared to be dormant if not totally disabled. And Bond had been smart enough to tell Trevelyan not to mess with it. Q fished a pair of tiny pliers out of his supplies by touch, forgetting that the 00-agent next to him existed except to nudge his head further to the side when he got in the way.

“Aren’t you going to interrogate me more, Q?” Alec sounded like he was trying to suppress his amusement at Q shoving at him. Knowing Alec, who could probably send a trained attack-dog running with its tail between its legs, he probably found Q’s antics puppyishly cute.

“That’s M’s job, not mine,” Q retorted with distracted dryness, gently pulling casings away to reveal more wires, some cut by Bond, some not. “I could care less about your answers. I just want to keep the MI6 building intact, meaning it is apparently my job to make sure you don’t explode.”

Alec grunted; apparently they were starting to stitch him up, and he was perhaps wishing he’d asked for more painkillers. Served him right. “You’re a font of optimism. Has anyone ever told you that, Q?” 006 gritted with good humor that was quickly thinning to annoyance.

“Stop talking and let me work.”

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“I managed to remove the explosive device from 006,” Q reported to M. This was such a rare event that M had personally continued to oversee it, and Q was now relaying everything to her in person. He would have much rather written up a paper report that she would never had seen. “It was true that Bond had mostly disabled the device, although he did such a botched job of it that I’m surprised.”
Surprised and subtly impressed, but Q wasn’t going to mention that. His carefully-constructed shield of detachment and sarcasm was a defense mechanism that he couldn’t afford to lose hold of, especially when he was shaking a little bit even now at the memory of being so close to an injured 006.

At the time, all Q had been thinking about had been the bomb, his interest spiking to fascination as he’d gotten a good look at it. Later, however, when his immediate curiosity had passed along with most of the threat (the bomb was good, but not better than him), Q had noted his proximity to Alec like a punch in the gut.

Like most any Angel, Alec Trevelyan was all muscle and a dangerous personality. This, coupled with fast reflexes and a plethora of irritating injuries, and Q had to realize how easily he could be injured in a split-second. With only a few foolhardy exceptions, Q kept himself out of arm’s reach around 00-agents purely to avoid any possibility of physical roughhousing…and today he had gotten so close that whenever Alec laughed he could just about feel the vibration and the chuckling exhale against the top of his head.

To say that Q had been unsettled by this realization would be an understatement. Fortunately, he’d completely removed the bomb by then, so the shaking of his hands was cause only for personal alarm, instead of threatening to accidentally blow up the whole Medical wing.

“Q, are you listening to me?” M’s voice cut into the young Quartermaster’s mortified musings. She was glaring at him, but at least was not adverse to repeating: “I said I’ll need you in the field with 007 by the end of the week. 006 and 8 will either join you there or be in place before you arrival, depending on 008’s present mission status and 006’s bloody recovery time.”

While M was muttering direly about how 00-agents often made it a game out of escaping Medical before they were fully fit to do so, Q sat in his chair, stunned, wondering when the world had decided that it hated him.

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While Q had been defusing the bomb dragged in by 006, M had been getting more reports – sporadically – from Bond. It almost felt like a master plan to outflank him: keep the Quartermaster busy while planning an atrociously horrid plan behind his back! Q could not possibly have been less enthused, but was frankly too shocked by the orders to question them. He simply walked like a zombie back to his office at Q-branch, shut the door, and let his legs give out when he got near his chair. By a miracle, he actually landed in his chair, and proceeded to sit like a pile of sticks and stare numbly at the sheaf of papers he’d been handed.

Orders. That’s what they were. Mission info and orders. Wonderful. He still stared at them as if they were death-threats, which they honestly were. Obviously, M either overestimated Q’s self-defense skills after watching that doctored footage of the rec-room, or else she’d completely forgotten how little the double-o’s cared for him and vice versa. That was all combined with the fact that Q was very, very accustomed to walls and cubicles and the indoors – and now they were sending him out on an actual mission. Q banged his head down onto his desk like he’d been wanting to for ages. He felt like a bloody indoor cat suddenly being shooed out the door. ‘With a triad of hungry wolves for company, no less,’ he reflected with no amusement whatsoever. The double-o’s had grudgingly given in to having a stringy Quartermaster calling the shots on half their missions, but that had mainly been due to the fact that said Quartermaster rarely ever left Q-branch – out of sight, out of mind, and
only occasionally a voice in their ear calmly giving directions.

Q remembered 008 looming over him as he brazenly lipped off.

He remembered doing much the same with 007, basically standing on the toes of the handsomest of the 00-agents while verbally slapping him.

And now, just hours ago, foolishly forgetting how frustratingly breakable he was, he’d loomed all over Alec Trevelyan as if the man were as dangerous and sentient as a tree.

Maybe sparring with three double-o’s had been a bad idea, because it had obviously given Q an inflated sense of his own indestructibility. Being able to ostensibly defeat two out of three of MI6’s best did not a field agent make. If Q had thought he stood a chance against M and her razors-and-ice stare, he’d have marched right back and dumped the files back into her hands. In fact, he could see it all now: himself, looking regretful but courageous, looking down with aloof apology as he explained that no, he could not go on a mission…

And then he saw his plans go down in blood and flames as M tore a strip off him, and Q’s mental plans stopped then. Aware of his minions peering worriedly in at him through the blinds on one side of his little office, Q picked up the file, decided he may as well be educated on how he was going to spectacularly die, and began reading.

And the first thing he read was that they expected him to get on a plane.

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The motel room was seedy, but had the advantage of having a good view of the parking lot and a second exit by way of a window in the bathroom overlooking the alleyway. Therefore, Bond saw 008 coming from quite a distance, and the Walther he held in his hand was mostly just a formality.

“You going to shoot me with that or just use it as a conversation piece?” 008 asked as he walked through the door, eyes taking only a second to find 007 standing out of the way in the shadows.

With the way Bond’s wings were colored, he almost seemed not to have them: their grey and black surface blended with the shadows at his back. In fact, until he stepped forward, he looked like a normal, Mundane man, albeit one with a killer physique and the effortless balance of someone trained to hunt. He stepped forward, holstering his gun and smirking as the shadows peeled away from him. “Can never be too careful,” he excused himself as he and 008 moved to exchange grips.

The whole while, however, both men’s eyes were constantly moving, the faint hum of tension in their muscles proving they were on alert.

There was plenty of reason to be alert. Ever since a botched attempt at stealing sensitive information had sent 006 and 7’s target fleeing to Canada, things had gone downhill. “They’ve probably got eyes on us,” Bond filled Brant in, his own tone less than enthusiastic about the whole situation, “Even before I got Alec back, it’s been clear that the other team is on to us.”

“Any idea who this other team is? And what happened with Alec anyway?” Brant dumped his duffel bag on the second bed, but didn’t sit – partially because he could react quicker when standing, partially because the bed looked highly questionable. “All I hear is that the guy comes back with a bomb for a collar, and I’m sent here to take his place.”
“Alec will be rejoining us, hopefully, as soon as Medical clears him,” Bond added to that, before shrugging and giving in to explain, “Best guess? Someone with good aim and a dart-gun tranquilized him. Alec doesn’t remember, though, so it must have been something with amnesiac qualities.” The memory was all very unsettling: one moment, Alec was on the other line, talking in his usual, taunting way, and the next there was only a thump of a body hitting the ground and then silence. Bond had felt that sensation of ice surging through all of his veins at the knowledge that he might have just heard his partner for the last time, but then he’d remembered the tracking capabilities in his phone. “I managed to find him in a warehouse a few miles away from his previous position, thanks to those new trackers.”

008 had opted to sit in the flimsy-looking desk chair, and arched one eyebrow as he resettled his wings. “One of those computer chips from Q-branch linked to satellites?”

Knowing full-well how displeased most all of his fellow Angels had been about the little gadgets, Bond smirked and put in a bit of cheery lightness, “Didn’t you hear? The new Q has us all chipped like pet dogs now.”

In a less than joking mood apparently, 008 snorted and rolled his eyes. He took off his watch and turned it over in his hand – that was where the tracking device was, despite Bond’s allusions to subcutaneous means. Usually, agents tried to destroy them at least once every other mission, but Bond was grateful that Alec had still had his, and Bond had managed to activate it. So long as they weren’t being used to track him, Bond had decided he was okay with Q’s new addition to their gear.

“I didn’t see Alec before I was shipped out here. He okay?” Brant looked up, worry on his face that he showed few people.

Bond’s own face was still a mask, but maybe the glacial blue of his eyes softened a bit. “Right as rain. He’s Alec, isn’t he? Monsters like him aren’t made every day, and they’re not lost every day either. I got there too late to keep them from rigging him with that bomb, but any other plans they had-” Bond shrugged, but the tilt to his smile turned vicious. “-I ruined. A few things blew up, Alec cursed a little but did not blow up, and we were on our way. Since MI6 is still sending me annoying messages on my phone, I assume Alec didn’t detonate upon arrival?”

“Everyone was praising your bomb-diffusing skills far and wide,” Brant grinned by way of answer, gesturing grandly with a hand and an echoing wing. He added more ruefully, “Except for our new Quartermaster, I hear. The grapevine says that he thinks you have the bomb skills of a damaged squirrel.”

Bond’s smile turned flat and his eyes maybe took on a chilly hint behind the smile. “Oh, did he now? Maybe next time I’ll just pat Alec on the back and send him on his way.”

That goaded them both into laughing, the low, quiet laughter of two men who could find humor in the direst circumstances. It was necessary, when their job so often made laughter difficult if not impossible. They knew they weren’t safe here indefinitely, however, and Bond was the first to stop chortling. As his smile faded to just the faintest tick at one side of his mouth, he began to get down to business. “You know the mission specs?”

“Yes. You and Alec were sent to get a certain thumb-drive from a certain man. Certain man got wind of you, and ran.” Brant was a big man, bigger than Alec and Bond both, and he had a habit of moving his wings when he shrugged; this time, he almost cleared the lamp off the desk, but didn’t appear concerned. “Ran all the way to Canada. And you’ve been plagued with bombs and booby-traps ever since.”

“I almost got blown up just getting in my car. Twice,” Bond felt the need to elaborate. He wasn’t a talkative man by any standards, but this mission was truly getting him edgy – it was simply
unprecedented, and dangerous. Not only was it unheard of for an Angel to be kidnapped and turned into a walking bomb, but Bond had never been on a mission when the enemy was so faceless and unreachable. Instead of targets he could aim a gun at, he had a nameless enemy that set traps for him whenever they got close. It was still important that Bond get the information he’d been sent for, but tracking his target was incredibly difficult when someone appeared to be avidly hunting him in return.

Someone with enough skill to outmaneuver Alec.

Someone who had a taste for bombs that was disturbing, creative, and refined to a whole new level of deadliness.

Someone who obviously knew they were up against MI6 Angels, but didn’t seemed at all perturbed by that.

“Make yourself comfortable, Sims,” Bond advised, wishing they had some liquor to make this report go down easier, but knowing they couldn’t afford to relax that much, “Just telling you about the bombs alone might take awhile.”

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Chapter End Notes

So technically Q and 006 are not friends yet - I might have them tussle a bit later, but 006 has mostly gotten that out of his system. Feel free to love him! Q's on the fence about whether to be afraid/wary of him, but I love 006. :3 Oh, and for those who wanted to see/read about M verbally castrating 006, 7, and 8 - sorry, I couldn't write it to satisfaction. It is up to your own vicious imaginations!

I think I have one more chapter already written - then I need to type up more. If I don't...well, I'll warn you!
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Q takes a plan trip (not fun), M talks to some double-o's (fun for her, probably, not for them), and Bond and Q get some quality time (fun optional).

Or the chapter in which it is Bond’s turn not to be a jerk. Mostly.

Chapter Notes

Long-ish chapter! :D PLEASE ignore all mistakes - I know nothing about either cars or bombs. Any mistakes I make are purely for the sake of plot, so telling me doesn't really help.

Cars + bombs = interested yet? ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

M had suggested Q hold off leaving the extra few days it would take for 006 to be ship-shape again, and then leave with him. *That* was when Q put his foot down.

Q didn’t really considered himself a brave person – a stubborn, prideful, foolish person, but not a brave one. Therefore, when he stood up in front of M and solidly defended his point, he wasn’t sure how to categorize his actions. If it was bravery, he probably ruined the effect by checking himself over for bullet wounds afterwards, certain that he couldn’t have possibly gotten out of that office unscathed.

In no uncertain terms, the slender Quartermaster had informed his boss that he would not be leaving on a mission with a babysitter right from the start. “I may not be a fully-functional double-o – not even a fully-functional Angel-” he admitted without hesitation, showing no embarrassment on a face he’d carefully molded to show only stubbornness and competence, “-but I do have field training, enough at least to survive the trip out to meet up with 007 and 8.” He actually succeeded in holding back a pained grimace as unease flickered through his stomach at the memory; it felt as if all the muscles along his belly knotted up, and he very suddenly wanted nothing more than the comfort and distance of his Q-branch office.

Eyes narrowed, seeming to glean information from the faint nuances of Q’s face (what little he was providing), M skirted his words just enough to hit the nail on the head, “And what about the plane trip?”

Q swallowed. No... no, he was not going to have a panic attack just thinking about it! “You’ve seen my files. If anything, you should realize that putting Alec with me on a plane will completely destroy what credibility I have with the double-o’s. I can survive a plane trip….” He felt some of the professionalism bleed away from his face and posture, leaving him feeling rather haggard and raw instead. He met M’s eyes candidly and told her just as truthfully, “…I just can’t survive one gracefully. If at all possible, that is why I’d prefer to travel alone.” He sighed, finishing, “Then I can
“drug myself up as much as I want to or need to, and no one that I have to give orders to later will know.”

For a moment, he thought she’d order him to go with Alec anyway. Q’s mind raced, trying to decide just what he’d do in the face of such a decision; counteract it, certainly. The genius Quartermaster had already thought up over a dozen ways to ensure that he and Alec never stepped foot in the same airport by the time M actually opened her mouth to declare a verdict.

“All right then, Q. I’d say that you are missing how risky this decision is, but I know you’re smart enough that you’re not.” Q, who had expected a fight, could only stand and blink for a moment.

And then, as an unexpected gift as he was going out the door to fine-tune this plan, M informed him of two more things that nearly made him giddy with relief: due to time restrictions, Q had to fly up to Canada, but he did not have the fly back (a long, relaxing boat trip would be fine), and M said that medication would be prepared to handle Q’s stress through the flight.

That last was both a surprise and a relief. Sometimes, being an Angel was more troublesome than useful, especially when the perks of having wings were obviously absent. The worst of it was Q’s metabolism: his body ate its way through anything. That meant that normal drugs were next to useless most of the time. Unfortunately, drugging him up with prescriptions fine-tuned for normal Angels didn’t work either, because the loss of Q’s wings had subtly affected all of him. Therefore, he was stuck in limbo. Even something as simple as anti-anxiety medication got complicated when attempts were made to apply it to the Quartermaster’s unique biology, so M’s offer to put MI6 on the job to put together something for him was a minor miracle. He didn’t care if it meant he was drugged out of his mind the whole flight…in fact, he rather relished the thought. Q avoided plane trips, and the few he remembered after losing his wings were all memories he would have been better off without.

The final thing that M said was, “Q, I will be telling 006 through 8 about your condition.” Her eyes were hard, her wings still but her posture tense as she waited to come up against dissent. “They deserve to know why your flight schedule will take special attention.”

Surprisingly, as he thought about that and how it made him feel, Q couldn’t find it in himself to actually be angry about that. It was only logical. “So long as they don’t have to actually see my particular brand of phobia in action, I see no problem with that,” he stated without rancor.

“Good. Then I’ll inform Bond and Sims now, and 006 before he leaves. They only need to know the bare bones of this,” M finished, proving that she was just as canny as her high position implied, “I do not need the position of my Quartermaster compromised because of a loss of respect.”

Q wanted to say that respect was a little hard to come by already, but decided that he was in her debt enough for the little leeway she was giving him. Instead, the young Quartermaster simply nodded and strode out at that point.

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“008, put Bond on the phone. He’s the troublesome one.” Brant Sims smirked and twitched his barred wings, handing the cellphone regally over to Bond. Looking mutinous, Bond took it, immediately getting the continuation of the defamation of his character: “I would have called him directly, but a certain agent apparently lost both his phone and earpiece already.”

“A certain agent,” Bond replied coolly, maybe the slightest tetchy edge on his voice, “is now on the line. Plus, I’ve been chasing a profligate bomber for days. There have been technological casualties.”
“Exactly the reason why I’m sending your Quartermaster out with new supplies.”

Bond sat up straighter, eyes narrowing and sharpening. 008 had been sitting back in the little hotel chair, apparently unconcerned, but the faint ripple of his feathers showed that he’d been eavesdropping and was now concerned as well. “Come again?” Bond tried to keep the edge out of his voice, wondering if this truly was ridiculous as it sounded or if he was hearing things.

“Q has field training in his past, and because of the unique troubles you are facing and your reports of multiple bombs, I have assigned him on your mission. He will be dispatched shortly. Not long before 006 leaves, I imagine.” M was monumentally untroubled by Bond’s tone of impending argument, and rapped off information as coolly as ever. Then again, the woman was unflappable: if MI6 were burning down, she’d still be wearing a look that could slice a man in half.

Having faced down that look at its worst and lived, Bond didn’t have any problem opening his mouth almost immediately to debate, “M, we’ve got things under control here. It’s not necessary—”

“Your version of under control includes one of your fellow agents getting kidnapped and turned into a bomb, and no success in getting the information you were sent after,” M snapped back. “Forgive me, 007, if I see room for improvement here.”

Bond was growling out a sigh under his breath, but Brant was growing livid as he listened in to the conversation. “The Quartermaster won’t cause improvement – the bloody boffin will slow us down, if he doesn’t just get us killed.”

“Since 008 is obviously monitoring this conversation, he may as well know that I can hear him, too.” Brant’s face mottled with embarrassment and temper while Bond smirked. “Boffin or not, Q has more bomb expertise than anyone else in MI6, a skill that your reports suggest you need.”

While 008 was grumbling under his breath direly, Bond settled back into the cool, calm persona that was not quite as well known as his destructive side. This more collected side of 007 was actually what made him so dangerous behind the scenes, because it meant he took a step back from the situation and considered it detachedly and carefully. In this way, his temper cooled while 008 continued to quietly rail at the increased interference of Q.

He could see the common-sense in it. Ego aside, Bond had to admit that 00-agents weren’t making much headway at the moment, and that he personally spent more time looking out for hidden tripwires and explosives than he did hunting out their target. It was either ship their Quartermaster out here or buy a bomb-sniffing dog to keep with them at all times.

“Since 008 is still ranting, I’ll just tell you and trust that you’ll pass on the necessary information when he decides to act like a government agent again,” M continued with something between displeasure and resignation. The almost somber edge lining her tone was what made Bond pay attention, though. “Our Quartermaster has an acute fear of flying on a plane. Due to this, MI6 is closely monitoring his trip, so you only need to worry about being ready to accommodate him – as well as 006, I may as well add – once he arrives and needs to be picked up from the airport.”

“Fear of plane trips?” Bond repeated, one eyebrow arching over his glacial eyes as he considered this, unsure what to make of it. Pretty much all he knew about Q was that the man was missing the wings that an Angel was supposed to have, but somehow didn’t lack the attitude. “Sounds inconvenient.”

M didn’t comment, instead simply continuing with her orders, “Expect him the day after tomorrow. MI6 has procured medication to allow him to handle the strain, but he might be slightly groggy for some time after the flight. He’ll contact you himself with more specific times and details as it
becomes necessary. For the record, he is in charge of this mission, barring orders from myself.”
Before either 007 or 008 could bristle at that, M deftly changed the subject, “Considering the track-
record of 00-agents and Medical, expect 006 no later than the day after.” There was a pause. Then M
subtly proved that she did have a sense of humor: “I don’t think that Medical will dare hold him any
longer.”

Still too irked by these new orders to smile, Bond nonetheless felt a little flame of amusement ignite
in his chest. “I understand our orders. Anything else?” Bond finally just replied.

“Yes. Don’t kill our Quartermaster, or I’ll ensure that you are given a desk-job and never leave it.”

“And if he gets himself killed?” Bond was able to ask unfeelingly. 008 was listening again, but his
face was equally unemotional: what Bond was commenting on was simply a risk of being a field
agent. They died.

M understood this, too, and Bond heard her take a deep breath and let it out tightly on the other end
of the line. “He knows the risks. Good night, Mr. Bond.”

“Good night, ma’am.” The two hung up.

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Q’s brain felt like it had turned into a squishy sponge, or maybe a particularly sticky marshmallow,
his thoughts mired down and slow. He could think, but it was a near thing, and the plane-trip had still
been a nightmare. Fortunately, the drugs had kept him from doing anything ridiculous even though
he’d been a wreck of nerves beneath the pleasant numbness and languor. He was pretty sure that the
stewardesses all knew he was phobic of planes, if the pitying looks they’d given him had been any
indication. Well, except the brunette that had obviously thought he was incredibly drunk, and had
sniffed disdainfully at him instead. Q had more than briefly considered puking on her, if the
medication had allowed the unsettled feeling in his stomach to reach the point of puking.

Landing had been the worst, because the medication had been starting to wear off, his legendarily
annoying Angel metabolism starting to bite huge chunks out of the drugs. One more minute aboard
that plane, and Q would have made a spectacle of himself by flying into a full-blown panic-attack,
screaming included. As it was, he had to restrain himself from trying to claw right out the window
once he saw they were on the tarmac. The plane, predictably, took a deathly long time to unload, and
after reaching the airport Q had locked himself in a bathroom stall for over half an hour, intent on just
breathing.

The knowledge that he had to now meet up with 007 and 008 goaded Q into collecting himself a bit.
He was tempted to just pretend that his plane hadn’t landed for another hour or two, but knew that he
was just being childish; he had a mission to do. So he texted 008 (007 never failed to annoy with his
ability to destroy Q's precious tech, so he was effectively unreachable) with instructions on where to
pick him up, then communicated with MI6 as well to assure them that, despite so much evidence to
the contrary, he was alive and fine. Maybe ‘fine’ was stretching it. They probably wanted him to call
in personally to assure them of his continued survival and sanity, but Q didn’t think he could pull that
off without coming across as completely wrecked.

Which he kind of was. The medication was a haze over his powerful brain, and beneath that haze, he
was a shaky mass of nerves that didn’t seem to completely comprehend that he was no longer in a tin
can way up in the sky.

‘You’re going home in a boat,’ he just kept reminding himself, ‘You’re going home in a boat…’

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Bond turned up twenty minutes later, eyes calmly surveying the crowd of people similarly awaiting their ride. With the ease of practice, he kept his heavily-tinted window partway up and kept his wings tucked back, out of easy view. Generally, 00-agents weren’t shy about showing their wings (usually, it was unavoidable, although the intimidation factor was priceless), but sometimes James preferred to slip under the radar until he was certain of a situation. At the moment, he hadn’t caught sight of Q yet, and a muscle in his jaw flexed fractionally.

Suddenly, a tousled, dark-brown head ducked into view, Q’s thin frame weaving out of the anonymity of the crowd where he’d been quietly hiding himself. Bond felt a fraction impressed at the move, but didn’t show it. Instead, he hit the button to unlock the car doors a second before Q pulled on the latch and slid in, bags first. His large duffel bag he tossed across to the far back seat, but his backpack and computer bag he treated more carefully, as if they were children. “I don’t have any other bags,” he said without prompting.

Reflexively, Bond’s brows lowered, uncomfortable with people answering questions seconds before he even asked them. “Good. We’re moving then.” Barely seeming to check traffic, Bond shifted the car into drive and moved them into traffic again. He didn’t watch Q in the rearview mirror – he didn’t have to. Now that he’d learned his Quartermaster did, indeed, have Angelic energy, it was fairly easy to keep track of Q’s movements by monitoring that. Because Bond was generally mischievous and recalcitrant, he had to ask, “How was the flight?”

Now Bond looked back in the mirror, because life was too short to miss the glare he knew the thin Quartermaster would be directing his way. Sure enough, from where Q had already brought out his laptop in the back seat, the bespectacled man was narrowing eyes at him rather viciously. “I imagine that M must have called you regarding my impending arrival, so unless she just forgot to mention that I have a phobia of planes, then you know that my trip was acceptably horrid. Happy?”

That little smile curled up the corner of Bond’s mouth as he looked back to the road again, deadpanning, “Ecstatic. Do you want a full report then?”

“I came here on short notice and on a cocktail of anti-panic drugs, not uninformed,” came the cool, dry response, and Bond’s sensitive ears heard the clicking of computer keys. However, then there was a pause, a faint, frustrated sigh, and the wingless Angel admitted, “Maybe a rundown of the most recent events. I am…hesitant…to say that I know the most current reports with certainty at the moment.”

Q did look kind of out of it, especially compared to the razor sharp little scarecrow who had stood at the toes of Bond’s boots and berated him in the rec room. Keeping that in the back of his mind, Bond decided that he could play nice – it was part of the job. Bond could be an incredible nuisance, but when lives were on the line, he usually toned it down to merely cheeky. “Well, Sims and I are still having a hard time keeping a lock on our target. It’s hard to chase down a man when he seems to leave behind bombs as footprints.”

“A dangerous predicament,” Q allowed without any evidence of sarcasm, looking at his laptop
“You trust my bomb-defusing skills?”

Bond had meant it as a dig, referring obliquely back to Q’s comments about Alec’s explosive collar, but Q didn’t seem to be following. Eyes a little foggy behind his glasses and bird’s-nest hair, Q looked up, brows slightly beetling. “I’m not entirely sure I’m following you, 007.”

Sighing as he realized that his taunt had fallen flat (which was probably for the best anyway, if the two of them were supposed to coexist in the near future), Bond backed up and tried again. “I kept a few of the explosives, but I’m afraid most are just remnants of those that blew up on us. They’re all yours.”

“Thank you, 007,” Q nodded from the back. A few more keys clicked, then the Quartermaster cursed under his breath and there was the repetitive clicking of perhaps the delete key being typed before Q started over again. It was the messy-haired Quartermaster who continued the conversation, though: “You said that you were having a hard time keeping track of your target’s position?”

Since Q didn’t sound derogatory, Bond decided to answer, “Correct. According to you, he hasn’t left the country.”

“I tagged him in various criminal databases, so I rather hope he hasn’t.” Q retorted, and since he was looking down at his computer screen, he missed the slightly impressed look that Bond shot him in the rearview mirror. The Quartermaster simply went on, “He hasn’t left much of a paper trail or a cyber one, but his movements will be limited unless he wants to get caught by the local governments on charges of murder – totally false charges, but I challenge anyone to try and find where I hacked in.”

Bond wasn’t the laughing sort, but his chest shook with a chuckle as his eyes crinkled. This was a slightly different side than he usually saw of their new Quartermaster, and while Bond was still on the fence about the young man ordering him around, he could appreciate good skill used in artfully underhanded ways. Bond did it all the time, although rarely with computers. Keeping his tone level and businesslike and his eyes on the road, even as he nursed the humor in his chest a bit longer, Bond nodded, “That should make things easier.”

“Yes, and it will mean no more plane trips for me,” Q quipped darkly.

On a whim, and because the drive back was rather dull and long anyway, Bond tried a more conversational route. “Until the trip home, at least.”

“I’m taking a boat,” was the emphatic declaration, and then Q put a stop to idle conversation just as blatantly, “Now let’s get back to the mission. Your last reports said something about having evidence that he was near here?”

“What, can’t remember the exact wording?” was Bond’s jovial retort, proving to both of them that he didn’t care to be bossed around, verbally or otherwise – he could direct conversations quite well himself. “You – the prodigy with the genius IQ?”

Q’s energy had been barely noticeable, but now flared up, and Bond’s eyes lit with impish triumph as he realized that he’d gotten under the man’s skin. Before things went beyond amusing and into irreparably confrontational, Bond softened his tone into something more respectful and cut into the building temper in the back seat, “Calm down, Q. It was in my last report, and I said that 008 and I had heard some rumors at a poker game. A bit of follow-up work has proven the rumors true, so we’ve got a general location to go by.”
The other Angel’s internal energy was still rippling like the surface of a disturbed bowl of water, and Bond was pretty sure that if Q had been 008 instead, a fight would have exploded into existence in the car. Instead, Q didn’t so much as snarl, but instead paused to the precise count of three before speaking rationally, “I am calm. I am also aware of the fact that you and I will have to be working together, so if this is how your attitude is going to progress, 007-”

Bond had just shifted the cruise-control on, and his ears almost physically twitched as he heard a faint beep that was familiar and unfamiliar at once: unfamiliar for the inside of his car, but terribly familiar for all of the bombs he’d been trying to survive lately. “Q, be quiet,” James ordered suddenly, every feather on his wings going tense along with his muscles.

For once, it was a good thing that Q apparently read the energy of other Angels, because he immediately sensed how Bond’s flared from a steady low burn to a bonfire. He didn’t move except to look up seriously from his laptop, fingers frozen over the keys. “What is it?”

The growl in Bond’s throat was due to frustrated temper, as he wished for about the millionth time that their opponent would just show his or her face so Bond could put his fist through it. “I just heard a telltale beep that sounded particularly problematic, considering this car does not beep,” he said through gritted teeth.

For a moment, Q paused, and Bond could see his eyes flashing back and forth behind his glasses as if rapidly going over information. “Where did you hear it?”

“Somewhere right under the steering column,” Bond said without hesitation, still driving. The road was empty and open, and although the seasons were heading towards a cold Canadian autumn, the roads were in good condition. “I heard it as soon as I switched to cruise-control.”

Q was quickly shifting aside his laptop, and just as quickly was undoing his seat-belt and leaning up into the front seat. “And you recognize that as the sound of a bomb arming?” the Quartermaster concluded quite calmly.

007’s mouth twisted in distaste at this whole situation even while tension continued to radiate from his frame. “I’d say I’ve heard the sound enough to very nearly recognize make and model by now,” he still managed to joke, although his tone lacked humor.

“I’d suggest keeping the cruise-control on.” Q almost instantly deduced that he couldn’t see enough while leaning out of the back seat, and clumsily but swiftly climbed into the front. An expert driver under odd and dangerous circumstances, Bond didn’t twitch. “If you heard the beep then, and we’re still alive, I imagine that turning on the cruise-control merely armed it. Turning it off may set off the bomb.”

“Oh,” Bond argued through gritted teeth, “we simply can’t hear it ticking off the final thirty seconds we have.”

“In that case, you’ll only have to deal with me for thirty seconds longer.”

“I’d rather be alive, Q.”

“Fine, then let me work!” the Quartermaster snapped, already dragging tools from his bag in the back. “I need you to be more specific about where the noise came from.”

It was a fact that, when his life was on the line, Bond was capable of being both a perfect gentleman and perfectly cooperative. “Roughly from the underside of the steering column. Just a light beep. Barely heard it.”
“You probably weren’t meant to,” the thin Quartermaster commented distractedly, eyes peering where Bond had indicated as his tone turned more businesslike, “Fine. All right then. I need to take apart the steering column.”

Now Bond took his eyes off the road to shoot Q a look. “Without turning off the cruise-control?”

“Preferably,” was the tetchy reply, “That is, if you want to stay alive. If the bomb has, indeed, been inserted into the steering column, I should be able to deduce what sort of trigger it is linked to relatively quickly. I can already see evidence of where the bomber opened up the casing.” His eyes went contemplative, and he added more lightly, “Although it is incredibly well hidden.”

“More work, less chatter, Q,” Bond reminded. “What do you need me to do?”

Q was hiding his discomfort, but his pale skin meant that the blush that reddened his ears was a dead giveaway. “Keep driving and hold still,” was his sharp reply, before he finally relented and admitted, “And probably move the driver’s seat back, because we’re going to have to share the space if I’m to get at the bomb with you still driving.”

The 00-agent had probably, somewhere in the back of his head, realized this: the bomb was likely right over his legs, and to avoid detonating it, he’d have to keep driving while Q worked on it. Considering the general lack of space in the driver’s seat of a car, the new Quartermaster would have to be more or less in Bond’s lap. Quite suddenly, the blond agent had the urge to laugh. He’d been in far more compromising and embarrassing situations before, and was therefore only minutely discomfited by this – although it looked like Q was far more uncomfortable.

Suddenly smirking his roguish smile, Bond said, “Get on with it then. I’ve been declared dead a few times, but I’d rather not try my luck again.” He paused, considering, eyes back on the road even while he complied to scoot his seat back as far as possible. “M would kill me if she had to go through the paperwork of my death again.”

“That is an impossibly contradicting phrase, I hope you realize.” Q’s voice was still tight, and his argumentative temperament was coming to the fore to hide how unsettled he was. As calm as he was seeming… there was a bomb in here!! Trying to ignore that impending death hanging over him, and the imminent prospect of crawling over 007’s muscular legs while trying to diffuse a bomb he knew precious little about, Q took a deep breath and pinched the bridge of his nose briefly.

There was nothing for it, so even though he expected to be teased about this later, the slender wingless Angel stretched forward until he could twist his head and arms up under the steering wheel.

From sparring with Bond and watching him work over camera-feeds, Q knew that James Bond was strong, but knowing that and feeling thick cords of muscle under his chest were two entirely different things. Bond was a powerhouse, just like the other double-o’s, and it did something to Q’s already-drug-affected concentration to be sensing that strength in such a… tactile fashion. Bond was keeping his legs still, keeping himself and his Quartermaster safely moving down the road with just adjustments to the wheel, which was a plus. Q immediately identified where the casing underneath the steering column had been removed and put back into place.

Bond’s voice drifted in from above him, ridiculously calm for all of this. “I’ve gotten used to keeping an eye on our vehicles at all times, and didn’t see anything during my shift last night. I’ll have to ask 008 if he saw anything suspicious when we traded out.”

Q decided to say nothing, both because he needed to concentrate and because he probably would have had only scathing things to say about the other agent. Right now, Q didn’t trust himself to say anything polite about anyone, just because circumstances had conspired to put him inches away from...
a possibly explosive device. He got the plastic casing off and growled under his breath as he maneuvered it out of the way, tossing it back somewhere towards the passenger seat while at the same time contorting to get closer to the wires he wanted to see. Now he was turned halfway onto his back so that he could best face the problem, not that there was much question anymore as to what the problem was.

“Verdict?” Again, Bond asked quite lightly. There was an undercurrent of rigidity in his voice, however, that bow-string tautness that Q had heard often enough when Bond was talking while watching a target through the sights of his gun.

Fingers following wires out from a small box that should not have been there, Q didn’t bother to answer for a minute. After all, this was neither the time nor place for small-talk, and he’d never been one for sugarcoating the truth just for the sake of someone else’s peace of mind. Only after he’d found out what he’d wanted to know (a time that the 00-agent filled with nothing but surprisingly patient silence) did Q reply tersely, “Whatever you do, do not hit the brakes or otherwise turn off the cruise-control. I’m ninety-five percent sure that that will cause us both to breathe our last very, very quickly.”

Bond asked, voice low, “And what about the other five percent?”

Q didn’t want to tell Bond that the other five percent was still muddled thanks to the medication he’d taken on the plane. Instead he began pulling out the tools that he’d hurriedly stuffed into his pockets for easy access, switching between a selection of minute screwdrivers, needle-nosed pliers, and wire-cutters that he was hesitant to use. “I’m not even trying to defuse it,” he said almost absently, mouth set in a thin line as his brain focused on the deadly technology in front of him.

“Uhh….Q?” Finally, some unease slipped loose and into 007’s voice. Q actually managed to smile triumphantly at that feat, despite the seriousness of the situation. “Isn’t that what we want to do? To avoid blowing up, if at all possible?”

Q irritatingly brushed aside the worry, shoulders shifting as he tried to maneuver both arms in the tight space, fingers of one hand buried in wires to his knuckles, “A bomb is only marginally dangerous when there is no trigger to set it off. I’m going to disengage it from the cruise-control so that it won’t realize when it’s turned off.”

Bond shifted nervously, a minute motion that sent sparks through Q at the feeling of toned muscles rippling against his shoulder and ribs. “Are you anthropomorphizing this bomb, Quartermaster?”

“Points on the use of a big word,” Q retorted, finding the wires he wanted to disconnect and the ones he needed to reconnect so that the change wouldn’t lead to instantaneous detonation. His stomach was doing flips, but his tone had turned flat because he simply didn’t have the added concentration to monitor it, “But no, I’m not. This is a complicated bomb, but nowhere near sentience even in the most flagrantly ridiculous science-fiction novel. The effort put into sneaking it right into the steering column probably took more effort than making the bomb itself.”

Still driving smoothly, turning the wheel slightly to accommodate a slight turn, Bond huffed but made no more comment. A few moments later, he did say in all seriousness, “Just tell me when you’ve neutralized the threat. We’re heading into more populated areas, which means decreased speed limits.”

“You’ll have to ignore them. I haven’t managed to rewire this to safely detach it from the cruise-control,” Q informed him flatly.

Bond, still managing to sound unconcerned and idle again, shrugged and amended, “I have no
problem ignoring the speed limit, but police vehicles are another matter. I’d rather avoid an altercation that gets the Canadian government involved in British business.”

At that reminder, Q froze a little, having forgotten that possibility. Just about anyone would recognize Bond’s wings as those of an MI6 Angel if they were pulled over, so if they were pulled over for speeding – or, goodness forbid, ended up leading a car-chase – things would get sticky incredibly fast. He wasn’t sure what Bond would do if pulled over by a cop in Canada, but the possibilities ranged from bad to worse. “Try to avoid them,” was all Q could come up with, infusing his voice with authority he hoped didn’t sound as thin as it felt. “I predict that it will take about another four or five minutes for me to disconnect this bomb from any sort of trigger.” Especially since he had to make sure that it didn’t have any back-up triggers or a hidden timer that was counting down in secret. So far, nothing.

“You might have less time than that. I am presently doing considerably more than the speed-limit in a town just conveniently big enough to have cops,” Bond quipped, and then he was turning.

The turn combined with the speed jerked Q, forcing him to drop one hand and brace it against the floor between Bond’s feet, and he barely kept from swearing. “Bond!”

“Necessary,” the double-o grunted shortly, turning again.

Waspishly, Q retorted as he tried to regain his posture, “I’m adding two minutes onto my estimate.”

“As you wish,” Bond grunted, obviously realizing that Q’s work was very much out of his control and resigning himself to that. He had the good grace to explain his driving, however. “With a more populated area like this, I’m trying to take roads to avoid people. Hopefully that will translate to avoiding cops and not running over pedestrians.” When Bond took another turn at a speed not recommended, he lowered one hand to brace Q with a hand on his hip, considerately making sure he didn’t get thrown about this time. The pressure of the man’s fingers was like a solid, taloned grip, as Q tried to keep his mind off it as he kept up his delicate work.

“If you could get out of town and onto a straight road of some sort, I’d be grateful,” Q informed Bond, his words a suggestion but his tone making it clear that it was an order. He was not redirecting the power on a bomb while they were driving like this. “Unless you like the idea of going down in a fiery inferno.”

“You,” Bond growled, clearly not enjoying this any more than Q was, “are just a ray of sunshine.” But then he added, “I’ll see what I can do.”

Good and bad happened at once: Q could tell by the feel of the road that they’d exited the city, but his ears picked up the sound of sirens and nearly the same moment. “I’ve almost got it!” Q declared, wracking his brain at the same time for a way to make those police sirens go away, although he was coming up empty on that.

Now that they were driving in a straight line, Bond seemed to have relaxed, and had both hands on the steering wheel again. Q felt one of 007’s legs shift underneath him, and a look showed him pushing down on he gas fractionally. “How much more time do you need?” was all Bond asked, voice stern and unreadable.

The sound of sirens was getting louder, and Q was still frustrated by the faint fuzziness of his brain. It was like drag on a jet airplane, and it drove him nuts even if wasn’t crippling his brain capacity. He worked quickly, moving wires and stripping then, clipping others entirely. “Just half a minute, 007.”

“Good, because I can’t just ignore a police vehicle for much longer than that, and I imagine that M
will skin me if she finds out that I was in another police chase.” Bond’s voice was light even if Q could just see the tension in the man’s large hands on the wheel. The sirens got more insistent, and closer. “Q…” Bond warned.

Now or never. Q couldn’t think of anything he’d messed up or missed, so all there was left was to clip the wire connecting the bomb to the cruise-control. If he was wrong, he probably wouldn’t get time to think on it as his failure was swallowed in a massive explosion. Bond must have felt Q stiffen in preparation or see him actually close his eyes, because the man barked his name much more sharply.

“Q!”

Snip. And no explosion. Q let out a controlled breath of relief that whistled faintly out his nose. “Got it,” he exhaled.

Instantly, Bond slowed, giving Q no time to think on his victory. The car was easing to the side of the road as the police sirens caught up with them, the sound of smooth tarmac turning to the slow crunch of gravel. Again, no exploding 00-agents or Quartermasters, and Q’s relief was so great that he forgot for a whole other half minute that they’d stopped and a police officer was doubtlessly walking up to their car. Where Q was still sprawled across Bond’s lap.

Just as Q tried to get up, he was startled to feel a forearm settle heavily across his torso, making getting up impossible. “Bond!” he squawked in startled outrage, taken off-guard and in no position to use any sort of leverage against the larger Angel. Bond just calmly but deftly twitched a wing, artlessly knocking the rest of Q’s supplies out of sight onto the floor in front of the passenger seat.

“Shhh, Quartermaster,” Bond said quietly when Q turned his head to glare up in affronted shock; 007 was smirking faintly while his ice-blue eyes held a puzzle of mischief. “Let me handle this. How about you just relax?” And then he was rolling the window down and directing the most charming, pleasant smile at the uniformed man that was at the window.

“Sir, did you realize-?” That was what the officer started to say, before he saw the situation as it seemed: Bond, a good-looking, incredibly handsome man with wings, sitting with one arm draped over the steering wheel and the other resting possessively over another man, suspiciously lying in his lap and red to his ears with embarrassment. Bond didn’t look embarrassed in the slightest, but the officer immediately jumped to conclusions that made his face flush beet red.

Q wasn’t considered a genius for nothing, and he realized immediately what it looked like. His first instinct was to scream that he would never do that in a car, but his second reaction was to simply die of mortification – the ultimate result was that Q didn’t say anything but also didn’t comprehend a word that Bond said to the officer, although he no doubt continued to grin like a cat with a canary (a big cat…a big stated cat who deserved to have his tailed slammed in a door multiple times) and speak with the same smooth, cultured tones that he used to woo targets on missions. Either way, they were not arrested, and if they got a ticket, Bond discarded it before Q could consider it.

After that, Bond started driving again and let Q go, making no effort to either help the Quartermaster up or to actually stop smiling, although Q had to be incandescent with rage by now. If Bond wasn’t looking at his face, there was no way he could miss the way Q’s supernatural energy was at a dangerous peak. “That, 007,” Q said in a tightly controlled, sharp-as-thorns voice that was millimeters away from exploding into a roar, “was completely unnecessary.”

“Did you want to get arrested?” Bond turned his head to ask, smoothly scooting his chair forward again while driving on placidly. The casing of the underside of the steering-column was still off, and wires were sticking out, but Bond had been in odder situations and still driven a car with aplomb.
“We would have gotten a ticket for speeding.” Q noticed a paper fluttering on the dashboard, and corrected with more temper, “We did get a ticket for speeding.”

“I’m an MI6 Angel, Q,” Bond stressed, and it was the returning air of seriousness that got Q to come down from his climbing rage, “it wouldn’t have been a simple ticket. Canada might be renowned for peacefulness, but that’s because they’re careful. If that officer hadn’t been so distracted by what we were supposedly doing in the car, he would have seriously considered taking us to a police station until some higher-ups could figure out exactly what a 00-agent is doing in Canada.” Bond tapped his fingers pensively on the steering wheel, frowning now. “We don’t have that kind of time to waste, and while I’m good at international incidents, I do not enjoy them.”

Q had buckled himself into the passenger seat, and while he saw the logic in 007’s argument, that just served to transform his ire into impotent frustration – now he couldn’t be mad at Bond. Well, he could, but he couldn’t do anything about it. He picked up his supplies in silence, a silence that stretched on a few long minutes after that, too. Finally, with Q sitting primly and as stiffly as a cardboard cut-out and Bond driving with a carefully blank look on his face, it looked like the matter would be dropped.

Then Bond smirked, eyes glittering evilly, and he observed smoothly, “Besides, I think that officer looked a bit turned on by it all. You did look particularly ravished-”

Q bit out with terse violence that barely clung to an edge of professionalism, “If you ever speak of that again, 007, I promise you that I will erase every credit card you own and ruin your credit score to boot. And add so many offenses to your driving record that every time an officer so much as senses you get behind a wheel, they’ll arrest you.”

Grey wings giving an unreadable twitch, Bond just continued to smirk insufferably like the rogue he was. “Understood, Quartermaster.”

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Chapter End Notes

This was my last pre-written chapter - updates might slow down a little. Still, I'm hoping to have another chapter typed in just a day or two.

*If you get impatient - just comment and ask! ^_^ Anyone who has commented before knows that I answer quickly! I'd be happy to give an update on my typing progress.*
When Bond and Q arrived at the motel they were presently staying at, 008 was waiting for them. The man stood just outside the second-floor door (a strategic choice for agents who could fly), wings spread out so that the evening sun warmed the speckles plumage on their downy fronts. 008 had never seen the point in any sort of secrecy, but Q wondered if the man was inviting trouble by flaunting his wings like that.

Then again, considering how frustrated the double-o’s were with how ethereal this opponent was, the idea of luring in a physical enemy probably had some appeal, regardless of danger.

“How was the trip?” 008 asked, coming forward to the motel railing, wings giving a soft beat. His tone was light but his eyes turned guarded and chilly as Q got out of the car. Still, the antagonism ended there.

Bond slammed the car door and smirked, sharp eyes crinkling slightly. Q successfully held back a groan as Bond immediately opened his mouth to explain, “Uneventful, if you count a car-bomb as uneventful.”

That got 008’s huge frame to shift, everything about him subtly growing more serious. He continued to play along with 007’s humor, however: “Well, considering how many we’ve nearly been killed by in the past few days, I’m not really sure anymore. You look remarkably not-blow-up. What happened?”

Instead of going into sordid, humiliating detail, Bond actually cut the story short, to Q’s surprise. “Our Quartermaster earned his keep. The bomb is probably still active, but it’s got no trigger
anymore.” Q was slightly impressed that Bond didn’t just say diffused, after Q had made the distinction. Pulling his things out of the front seat, Q turned to do the same in the back only to find that 007 was making himself useful: the man silently removed Q’s other bags from the rear seat. Although Q had to admit that someone else holding his laptop bag made him nervous, Bond was comporting himself with polite manners at the moment, tucking his vast grey wings back as he handled the Quartermaster’s things. He simply began walking them towards the motel room, although Q had to withhold a squeak of alarm as Bond suddenly flared out his wings again and flew right up to the second-story landing. Gusts of wind from the downbeat blew dirt everywhere, and Q could just imagine all of his precious tech falling in the mayhem to break into a hundred pieces.

When Q lowered his arm and dust stopped flying around, however, Bond was standing as perfectly as ever next to 008, Q’s laptop bag and backpack still safely in his grasp.

“I’m going to stay out here and deal with the bomb,” Q called, relatively sure that 008’s presence had long-since warned off any curious, innocent ears. Still uneasy about how to act now that he was in the field with two double-o’s, Q stood with his hand restlessly on the driver’s-side door.

Bond didn’t turn around, but he looked to 008 a moment before entering the motel room. “Watch him,” Bond commanded mirthlessly, tone immovable. Then he was out of sight. 008, instead of testing the orders (or, worse yet, testing Q just for fun), gave an abrupt nod and leaned against the second-floor railing again, eyes scanning patiently around Q, the car, the parking lot – anything that could become a threat.

‘Okay, I can work with that,’ Q decided, giving his shoulders an experimental roll to relax. From there, he opened up the car-door and got to work with the efficiency and focus he was known for. And maybe he was a little bit eager, too – because, after all, a lot could be learned about a bomber from the bombs he or she made.

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It took Q an hour before he finally deserted the car and entered the motel room, but only because he’d put the car back to rights and because he’d quickly become fascinated with the workings of the bomb he’d faced. With the car parked and no more unpredictable variables (assuming that 008 was doing a good job as watchman, better than whatever kind of watching he’d done when the bomb had been installed in the car), Q was almost instantly sunken into his own of wires and needle-nosed pliers and gadgetry. If either 008 or 007 had actually come down to check on him, they’d have found their Quartermaster folded up under the steering wheel, driver’s seat pushed all the way back, staring with avid fascination at the bomb like it was a recent present.

Eventually, Q pulled the bomb out. The car would work, he was reasonably sure (he was marginally less genius with car mechanics, but that still made him terrifyingly above average), and now that left him with just the bomb as a separate unit to investigate.

And by ‘investigate’ he meant ‘take apart’.

There was a moment of tension as Q came up to 008. Being wingless, Q had to actually trot up the stairs like a normal person, making his way along the joined balcony until he came up to 008 and the hotel door 007 had gone into. Focused on the box with protruding wires in his hands, it wasn’t until he was within wingspan that Q sensed the threatening growl of energy coming from 008’s core. Brant Sims wasn’t showing signs of active violence, but Q could sense a dangerous situation from
further away than this. Infinitesimally stiffening his posture, a habit left over from when he would have had black and white wings to half-spread in warning, Q continued walking forward. “Is this the only room we have?” he made himself ask in a perfectly level voice, stopping to stand at a range that was already probably too close. Backing down from 008 would only lead to more trouble, however, so Q braced himself quietly and tried to gauge whether this would lead to an altercation.

For a long moment, 008 continued to stand in Q’s way, arms crossed over his broad chest and dark eyes narrowed slightly to watch the smaller man irritably and with a slight but definite edge of challenge. Just when Q was preparing to sigh at the inevitability of facing off with double-o’s, 008 gave way. “This room and room 202. You get 201-” He flicked a wingtip at the room where Bond had gone. “-And James and I will switch rooms so someone is always keeping an eye on you.”

Q squashed the instinct to say he didn’t need to be watched, both hearing and seeing the demeaning air to 008’s declaration. However, Q hadn’t gotten so far up in government hierarchy by being impulsive and easily angered. He swallowed the annoyance with only slight effort, falling back on logic that told him this plan had merit. Before ending up in his present wingless state, Q would have been quite capable of taking care of himself in the field, but now it was a foregone conclusion that he’d keep close to the 00-agents.

Calling him helpless was, of course, a mistake. But the fact remained that Q lacked the wings of the double-o’s and had been fighting with wires, binary, and coding instead of dangerous physical people for the past few years. ‘Out of practice’ was his middle name, sparring session with 006, 7, and 8 notwithstanding.

“Thank you, 008,” was the best reply Q could come up with, but he made it sound neutral and formal. Then he took the risk of walking past Sims to get into the room.

Q did not hold his breath. 008 also let him pass without contest, so the held breath was hardly necessary.

The room definitely wasn’t anything to brag about, especially since Bond had already commandeered the one table – he was cleaning his gun on it. Wings splayed out, relaxed with their darkly shadowed tips whispering against the floor, he took up a disproportionately large portion of the room. When he saw Q, a faint spark of amusement made his eyes glint, and it didn’t take much of Q’s genius to imagine that the agent was thinking of their earlier farce in the car. “If I tell you that I have a new cell-phone for you, will you relinquish the desk to me?” Q asked in a bit of a huff, starting to feel the long day dragging at his heels. He wanted to look at this bomb and he wanted a flat, clean surface to do it on.

Sadly, it was not meant to be. Bond’s amusement spread from his eyes to his hard mouth, which coiled upwards at the edges. Lifting up a hand deftly, he unfolded his fingers to reveal said phone already in his possession. “I’m afraid that won’t work on me, Quartermaster,” he said with all levity. Q’s eyes flicked to his bags, positioned on one bed and looking completely orderly despite the fact that Bond had apparently rifled through them. Granted, the phone that Q had been directed to bring to Bond (along with a replacement earpiece) had been in a fairly accessible outside pocket. After surviving a bomb in the car with Bond, Q just didn’t have it in him to fly into an outraged tantrum at the intrusion – plus, at least three-fourths of his mind was still locked onto the bomb in his hands, changing at him to just get on with it and take the technology apart. “I’m not going to ask how you got that, Bond, seeing as the answer is obvious,” Q relented, refusing to show an ounce of irritation. Irritation was like honey to bees with double-o’s. He ignored the fact that Bond’s smirk turned complacently smug, as if the man had been congratulated on something. Just for that, Q played dirty, “How about if you give me the desk space, I won’t rewire your earpiece to play ‘God Save the
Queen’ every time MI6 contacts you?”

Bond’s smile abruptly vanished. Apparently he hadn’t found the earpiece yet, meaning it was a valuable hostage for the Quartermaster. That abruptly improved Q’s mood, and he allowed himself a small smirk of his own to coolly settle over his face. “You know I’ll do it.”

Fingers of his free hand drumming on the table, Bond considered this only for a few seconds before giving Q a mutinous look (usually reserved for M or frustrating teammates during missions) and then turning to his gun. 007 had given in: he reassembled the last of the weapon’s pieces in seconds, snapping and sliding everything into place and cleaning up just as efficiently. Tucking his wings up to his back unconsciously to avoid the chair, he swung out of the seat and left the desk to Q.

It said something for Q’s concentration that he immediately brightened and slipped into the seat, focused on the detached bomb and eager to deign dissecting it. Bond could grump all he liked – Q had himself a desk and something to do with it. Therefore, the Quartermaster paid little attention as Bond ambled around the room. The man was near-silent anyway, undetectable to pretty much every sense except that Angel ability to detect a fellow Angel’s energy. Expression calm and quietly focused, Bond checked around the room for likely the third time; then, with a brief pause for consideration that ended in a faint smirk, he changed directions to head back towards Q’s side of the small room.

Q jumped a little as physical contact broke him out of the deeply concentrated focus he’d had on his task, startled until he realized that it was just Bond, resting an idle hand on his shoulder. Both hands buried in wires and not happy at being interrupted, Q was about to snap something at the other man when 007 leaned in just enough to comment quite politely in his ear, “The phone just fell out of your bag, by the way. I never riffled through anything.”

Great, Bond was a bloody mind-reader. Q sat back minutely, sinking down in his chair a bit as he felt the heat of embarrassment touch his face at the realization that his accusations (however silent) of Bond digging through his stuff were false. Sometimes he just got so used to double-o’s being inconsiderate brats that he forgot they could occasionally possess manners.

Bond finished, still as lightly as if this was just an everyday occurrence and with not a jot of indignation in his voice, “Must have gotten jarred about when I was taking corners in town.”

Q remembered Bond’s hand bracing him at the hip, preventing Q from being jarred around in the same manner. Ironically, the same touch that had kept him from being physically jarred had probably done a lot to mentally jar him.

As it was, Bond had deftly made his point, showing why he had such a reputation for being suave and in control of situations. Wings again shifting and tucking smartly out of the way so that they wouldn’t brush Q, Bond walked past and headed towards the door. “008 will take the next watch. Three hour shifts.” Footsteps like a cat, the blonde 00-agent exited with the jaunty air of one who has won a minor personal victory.

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The next hour actually saw all three of them in the same room as Q finished up his inspection of the bomb as well as the other bits of bombs that the double-o’s had recovered. Of course, by then, Q’s car-bomb hardly looked like anything but a landscape of wires, screws, metal plaits, and other
“It wasn’t a very complicated bomb, really,” was Q’s deduction, as he gave his report to his new teammates.

008 had commandeered the only other chair in the room, but Bond looked comfortable with sitting on the edge of the bed, face unreadable but eyes keen as Q related his findings.

“Well, even if we’re dealing with an amateur-” 008 started with a grouchy twitch of his wings.

“I didn’t say that we were dealing with an amateur,” Q interrupted. For a moment, he and 008 locked gazes, and it was nearly a fight again. Initially, Q had thought he hated Bond’s unflappable silence most, but not it was becoming clear that Bond’s impenetrable mask of calm was the least of Q’s worries. He knew that, on missions, 008 could be perfectly professional, but he’d also seen moments when the man’s temper had taken over, too. All 00-agents had dangerous moods, 008’s was apparently triggered by Q’s mere presence. “I looked at the other bombs you and 007 had encountered, and the dichotomy is remarkable,” went on the smaller Angel, gesturing with a hand purposelessly as he began to focus on his topic instead of the irritable nature of Brant Sims. Q pushed his glasses up a little higher on his nose, blinking as the rims touched his hair. “You see, the signatures are obviously the same, but even though I am sure these were made by the same person, we have strikingly different bombs here.”

Now it was Bond’s turn to interrupt: “What are you saying, Q?” He sounded patient enough, but his eyes said he was wary of Q slipping into technological jargon.

Q quickly got ahold of himself, realizing he’d been getting excited. “Most of the bomb fragments you had to show me were obviously from very intricate bombs. This bomb, however-” He touched long fingers to what had once been the explosive device hidden in Bond’s car. “Was made so simply that any Q-branch minion could have diffused it, disregarding the complications of keeping the car moving on cruise-control in the meanwhile.” Having finally gotten that traitorous blush under control, Q was able to reflect on the incident without feeling his ears burn up. He wanted to find and strangle whoever had made this bomb purely because of the embarrassment it had put Q through, although at least Bond had gotten a laugh out of it. “In fact, the noise you heard was intentionally wired in – you were meant to hear it.”

That got both double-o’s to straighten up and pay attention. Both sat forward almost unconsciously, and even 008’s animosity disappeared like smoke as his gaze grew professional and hard. “So you’re telling us that whoever put this bomb in James’s car meant for it to be found?”

“And dismantled. The bomb itself was very, very simple. Especially for me.”

Ignoring Q’s entirely-deserved-boast, 008 pressed further, “But you were saying that the other bombs – allegedly made by the same person – were complicated.”

“Precisely,” Q responded automatically, his brain already grasping the whole conversation, so 008’s comment didn’t offset him at all, “That means this one had to have been simplified on purpose. The connections all around the bomb was truly quite professional, but, in a nutshell…” Now what Q was going to say strayed into the realm of supposition, which was much shakier ground than the facts that Q usually worked with. But he’d been brought here for his professional opinion and his knowledge of bombs, so he may as well speak his mind-

Then, to Q’s surprise, Bond beat him to it. “In a nutshell, someone is toying with us.”

008 and Q both looked at Bond, who with his dappled grey wings and practiced stillness seemed to
fade away into even a tiny hotel room like this. It was such a stark contrast to the debonair lady’s man he could become in seconds with only a smile and a suit (sometimes without even the suit). Right now, there was something angry in Bond’s eyes, showing the 00-agent who didn’t like to be toyed with.

Slowly, his own expression uncertain, 008 turned back to Q, searching his narrow face warily. That urged Q to commit to an answer, and he was quickly nodding. “That was my conclusion, especially when I found these.” Once again, the wingless Angel turned around to the desk, picking up seemingly random bits until he had a palm-full of minute connectors and wiring.

Again it was Bond who spoke, leaning forward towards Q’s hand only for a moment before looking back up with a raised eyebrow. “What am I looking at, Q?”

Sometimes Q forgot that not everyone had his brain for technology…other times (like now), he remembered perfectly well, but still couldn’t help showing off a bit. Still holding out the wires and ignoring both 008 and 007’s looks of impatient bafflement, Q laid out the most shocking of his findings: “Parts from Alec’s phone.”

That made both 007 and 008 alert again. There was suddenly a wire-fine tension in the room, like a violin string being pulled taut so suddenly it vibrated – only in this case, the tension was far more dangerous. Both 00-agents sat up again with motions that unconsciously promised violence, and Q worked to keep up a mask of detached, professional calm. Eyes slightly lidded behind his mop of hair and glasses, he subtly studied his companions’ energies, easily detecting the spike. “Alec’s phone was never recovered, but now I can report that I have at least a small portion of it,” he finished.

“Why would someone put pieces of a bloody phone in a bomb?” Sims exploded, but other than the change in pitch of his voice, he stayed under control. One wing twitched enough to scrape his flight feathers against the ancient television, but he could have knocked it right over.

“Wires are wires,” Q shrugged. “Just about anything can be used to make a bomb.”

“But a kidnapped 00-agent’s phone isn’t ‘just about anything’.” Maybe Q had underestimated how frustrated 008 had been getting over this mission, because now the man was standing and looming over him. Reminded starkly of their snarled meeting over his desk back in Q-branch, Q found Sims right in front of him, hands braced past Q’s shoulders to the back of his chair. Preparing sharp words that bit at the back of his teeth, Q tensed, but then 008 turned his head aside and snapped at Bond, “Teasing us. That’s what’s happening. This bomber got Alec once with no trouble, and now he’s teasing us with that information.”

Perhaps 007 would have responded in a way that diffused his comrade’s temper, but Q wasn’t going to count on that. Instead, he pulled himself together and raised his voice sharply: “I agree.”

Two heads turned sharply in his direction again, Brant Sims from only a few hand-spans away. Unflinchingly making eye-contact, Q continued like an implacable computer program reading off a reply, “There is not other reason for an obviously expert bomb-making to degrade themselves with such childish work if they’re not teasing us. Clearly, just trying to blow you and 007 up got boring, much like trying to teach 006 not to tease enemy agents.”

Bond ignored the humor. He had something else on his mind, and Q turned his head away from 008 when the grey-winged Angel spoke with solemn insight, “Or they realize that you are part of the game now.”
For a moment after 007 had said that, Q had just sat in silence, stunned. Partially, he was shocked at the possibility, but a lot of his surprise simply came from the fact that he hadn’t considered that himself. Brant Sims had backed off, standing up with a jittery twitch of his wings – the edgy behavior of an aerial predator cooped up for too long – and Bond just kept watching Q with grave patience.

Q didn’t return the look. He was thinking. Chewing his lip, he stared off into the middle distance.

Then he abruptly jumped up and started hustling around the room, nearly going through Bond before he discarded the idea and went the other way around the bed, grabbing the bag positioned just behind 007. “Where’s the fire, Quartermaster?” 008 joked lightly in the background, his tone guarded but also slightly uneasy by his Quartermaster’s sudden, inexplicable motion. Bond had immediately twisted, wings flaring, as Q had gone out of his range of vision – no 00-agent worth his salt liked people walking behind them.

Q had just been getting his laptop. He barely noticed that Bond was in the way, or even that he was sharing the room with two people. Frowning in deep thought and frustration because the information wasn’t at his fingertips right now, Q actually just plopped down on the floor at the foot of the bed because waiting to get to the desk took too long. He flipped open his laptop with a practiced twitch of his wrist and was almost immediately typing keys.

“You think he’s lost his mind?” 008’s voice was mild, but annoying. Q frowned a little bit more deeply at the annoyance but brushed it mentally away. He didn’t pay enough attention to understand what Bond murmured in return, but it sounded chastising.

Q found what he wanted a moment later as a red dot appeared on the image on his screen. “Ah!” he exclaimed, sitting back and baring his teeth in triumph. Then the light blinked out and Q almost physically deflated. “Drat.” A few quick flicks of his eyes on the screen to identify the problem, and Q was up and moving again.

Now it was Bond’s turn to finally give in and admit that he was getting frustrated by Q’s baffling, unexplained behavior. “Q, if you don’t tell us what you’re doing, we’re going to have to go with Sims’s opinion and label you as mentally unbalanced.”

“I’m not mentally unbalanced,” Q snapped reflexively, approaching his bag again but this time finding Bond standing to get in his way. Angry at being thwarted when his brain was working in high gear, Q shot him an absolutely scalding (and, honestly, childish) glare before simply going the other way around the bed. As it turned out, what he was looking for wasn’t in that bag, but he quickly hunted up the other one. By that point, both 00-agents were looking rather exasperated and out of their element, but Q’s mental calculations hadn’t slowed down enough for him to sympathize. He started heading out the door with a new contraption being assembled in his hands as he walked.

“You think you’re going?”

Brant Sims hadn’t physically stopped him, nor actually blocked the door…quite. The Angel instead just stretched a wing out so that it made getting to the doorknob impossible, and was narrowing his eyes cautiously in the smaller Quartermaster’s direction.

Oh well. Q had to put the thing together anyway. Eyes focused on the fragile configuration of metal in his hands, he replied unhesitantly, “On the roof.”
Now Bond entered the conversation, slowly walking up. Again, he didn’t actually do anything, but double-o’s knew exactly how close they had to be in order to be effective at disabling an opponent. Or an unpredictable Quartermaster. “I think that the owners of his establishment might frown on that, Q.”

If the double-o’s kept talking to him in that patronizing tone…! Q bit back a very animal growl, deciding that maybe the tone wasn’t patronizing, because the more Q was forced to slow down, the more he had to admit that his actions probably seemed out-of-the-blue. So instead of lecturing 007 and trying to shove 008’s wing out of the way at the same time, Q relented to huffing and then saying, “Fine then. Someone needs to get this up on the roof. Or as high up as possible.” His thoughts began to reach another conclusion, and he added thoughtfully, “Which should be perfectly easy for you two, since you have wings.”

Since Q wasn’t looking, he didn’t see the fleeting looks of surprise that touched 008’s and 007’s face before being just as quickly wiped away, an economy of motion matched with an economy of emotion. Both were taken off-guard to hear Q talk about his own flightlessness so idly, although it was only 007 whose cold blue eyes briefly showed sympathy on the heels of surprise.

Oblivious to the swift there-and-gone play of emotions, Q decided not to risk the fight that breaking a few of 008’s feathers would cause, instead turning around and trying to slow his mind down enough to explain to mere agents. He sighed. “Okay. This…” Suddenly the explanation was too complicated: the piece of technology Q was holding in his hands he’d made himself. “Think of this as an antenna, only better. I need to get it as high as possible, and it will boost the signal.”

“What signal?!” 008 finally snapped his wing back finally, out of the way, but then snapped both of them out in pure exasperation. Q: the only man able to drive 00-agents to the brink of insanity in a matter of minutes. 008 looked like he was trying to pull out his hair. Bond looked to have developed a twitch near his eye.

Q just blinked. “006’s phone. If the bomber was teasing us and trying to get our attention with the car-bomb, it was theoretically possible that he or she would also have kept the signal of 006’s phone active.” He looked at Bond, twitching an eyebrow upward, “You were the one that said ‘game’, 007. Wouldn’t it make sense for a game to have more than one step?”

At that, Bond’s eyes turned reflective a second before they turned unreadable – it was the look of Bond on a mission. Deadly and impenetrable. Before Q could try to unravel what 007 was thinking behind that suave, collected look, 008 stole his attention but pointing at the desk and asking, “I thought you found half of Alec’s phone in that.”

“I never said half, and the part of the phone that sends the signal is minute. And nearly indestructible,” Q added dryly, “After having them destroyed by 00-agents a few times, I’d better hope I’ve made at least parts of them unbreakable.”

Abruptly, Bond stepped forward. It wouldn’t have been such a notable motion, except for Bond had been so still a moment before by contrast. The man was like a Murcielago car: he went from stillness to motion with a grace and swiftness that was honestly one part breathtaking, two parts scary. While Q was working on holding his ground and keeping his face calm and blank, Bond shocked him by unhesitantly, offering, “Give it here, Quartermaster. I can fly it up.”

Suddenly Q had reservations about this plan. 007 held an MI6 record for destroying tech that stretched way back before the present Q had even gotten there. There were less selfish reasons, too: “The roof might just be better. If mean, if we’re being watched by an enemy faction-”

“Then they’re as likely to shoot you traipsing up on the roof as me flying over it,” Bond interrupted
with a shrug, adding with a soothing smirk, “Plus, I’m more used to bullets than you are.”

True, he probably was. Q hadn’t been in the field since he’d lost his wings years ago, and in his new profession behind a computer screen, bullets were rarely a problem. Unable to come up with any other excuses important enough to voice, he relented with as much grace as he could manage, “Let me set it up and get it running. Then you just have to fly it up and I can monitor whether the signal strengthens as you get higher.” Adjusting the delicate object in his grip, he looked up sharply over his glasses, through his fringe of hair, “If you damage this, Bond, I swear–”

“Relax, Q,” 008 chuffed. When he flicked a wing again, it came precariously close to bumping Q – would have, in fact, except Bond stepped forward and caught a handful of pinions without seeming to look. For a moment, the two scuffled with the reserved power of two big cats who realized how easily their games could turn to killing each other. At least 006 wasn’t here – he didn’t usually hold back enough to realize it. Q suspected the man of being slightly suicidal.

“Here,” Q finally said, pushing down his reluctance ruthlessly in favor of doing his job like the mission demanded. The antenna-like contraption was placed in Bond’s hands, and it was at least one small piece of luck that the two double-o’s also become mostly serious again. 008 batted Bond’s back with a wing, but 007 merely grunted, ignoring him now. His attention was on Q, and he (thankfully) looked more or less prepared to take orders. “Whatever you do, do not drop it.”

“And don’t get shot?” Bond teased, that ravishing smile back.

This time, Q was having none of it. Spine straight, shoulders squared, and face completely unfazed, he said back, “I didn’t say that. I said don’t drop it.” And with that, he spun on his heel and opened the door.

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Chapter End Notes

My new job takes up a bit more time than I thought it world, but I’m going to try and get up at least a chapter every day or two - but same as last time: if you want to know how the next chapter is progressing, just shoot me a comment! :D I already have a few plans.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Bond does a tiny bit of flying. The bait is located. Alec is picked up. The Three Musketeers of Trouble and their Intrepid Quartermaster get up very early to start their road-trip to trouble.

Or the chapter of getting ready.

Chapter Notes

Q is not a morning person. So if he sounds whiny, he's not entirely at fault - losing ones wings messes with a person :(

(But for those who wanted 006 back, he is back! And 008 even smartens up a bit - and you get more insight into Q and his background/winglessness)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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It hurt him, swift and sudden and deep.

Usually, Q could see other Angels fly and it didn’t bother him at all, or at least no more than a faint twinge like the tenderness of an old scar (a fitting analogy, he noted).

But there was just something about seeing 007 fly right in front of him that cut like the bite of fire.

Unlike when Bond had unexpectedly flown up to the second story of the motel, 007’s broad wings beat once, twice, and then kept on beating, dragging against the weak chains that gravity tried to throw around the smooth, strong feathers. Q remembered that feeling: it was a battle of body and soul, where victory was accompanied by a surge of triumph as the pure strength of the body defeated the pull of the earth.

The internal sensation was still crystal clear in Q’s chest, but the tools to bring about the physical side were broken.

Power. Bond flying up so far into the air was power. 008 was bigger than Bond, with slabs of muscle making him an intimidating man even without being an Angel – but somehow, in moments like this, Bond had more pure might in a million ways. Q couldn’t keep his eyes from tracing the vast arc of wings, each flight-feather curving against the air. Their greyness should have looked out of place in the daylight, but instead of being washed out like shadows, the dappled grey of Bond’s wings simply turned to silver touched by mercury. It was so unfair that Bond could be a stunningly handsome man while also being an impossibly beautiful Angel.
Q watched, mesmerized despite his best intentions, seeing Bond ascend.

‘I used to be lighter. I would have taken off faster.’

Cut. The pain was new and fresh.

The Quartermaster swore almost silently – and almost reverently – under his breath, watching Bond move gracefully higher despite the laws of nature that said his weight in muscle should have dragged him down. It drove Q to admit to himself, ‘Sure, I’d have been faster, but I don’t think I could have matched that majesty.’

Cut. Q was sure he should have felt twin cascades of blood running down his back again, because those old wounds were suddenly as open as if they’d just been inflicted. Q realized he had to stop watching before he lost it altogether. Dragging in a deep breath that was more ragged than he wanted to admit, Q turned around, pretending to be moody and pensive. If he wanted to call it pacing instead of walking off a storm of emotions, that was his business.

And then he remembered that he was supposed to be looking at his laptop.

Scrambling back to where he’d set his laptop on the back of the car, nearly tripping in his haste, Q started tapping at keys, instantly finding what he wanted. “A little higher, Bond!” he shouted.

People were probably looking from their motel rooms now, unless 008 was doing a particularly good job of looking scary to ward them off. Q just hoped that the added attention wouldn’t get them in trouble. He had the feeling he’d be erasing a lot of security footage later. Then again, if he’d fallen off the roof…

The signal strengthened, and Q started typing almost faster than most people could think, zeroing in on the location and locking it into his computer. “Good, Bond, good!” he called, eyes never leaving the computer screen even though he sensed 008’s nearness like a fizzle in the back of his brain or like the crackle of something static at his back. “Got it.” He turned around, and despite himself – despite the ache that hadn’t quieted in his chest – he had to get one last look at Bond as the man flew. He sidestepped 008 neatly, deciding to pretend that the man wasn’t trying to intimidate him by looming.

008 flew a lot like a torpedo, and 006 flew like a predator, pure and simple…but Bond… Q was staring again and couldn’t help it. He could face down 008 and spar against three 00-agents in a row (winning two out of three times), but this was like the biggest bloody chink in his armor that he could imagine. Out of all the double-o’s, Bond was the only one who flew like a bird. A bird of prey, true, but it was a combination of grace and dangerous power that eagles and hawks had.

It twisted up something so tight in Q’s chest that he thought it would snap. Somehow, past a lump in his throat that had appeared suddenly out of nowhere, Q managed to call out in a semblance of calm and control, “All right, you can come down now, 007. Remember – careful with my tech.”

Bond landed in a windstorm of wind kicked up by his broad grey wings, making it look so simple. “What happened to ‘Bond’?” he asked lightly, striding forward to hand the antenna-like machine back to its owner.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Q aloofly, taking his property and quickly focusing his attention on checking it over. Now that Bond had landed and folded those Angel wings behind him, Q could sublimate the unbecoming surges of emotion that had come up so unexpectedly. He wanted to take a deep breath and give himself a little shake to get the last of it out of his system, but figured the two double-o’s would notice. They were sometimes laughably oblivious, but in the field
they were too observant by half. “Well, I now know where the remainder of 006’s phone is. Also—”
He pulled his own phone out of his pocket as it startled him with a quick vibration – a message from MI6. “Also, 006 will be at the airport by tomorrow morning at 6:00 AM, barring bad flight conditions. That just leaves one thing.” Q turned around, facing 008 and 007 with a calm face once again. 007 and 008 faced death on a daily basis, but even if Q didn’t, he could pull up a poker face to rival any of them. “What do we do now?”

008 actually looked taken aback, and the involuntary snap of his wings nearly hit Q’s laptop off the hood of the car. “You’re not going to tell us what to do?” he asked as if barely daring to believe it.

After jumping forward to save his laptop, Q just tipped his head to look at 008 with one raised eyebrow. His reply was completely candid and he didn’t hesitate: “I might be in charge logistically, but I’m not an idiot: I’m not a field-agent first and foremost, like you are. I’m more than smart enough to defer to your judgment.”

For the first time, it looked like 008 was reconsidering his original opinion of Q. The man was just standing and blinking, his wings hanging loose-jointed as if he’d just flown into a bullet-proof window.

Therefore, it was Bond who made a decision first. “Hotel room,” he coaxed flatly, wings spread like a mother hen guiding chicks. Clearly, they’d make decisions after they were finally out of the public eye.

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In the end, Bond had called MI6 to give a report of their status. 008 had smirked as he’d reclined on the bed (Q’s bed, the Quartermaster noted, but decided not to break their fragile peace by bringing that up) and said that 007 had to call because Bond was M’s favorite. After a rather convoluted conversation full of humorless grins on Bond’s part and poorly-stifled snickers on 008’s, Q was pretty confused: it sounded like Bond’s status as M’s favorite was bought at the price of also being her most hated agent. Q began to wonder if M sent 007 around the world because the man was the best, or because she just wanted to inflict him on someone else.

So while 008 went outside to keep watch (and also to make it clear that no one had seen anything earlier), 007 took up a position in the room’s second chair to have a long chat with M.

Q was, logically, listening in. No one would expect any less. Outwardly, he was renewing his investigation of the bomb he’d already dissected, seeing if there was anything he’d missed. He didn’t look up when Bond said, low and serious, “…Yes, we’re pretty sure it’s a trap. Only bait looks that good.”

Bond’s eyes flicked over to Q, checking if he was listening. Instead of lifting his head or making any kind of actual response, Q settled for just nodding his head – he agreed. He wasn’t a field agent now, but he had been, briefly. Plus, he wasn’t an idiot. Even as a kid he’d known that something this good couldn’t be true.

Nodding briefly back, Bond seamlessly returned to his conversation on his new cellphone, “Uh-hm… Yes, we’ll pick up Alec tomorrow.” Suddenly Bond flashed his roguish grin as if he’d just been complimented, which meant M had probably insulted him. As easily as honey off his silvered tongue, the infamous 007 finished, “Of course we’re going to go after the bastard.”
Q shook his head and put on an expression of mild, resigned exasperation, but inwardly, he’d expected nothing less. They’d been chasing the bomber for ages, and this was the closest they’d come to finding him.

Looking over at Bond’s dangerous smile, Q reminded himself that at least no one survived a trap like a double-o.

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As promised, 008 and 007 took turns being awake and on watch. In theory, this meant that one of them would be asleep in the other room while the other watched over while Q slept in this one. That, of course, took for granted that Q would sleep.

“He’s still up,” 008 grunted, hooking a thumb back over his shoulder into the hotel room as he switched watch with Bond. 007’s head jerked to stare at 008 in surprise before he actually looked into the room, his eyes proving Sims’s words to be true. After Q’s open admittance of not knowing as much about field protocol, 008 had fallen back into a respectful silence around the Quartermaster that was a vast improvement on their previous relationship.

After a few incredulous blinks, 007 finally accepted that their Quartermaster was an insomniac. With a grunt, he sidled in past 008 with just barely a whisper of feathers. The fact that he’d made any noise at all was a reminder that he’d been quite asleep only minutes before. 008 disappeared out into the dark night and 007 took his place, closing the door to stand leaning against it. Q was at the desk, hunched over the guts of the bomb with his computer within reach now, so that he had both of his hands busy with one or the other and his eyes traveled constantly in between.

“Q, you know that normal people sleep, don’t you?”

That comment garnered no discernible reaction, although Q eventually pulled himself out of his work just enough to mutter back, “I’m not normal people. I am MI6’s Quartermaster, and I’m trying to make sure we stay alive tomorrow.”

The sigh from Bond at the door was accompanied by the rustle of feathers. It was so surprising to hear a sound from the man who was usually as eerily silent as a panther that Q’s head actually jerked up. And Bond chuckled; he’d moved his wings on purpose. “And if our Quartermaster goes to sleep on the job, how will things go then?” he chided, all in good humor.

“What you don’t seem to realize, 007, is that I’m on the job now,” Q pointed out, and stalwartly went back to typing things into his computer. “My job just doesn't have clearly defined boundaries like yours. I’m not on the job when I picked up a gun, and off when I put it down.”

“Q?”

“What?”

“I may not have my gun in hand right now, but if you don’t turn off that laptop and get into that bed, I’m going to make you wish you had.”

Now that was a threat. It wasn’t the most creative by any means, but it was said with the steady sincerity that only 00-agents could manage. For a moment, Q wasn’t sure whether he felt a skitter of cold fear down his back or a burst of anger at the challenge from the other Angel. Since said other
Angel happened to have a license to kill as well as wings, Q decided not to argue. Making it clear by his glare that he was acquiescing under duress, he stood up and was surprised to find that his legs had gotten so stiff he could barely stand on them. He pretended that he was just leaning over to turn off his laptop instead of wobbling on limbs that were suddenly pins and needles. Drat. “It won’t really make any difference whether I sleep now or not,” he felt the need to argue to hide the fact that he was subtly trying to stretch feeling back into his ankles.

“Good,” was Bond’s cheery reply, “Then go to sleep.”

Q huffed a sigh, reminding himself that Bond was always glib, and reacting had only made it worse in the past. “That’s not what I meant. I am much more useful awake, obviously, and am the kind of person who functions best on little or no sleep.”

“Bed. Now,” was the slow, implacable statement. Somewhere along the way, Bond had gone from patiently amused to edging on annoyed. It didn’t help that Q had been staring at the light from the lamp and his laptop so long that he’d literally killed his night-vision, and that meant Bond was a picture of shadows across the room. His wings didn’t even exist.

“Fine,” Q gave in. Maybe bed did sound nice… He’d toed off his shoes hours ago, sometime after 008 had finally given up on telling him he should be asleep. Sadly, Bond was made of more determined stuff. The slender, wingless Angel flopped down onto bed with more eagerness that he’d earlier possessed, sleep gaining a foothold and then taking a mile. Q’s eyelids felt like a thousand pounds as he sat there. For a moment, his hands reflexively reached for his shirt to unbutton it and slip it off, but then he stopped, a spark of lucidity reminding him why that was a bad idea. Nakedness didn’t bother him, or it wouldn’t have if he didn’t have massive scars to show. He decided to crawl into bed fully-clothed instead, unwilling to undergo the hassle of changing out of sight in the bathroom. “Happy?” he asked Bond with a thin, smooth edge of false politeness he’d gotten rather good at using.

Bond, acknowledging the sharp shard of glass hidden beneath that statement with a crooked smile, just said back with a completely straight face, “As a clam.”

“Good. Because I’m not. 008 got his bloody feathers on my bed when he was lounging here earlier. Remind me to give him a water-gun next time instead of that metal monstrosity he prefers.”

“Understood, Quartermaster.” The faintly sarcastic response was accompanied by a deep chuckle, and Bond got the last word because Q fell asleep.

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5:00 AM. That was how early they’d gotten up so that they could pick up Alec.

Q could not remember the first part of the trip. For all that he knew, he might have been magically teleported into the car, because his first morning memories didn’t start up until after he was already bundled, cranky as a cottonmouth snake, in the back seat.

“Blimey, just think what he’d be like if you hadn’t gotten him to go to sleep.”

“I heard that, 008,” Q snapped, trying to appear professional and failing because he was huddled, fuzzy-brained and half-asleep, against the driver’s side door. Mornings…one day, he hoped to invent a way to destroy them all. Once he’d been a morning person, but something about losing his wings
had heavily disrupted his internal workings, and mornings had never been the same since. “I suggest you spend less time commenting on my inclement temperament and check on the progress of 006’s flight.”

As a sign that miracles did happen, Bond stepped in to calm the situation. Tone suave as always, despite the fact that it was too early even for birds, Bond noted, “At least he’s not as bad as Alec when you wake him up after a night out.”

That had 008 chuffing out a rough laugh. “Thanks for the reminder. He nearly broke my leg last time.”

“And you only tried to get him up off the floor. I tried to take the empty vodka glass out of his hand.”

“And he threw you across the flat, yeah?” 008 shot back, grinning because he knew he had Bond trapped.

By now, Q was listening, rousing himself from his early-morning stupor enough to be interested. He noticed the extended pause before Bond obviously lied, “No.” When Q stifled a snort, Bond’s voice drifted back to him from the driver’s seat, “Amused, Quartermaster?”

“By the fact that you were thrown by a sleeping drunk man? No, why would I be amused?” Q replied so coolly a snowflake wouldn’t have melted on his tongue. Because he knew that he was out of view directly behind Bond’s seat, he smirked. “I’m barely even awake, after all.”

Bond snorted something that sounded uncomplimentary, but Q’s brain wasn’t functioning, so he missed it. The rest of the drive predictably went the same way, more or less: Q remembered bits and snatches when his body let him wake up, and then it was a toss-up whether he’d be cranky or not, and another toss-up whether the double-o’s would humor him or get their hackles up. Oh well. Q rarely remembered mornings until at least noon, so this would all have the fuzzy quality of a dream. Sometimes there were perks to having a supernatural imbalance that no one knew about.

“Q. Wake up. We’re at the airport.”

“Good,” Q heard himself grumble in a voice that sounded and rather felt like a minor rockslide, “Let the bloody airport handle itself. I’m staying here.”

There was no telling if Bond or Sims had spoken first, but it was clearly Alec who spoke next around a full laugh. “Wow. You weren’t joking when you said he was a monster this early.”

Q cracked an eye open from where he was still folded up against the door and the seat, leveling a gimlet glare past his glasses to where all three double-o menaces were now looking in on him through the door opposite. 007 and 8 were visible only as a pair of legs and waists, but 006 was leaning down, his too-white teeth showing in one of his famous shark-grins. He looked entirely too amused, and Q briefly and murderously considered another sparring session, right here, right now, just to prove that double-o agents couldn’t laugh at everybody with impunity. Q realized that it was a juvenile thought born out of his hatred for mornings, and quashed it, instead kicking out his foot just far enough to hit the far seat-belt lock.

006 had been too far away – and too fast – to kick, but he hadn’t noticed that the empty seat had been buckled. Now, as the belt was unlocked and flew back, it caused him to yelp. Q closed his eyes and smiled blissfully, glad for whatever semi-coherent spark of genius had prompted him to buckle both seat-belts into place, one around himself an the other around his laptop case as if it were a small child.
Q didn’t realize that he’d fallen asleep to the happy sound of 006’s yelp until he woke up again to the car moving and 006 sitting next to him, remarking in amazement to those up front, “He really is dead to the world until noon.”

Alarmed at the loss of time, Q tried to scramble upright, only to find that the seatbelt (such an amusing contraption earlier) was rather hard to fight when only half of your brain was awake. “What time is it?” he rasped, afraid that it really was noon. How far was it that they had planned to drive today? Had the signal really been that far away?

Bond was still driving. Apparently a car-bomb made him want to drive more instead of less, or else he was just the best driver. “Back among the living, Quartermaster?”

“How far was it that we planned to drive today? Had the signal really been that far away?”

Taking in a deep breath and closing his eyes slowly, Q purposefully tried to acclimate himself to the new circumstances: he was now outnumbered by three double-o agents that he had to somehow work with, and they were all headed into a trap that probably included a ton of bombs and booby-traps that he’d have to disarm. And Alec Trevelyan was laughing. “008, 007, have you informed Mr. Trevelyan of the circumstances?”

Belligerently, it was 006 who answered, still with a smirk evident in his jovial voice, “Of course they did. Why, did you think they didn’t?”

“I think that you’re very relaxed.” Q opened his eyes to glare at 006, wishing that it weren’t so early and he was more himself.

If anything, that answer relaxed 006 more. The muscular, black-winged Angel reclined back into his seat, one arm laid along the window and the other draped over the back of the seat, midnight wings loosely situated beneath so that his corner of the car was painting in splashes of black. “You haven’t worked very closely with us before, have you?” he said in a low, smooth tone, eyes intense and strangely knowing.

The other double-o’s had gone silent, and Q kept his look shuttered as he looked between them. “No, I haven’t,” he admitted sincerely, deciding to throw out the truth even while he coiled internally in preparation for an argument or even a fight. He always felt he had to prove himself to these 00-agents…!

At the last second, he realized that his energy must have given him away, because Bond – who had an eerie way of reading energy, it seemed, when other Angels barely noticed – spooked suddenly, “It was a rhetorical question, Q. Alec was just trying to make a point that we are usually very relaxed right now.” Now that Q was sitting up like a coherent person, he could see Bond in the rearview mirror, glacial blue eyes meeting his in the slice of reflective surface. “It’s all part of the job. You tense up.” He shrugged, voice low but never changing tone even as his words became chilling, “-You die.”

Q had almost forgotten that part of the job. He sat back in his seat, letting out a long breath, truly realizing how detached from fieldwork he’d become. With another slow breath, he focused on recalling all of those instincts that he’d once known as easily as breathing silently, waiting patiently,
and attacking ruthlessly. Hopefully, he wouldn’t be called upon to do those things, because he wasn’t entirely sure he could do them quite as well now that he was an Angelic cripple. “So 006 has been briefed?” he changed the subject, wanting to get down to business.

Again, being the glib fellow that he was, 006 answered, “A baited trap. Likely lots of things that explode and want to kill us. All set in the middle of nowhere in Canada.” Q looked over despite his better judgment, and found the man grinning viciously. “Sounds like fun.”

“Sounds cold,” 008 grumbled, but in the passenger seat, a faint slice of a lethal smirk was touching his mouth, too.

It was a fact that MI6 Angels were dangerous. What few people appreciated was that they were ten times more dangerous when their foe had been baiting them for weeks.

“The outdoors should do us good,” Bond observed blandly.

008’s faint smile turned into a full-on smirk that held no humor. “You’re just saying that because we don’t have to hold back when we fight in the woods.”

Bond didn’t reply, and Q was subtly trying to angle his head to see Bond’s expression in the rearview mirror when 007 deftly redirected the conversation. “We’ll be reaching the target in an hour. How far away do you want to stop to start bomb-hunting, Q?”

Okay, it was time to get his head in the game. “Stop the car now. If we want to survive this trap, we need to stop now and figure out what you’d call ground rules.”

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Chapter End Notes

Sorry that I promised action and delivered another filler! XC I am a bad, mean author. At least this chapter was short, so I can't have bored you for long :P

I needed to set up the situation just a little bit more, though (Alec needed to be picked up, the 'bait' needed to be found, etc.). Plus, my job is taking more of my time than I thought.

Anyway - within the next day or two (likely two), REAL action should start. Sorry for the wait - please bear with me.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

The pieces are set.
It's time that the game began.

Or the chapter in which Q and his team of double-o's take a walk through a mine-field.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long hiatus! I was finishing up my other 00Q fic (Yay! Finished my first fic!) I also got a bit of writer's block. The upside: I'm over the writer's block, and am proud of this chapter (n_n)

And fear not: I actually know nothing about bombs. I just make a ton of stuff up that sounds cool and goes BOOM

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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The breath plumed out of his mouth, following in an arc as Q turned his head, keeping track of 006 on his right.

They’d ditched the car. When Q had made them all stop by the roadside and plan, he’d extolled the dangers of both driving and flight. “That is what the bomber will no doubt expect. Obviously, it is already a known fact that you three are Angels, and have a car.”

“It also seems likely that our bomber is aware that you are without wings,” 007 had pointed out, not unkindly, his eyes serious as they met Q’s unwaveringly. “That means walking won’t be safe either.”

“Nothing will be,” Q got in the last word, just as serious as Bond but twice as logical.

As they’d neared their destination, however, it had swiftly become clear that their choices were limited – truly, they were heading to the middle of nowhere. As Q slowly but surely donned a mask of his most impenetrable calm, he’d noted the increasing buzz of anxious energy from the other men. It wasn’t nervousness, but was instead some combustible mixture of anticipation and fear hovering on that edge before it became violence. It was almost a relief when the Canadian wilderness closed in on them and finally made driving impossible. For all of Bond’s love of driving, he ditched the car pretty easily in favor of just moving, and 008’s tendency to twitch his wings became even more pronounced. It was actually a sight to see: getting out of the car, three MI6 Angels exiting in smooth movements and immediately stretching their wings in controlled, rustling flexes. 008’s banded shades
of brown, 006’s pitch-black, and Bond’s smoke-and-dusk grey. They looked around with eyes as sharp as any hunting hawks’, and seemed glad to be released of the fetters imposed by the car.

“Move slowly,” Q had said, taking charge subtly and remembering his promise to listen to them in most matters of field work. “If there are traps set up on the ground, we have a chance of noticing them, but if you rush and get stuck in anything, I can only move so fast to pull you out of it.” Q had installed a program (which he’d designed himself) on his phone so that he could detect electrical signatures. This far from civilization, anything with electricity was most certainly worth paying attention to, i.e., a bomb. Some types of explosive devices he wouldn’t be able to pick up this way, but even the occasional warning would be nice. “I’ll be monitoring all of your comms-” He flashed Bond a look, and the man grinned, knowing that the Quartermaster was recalling how recently Bond had destroyed his last one. Predictably, 007 was unrepentant, but Q was too tense to get properly worked up about that. “—So just speak up if you so much as imagine you’ve stepped near something that promises to blow you up.” Shifting from booted foot to booted foot (it wasn’t winter yet, but in Canada, it hardly made a difference to the frigidity of the temperature), Q noticed for at least the millionth time that he was only about half the size of the 00-agents. Only the solid knowledge that he had invaluable skills kept Q from thinking himself out of place.

He turned formally to Bond, whom he’d pegged before now as the most levelheaded of the three double-o’s. “I leave any other plans up to you. Any sort of formation you advise, I’ll follow.”

For a moment, Q wondered if perhaps Bond would fall back on his playfully teasing side and joke about his Quartermaster’s stiff, formal nature, but the man’s smile remained only faint – a tempered glint in his pale-blue eyes – and when he spoke it was clear that he was thinking of the mission, too. “All right then. Brant, Alec, how about that thing we did in Indonesia?”

In some of their talking back on the road, the three double-o’s had argued, forcing Q to step in as mediator, but now they were all business. Brant’s wings abruptly stopped their fidgeting, down to the last cinnamon-and-dun feather, and Alec gained the alert attention seen in wild wolves, but at least that meant the dangerously playful light in his eyes became tempered by canny seriousness. He and 008 both nodded, thoughtfully at first and then in agreement after a second of remembering.

Not having a clue what that was, Q had looked from face to face, wondering if it was childish to feel excluded. However, when Bond began giving deft orders – catching Brant’s eye and jerking his chin further afield, murmuring, “I’ll take the left” – he finished by turning to Alec and then indicating the slim Quartermaster with a thumb. “Him,” was all he said, as if the word needed to be enunciated very clearly to get it through Alec’s thick skull.

Maybe it was necessary – because Alec never entirely lost his sense of humor, even in the midst of missions. A coiling cloud of air preceding his words, he jested quietly around a smile, “But taking the middle position is boring, James! Don’t do this to me!”

“It won’t be boring for you,” came the reply, which actually sounded more like a threat as 007 scowled. He snatched a glance at Q. “Keep an eye on our Quartermaster and make sure he remains undamaged. M will kill us if he’s got a hair out of place, I’m sure of it.”

If only because he naturally disliked people talking over his head, Q managed with a perfectly bland expression, “I sense a note of fear in your voice, 007. Did M threaten dire consequences if harm came to my person?”

Bond just looked at him again with a distinct lack of amusement. “You have no idea.” And on that cheery note, he and 008 turned and began stalking silently away. Q’s brain began working, following the two men’s trajectories and deducing that this was a sort of a sparse line, Q and 006 heading up the center and 007 and 8 flanking-
“Shut down the calculations, Q,” Alec cheerily commanded, knuckles of his gloved hand rapping on Q’s head. Reflexively lifting his own hands to protect his head, Q turned to glare even though, logically, he knew it was useless. Glaring worked well on Q-branch minions and some double-o’s, but Alec Trevelyan used it like kerosene on a fire. Unsurprisingly, the man’s rugged face was stretched in a smile, blacker-than-night wings half-spread behind him. “Time to go to work. Any questions?”

“No.” Q was pretty sure he had this all figured out, formation-wise. “Just don’t tap me on the head anymore.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Lies.”

It was cold. Nights in Canada probably always were, even in summer likely, and this was an early autumn night settling in. It was crisp and clear with only a very distant-looking bulk of clouds threatening to block the star- and moonlight. If Q weren’t so focused on making sure that they didn’t all die, he would have wished he was being escorted by Bond, if only to see whether those dappled grey wings absolutely disappeared in the dimness.

006 was interesting enough to walk with. It was one thing to watch through commandeered security cameras and listen through a comm-link or phone – it made Q appreciate that even the brattiest of 00-agent was a finely honed tool in the field – but it was another thing altogether to witness them work while walking right next to them. So far, Q could only think that 006 moved like a bloody ghost. Q had been out of the field for quite a while, and was finding it hard to remember how to place his feet just so to keep himself soundless. Twigs and dead leaves seemed to appear out of nowhere to crinkle under his feet, and he was glad that they were still quite a ways away from the cabin they were supposed to be heading towards. If Bond had any sense, his plan would include Q staying far back so that he didn’t alert their quarry with his less-than-stealthy walking.

As if brought into being by being brought to mind, Bond swore softly into the earpiece. “007?” Q immediately asked, tensing.

“Undergrowth,” was the short, irked reply, and Q also heard 008 (everyone was hearing everyone) grunt in dryly-amused affirmation.

“No problem where we are,” 006 felt the need to chip in, to which either 007 or 8 made some sort of jealous noise. Q was just glad that the three had become more and more professional with every step they took, to the point that 006 didn’t even sound as though he were teasing now. In fact, as Q tucked his hands under his arms to give them a bit more heat (his gloves were thin and specially made to allow him to interact with his phone unhindered, but it made them rather inadequate for Canadian cold), 006 was already looking ahead and around them with a speculative eye. When he spoke, it was clear that he was conferring with the other double-o’s. “Actually, I think I’ll scout ahead a bit. Like Indonesia?”

“Yes,” Bond agreed.

“Then I’ll make good use of the opening Q and I have here.” Black wings detached from the black mass of 006’s winter coat, rising like jagged onyx shards – gorgeous in their own way. 006 turned to look back at Q, and for all of his professionalism, he still had the gall to smirk and playfully address his Quartermaster, “Now, stay put like a good little boffin.”

“006, if this mission doesn’t kill us all, I’m going to make sure that M takes you off missions until
you learn to act professional,” Q frowned at him.

006 just continued to smile distractedly, already looking forward again as he threw back over his shoulder with that Angel confidence, “You wouldn’t love me half as much that way.”

Resigning himself to the fact that Alec Trevelyan would never take anything seriously until the day he died, Q turned to look around him as 006 limbered up his wings, presumably to scout ahead. Their way was indeed clear, but not so much so that it would serve to make the agent any sort of open target – just a gap in the trees wide enough for Angel wings to spread, if you wanted to fly ahead a bit. Q looked down at his phone, which barely qualified as a phone anymore after he’d practically gutted it and remade it to track down electrical signals. Nothing, but its range was short. There was something giving off faint readings, but it was just a slight blip, like-

Electrical lines.

Q’s head snapped up, eyes jumping to the layout ahead of them. Visibility was good, good enough that their lack of night-vision goggles wasn’t foreseen as a problem, but it was still edging heavily into night. The white birch stood out like the bones of lost men, pale, spiked fingers to the sky already nearly bereft of leaves. Q’s ex-agent mind was seeing other things, however, and combining with his technological mind: he saw extra leaves missing, as if shaken loose, leaving some trees more bare than others, and as his eyes latched onto those trees, his technological eyes saw-

“Wires!” He was so startled that it actually just came out as a hoarse breath, not enough surely to make 006’s ears twitch.

That didn’t matter, because Q – so fast one foot skidded in the wet leaves – lurched forward desperately. Dragging his eyes away from the delicate, nigh-invisible lace of wires stretching through the branches before them, he managed to grab a fistful of feathers before Alec took off. Understandably, the 00-agent growled, body tensing and his supernatural energy spiking, and the look he shot Q was reflexively deadly.

It wouldn’t have mattered if 006 had pulled his gun on him. Q pointed mutely up ahead, not letting go of the stiff black feathers in his right hand. While his left hand directed 006’s eyes – quickly growing more flustered and worried than angry – he explained breathlessly, “Stop. If you take off, you’ll get tangled in those wires. I almost didn’t notice them because they barely give off any electrical signature, but I’m sure they’d do something if you touched them.”

“006, what’s going on?” Bond demanded, all sounds of him fighting with the underbrush vanishing.

006 was still looking up where Q pointed, eyes widening in belated shock as he, too, saw what Q had seen.

Before Bond could flip out, 006 answered calmly, “Our Quartermaster made a nice save, James. There are possible tripwires strung up in the trees, about twelve meters up. No idea what they’ll do if you touch them.”

“I can find out,” Q stated determinedly, entering the conversation. Silently cursing the unstoppable sounds of his boots on the cold ground, he trudged around 006 with a stubborn look that made it clear that he knew what he was doing and was going to do it.

“Are you just going to let him do that, 006?” 008 asked, clearly forgetting or ignoring that Q could hear him perfectly well.

Q was still close enough to hear Alec shrug in a rustle of feathers. “He seems the determined sort. I’m just going to follow him. Stand by.” And then Q assumed that 006 followed him, because all of the talking stopped, and a moving double-o agent was just as silent as a still one.
Truly, Q did know what he was doing. From the ground, the wires were no danger to him, and his eyes were peeled for any additional traps underfoot. He wondered briefly if he should worry about 006 following in his footsteps, but the man had been finding his own way this far (to say nothing of the distant 007 and 008) and no one had come to any harm yet. Sometimes Q had to remember that the 00-agents had dealt with bombs in the past, just not this many of this level of complexity. Eyes serious and focused, Q reached the trees, looking up at the thin wires stretched above like hair between bony branch-fingers. From this angle, the light of the ascendant moon silvered them slightly, turning them to spider-webs. That analogy made Q shiver, and he suspected 006 did the same, seeing the man’s for-once-humorless expression out of the corner of his eye.

Even for a genius, there was little to tell about a trap set meters above one’s head, and there was no way Q was going to waste time climbing the tree. Still, he learned what he could. It sounded like both 007 and 008 had stopped moving entirely until this was resolved, a decision that Q had to approve of. “From what I can tell, the wires aren’t strong enough to actually injure, unless they’re some super-strong compound, or designed to cut.” He said this coldly and clinically, even though the idea of razor-sharp wires twisting around flesh – cutting, sawing in with every struggle for freedom – made his gut twist and the taste of bile sickeningly fill the back of his throat. Keeping his breathing steady with difficulty, Q continued as calmly as possible, “Although by the readings I’m getting, they are electrified.”

“Enough to take one of us out of the sky?” Brant asked, and, honestly, being the biggest, 008 would be the hardest one to take down.

“Not necessarily,” Q shrugged, “But, combined with the physical presence of the wires, I imagine that you’d end up falling anyway.” Then, worried that the 00-agents would see this as a challenge (if something wasn’t absolutely 100% deadly, they tended to go right for it with grins on their faces; Q couldn’t fathom why), he firmed up his voice. “This is assuming that those wires aren’t merely attached to explosives, waiting to be triggered. Do not touch – I repeat: do not touch,” he ordered.

“What do you want to do now, James?” 006 asked then, as if they’d all been walking in the park and were ready for a new pastime.

Bond was more serious, which Q appreciated. “Nothing changes. Although, Alec – I want you to keep ahead just a bit. If the way is open and Q keeps seeing things to warn us about, it’ll outweigh the risk of you two hitting trouble first.”

“We’ll retreat and wait for back-up if trouble hits,” 006 both agreed to the plan and assured Bond all at once.

008’s snort could be heard in everyone’s ears. “Since when has Trevelyan ever waited for back-up?”

In a strange turn of events, Q found that he agreed with the bellicose man, and sighed tightly at the memory of mission after mission being ignored as he told Alec to stay put and keep his head down.

But, of course, 006 was insuppressible. “I always come out alive and with the goods, don’t I?” he grinned before starting forward, reflexively extending a wing to catch Q in its arc as he came.

The reminder of feathers against his back – feathers that were not his – made Q tense up, and his mood (already less than stellar because this was deadly serious even if the double-o’s didn’t always seem to think so) soured. Speeding up and pulling away, he made it clear that he’d forge his own path.

They walked on like this as night drew in like a cloak, moving carefully a slowly. After finding the hanging wires, Bond called for a change in formation: Q and 006 now led an arrow, allowing Q and his expertise to clear a more-or-less safe path that the others could follow in. Still, Bond and Sims
were spread out enough to flank them, and they hit a snarl eventually.

Q had been concentrating on the forest around him and the readings of his phone, his earpiece filled only with the faint sounds of cloth rustling and the occasional hush of a branch brushing near the heads of one double-o or another. He twitched as he noticed a deeper quiet in his ear, an almost indecipherable warning before he heard Bond’s solidly calm voice, “Q.”

“Have you met with trouble, 007?” Q asked, already knowing the answer like a twisting in his gut. He stopped, focusing on Bond’s voice to the exclusion of missing 006, who came up near him and spread his jetty wings slightly – a protective, ready posture.

“If by that you mean I stepped on something that clicked warningly, yes,” was the wry reply, only the edge of tension in 007’s smooth voice giving away that he was apprehensive. He went on in a less sarcastic and more knowledgeable tone, “I’ve stepped on a few pressure-sensitive bombs before, and think that’s what I’ve stepped on again.”

“Only you, 007,” Q growled, already turning around to orient himself on where Bond was in the woods, “have the distinction of saying you’ve stepped on pressure-sensitive bombs twice.”

“More than twice. You missed where I said ‘a few’.”

“He’s a real klutz, our James,” 006 put in unhelpfully, and Bond’s calm snapped enough for him to growl.

Q butted in before 008 could further aggravate the situation, “Where are you, 007? I’m coming to you. 006...” He thought quickly, and came to a decision while simultaneously preparing for an argument, “Move on ahead. This might take awhile.”

Surprisingly, instead of getting grief, Q got support from 007. “Sounds reasonable. Just keep it slow and steady, though, eh, Alec? Don’t gain too much ground on us.”

Alec’s chuckle set a plume of breath out in front of him, crystalizing in a mist that wove back eerily over his night-black wings. “No problem. 008, you’re with me. Try not to step on anything dangerous.” Before turning forward again, 006 cast a final look back and Q, and there was a surprising amount of concern there. One eyebrow arched. “Will you be able to find James in all of this?” He indicated the forest around them in general.

Worry was better than derision, but Q still took a brief moment to assure 006 of his independence: “I haven’t always been behind a desk, and I’m remembering more than enough to navigate, thank you.” Because 006 was behaving remarkably well and treating Q with respect despite his station, Q kept any actual derision from his voice, keeping it merely stiff and formal. In reply, 006 just shrugged, turning around with an idle snap of one wing. He disappeared like a really big black dog into the trees. A really dangerous black dog. Despite how much he’d worked with Angels recently and the fact that he really was one, Q had to admit that he shivered at the lethal, predatory way that man moved.

Walking back to Bond was a bit of a challenge, but not because of navigation problems. Mostly, Q just had to follow his own trail back, because 007 assured him that he wasn’t far off from that trail. 007 had a cool head in a fix, and was proving it by giving steady, calm directions as if he weren’t standing on top of a bomb. The challenge for Q was mostly that he began to notice the underbrush that 007 and 8 had complained about, and began to reevaluate just how many skills had gone to pot since his injury.

“I can hear you,” came 007’s level, surprisingly-non-judgmental voice in the earpiece, “Start heading
to your right. I'll lead you in, although you should be able to hear me soon, too.”

“I can, 007,” Q found himself replying (maybe the teensiest bit relieved, or proud of himself – he’d found the man, in the dark, in the Canadian forest) as he picked up the 00-agent’s smooth, low tones outside his earpiece. “Be right with you.” And, of course, right then he nearly tripped. Swearing fluently in multiple languages, Q got his foot clear of a root and made it the final few meters to Bond.

Although, by the faint tilt of the man’s eyebrows, he’d heard the sudden, hushed ruckus, 007 made no comment. Notably, neither did 006 or 8, who would have heard everything through the earpiece. Field agent training nowadays obviously included differentiating between when your comrades were in trouble and when they simply tripped foolishly on a sly piece of underbrush. 007 was standing carefully in place, hands at his sides but wings out – clearly in preparation to clear the area as best he could should the explosives beneath his feet go off.

“Think you can outfly a detonation, 007?” Q couldn’t help but ask, letting his eyes skate over those grey-dappled wings, which really did start to disappear into the nocturnal shadows.

007’s mouth curled upwards at the edges. “Where’s the harm in trying?”

“Well, don’t try yet,” Q ordered sharply, slinging his pack carefully off his shoulders, eyes taking in everything that he could see by moonlight before he pulled a small flashlight free into his hands. Knowing he was about to effectively blind himself for the sake of seeing things better, he quipped, “I’d suggest looking away, 007, unless you want to have your night-sight ruined along with me.”

Without any more warning than that (if Bond didn’t follow orders, so be it), Q flicked on the light, keeping it shielded with one hand so that it wouldn’t attract attention. It was a reddish sort of light, the kind that his eyes would recover from the quickest – he had figured he’d be working in the dark on this mission eventually.

Bond had obviously done a bit of careful digging, for it was obvious that he had one foot over a device of some sort. Usually, Q would have railed at someone for getting nosy with a possible bomb, but 007 had been careful: not only had he not been blown up, but he’d cleared away the careful layers of dirt and leaves hiding the device, so Q got the whole picture quite quickly. He spoke to all of the double-o’s, his voice serious, “It’s most definitely a pressure-sensitive bomb. Be advised that 007 and myself will be held up a bit while I disarm it.”

“James, I thought you said we were doing what we did in Indonesia, not what we did in Chechnya,” came Alec’s pleasant voice over the line, and soon 008’s low chortle. While Q continued to inspect the bomb, one hand mechanically resting on Bond’s boot to ensure he didn’t move, the double-o’s quibbled. Alec, who apparently hadn’t learned any fear from his own bomb experience, was having quite a fun time laughing at 007.

For his part, 007 stood impatiently over Q and bared his teeth in a humorless leer at the black-winged Angel he could neither see nor pummel from here. “And you, Alec, seem to be under the false impression that you are funny.”

“I’m bloody hilarious and you know it.”

“If I’m to be the deciding vote~” 008 chimed in, and Q was just about ready to turn off his earpiece to avoid the constant distraction. He didn’t know if he liked it better or worse to hear Bond’s actual voice, retorting with a continued frostiness.

“You’re not. Now do what you came out here to do.”

“Or what?” 008 had the audacity to return, sounding cheeky.
Q, finally unable to take it, sat back on his heels and snapped so that all three of them could hear his hissed voice, “Or I’ll tell M on the lot of you! Don’t think I won’t.”

The new silence was akin to that of the wonderful quiet that accompanied scolded children, looking down and scuffling their feet in embarrassment. Bond, fortunately, was doing no feet-scuffling with a bomb under his toes, but even he had the decency to look chastised. If they weren’t in the field with the very likely possibility of dying hanging over their heads, Q might have preened a bit at his victory. He turned back to the task at hand. “I’m going to find something to replace your weight. It’s the quickest way, and otherwise we’ll lose time.”

Bond nodded shortly, understanding. “I haven’t put my full weight down on it, so you won’t have to find something quite that heavy.” If Q hadn’t been looking, he would have missed it: 007 tilted his eyes, a rare look of unadulterated query on his face. “Do you know how much I weigh?”

“Of course I do.” Q hid any embarrassment he felt over that by turning away to look for something suitably heavy to trick the bomb into thinking that Bond never left it. “It’s a job requirement for my position to read the files of all the double-o’s, and that includes such mundane things as height and weight.”

Sometimes it was easy to forget that he was sharing his conversation with two other men as well, but he was reminded as 008’s tetchy tones came to his ear, “And yet we don’t get to read yours?”

It had apparently been premature to think that 008 was ready to accept his new Quartermaster. Drawing himself up erect (as if the man were close enough to see him), Q replied with renewed starch in his tone, “I’m going to assume that was a rhetorical question, 008. Both you and I have jobs to do.” He’d found a downed tree-limb, heavy and old, that was close enough to drag and not so unwieldy that he couldn’t manage it. Focusing and steeling himself, Q called up his remnant Angel energy, using it to help him pull the object he otherwise would have struggled with, being as scrawny as he was. He soon had the object held precariously near Bond’s foot. Thankfully, 008 had decided not to answer. “007,” Q said, voice tight because he was panting just slightly, “Do you believe you could-”

“Move so that you can replace my foot with that?” Bond finished, “Gladly. Just try not to crush my foot with that thing.”

“A crushed foot versus a body blown to smithereens,” Q laid out the choices with a touch of dry humor, “How will you ever decide?” But he maneuvered the heavy end of the branch in time to the careful slide of Bond’s foot, until one replaced the other. For a second, neither moved.

As with the last bomb they’d faced down together, though, both 007 and his new Quartermaster drew breath once again in the land of the living. Bond relaxed and released a slow breath, his tense wings easing with a susurrus of feathers gliding against each other. Q sat down heavily on the ground, arms draped over his knees and muscles abruptly shaking as if cold.

For a moment, it looked like Bond was going to congratulate him, and Q felt himself being tricked into a smile as 007 grinned broadly, but 006’s voice came into their ears then: “I’m assuming that James is in the clear, and while I’m very happy for you, James, I’m afraid I have bad news. Brant and I have hit a rather unfortunate snag up here.”

Knowing Alec and his tones, his light banter could be indicating everything from a chipped nail to Armageddon, so Q immediately felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end with tension. “What is it?”
“I hope you’re done over there, boffin,” 006 drawled, idly using his new favorite nickname, “because Brant and I have found you some new toys to play with.”

008 was more frank: “There’s a whole line of bombs here. We can see some of them, but mostly we just see some very obvious tripwires.”

“And obvious tripwires mean that there have to be some less obvious ones waiting for us to relax,” 006 chimed in, sober now.

Q noticed that 007 had grown somber, too, his brief smile of victory now gone, replaced by a tense frown that made his eyes look older.

“There’s no sense in going through them,” 006 sighed on his end. Q could hear him scratching idly at the stubble along his jaw. “I’m going to see how far they stretch, and if we can go around without getting lost in all these trees.”

“We’ll be right with you,” Bond assured him, then immediately turned his eyes – turned to shadowy ice by the moon and the dark – to Q. “Come on.”

Bond moved pretty fast, but so did Q, once he was backtracking along his own trail. He’d tripped over everything once, and his brain was quick enough to map it out so that this time, he slithered through the threes and brambles like the whippet of a man he was. Bond might even have been a bit impressed, walking close behind him and watching the efficiency and determination with which his Quartermaster moved. In moments like this, it was possible to see what Q had once been.

“Scrap going around it,” 008 grunted, still sounding out of sorts from Q’s revelation about reading their files – which, really, shouldn’t have been that surprising. “We’ve got wings for a reason. Some of us, anyway.”

Q shook off the barb, pretending it couldn’t touch him. He also knew that 008’s juvenile behavior wouldn’t go away if he returned it. “008, do not fly over this obstacle,” he ordered without hesitation, picking up speed as he felt prickles of unease running up and down his spine, worse and worse. He and Bond were back on their original path now, and Q knew his way without barely having to think. This area had been checked for bombs already, so they broke into as quiet a run as they could manage while Q continued his hushed argument with 008. “There might be more of those hanging wires that 006 and I encountered.”

“This area is clear,” 008 argued.

“Yes, and why do you think that is?” Q retorted, voice growing more vicious as he realized that 008 planned to override him. “Half of the tripwires you said were in the open, likely on purpose – why not use subterfuge elsewhere as well?”

“James, Alec – I know what I’m doing,” 008 appealed to the other double-o’s, and Q just barely held back a growl of frustration at being outnumbered. He wished that he was right with 008 right now, so he could stand toe-to-toe with the man and break his nose. Q figured he had enough Angel energy in him to fuel a punch that would lay the man out flat, and if it broke a bone in his hand, well, at least he still healed like an Angel.

Alec was otherwise occupied, still following the plan of trying to flank the encumbrance. “I’m still seeing loads of bombs. It’s like a moat of the bloody things. You’ve got to see this, James.”

“The fact that you can see them worries me,” 007 put in, and Q was surprised to hear his own suspicion and worry reflected in the blond agent’s wary, guarded tone.
And Alec wasn’t witless either: “You no less than me, James. It’s eerie as fuck.”

“I still say we take advantage of flight,” 008 was dogged, but perhaps hearing reason, “Even just a direct, upward flight. Like when you lifted up that antenna for the Quartermaster, Bond. Just to get a better view.”

It was a more reasonable plan than the last one, but Q still felt uneasy. He’d reached where he’d left Alec before, and now had to track where 006 and 8 had walked from there, which slowed him down. Tracking wasn’t the same as looking for bombs, and Q seriously wasn’t as fluid at it. Without a word, Bond took the lead, deftly finding his comrades’ footsteps and leading Q in. Which gave Q more opportunity to think…

“Remain where you are, 008. We’ll regroup in just another few minutes. Then I can look at the bombs, and we can decide whether your plan is necessary from there,” was Q’s ultimate decision.

“Want me to come back?” Alec asked equably enough, although he didn’t make it clear whether he was asking Bond or Q.

Bond took the liberty of answering, “Yes.” And there was no argument – not even a burble of humorous discontent – from the black-winged Angel, but presumably he began to trace his way back to the others.

As it was, Bond and Q were still a good ways from this unexpected line of bombs, although moving closer steadily, when 008 grunted unexpectedly, “Sod this.” And suddenly Q heard the sounds of wings and beating feathers in his ear as Brant Sims took off.

“008!” Q just about shouted, lunging forward as if he could magically get close enough to grab the man as he’d grabbed Alec.

No such luck this time.

This time, there was only a faint beep – coming, presumably, through 008’s comm-link - 008’s faint curse, and then the whole night seemed to rip open as an explosion like a dozen angry suns erupted in front of them. Trees snapped like match-sticks or disappeared altogether into the thunderous light, and Q’s world went silent a second before the blast hit him like a wave and it went dark, too, in a wash of pain.

~^~

Chapter End Notes

CLIFFHANGER!!!

I don’t know how long it will be before the next chapter - I’ll shoot for 3 or 4 days, but if nothing else, probably before the weekend is up. Now that I’ve got one fic finished (‘The Hand That Holds the Leash’ if anyone is interested in vulnerable-Q and a finished fic), I can devote more time...buuuut I’ve still got a Harry Potter fic that needs my tender loving care :3

Anyway: if you get anxious, just shoot me and comment, and I’ll reply with an update
on my writing status!
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The aftermath.
Or the chapter in which things start bad.
And get worse.
Enjoy! :D

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long! But it's here now - and it's longer than my usual chapters, I think!

Warning: I know about as much about guns and I do about bombs. Therefore, anything I say about these weapons cannot be used against me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

~^~

The pain was still there when Q felt consciousness returning, but it came second to the maddening ringing in his ears and the sense that something was horribly wrong.

The sense became logical memory as Q’s brain lit up the rest of the way like a room with a fluorescent bulb, slow to turn completely on. ‘Canadian forest. Bombs. 008. Explosion.’ Before even trying to open his eyes, Q was trying to sit up.

“Down,” was the grunted command, a sound that somehow made it past the incessant ringing that the explosion had left in Q’s ears. Immediately, the young Quartermaster’s eyes shot open, whole body tensing where it lay supine on the ground. The hand on his chest just belonged to Bond, however, as well as the grave voice. Or graveyard voice. That was what Q sometimes labeled the way certain double-o’s talked when they were close enough to death or killing to shake hands with it. That line of thought told Q that his brain was still rambling, and he tried to center it.

That meant he also tried to push Bond’s hand aside and sit up anyway, because stubbornness was Q’s go-to response to tense situations. Sadly, Bond was also a pro at stubbornness, but he did it with a lot more physical force than Q did: the hand on Q’s chest abruptly fisted in his jacket and shoved down.

“I’m all right, Bond,” Q tried to assure the 00-agent, wanting to get up and see what in the world had happened. Some of the ringing in his ears turned out to be his earpiece, which had taken a beating in the explosion. Seeing it for the lost cause it was, Q wrenched it out with rather more force than was
necessary, because his limbs were full of adrenalin and Angel energy.

“Not for lack of trying,” snapped 007 with enough harshness in his reply to give away his own tension. He was crouched down on his haunches to make a smaller target of himself, and by the way his wings were out like a dark shell over them, Q suddenly realized that the 00-agent was protecting him. Bond had been looking in the direction of the explosion, but now turned his head to glare down hotly at Q and finish, “You ran right towards it, and I barely managed to grab your collar before everything went downhill.”

By turning his head, Q could already see a lot even if Bond didn’t let him up, especially since there was enough fire where the bomb had been to now light up the night in tones of warring red and gold. Everything that Q saw – the forest torn apart, the dark solitude turned into the battered, fiery Hell of a warzone – made him desperate to see more even as it frightened him. His heart-rate was going a mile a minute, and he had to bloody do something, because 006 and 8-

He forced himself to stop the increasing panic in his thoughts, reminding himself that he was the Quartermaster of MI6…even though he felt impending grief already beginning the nibble at the edges of his resolve. There was no way that anyone could have survived the explosion from up close. Still, Q forced his brain to function, because he knew that he and 007 could end up dead, too, if they weren’t careful. “I truly am uninjured, 007, I promise. And I want to sit up.”

The man had a hidden protective streak, apparently, but more than that he was a professional. Gauging the sincerity in Q’s expression and voice carefully, 007 gave a nod of acceptance a moment later, removing his hand. He went back to watching the dancing line of fire while Q sat up, putting a hand to his head as a wave of dizziness crashed in and faded. His glasses were crooked but present (a miracle), although a quick search of his fingers into his hairline revealed a bit of blood and debris. It was all splinters, parting gifts of some of the many trees now blown to bits. Q’s thick winter coat had gotten similar treatment, ripped in places. Q felt a flicker of wry relief at the thought that he might have been telling Bond the truth, unless the shock wore off later and proved that there was some underlying injury.

“Do you want a status report?” This said by Bond, voice as even as the sights on his Walther, eyes reflecting fire like chips of glass as he kept his head turned, watchful. In a crisis, 007 evolved, Q had to admit: bored between missions in MI6, Bond was a menace, but now he was as serious as steel.

Q did his best to follow suit. It should be easy enough – after all, he didn’t have to change all the way from ‘brat’ to ‘professional’ like the double-o’s did. Reaching down to feel the side of his right knee (there was some blood on the material of his pants, and an ache, but all of him ached from the shock-wave of the bomb anyway), Q also focused his eyes on the aftermath of the bomb and tried to glean what he could from it. “As much as you can give me,” he replied calmly. Bond could go for stern; Q preferred detached. His leg felt a little stiff and battered, but not seriously damaged. The destruction all around them was far more earth-shattering. It was as if someone had abruptly changed scenes on them, going from silent and dark and full of trees to barren and burning and dotted with patches (sometimes swatches) of crackling fires.

At first, 007 had appeared mesmerized by the brutal light of the flames, but now he shook out of it a little, turning his head about in a more useful manner to scan all around them for further danger. “No sign of 006 or 008. When the explosion went off, you were leaping like a crazy rabbit in front of me, but I doubt it mattered. We were both thrown back a good three car-lengths.” Bond’s tone was somewhere between sarcastic and caustic, and Q didn’t appreciate the rabbit reference, but let it go. Deep down, he was just glad to have had any 00-agent with him at all…

Then something moved, a crack of a twig beyond Bond, and 007 moved so fast that Q couldn’t even
drag in a breath to shout – the man was just in motion. When everything stilled again, Q was aware that he’d been knocked to hands and knees (probably by Bond’s wings) and had his glasses half off his nose. Blinking and breathing fast with the shock of it all, Q then noted the heavy weight of feathers brushing down atop his back – Bond’s right wing as he held it cautiously over the Quartermaster. Bond had spun on one knee and already had his gun out, cocked, and aimed, as efficient as a machine. Q’s wide eyes flicked up to see a humanoid silhouette in 007’s sights, standing a few meters away.

The figure lifted his hands in a gesture of harmlessness, but then also stretched out familiar, charcoal-black wings so that Bond and Q recognized him instantly. Q let go a breath of relief so deep it left him feeling deflated, and even Bond let out a choked little gasp, lowering his gun so that it was no longer aimed at his teammate’s chest. Alec Trevelyan dropped his hands and settled his wings behind his back again, walking towards them.

“Glad to see I’m not the only one with nine lives,” Bond said by way of greeting, taking Alec’s upright posture as a sign that he could safely do the same. While Bond’s words were light, his tone was not; it held too much gravity to capture levity. Still, his hold was strong as he and Alec exchanged grips, as if to reassure himself that 006 was as solid and whole as he appeared.

Because Bond did not appear as though he were going to ask how Alec had survived, Q did. “How did you survive the blast, 006?” He stood, meaning to approach the two men as well, but found his right leg was a little shaky. Maybe he’d hit it harder than he realized.

Any doubts about whether 006 was really there and alive fled as the man somehow managed to pull out one of his cat-with-the-canary grins. “You strike me right to the heart, Q – it almost sounds like you’re disappointed to see me back!” When Alec strived for joviality, he always hit his mark, and now his eyes were sparkling with mischief that was perhaps just a little bit too sharp, a little bit too like the reflected fire, to be entirely true.

Q did not want to deal with double-o humor right now. He was tense and he ached and he was worried that, if they wasted too much more time, he might slow them up because the shock was fading and his leg-“Bond!” he blurted suddenly, seeing as the man turned and the golden glow of the distant fires made a play of light and dark upon his wings. “Your wing!” The light was glinting off a large splash of wetness that was too dark to be anything but blood sticking to the grey feathers.

Since 007 merely looked over his shoulder (first at Q, then angled down at the feathered appendage) without any outward sign of surprise or dismay, he was fully aware of the injury. “Are you going to tell me I can’t fly now, Quartermaster?”

At first, Q was deeply stung by the comment, until he saw the faint, faint tilting of one side of Bond’s mouth. In this light, the man looked haggard, and as Alec lost his smile, so did he. Blood was running down 006’s face from some unseen cut in his hairline on the left side, and it was obvious that he’d just weathered an explosion. Bond’s wing – the one he’d brushed over Q’s back, both as a belaying touch and as a sensibly protecting one – still moved like the other one, but that wasn’t the only blood on the man. Like Q, splinters of various sizes had nicked him.

And then, as if on cue, everyone realized that they at least were alive.

‘I’m the one in charge,’ Q swallowed, shouldered the responsibility. ‘It’s my job to ask.’ “008?” he forced himself to ask without emotion, although his voice cracked and he had to clear his throat before he could state the question.

007 looked to 006, whose eyes were suddenly like chips of marble in a voice devoid of humor. He spoke coldly, mercilessly, and without hesitation, because that was how this job went. “He didn’t
survive the blast.” Even 006’s cold mask broke, and he had to turn his head abruptly away, and the same firelight that so harshly lit their features on one side softened his into compassionate shadow as he turned the other way. In a motion more like Brant Sims than himself, 006 gave his wings a few uneasy movements, jerks that made the sinews snap and feathers whisper – small testament to the mounds of emotions walled away behind.

Bond had already walled away his emotions, but then, he was an expert, wasn’t he? “We should get moving. If we hadn’t drawn attention before, we have now.”

“Correction,” Alec returned to the conversation. It was as if Bond were a catalyst, his stony detachment giving Alec the ability to follow suit and pretend that he hadn’t just lost a teammate – a friend. Q shivered a little and almost swayed, because he could feel the actual shift in their energy as they purposefully moved on. For now. Grieving would come later, as would blame and frustration and cold, sick, empty loss. That was where all of the 00-agent drinking stories came from, and their legendary alcohol tolerance. “We have to get moving. I was at a different angle to see things at than 008 was, and I saw movement beyond the bombs a second before-” 006’s pause was so brief it almost didn’t exist, then he was plowing roughly onwards. “-008 got bloody pigheaded and decided to do things his way. I was close enough to see what looked like a person, and then everything went up in flames.” Clearly, 006 was angry, his face not moving particularly but his eyes taking on a level of coldness that was unnerving – frostbite cold, liquid-nitrogen cold. “We’ve found tripwires, pressure-sensitive bombs, and wires strung between trees, but this is the first time we’ve found a person.”

At the possibility of a living, breathing foe, Q saw the double-o’s shift like hunting dogs pricking their ears. More interested, Bond asked, “You think it was the person who set off the bomb?”

006 showed one feral incisor in a humorless, twisted sort of smirk. “I’d count on it,” he promised.

“Do you think he survived?” 007 continued the conversation, and by now Q was feeling left out. He was beginning to realize that he’d just been thrown through the air by a bomb blast, however, so a moment of silence to let the double-o’s take over was rather appreciated. The ringing in his ears had stopped, but in its place had arisen a body-wide mild ache that sapped his energy just to tolerate.

Being used to physical damage, Alec just blinked as blood ran near the outer edge of his left eye, answering candidly, “I survived by diving into a ditch, and where he was standing there looked to be another one.” He shrugged, adding a little bit more viciously, “If he set off the bomb, I sure hope he’d be smart enough not to be killed by it.”

“Yes,” 007 pondered, his voice a low rumble that went straight to Q’s gut despite the circumstances, “It’d be a pity if our bombing friend died, wouldn’t it?” Suddenly Bond’s eyes – usually ice-blue, now glazed with reflected gold – flicked over to Q. “Are you up for some people-hunting, Q?”

Blinking owlishly and belatedly realizing that he’d been standing there in silence this whole time, Q drew himself up and back together. “I assume there’s little choice,” he managed to point out, voice as dry as a desert, “You two wouldn’t get very far without my bomb-defusing skills.”

006 started with a rather surprised snort, flicking his eyes between Bond and Q as if to ask, ‘Are you seriously going to take that from him?’ but then 006 just dissolved into a series of low chuckles. He would have burst out raucously laughing like a whole murder of crows, Q was sure, except they were still presently in dangerous circumstances. “I guess that’s a yes,” 006 deduced.

007 was more seriously, eyeing Q with his intense, unreadable eyes. “Are you fit to do this?”

Any injuries Q had weren’t serious enough to be any business of 007’s. Straightening his spine, Q
looked the taller man in the eye and returned, “Are you?”

That tricked a jaded smile onto Bond’s face, a lopsided affair. “Then we’re moving. A closer formation this time – I’d lead, but I don’t want to get a foot blown off.”

‘I don’t want to end up like 008,’ was the unspoken truth behind those words. Then again, 008’s sudden end was mostly due to his own foolish choices. That didn’t make it any easier to think about, however.

006 seemed perfectly happy to let Bond be the bossy one, and just gave his wings one big flap to loosen them up while Bond began walking. Unlike Alec, who’d swooped Q alongside him with an absentminded wing, Bond took the time to place a gloved hand on the Quartermaster’s shoulder to turn him and get them both moving. Injured Bond was, but hesitant he was not. “Let’s go hunting, shall we?”

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Q knew how to spot hidden traps and explosives, but the double-o’s could track like foxes. Most the time they ranged at Q’s elbows like looming shadows – as if he had wings again, arching up over either shoulder. The effect was eerie, and combined with the knowledge that they were hunting a man who had already killed one 00-agent, it rattled Q nearly to his bones.

Bond was leading from behind: while Q kept ahead just enough to make sure they put their feet down on safe ground, both 007 and 6 were looking for signs of someone’s passage, and it was 007 who would then wordlessly nudge or point Q in that direction. They’d started by going through the minefield that their quarry had so gloriously destroyed.

They went straight through it, the explosion itself having made the ground clear and safe to tread on if one avoided the fading fires. 006 unexpectedly loped off to one side, and although Q suspected why, he didn’t ask. Likewise, he didn’t need any explanation when the man came back, face a mask, and shook his head without a word. 008 was truly gone.

Not long after that, they got to where 006 had apparently seen whoever was responsible, and sure enough, they found footprints. Q, actually, saw nothing, but he was smart enough to keep his mouth shut and just follow the commands of the double-o’s at his shoulder. His knee was aching like fire now, but he kept limping on.

“Q?” Bond’s voice was quiet, with that faint edge to it that always somehow suggested, ‘If you don’t respond, am I going to have to put you in a headlock?’ Maybe the tone was subtly gentler this time.

“What?” Q asked without stopping. Alec was moving like a big dark wraith further to the right, and Q didn’t want to miss anything that might indicate a trap in his path.

“Your leg. Don’t tell me you don’t feel that.”

‘Ah.’ Q winced, not from pain, but from being found out. So Bond had noticed. “I’ve a bit of a scrape and some heavy bruising on my right knee,” Q gave out the information without hesitation, seeing no reason to pad around it, “But I can walk on it. And I can do this. I’m not just being stubborn and prideful either.” He let loose the tiniest smile, to let Bond know he was being humorous as he added primly, “I leave that to the 00-department.”
For a moment, Bond looked torn between laughing and swatting him, giving Q a surprised look. He settled for snorting and shaking his head. “After this,” he promised with quiet, sincere humor, “you are going to find out what it’s like to be in Medical while 00-agents are.”

“You say that as if I behave myself with Medical better than you do,” Q demurred, eyes forward. He really was too tense for humor, but dredging it up seemed to be distracting Bond from mother-henning him.

Now Bond was really flashing him a look of amused surprise, as if this were a new Quartermaster he were suddenly seeing. “Full of surprises,” Q thought he heard the man murmur, but Bond was back to scouting around them, head turned away so that the night deftly hid his features.

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“We should be getting close,” Q cautioned in a whisper. 006 and 007 must have been following their own mental maps very closely, because their nods of affirmation held no surprise. The moment of light banter with Bond was gone, and likewise 006’s dark sense of humor had faded, leaving everyone tense. Q still decided to repeat information, just to clear his own head if nothing else. “Due to this location being in the middle of nowhere,” he complained without actually sounding like he was complaining, “we have an abysmal lack of data available, but from what I could find, we should be approaching a building or group of buildings of some size. Records say it was a farm at one time, but recently bought out.”

“By the man we were originally sent out after,” Bond finished, “because of some information he had.”

“A USB-drive of information that MI6 would still like us to get hold of,” nodded Q. It was so strange, recalling the cold, detached outlines of the mission, when some part of him wanted nothing more or less than retribution for an agent lost under his watch. Perhaps 006 and 7 were of like mind, because they didn’t comment, just kept walking. Their pace was steady and as fast as conditions allowed. Since Q had taken them safely around no less than six traps thus far, and had been forced to disarm one entirely when 006 had gotten too close, conditions were deadly.

Suddenly, a thought occurred to Q – nothing extremely life-threatening, but still, a question that hadn’t been asked. For the sake of being thorough, Q asked, “006, was the man you saw triggering the explosion our target?”

By the way 006 immediately looked at Q, this was actually a question he’d been rolling over in his head until Q had verbally pegged it. “The funny thing is,” Alec mused in a voice that wasn’t funny at all, “our target is a thin balding man. Granted, I only saw a poor silhouette, but I wouldn’t be surprised if it was a different person.” He shrugged, his wings following the movement with a graceful sweep even as he tugged at his own coat, too. “Although winter attire can do a lot to a skinny frame.”

Q decided not to mention that he was wearing winter attire and had a frame that was generally derided as skinny. Then again, he’d picked out his own clothing, choosing something that was warm without making him look like a marshmallow. “Let’s be safe and assume that our target is not alone then. For the number of bombs, it makes sense to have help-”

At that moment, 006 picked up on some subliminal signal from 007, and froze; Q only noticed that
second response, and by then both double-o’s had become frozen and attentive, looking off to the right. Before Q could open his mouth to ask a question, 007’s hand was on his shoulder. He pushed down with gentle but steady force like a doe pushing a fawn into the grass. One smoke-and-fog wing reached out, just brushing Alec, and 006 responded immediately by melting back into the shadows.

“Stay,” Bond ordered under his breath to Q, then looked to Alec, “And you stay with him.” No argument. Smart enough to listen to a man who was a professional at staying alive, Q allowed his legs to fold up (the right one doing so only grudgingly and with a stab of pain) as 007 urged him to stay low. Memory told the Quartermaster that 006 was barely a meter away, but he’d gone so still and silent that, for all intents and purposes, the muscular man had disappeared. Soon 007 was doing the same, walking forward very, very carefully because he didn’t have Q to clear the way for him.

Out of a sense of duty, Q nearly got to his feet to follow, but then bit his lip in frustration and made himself stay put.

007 wouldn’t have suddenly done all of this for no reason.

Apparently 006 trusted in the same thoughts, because it wasn’t until a good five minutes later that Bond – now carrying something – returned, and only then did Alec melt back out of the night-time blackness. “What you got there, James?” he asked, that dangerous, thin-lipped smile saying he had been hoping to hear gunshots. Q, curious but less bloodthirsty, worked to get to his feet with a knee that didn’t want to cooperate. He was surprised that, when he tottered, stiff flight-feathers nudged under his hand for support. Looking up, he saw Bond, face still inscrutable but eyes watchful. Nonjudgmental. Not wanting to make anyone think that he was the weak Quartermaster they’d originally thought him to be, Q used the help only a little, but was indeed grateful for it as he regained his footing.

Presently, Bond was silent and, if possible, even more grim than before. Alec merely looked at what the man was holding, raised one eyebrow in unpleasant surprise, and muttered, “Well, that’s not good.”

“I thought I saw the shape of a person watching us, but it was only this,” Bond turned to explain, and he held up a dinner jacket, hanger and all. The disturbing part was the bullet-hole and blood over the coat’s left breast, unmistakable even in the darkness. That on its own made Q give a perplexed noise, eyes narrowing, but then he saw a name-tag. On said nametag was typed ‘Adams Everett’, which his mind immediately connected as one of the aliases of their target.

He was about to mention this when Bond, clearly following the Quartermaster’s thought-path, handed him a folded piece of paper. “This was tucked into the pocket where it would be noticed.”

Since Alec had apparently read it while Q was fighting with his leg, the Quartermaster just took the paper and unfolded it carefully, considering getting out his flashlight but ending up just tilting it to the moon. Scrawling in neat, presumptuous handwriting was:

*Dearly sorry you missed Mr. Everett.*

*But don’t worry.*

*The party is still very much in full-swing, and it would be a pity if you turned and left now.*

Then, almost as an irked afterthought at the bottom, Q read another line that practically resounded with a sigh:

*And if all you’re interested in is a certain USB-drive full of delicate information, you might want to come for that, too.*

It was unsigned, and Q hadn’t the faintest idea who could have written it, except whomever it was
must have had a few cogs loose. Also, looking up and again seeing the destroyed dinner jacket – too much blood on it to ever be washed out, too much blood for one man to survive the loss of – he figured that whoever had written this was a murderer, too.

006 had his eyes narrowed, thinking. He came to the ultimate decision of, “I still think we should keep going, at least until we shoot someone.”

Bond never rustled his wings idly, but the barest twitch at the corner of his mouth said that Alec’s plan had merit. However, instead he said more diplomatically, “So long as that information is out there, we’ve got a mission-”

And that was when the shooting started.

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Because MI6 Angels were bloody fast and operated on hair-trigger reflexes, Alec and Bond were both moving almost before the bullets started flying. 006’s wings whipped out to their full expanse for balance as he spun, ducking his body low; Bond jumped forward, wings only half-extended but feathers bristling, giving Q a hard shove that was hint enough to go for cover. Although he was cursing himself for not reacting as fast as his two Angel companions, the Quartermaster was no wilting flower in a fight: he instantly judged that he wouldn’t be much use in an offensive sense, and dove into the lee of a fallen tree where he’d already gauged bullets couldn’t get him. Sometimes, having a brain that went a mile a minute was nice. “007! Four o’clock and about a meter up!” Q shouted, gritting his teeth as the sounds of gunshots continued to batter his ears. His eardrums still felt tender from the explosion from earlier. His brain – less queasy – continued to calculate where those sounds were coming from even as his eyes saw Bond duck out from behind a tree long enough to shoot where Q had indicated. Someone screamed and there was a thump of a body falling, but that body didn’t belong to 006 or 7 or their Quartermaster. “006: Your five o’clock, as high as my head!”

Another shot. Another scream. Go figure 006 knew exactly the right height to shoot at Q’s head. “There are six more. Possibly more if they haven’t all shot off anything.”

Since there was obviously no more use for silence as a rain of bullets kept them all pinned down, Alec wasted no time in yelling back over the cacophony, “You know, for a boffin, you’re kind of creepy!”

“Shut your trap and shoot,” Q retorted, unable to sound professional while also yelling.

Bond was more practical; near enough to Q’s position to call to him without having to bellow, he warned, “Q, if you keep talking, someone-”

“Is going to shoot at me? Oh, I imagine that everyone already is,” returned the Quartermaster dryly. He’d drawn his own gun at least. Sadly, he hadn’t shot it in so long that he wasn’t entirely sure what his aim would be like. When he’d been packing to leave on this mission, he hadn’t planned on bringing a gun along at all, because the plans had most definitely not included him using one. Then M had made a comment about him having to use it on the double-o’s, and Q had packed it anyway. At least he was using it on the enemy instead of 00-brats. That thought just about made him laugh.

Bond shot two more men in the space it took most people to say their own name, and Alec finished off one more but also kept anyone with a brain at bay with his unhesitant shooting – just because he
didn’t have a clean shot didn’t mean he was going to hold back. Seeing how trigger-happy Mr. Trevelyan was, Q began to seriously wonder how in the world Bond was the one with the worse reputation.

As soon as those bodies dropped, however, Q’s ears and brain worked together to spell out a worse conclusion. “More gunmen,” he barked shortly, making sure his gun was cocked and ready. He’d never been like Bond or Alec: he’d preferred guns only as a last resort, and always hesitated before pulling a trigger. That was probably why he’d always spent more time sparring than in the shooting range, brushing up on different skills. “They’ve at least replaced those you took down.”

Alec swore loudly and likely not in English, and Bond followed suit under his breath but no less vigorously. Already there was the sound of them having to reload, although goodness knew that they had enough ammunition hidden away on their person – Q had brought them half of that equipment, after all!

And, as with all equipment in the past, 007 ended up misusing it: without warning, the man suddenly hefted his pistol in one hand and threw it like some sort of axe.

“Bond,” Q said, voice level like a steel blade, “Tell me you did not just throw that-”

“It was empty, I had to kill someone, it was right there in my hand,” Bond deflected, already drawing another gun that he still had ammunition for, “I think my actions were valid.”

“If we weren’t already in so much trouble, I’d threaten to choke you with one of those silk ties you favor so much,” Q snarled.

At long last, and with slight annoyance in his tone, Alec joined the conversation: “Not that I don’t mind a few death-threats between friends-” Suddenly, he cut off with a roar of pain even as Q heard a bullet lodge itself in a tree.

Without earpieces (not only Q’s had been overloaded in the explosion), there was no way to ascertain if 006 was dead or alive except to yell. Reflexively, Q almost left his pocket of safety to run to the man, but a bullet near his head got him to duck down again. “006! REPORT!” he raised his voice as loud as it could go to demand.

There was a snarl in response, even as Bond – too focused to waste breath in talking – took up a new position to try and cover both Q and Alec. Since it was 006 snarling, it meant he was alive. “They’re like bleedin’ ants!” the black-winged Angel said in exasperated outrage a moment later.

Q was coming to the same disturbing conclusion. There were far more people here than they had had any hope to expect, a number that went way beyond ‘ambush’ and right into ‘overkill’. There was no question that their foe had been preparing for Angels, but even for that, this was almost ridiculous! Q’s brain was wrapped up in all of those horrendous facts, trying to sort some sense out of them, when for once someone shouted his name. “Q!” Bond shouted with something close to panic in his voice.

A bit more direction would have been nice, but it turned out the point would have been moot, as a stranger leapt over the log that Q had been hunched behind. One second Q was alone, the next he was looking up at someone coming down at him – fast.

He didn’t think. After all of the field training he’d had – however in the past that was – he didn’t need to. Both hands wrapped expertly around the grip and finger already depressing the trigger, Q jerked his gun straight up and emptied half the clip.
The body still nearly fell on him, but Q used some of the supernatural speed and strength he’d called up when sparring with the double-o’s. He used it in a bit of a panic now, but at least the fickle energy answered him, allowing the thin young man to hurl his dead enemy away from him. Breathing too fast, adrenalin like acid in his veins, Q’s eyes shot around for another threat.

There were more than enough – too many. Bond looked like he wanted to keep an eye on Q (despite Q’s continued assurances that he didn’t need watching over), but he simply couldn’t. It was like the Many-Headed Hydra of legend: cut one down and twice as many came back up. 006, Q saw with alarm, was already down to hand-to-hand combat. Granted, he was very good at it. If anything, he was going even better: so far as guns went, a human technically could match an Angel if they practiced enough, but an Angel would outdo a Mundane in pure speed and strength. Gun either re-holstered or lost (knowing double-o’s, likely shoved down someone’s throat), 006 was now laying about him with hands and feet and wings, a veritable wrecking-ball of muscle and onyx feathers. If someone hadn’t shot him already (Q wished he could see in the dark, to verify the damage done), Alec would have been too dangerous to even step near. He’d pulled a wicked-looking knife from somewhere on his person, and seemed all too eager to use it.

007 lifted off the ground in a rush of feathers, gaining altitude for a moment as he, too, was forced to put away the gun and use more visceral means instead. The fight was getting too close. However, when he jerked unexpectedly in the air, Q nearly thought that he’d missed the sound of another bullet hitting home. But Bond was landing heavily on the ground again, looking upwards and swearing. Eventually he got out the useful bit of information: “More lines in the trees!”

“Like last time?” 006 asked back, barely keeping his voice level. He was favoring his left side heavily, and not from the cut on the head he’d sustained in the earlier explosion. Bond and Q were being backed into each other, because whoever had planned this little battle had planned an army. “No, just wire,” Bond admitted, then added more darkly, “A lot of it.”

“By ‘a lot’ you mean enough to get tangled in, don’t you?” Q couldn’t believe the extents a 00-agent would go to remain flippant in the middle of a battle: 006 sounded put-out more than anything. He also sounded like he was straining, the levity and thin veneer over agony.

Bond was missing a whole chunk of feathers from the bottom of his left wing, evidence of a bullet that had probably been aimed for his middle but had been a good meter to the side. Oddly enough, Q was now the only one with a gun out, and he decided to use it wisely before the wave crushed the rest of the way in. Every pull of the trigger created a kick-back that he had to use supernatural energy to counter, but all of his bullets hit bodies, too. Grimly, he asked as Bond got close enough to hear him without shouting, “Could you and 006 make it? Straight up?”

“Didn’t you hear Alec’s little thought about tangling?” was Bond’s snarky retort.

Q noted that he hadn’t actually answered the question. Jaw set and eyes picking out another target – another shot, another fraction of his energy used up to handle the recoil – Q asked again, defining every word like a surgeon’s cut, “Could. You. Do. It.”

Someone must have been getting bold on Bond’s side of the fight, because Q felt the rush of wind against his left side that heralded one smoky wing snapping forward. The sound of it hitting a body was loud enough that whomever Bond had hit probably had broken bones. As for Q’s question, Bond heaved an explosive sigh and dodged the question again, “That would leave you in he lurch, Q.”

That meant that, yes, 006 and 7 could do it. They just weren’t.

“Bond, if this situation had come up even two weeks ago, you and 006 would be out of here
already."

“Even two weeks ago,” Bond admittedly frankly, “006 and I hated your guts.”

“Flattery will get you nowhere,” Q grunted as he squeezed off another shot, feeling how the shot echoed down his bones while Angel energy kept his muscles firm. He wasn’t fit to do this, he realized. He was going to hurt himself. “Now go remind 006 how nice it is to survive, and get out of here.”

Maybe Q should have expected the answer. 00-agents were notoriously stubborn, annoying, and recalcitrant, after all, and giving them orders was just an excuse for them to disobey. Nonetheless, Q felt a shock all the way down his spine as Bond, flippant and calm as you please, said, “No.”

Shocked and terrified by the answer – by the knowledge that now none of them were getting out of this, because without wings, Q sure wasn’t – Q nearly missed his final shot, and had to resist the urge to turn around and stare at 007 as he squawked, “Bond-?!”

“M would kill me if I lost our newest Quartermaster,” the agent smoothly explained, an excuse like honey on his silver tongue. Near-death experiences seemed to agree with the man, because despite the fact that he was bloody, battered, and cornered, he suddenly seemed quite at home. “And – sorry – but I fear her more than you. Alec thinks the same, or he would have left by now, disloyal git.”

The humor was entirely false, and Q wanted to shred it aside for the distraction it was – with his bare hands if necessary. He wanted to beat sense into Bond if it took all day and all the skin off his knuckles and undid his Angel energy entirely. Unfortunately, there were simply too many other things demanding his attention.

The night-time forest was alive with enemies, a wave of men to destroy three.

Alec went down first. Q couldn’t see him, but Bond was facing that direction, and roared with such fury that Q jumped, nearly dropping the slim blade he’d exchanged his gun for. It wasn’t a proper sword by any means, just a sensible, slender knife the length of his forearm but half the width and wicked-sharp as sin. It made up for the reach he didn’t have without his wings. Bond’s wings were fully spread now, twin banners of shadow and smoke, and right now they gave testament to the helpless rage he was feeling as 006 made one wrong step – that was all it took – and suddenly disappeared beneath the bodies of his opponents. Everything was already a ruckus of yelling and screaming, so if 006 cried out, it was lost in the cacophony.

“Bond!” Q shouted to bring his remaining ally back on point, afraid that the man would go berserker on him. Feeling a shiver of fear go silently down his spine, Q had to admit that he wouldn’t last more than a minute if that happened. He was a superb fighter – good enough to throw one 00-agent and bloody the lip of another – but when it came down to it, the numbers were against him. He was also physically smaller, lacked wings, and was so out of practice that he didn’t know how far he could trust the supernatural energy at his core – energy that was already being used to its fullest so that he could hold his own. Faster and stronger than his frame would normally allow, Q lashed out, his blade so swift and sharp than he’d made three cuts before the first one bled.

But people were everywhere: something flashed silver, and while Q was fast, he wasn’t omnipotent, and therefore couldn’t do anything to completely stop the jagged blade that scraped down his arm, tearing through his layers of winter clothing with a shredding noise. The blade’s tip caught flesh somewhere along the way before Q found the room to move away. A second later, and Bond roared again, and a grey wing snapped back to fill Q’s vision on one side, effectively guarding that flank for a moment. Bond couldn’t spare the time to defend Q like that, but he did it anyway.
And Q felt instantly guilty, because Bond paid for it.

Someone had been pushing their way through the throng of bodies, closer and closer, another faceless enemy in the Canadian cold and dark. This man was different because he was calm, however, lacking the fanatical drive and wild voracity that everyone else had thrown at Q and the double-o’s. The part of the fight where 006 had been was now ominously quiet, as if Alec Trevelyan had never existed.

Q was facing the other way, back-to-back now with 007 so that he had wings beating against his shoulders at every stroke, tricking his brain agonizingly into thinking they were his every other second – except they were the wrong color, and he could feel the flexing muscles of another man’s back against his spine. He was so focused on staying alive himself and keeping opponents off Bond’s back that he had no idea that someone else was approaching 007 from the front, facing him down with calm, poisonous confidence.

“I think that it’s time for you to stop fighting now, Bond,” purred an unfamiliar, smooth voice.

And Bond shuddered, stiffened, drew in a sharp, stuttered breath-
-And dropped like a stone.

Shocked, Q started to turn, but someone had taken very wise advantage of the opening Bond’s body had left behind, striking the smaller, wingless Angel in the back of the neck with something that felt an awful lot like a sledgehammer.

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Chapter End Notes

I hope to get a few more chapters up before I get bogged down in my summer class, which starts Monday *blech* Still, at least you guys got to see who lived and who died...and you sort of met Silva... (ooops! Did I type that out loud? I meant 'our mystery villain who can take down 007').
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Q, Bond, and Alec fell. Now enter Silva...

Or the chapter in which Q is the only one awake to face off against a man with plans.

Chapter Notes

Yep. A very wicked chapter. It might be a different flavor that those before, but hopefully you still like it! Silva is quite wicked, but Q is likewise quite brave!

(And ignore the building they're in...I have no idea what it is, I just had to come up with an Evil Lair for my Evil Villain, so I do what I want)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

~^~

Being knocked unconscious was getting old.

Q came around slowly, and it felt that his world was created around the first sensation he felt: a burning tension in his arms. His brain was used to mapping out everything around him, but since it felt wrapped in cotton right now, it was struggling. Slowly, it began to map things out starting at that point of discomfort, coming to slow conclusions. ‘I'm hanging...by my arms.’ That realization sent a jolt through him, and the slight Quartermaster involuntarily twitched his wrist, feeling cold metal links where they bit into his skin and wrist bones, the source of his suspension. His feet didn’t touch the floor enough for him to take any weight off his arms, even if he did have motor control, which his brain hadn’t quite gotten around to yet. He now felt with exquisite clarity the pain of where he’d been struck. If it had really been a sledgehammer, his vertebra would all have been shattered, so he’d probably exaggerated – still, whatever he’d been taken down with had left behind a throbbing pain along his neck, the back left corner of his jaw, and his left ear, all leaching upwards into a truly stupendous headache. That was when Q started to wake up enough to begin to feel fear.

He twisted his wrists again, succeeding only in making the chain bite deeper. Drat. He tried wildly to think of another way out of this, but his brain was still fuzzy, protesting the speed with which Q was trying to force it to get back to normal speed.

Somewhere in there, thanks to a minute movement that set him swinging slightly, Q felt himself bump into something that felt...alive. Instantly, he remembered 006 and 007, and that all of them had been taken out. That drove Q to fight his way to wakefulness even faster.

Finally, with a snap, his sixth sense came online – the sense he used very often to detect the supernatural energy of fellow Angels. He sighed like he’d never sigh again as he instantly sensed
two familiar reservoirs of energy, both to his left. The fact that he could sense any Angel energy at all meant that they were alive, although the energy he sensed was weak – meaning they were either unconscious or very, very close to death. Neither thought was comforting. Q himself couldn’t detect any injuries he hadn’t had before: banged-up knee, cut on his arm, that final blow he’d take that had turned off all the lights as surely as throwing a breaker switch would...

A simple fact about being able to sense Angel energy was that it wasn’t person-specific – Q didn’t sense energy and immediately know, ‘That’s Bond.’ He could sometimes determine whom he was sensing by shape, however, since an Angel’s energy filled the space it occupied, especially when it was being used in a fight. But still: it was just energy. He knew he was sensing an Angel, but that was it.

Therefore, his eyebrows drew together in confusion as he felt another flicker of supernatural energy – stronger this time. Despite the fact that his mind was more or less back up and running, Q hadn’t quite figured out the logistics of how to lift his head yet or open his eyes, so he quickly did a mental check again, until he was sure that there were two Angels hanging motionlessly next to him. That left a third signature like an anomaly some distance in front of him.

He tried – failed – tried again and succeeded, and raising his head a little bit, gasping as he immediately felt the pull of stiff and brutalized muscles in his neck. Opening his eyes after that was harder, but the Quartermaster managed a groggy blink. Everything was fuzzy, but clearing quickly (he had his glasses on, by some miracle). Able to think of only one solution in his current state, he cleared his throat enough to croak out in disbelief, “008?”

The answering chuckle was startling as it broke the quiet much more efficiently, a sound that Brant Sims would never have made. “Goooood, gooood!” the voice – familiar now from Q just hearing it once before – applauded, “A totally incorrect guess, since I killed your 008, but at least that proves my theory that you really can sense Angel energy, little Quartermaster.”

Q flinched at the words, wishing he could draw himself up more erect, but that would presuppose that he had his feet firmly on the ground. Immediately going tense, he looked across the room – broad, concrete, unadorned, shadowed heavily so that the farthest reaches were lost in darkness – to where he sensed their antagonist to be. He felt a spike of mixed fear and raw hatred going suddenly through his stomach, knowing that this was the man who’d taken down James Bond like knocking over a house of cards. Now that his ability to sense supernatural energy had been found out, Q used it unhesitantly, eyes narrowed through his glasses at where a figure of some sort had to be in the shadows.

A figure of some sort who apparently was an Angel whom Q didn’t know.

Sadly, Q was not meant to regain any sort of control or equilibrium, because before the stranger stepped into view, Q heard, “Ah! How rude of me.” And then there was a faint beep, the briefest of warnings as the chains clanked, and then suddenly there was nothing keeping Q away from the floor.

Briefly – very briefly – his knee held his weight, and then it seemed to decide that the shock and the damage were too much for the moment, and with a lancing pain gave out. Q hit the floor swearing, biting his lip after a moment to keep quiet and at least pretend he had a little bit more control than that. The sudden motion had left him feeling dizzy and weak, so he remained puddled on the floor a moment as he tried to regain himself. A quick flick of his eyes told him that he was huddled on the floor in the shadow of 007, who appeared completely unconscious – beyond that, 006, whose only signs of life were the fact that new, red blood kept seeping up to join the dried blood on his shirt. Both double-o’s and Q himself had been divested of their jackets, no doubt because of all the many dangerous items secreted away in their pockets. Mentally swearing at the inconvenience, Q
nonetheless had to admit that simply taking the thick jackets probably took less time than trying to empty every weapon from them. Although his pants’ pockets felt empty, meaning anything else that he might have used to escape was probably gone, too. Q turned his eyes back to their captor, knowing he couldn’t afford to ignore him.

“More comfortable?” the indelibly pleasant voice asked.

Q’s frown deepened, but he tried to master his vertigo enough to at least sit up. An answer felt like the wisest choice until he had a better idea of what he was dealing with. “Depends on your definition.”

A full-bellied laugh answered him, and then someone was finally stepping into the light. Tall and broad-shouldered, the man had as much muscle on him as 008 had, but with an oiled look that imitated good breeding and a smile that imitated a cat as it played. Pale blond hair slicked back and clothing impeccable, the contrast between the man and Q and his grubby gang couldn’t have been clearer. “Come now, Quartermaster, at least you are not still hanging up there like your friends,” the man smiled broadly and waved a hand to encompass 006 and 7, still unresponsive in all ways. Their captor added with just the barest sliver of menace now, voice lowering a pitch, “Be glad that I like you more, to show you that courtesy.”

Nervousness making his skin crawl, Q tried not to let it show on his face just how fast his mind was trying to find a way to escape, and figured he failed. As frustrating as it was, he was battered enough that he probably wouldn’t be much of a threat anytime soon. That final blow had rattled him severely enough that he wondered if he were going to be sick – if he tried to stand up, he certainly would be. The headache was just barely in the range of manageable.

“Who are you?” Q demanded carefully but in a voice that broached no argument, like a true Quartermaster. “And how do you know that I’m a Quartermaster?”

“How rude of me,” the man clapped his hands, then obliged eagerly, “You may call me Silva. And I already know that you are Q.” The smile remained, as if he expected Q to reciprocate and continue the ‘pleasant’ conversation. When Q just continued to stare at him, crouched on the floor, Silva threw his head back and rolled his eyes in an exaggerated manner. “Come on, Quartermaster. Surely a brain as powerful as yours isn’t having a hard time keeping up. Ask me a question.” The eager look was back, playful and full of a dog’s anticipation, although with a dangerous intellect that Q was suspecting lay beneath. “Ask me about what I am.”

It took a bit of effort, but Q managed to steel himself enough to think through a sensible – if somewhat defiant – answer, “So you want to have a civil conversation, is that what you want?”

Now there was sarcasm, a wry twist to Silva’s broad mouth. “Oh, you catch on quickly.”

Refusing to get annoyed (he’d survived weeks of 006, 7, and 8 being irritating before he’d finally given in and made a fuss – he could stand this), Q simply continued to focus his frowning countenance on Silva’s face while also subtly keeping tabs on his energy. In truth, that energy was the source of about a million questions for Q, because despite having a supernatural signature as strong as an Angel at full-swing, Silva had no wings. “Let them down and we’ll talk,” Q decided to say, jerking his chin minutely to his left. He refused to shudder at the thought that they were already nearly dead, because at least 006’s energy was so low as to be almost unreadable.

“Oh, come now, Q – surely the two of us can be civil and just talk,” Silva pressed, voice growing coaxing as he took a few more steps forward. “We have a lot alike, you and I. Things that those two just wouldn’t understand,” he sneered at the two 00-agents he’d so neatly captured.

Ah, so there was a reason that Q was conscious and free while the double-o’s were still strung up
like prisoners. Q’s unease worsened: he was the main focus of his villain’s attention, this villain whom Q was having a disturbingly hard time wrapping his head around. Especially since his head felt as if it were going to split in half from his headache. Determined not to show how weak and unbalanced he felt, Q began pulling himself to his feet, biting the inside of his cheek savagely against the vertigo. He felt his cheeks mantle as he realized how obvious it was that he had to shift nearly all of his weight onto his left foot – his injuries were obvious. Physically swaying but face determined, Q finally got down to business. “What do you want of us? Since you obviously could have killed us all but didn’t.”

Silva chuckled, and Q could see in his slitted eyes that the man was thinking of 008 – he’d killed him. Fortunately, the man had manners enough not to bring it up…although his next words were no less disturbing to Q: “I actually only care about you, Q.” He waved a dismissive hand at 006 and 007 again, not even bothering to look. “Those two winged Angels I could take or leave – they’re a dime a dozen.”

Trying not to look startled, Q failed to understand how Silva could think of winged Angels as commonplace. Britain was the only place known to have them, specifically MI6. Apparently Q hadn’t managed to completely hide his reactions again, because Silva was smiling slowly and knowingly.

He answered Q’s unspoken query. “You and I are the rare ones. Don’t you see that?”

“No, I’m afraid I don’t,” Q said steadily, calmly, stalling for time.

Silva was beginning to look fanatical, his eyes too intense. Q worried that the man’s size compared to the obvious strength of his supernatural energy meant that Q wouldn’t stand a chance in a fight against him. Superficially, they were the same: both wingless but still technically Angels. Silva just seemed to have all of the power that Q had lost and then some.

“I can see that you’re thinking it right now,” Silva smirked, pleased at his own intuitiveness, “You can sense me, I can sense you: we are both Angels, yes? Let’s just both admit that fact. We are both Angels. But.” Now he lifted on long finger, as happy as a teacher instructing a quick student; Silva then deftly angled his hand back to indicate the empty space behind him. “-We both pose the conundrum that we have no wings. So far, we are the only two in the world like this. I actually thought I was the only one, until I heard of your unfortunate accident.”

Slightly back and to Q’s left, 007 groaned, shifting the barest amount so that Q jumped involuntarily. It looked like Silva’s men had taken the liberty of beating both double-o’s up a little bit more, judging by the bruises Bond was sporting. His eyes were still closed, and Q wondered how aware he was.

Silva frowned, clearly annoyed, and Q jumped again to realize that he could actually feel the man’s supernatural energy crackling. The man was a powerhouse, even compared to winged Angels, and Q couldn’t help but blink wide eyes in shock at the sensation. He himself couldn’t pull together a fraction of that power, which had had the advantage of making him mostly unnoticeable to Bond and his gang early on.

Then Silva began walking up to Bond, and Q felt his steady wariness shoot up into full-on alarm.

As he slowly walked, Silva talked. “Angels are famous for their strength and power, but really-” He tsked as if ashamed, then went on more darkly, “They barely even scratch at their potential. Their lives are too easy!” He stopped walking, far enough away not to be a threat to Bond or Alec yet, but still close enough that Q’s tension was obvious. Silva seemed to be looking to Q now for understanding, however, and he implored with gesturing hands, vigorous words, and eyes that cut apart what they looked at, “They don’t know what it’s like to be afraid, to be disarmed. To be locked
to the ground in a body that looks just like a Mundane’s.” Q shivered as he felt Silva’s eyes obviously rake over him, then dance over to glance dismissively at the wings of Bond and Alec, hanging limply from their backs like feathery waterfalls to the floor. Silva went on more introspectively, “They don’t know what it’s like to be born a freak, to be looked down upon by your own mother because you lack the one thing that an Angel is supposed to have.” Suddenly he turned back to Q, smiling a slow, sickly-sweet smile. “Supposed to. It’s such a fun phrase, hmmm? Everyone says it, but has anyone tested to see if it is true? What if those wings are weakness-” Again his eyes went to the two unconscious 00-agents…and then snapped back to Q with the piercing power of a bullet. “-And we’re the true pinnacles of our kind?”

Q was trying to figure out how in the world he was supposed to talk his way around a fanatic, and beginning to realize that generally you couldn’t. The edge of true terror crept in as Q began to suspect the barest touch of insanity behind Silva’s intense, canted eyes. “Where are you getting all of this?” Q asked, unable to keep some defensiveness from his tone. Despite himself, he wanted to understand how Silva’s mind was creating all of these ideas. That, and the other wingless Angel’s words had created an ache in Q’s back that somehow spread right down from old scars to grip his heart in talons of cruel steel. “Where are you getting this idea that I am Quartermaster, for that matter?” This time, Q managed to find his cool, detached voice, the almost dry tones that made his words an impenetrable fortress.

Silva just snorted, not to be diverted. But when he saw that Q also refused to buckle – refused to admit that Silva’s assertions were correct about his identity – Silva sighed and changed tact. “That USB-drive you and your brutish comrades were after? It came originally from MI6.” That hit Q like a punch in the gut, and he nearly lost his balance as he shifted his weight unconsciously – and his leg obviously complained.

“MI6 didn’t tell you that, did they?” Silva’s sly smile said that he knew he’d hit his intended target. So he went on to change topics again, before Q could regain his mental balance, “Did you see what I did to Bond there, in the end? I’m sure you were quite busy, but I hope you noticed how politely he went down.”

Now Q shoved aside his bewilderment in place of surprisingly protective rage. These were his double-o’s, and if Silva thought that Q would just stand by and let him mess with them, he had another thing coming. “I believe he killed scores of your men first, and Alec no less,” Q pointed out with vicious delicateness, words enunciated with almost gentle finesse as if to bely their brutality.

“Mere pawns, my boy, mere pawns. They’d die for me if I told them to.” Something about the smiling, all-too-knowledgeable look that Silva was directing him told Q that there was more behind those words, but he didn’t have enough info to deduce it. So Silva returned to the subject of Bond. “Alec was already out of the picture by more ham-handed means, but Bond I got the pleasure of dealing with myself. You see, Q, my dear-” Q narrowed his eyes. “-There are certain powers that come with being an Angel sadly bereft of wings. When life forces us to grow up hard, it eventually rewards us with skills that common Angels will never grasp, because they’ll never have the need. The need to withstand the derision of a parent, the physical abuse of so-called friends in school, the need to make a living in a world who thinks you’re a cripple because you lack a set of appendages that were your birthright-” Silva looked to Q, understanding softening his eyes until Q felt his skin crawl. “The need to overcome the pity everyone feels over what you lost, the need to survive and thrive in a job that thinks you’re weak, not to mention the need to physically show those below you that you’re strong enough to command them.”

The words struck to truth so soundly that Q gave himself away, eyes widening. “How in the world do you know all of this?” he demanded again, this time with more force because there was no way
that Silva could know so much about the Quartermaster’s time at MI6. Well, there were a few ways, but none bore contemplation – and none were easy to arrange.

“You’re thinking that you have a mole,” Silva guessed with scary accuracy. “And no, I’m not telepathic,” he went on with words so exact to Q’s train of thought that the Quartermaster was half-disinclined to believe him. By now, Silva was laughing indulgently at Q, but at least he wasn’t looking at Bond like a piece of meat anymore. “But that leads me to my first lesson, Q.”

Ominous worry clenched its cold, bony hands around Q’s backbone. “Lesson?” he repeated slowly, as coolly as possible but with unavoidable caution in his voice. He felt instincts telling him that a fight would come soon, but he knew he was ill-prepared to meet it. Surprisingly, though, he sensed no build-up of supernatural energy that usually accompanied an Angel readying for attack.

“Q,” Silva soothed, “You have nothing to fear from me. We are one and the same, you and I. The only difference is that you had wings for awhile, and then lost them, whereas I was born without.” Despite all of Silva’s proclamations of this being a ‘gift’, there was bitterness like a poison in his voice as he revealed this. His eyes clouded darkly over. “But since you haven’t been without wings to hold you back as long as I have, you are still in the dark, poor Q. You don’t understand.” This time, when he looked to Bond, it was with a look of detached pleasure as he saw the past events instead of the man he now had hanging from the ceiling by chains. “I brought down an Angel with nothing more than a look and a thought.”

Suddenly the room seemed to sway. This was more than Q could comprehend, and he spent nearly a full minute wondering if he’d heard wrong, or if Silva were just playing an elaborate game in which his insanity led the way. But Q couldn’t help but remember how…gently…Bond had fallen, Bond who never did anything gently, much less lose a fight. There had been no gunshot, no sound of an object striking flesh. Bond had barely made a sound before he’d just…collapsed. There were still possibilities, however – hadn’t Alec been taken down by a dart-gun before? “You’re lying,” Q returned flatly.

“I’m not, and I can prove it to you,” Silva said easily and finished the last few strides to approach Bond. Although it sent agony up his leg, Q moved to insert himself between them, and in a moment he was standing with Bond close at his back and Silva equally close in front of him, grinning down with surprised amusement usually reserved for a puppy that had done an unexpected trick. If Silva could read Q’s energy as easily as Q could read any other Angel’s, then Silva also had to know how much Angelic energy Q was using just to make sure his knee didn’t give out.

“Silva, you’re not going to hurt him, Q,” Silva said as if this were funny, “I see very clearly that the best way to get you to cooperate is to maintain the good health of your precious double-o’s. Well, those you have left.” The last was added with a more vicious hum of amusement to go with his derision towards Q’s attachment to the other Angels.

“You’re done a spectacular job so far,” Q retorted with biting sarcasm, knowing how obvious the blood and beatings were on all of them.

Silva’s eyes narrowed almost to a glare. Part of him obviously was surprised that Q – so like him – kept on showing his teeth instead of just coming to heel like a good dog. “How about this, Q? You’re really not much better than a winged Angel at this point, so I’ll demonstrate on you, never touching these double-o’s you are so obviously attached to.” The quiet dangerousness in Silva’s tone was amplified by his size and his nearness: he was so close to Q that they were nearly on each other’s toes, and Q felt stifled by his sheer bulk and presence alone. Quite suddenly, Q felt a childish and frightened wish that he wasn’t the only one awake right now, alone to face this madness…this madness that he feared had its roots in terrifying truth.
But instead of backing down, Q swallowed, stabilized his voice, and clarified, “You won’t hurt them?” Q knew as well as the next field agent how easy it was to lie about that, but what else was he to do?

Silva smiled with sudden brightness, glad that he was getting his way. “Not a whit. And, honestly, Q, it’s not like I intend to mangle you, either. You show too much potential.”

Q shivered again as if under the touch of grimy fingers, and clenched his hands. “Fine then. What is this first lesson?”

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Chapter End Notes

I have an unexpected update to give you: I actually draw, and have drawn out both Q and Bond with wings! You can peak at them a few chapters after this one ;)

haha - Another cliffhanger! I'm becoming quite a sadist...but I'm eager to write the next part, so it shouldn't be too long a wait!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Lesson One.

Or, the chapter in which Silva gets that much scarier and Q learns to dislike him more.

Chapter Notes

Silva’s got maaaad skills! Scary skills...

A bit of a short chapter - but at least it was fast! And it’s full of AwEsOmE

See the end of the chapter for more notes

~^~

Silva’s hands lifted and suddenly they were gripping Q’s head between them, and Q felt his lips peel back in a feral snarl instinctively as he reached up to try and pry Silva’s hands away.

“Husssshhh, Q. I’m just showing you what I did to Bond. And I took him down as gently as I could.” As Q had guessed earlier, Silva was strong – stronger than him, with both of them calling upon their Angel sides. True, Q was much stronger and faster than a Mundane, but Silva was about as far from Mundane as anyone could be, and uninjured besides.

Then Silva spoke again. One word. Like a gong going off in Q’s head and clearing it of everything else. “Focus.” Q felt his eyes fixate, wide and startled, on Silva’s confident face, a face that now showed concentration that tightened the omnipresent smile around his mouth.

The next word came almost right after, and this one slipped in through the hole torn by the first. “Just…” Q still had his hands clenched around Silva’s wrists, but he’d stopped pulling, and it was as if his brain had been detached from the rest of him and set adrift in his head. Everything was distant, muffled by the shocking power of that first word and the controlling grip of the second. He could distantly sense the supernatural energy pouring through Silva’s hands right into his temples, but he couldn’t do anything about it.

Then the third word came, the one that manipulated. “…Relax.” Now the power surged in, filled with intent that made the word a command, and for a second Q’s own supernatural energy rallied and fought it. But Silva was hushing him gently, determinedly, and each word rang with power that worked like the first word, shocking Q’s thoughts and emptying them.

Barely two seconds of silent struggling later, and Q felt his every joint relax and he collapsed limply to the floor.

His mind was still fuzzy, detached, and he had the feeling that he wouldn’t have been thinking
anything if his own Angel energy hadn’t been working wildly to reestablish control. “It’s a three-
word system that is not always necessary. To mesmerize and control Mr. Bond, I just spoke. He was
captured a bit unprepared, I’ll admit,” came Silva’s pleasant voice from somewhere above him, and Q
was so dizzy… He gave his head a hard shake, relaxed muscles twitching as they came back online.
Silva made a noise that sounded like approval. “Ahhhh, I’m impressed. See, this is what makes you
and I better than winged Angels. You’ve had nothing but your energy for years, so it’s already trying
to reassert itself. A typical Angel can’t do that.” A laugh, short and loud and brutal. “Most Angels
can’t do anything but fly, such a pity.”

It was terrifying to be this disoriented after being assaulted by nothing more than three energy-laced
words, and Q was shuddering inside and out; he felt destabilized. His supernatural energy was
waking him up, but it left him feeling sick, as if his inner ear had just been subjected to a particularly
ill-advised roller-coaster ride. He pushed himself up to his hands and knees, gagging at the roiling
sensation still going on full-force inside of him.

Silva was still lecturing with a self-satisfied tone, for all the world unaffected by what he’d just done.
“Angels are much harder to do that to than Mundanes. Once you get the hang of this, you can
essentially control any Mundane – give them a set of orders and zip, off they go!” Silva chuckled to
himself, finally admitting, “That’s how I got this USB-drive and all of that information from MI6.
Mr. Everett was just one of several people that I’ve use that trick on. The other—” His words turned
darkly triumphant. “—is snuggled right inside MI6.”

While Q tried to simultaneously grasp that revelation and keep from vomiting, he gripped Bond’s
trouser-leg, only then realizing that instead of hanging limply, Bond had the toes of his feet firmly
braced against the floor. Q was shocked and rattled enough by now that he jerked his head to look
up without thinking, and it was only because Silva had his head thrown back with laughter that he
didn’t notice. Q’s eyes focused through a tangle of hair to find Bond looking down at him, eyes just
slits (one well on its way to be swollen shut, to be truthful) and body still motionless to hide his
return to consciousness. The 00-agent was smart enough to realize that he was holding none of the
cards right now, but by keeping his head down and his face hidden, he was waiting watchfully for
any opportunity he had. His supernatural energy gave away nothing, and Q realized that Bond was
being especially careful to keep the energy dim. 007’s glacial blue eyes revealed nothing, but he
locked eyes with Q with steady, cool intelligence, perfectly alert.

Q made himself drop his own head so as not to give the agent away, part of him hoping that Bond
would act, but the greater – more logical – part of him knowing that any act on Bond’s part would be
useless right now. Restrained as he was and with Silva an entity with tricks up his sleeve that Q
hadn’t even imagined up until now, it would be a suicide run if Bond attempted retaliation. With any
luck, Bond was smart enough to realize that, so Q allowed himself to use Bond for support a bit
more and pulled himself back to his feet. He was still dizzy enough that he ended up leaning a
shoulder back against Bond’s chest, and he’d never realized how nice it was to feel warmth, a
heartbeat, and steady breathing so near. “Where did you learn to do that?” Q made himself ask,
panting a little and squinting his eyes as if against a migraine. Honestly, falling to the floor again
hadn’t helped the headache he already had. He felt a faint trickle of something warm at the back of
his scalp that had to be blood.

“Self-taught, in part,” Silva preened without hesitation. It was obvious that he liked talking to Q, so
hopefully if Q could just satisfy him in that category, their captor would leave Bond and Alec alone
and eventually (hopefully) just leave for a bit. Q was still pretty sure that Alec was utterly
unconscious, and that worried him, especially with how much blood was staining his shirt between
his neck and his left arm – and if Q had to stand much longer…well, he wouldn’t be standing much
longer. The part of Q that was Quartermaster and therefore responsible for the 00-agents under his
command wanted to see just how badly 006 and 7 had been injured, and the part of Q that was a
perfectly sensible individual realized that he wasn’t doing very well himself.

But Silva wasn’t done yet, taking monologing to a whole new level now that he’d found someone he thought of as ‘like him.’ “I also learned more than a bit from that information stolen from MI6, because do you know what this USB-drive holds, Q?” And for the first time, Silva flipped something out of his pocket to stand in his fingertips, revealing that he had the device that they’d been hunting all along.

Staring at it and realizing that he didn’t have the capacity to get it, Q admitted because lying served no purpose, “No.”

Silva tisked again. “Mumsy didn’t feel the need to tell you much at all, did she?” he sympathized, then explained, “This information is all that MI6 has gathered about Angels.”

Q’s eyes shot from the tempting UBS-drive to Silva’s face in a second, shocked. “What?”

“See, I knew you’d be impressed! Since MI6 is the only place likely in the world to employ Angels, it has a unique opportunity to learn about them. Honestly, your Medical is just about the only place that can treat an Angel with any competence, something that troubled me greatly in my childhood. But – ah! – I’m rambling!”

“He’s been rambling for dog-years,” Bond murmured in his softest voice, and still Q nearly had a heart-attack, and it was all he could do not to spin around and shush the man. Fortunately, Bond had pitched his voice carefully and spoken without lifting his head, so Silva didn’t notice anything.

“This USB-drive – stolen by my mole and transported by Mr. Everett, who sadly outlived his usefulness – has given me a marvelous opportunity to study up on Angels. I learned about you in here, too, although MI6 is sadly lax in its information in that category.”

Q knew that that was probably because he avoided Medical like the plague, even more so than any self-respecting 00-agent honestly, and because yearly check-ups annoyed him to no end. 00-agents couldn’t avoid such physicals for long, but the Quartermaster of MI6 had a different repertoire of evasive maneuvers at his command. He didn’t mean to be secretive, but that was one of the results of him just generally disliking medical staff. In fact, he hadn’t had much to do with nurses or doctors since the interim he’d spent in the hospital after the brutal loss of his wings.

“Using that information, I have learned what makes winged Angels tick,” Silva finished up with a vicious light to his eyes. “Most of my skills I’d refined already, but now I have a few different ways to apply them.” His eyes flicked pointedly but briefly to 006 and 7, and Q just felt Bond’s muscles coiling against where his shoulder leaned. He pressed a hand against one broad pectoral muscle, pretending to be keeping his balance when really he was trying his best to transmit an order to keep still. If Bond gave himself away, Q had no way to protect any of them – not even himself, apparently, if Silva could take control of his mind so swiftly. “So you practiced on Mundanes until you figured out how to use your supernatural energy to take control of their mental pathways?” Q guessed. ‘Attention on me, Silva. Just keep talking…until I think a way out of this mess.’

“Clever boy,” Silva congratulated with another oily smile, too-keen, almost-avaricious eyes fixing on Q as if he just wanted to suck the intelligence right out of him. “That’s precisely how this works – and I’m hoping that, after enough lessons, you’ll be able to recognize what the power feels like so that you can mimic it.”

“I’m not on your side, Silva,” Q stated with firm steadiness. He’d had training that told him he should be lying like a rug to keep Silva friendly and ‘on his side’, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it.
“Why, of course you are, Quartermaster,” Silva brushed the words aside, “For who else can remotely understand you?”

The words hit like a knife in the chest, and Q had to clench his jaw and swallow against the pain. Unexpectedly, he felt a gust of warm air on his shoulder, a breath of air from Bond that was harder than usual – a subtle reminder that he was still there, still listening. Q hadn’t realized how much strain he was under until that tiny show of continued support nearly undid him, and he felt tears threaten. It took a deep breath and biting the inside of his cheek very hard to steady himself again. “Well, at this rate, your lessons will kill me first,” he pointed out as dryly as he knew how, letting himself sway just a bit so that it was painfully obvious to all present just how poorly Q was affected by Silva’s actions. Q was banking on Silva’s continued interest in him, and that Q would be very much less interesting if dead or catatonic.

At least Q hoped that theory was correct. If not, he was very likely to end up either dead or catatonic very, very soon.

For a moment, it seemed like Q was about to get the short end of the stick, as Silva’s eyes took on a dark and amused light. “You can’t take a little pain, Q? I’m shocked! I mean, you survived losing two whole limbs.” While Q stood and shook and tried not to let his rage and frustration slip past his carefully constructed control, Silva backed off a bit and switched moods – for the better, this time. “But maybe you have a point. You’ve had a hard day, and this must all be quite a shock to you. And no doubt you want some time to check up on your double-o’s, hmmm?” Silva tried to hold back the smirk and failed, quickly giving in to burst out a bubble of laughter. Playing with lives like this may as well have been a game to him. “I’m so sorry that my other pawns treated them so harshly, but winged Angels can be so hard to subdue. Well, well, well then.” Silva stood a little more to attention, as if – finally – he felt like being businesslike, just when he brought the conversation to an end. “I guess a little break is in order. He gestured into the darkness, adding, “There’s a switch that should unlatch the chains, since I assume you’ll get into an absolute temper if I leave you here with no means to take the agents down. It’s quite late, so I might go to bed and sleep in a bit.” He cocked his head, thinking his own thoughts and considering, “I imagine I won’t see you until much later at that rate. But that might be good for both of us. I have a new lesson planned, before I try to help you master this one.”

Q clenched his fist, frustrated and unsettled by how easily Silva treated Q as an eager student, making plans for them both as if he couldn’t imagine Q – his only fellow wingless Angel – contradicting him. But he remained silent, not wanting to cause Silva to change his mind in any way. Right now, this planned break in which Q could get Bond and 006 down was the best thing he could ever hope for.

With a little wave of his hand and a smile too broad to be healthy, Silva made up his mind and turned easily, walking away. “Try to leave, and someone will doubtless shoot you,” he called back, as blithely and as lethally as could be. “That goes for you, too, Q. I like you, but I don’t care much for the idea of you running around.” Then his laughter ricocheted off the ceiling. “Not that you could really run at the moment. You seem a little lame.”

Q sucked in a harsh, angry breath, but it was with cool logic that he made up his mind before Silva got too far away. Knowing he’d have to act quickly because Silva obviously paid as careful attention to energy as Q did, the Quartermaster called up all of the supernatural energy he had and lunged forward.

His leg screamed. The pain was unimaginable. Being an Angel meant fast-healing, but nothing instantaneous – it was more of a long-term thing. What would take a Mundane a month to heal from would take an Angel about half that. Sadly, that meant that Q’s Angel heritage did absolutely squat
to help him with his damaged knee – so he just poured the energy into speed and refused to let his leg buckle out of pure determination.

He’d meant to just surprise Silva, probably hitting him with some sloppy sort of tackle. It didn’t have to succeed – it only had to offer enough of a distraction for Q to slip that USB-drive out of his pocket without being noticed. That, and Q had more pent-up fury than he wanted to admit, so some of this he was doing for selfish, vindictive reasons.

But the Quartermaster was also more battered than he wanted to admit, and he was seconds slower than Silva.

Surprise flowing swiftly into rage on the pale man’s face as he turned, Silva jerked around with equally-inhuman speed and in a second he had Q by the throat. Struggling, Q was unable to brace on his bad foot, which meant he couldn’t kick out, but he was already aiming a punch that would have shattered Silva’s elbow.

Suddenly, energy swelled inside Silva’s skin – and then crossed that barrier, surging down his arm in what looked like a wave of white to Q’s mind’s-eye and hitting Q as if he’d bitten into a power-line. The Quartermaster’s back arched and he screamed, feeling the vicious energy tear into him and leave in a second of torture.

He almost lost consciousness. A Mundane would have died. Q felt like he had. His brain was working only in short spurts, and if his own supernatural energy had been a living being, it would have whimpered and curled up into a ball. Silva was standing over him, panting, when Q recovered enough to blearily open one eye and look past crooked glasses. “I guess you just got a taste of lesson two a little early,” the larger man said, trying to sound light but failing. He swept a hand back to try and tame his hair, which was in disarray. He seemed like he wanted to say more – maybe do more – but thought better of it…maybe because he realized that he would have killed Q outright if he didn’t just walk away.

Q, realizing just how outmatched he was right now, let his head drop back to the floor with a sigh and a wince of pain.

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Q didn’t think that he’d passed out, but apparently the exhaustion had gotten to him, because he found himself waking up to Bond's demanding, imperative tones: “Q! Q, get up if you’re bloody not dead!”

Far from dead because death would no doubt be quieter, Q rolled over, actually feeling sparks of energy kick off his skin. Disturbingly, some of that energy was his, riled up by the wild charge Silva had hit him with. “I’m all right, Bond,” he managed to say calmly.

Bond stopped yelling. The man was still pretty much where and how Q had left him, but now with his head up and eyes zeroed in on Q with obvious worry and tension. By the trickle of blood coming down his forearms, he already tried and railed to get free but had only succeeding in rubbing the skin off his wrists. He seemed to be warriing over exactly what he wanted to say, but finally settled on a fairly professional topic: “Yes, but are you all right enough to get up and hit that switch Silva talked about?”
After running like he had on his leg… Q winced just at the thought, but knew there was nothing for it. He was already awkwardly pushing himself to his feet, although it looked increasingly likely that he’d have to hop on one foot across the room. “I think I can manage it,” he said with forced optimism as he got upright and worked on balancing for a second.

Silent again and watchful, Bond again looked as though he wanted to say something more personal, but ultimately looked to Alec next to him, who was groaning but nothing more. “Good, because Alec looks pretty bad.”

“How bad?” Q asked just for the distraction as he limped/hopped into the shadows of the room and towards where Silva had pointed him. Fortunately, the promise of a switch hadn’t just been a cruel hoax, and Q soon could see it.

“He took a bullet between his neck and his left shoulder back at the fight. That’s all I know, but it can’t be pretty with as much blood as he’d got on him.”

“Huh,” was all Q managed to grunt, laboriously getting close enough to finally sort of collapse and lean against the wall, using a quick jerk of his hand to flip the switch. He was gratified by the sound of chains clanking, but had to cringe at the sound of two bodies hitting the floor. Even Bond hadn’t been ready for that, and was swearing now. “Sorry,” Q called halfheartedly. He could also hear a grouchy, groggy voice that sounded like 006 cursing, so maybe the sudden drop had served a purpose. He began making his slow, painful way back to his teammates again.

Bond had already rolled Alec Trevelyan over onto his back and was checking him over, motions quick and economical despite how long he’d been hanging by his hands. His wrists were a raw mess of recently-chafed skin, but Bond was flexing his hands periodically as if circulation were coming back. Alec bared his teeth in a wince, but Q arrived quickly enough to see that his eyes were open before they squeezed shut. He said something particularly unflattering in Russian which Q’s groggy brain managed to translate and smile at. “By your use of language, I assume you’re coherent, 006?” he asked, standing over Bond’s shoulder and wondering how in the world he was supposed to get back to the floor now that he’d gotten to his feet. Falling seemed the only option, and he’d had quite enough of that.

“Oh, I’m incredibly coherent,” Alec assured him with vehemence and another snarl as Bond prodded at the juncture between his neck and shoulder some more, “I’m so incredibly coherent that I’m going to rip James’s bloody head off if he doesn’t stop poking around!!”

Bond sat back, one eyebrow raised. “If it weren’t for the loads of blood, I’d say he was fine,” he decided.

By this point, Q was pretty good at translating falsely cheerful field-agent-speak, and knew that this all meant that Alec was definitely not fine. Groaning as he realized that he would have to keep thinking and working (when he really wanted to just close his eyes, fall asleep, and hope this was a nightmare he’d wake up from), Q limped closer, enough so that he could lean a hand on Bond’s shoulder, a position that felt surprisingly natural by this point. “Help me down. Between the two of us, I imagine that we can at least get 006 stabilized until we find a way out of this.”

Q was on the side of Bond’s injured wing, the blood sticky and dried between his grey feathers, but still the 00-agent lifted the leading edge of the wing until it was nudged under Q’s forearm. Sadly, it was Q’s left forearm – in turn injured – and the Quartermaster had to bite his lip savagely to keep from crying out. “Sorry about that,” Bond said softly even as he helped ease the injured Quartermaster to the ground. “I saw the injury, but didn’t think you’d manage to turn your other side to me without falling over.”
“A possibility that I’m glad neither of us felt the need to test,” Q replied as magnanimously as possible while the pain faded. He spared a glance at his arm with its torn sleeve and damaged skin beneath, glad that it wasn’t bleeding actively anymore, even if it looked positively ugly. He managed to sit awkwardly so his right knee didn’t protest too badly. “Any other major injuries, 006?”

“Major by double-o standards,” 006 quipped, cracking one eye open, “or Mundane standards?”

Usually, Q would have tetchily answered the latter, but today was a different kind of day. “Let’s go by double-o standards until we have the luxury of safety, okay, 006?”

“Hm,” Alec hummed agreement, smiling cheekily at watching Q bend to their reckless way of life, “In that case, I think that’s the worst of it. The rest are just scratches.”

“And maybe a concussion,” Bond added, eyes on the dried blood around the left side of 006’s head.

“Since when have any of us cared if we had a concussion?” 006 retorted, “I bet you live half of your life with some concussion or other, James.”

“Stop arguing!” Q interrupted, louder than he’d meant to. As with every other time he’d raised his voice, it startled the 00-agents quite spectacularly. In the following silence, Q closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and counted to ten to try and calm himself. “If you want my help, be quiet. It’s been a rather long day, and saying my temper is short would be an understatement.” He almost didn’t realize that he was still talking, his voice dropping much quieter and showing a rare vulnerable edge as he added, “And I’m not exactly calm right now.”

006 probably didn’t understand, if he truly had been unconscious through Silva’s whole spiel, but Bond was often more intuitive than people gave him credit for. After a pause in which the agents both soaked in this strange show of weakness of their usually-stroppy Quartermaster, Bond took over with calm professionalism again. “How about we get Alec’s shirt off first? I’ve got a bit of field-medic training, so I can take a look at it.”

“Much obliged, 007,” said Q automatically. Hell, but he was tired. He also felt all shaken up inside like a snow-globe. It was an odd feeling.

“Can you tear the shirt up into bandages?”

The gentle tone snapped Q into himself again, and he just as quickly covered up the soft underbelly he had shown. “I might walk like a one-legged crane right now, but I’ve got enough energy to tear up cloth,” he made clear.

For once, Bond actually seemed cheered to hear the tart tone of voice, and offered an amused smile that could have been annoying under other circumstances. “Okay then,” 007 just said agreeably, and they began working to divest 006 of his shirt.

Chapter End Notes

There - NOT a cliffhanger! At least in my opinion. Lesson 2 I save for later :3 Also in the upcoming chapter will hopefully be some Q/Bond bonding time. (Lol - I said 'bonding' time, like, 'Bond' and...? Yeah, I'll stop...)

Also - I have colored the picture of Q's wings! Since I still can't figure out how to post
images on Archive, here is the link to the pic on my art account: Truth's DA account

Feel free to browse around! There's a link on that page specifically that will lead you to the uncolored version (to print and color if you really wish to). If you want the link to Bond (not colored yet), it's here.
Art by Me :D

Chapter Summary

Sorry - not a chapter! I'm already typing the chapter, but someone finally took pity on me and gave me instructions on how to upload art!

So, for those of you who haven't seen yet, these are the wings Q was born with. One chapter back, there are links to where these came from, if you want to see more - or if you want to color your own Q or Bond ;)

(I drew this simply in ink first, scanned it, and then worked on it using my Wacom tablet and a GIMP program). Bond is in the link for chapter 10 as well!

No color for Bond yet - but that should be coming! Hope this tides everyone over until the next chapter (^_^)
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Q and Bond get time to chat. Q tells about the loss of his wings. Discussion happens.

Or the chapter in which Q runs the gambit of emotions and so does Bond.

Chapter Notes

Finally! The story of how Q lost his wings!

(And the 'Bond'-ing begins...)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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The bullet-wound was a through-and-through at least, but it was still an injury that would have left any Mundane dead of blood-loss and/or shock by now. As it was, 006 was still clearly in a bad way. With Bond’s skill and Q’s practical nature adding a quiet helping hand, they got 006 patched up as best they could. Q, being exhausted and feeling as though he’d been run through the ringer, was mostly silent, simply listening imperviously to the banter of the two double-o’s. Mostly, Alec just swore in Russian, but Bond was flippant and charming enough to get around that without seeming to ever take offense. They ultimately decided to get themselves out of the center of the room, because even Q had enough field-agent instincts to want a wall at his back instead of camping out like sitting ducks in the brightly-lit middle of the room. Besides: the chains were just disturbing them all by this point, metallic reminders of helplessness.

It probably looked like a drunken affair: Bond had to help Alec to his feet, and then both double-o’s had to in turn help Q to his feet. Once there, Alec proved woozy and weak but otherwise fit, while Q was practically a cripple. Bond was strong, but being pretty much the only one strictly able to walk in a straight line meant that he was put to the test coordinating the other two. They made it without falling, thankfully, and Q just weakly slid down the wall as he heard Bond getting Alec situated. With 006 finally showing the strain, he’d quieted (which was more disturbing than when he was blistering their ears with swearing), but Bond just continued to talk to him in the calm, pleasant voice often shared between long-time friends. How Bond did it, Q would never know.

Then that friendly, easy voice was turned on him, surprisingly. “All right, Quartermaster, you turn. I may have been unconscious longer than you, but I imagine it’s safe to say you’ve had a worse time of it.”

Too drained to conceive of a really good retort, Q narrowed his eyes a moment before it became too
much of an effort to tilt his head up at Bond. Q let his head loll back against the wall again, looking forward with tired eyes and an irked sigh – the best response he could come up with at the moment. But he gentled it slightly: “You do this mothering bit rather well, 007. Ever thought of a change in profession?”

Bond snorted, torn between surprised and amused, it sounded. Q didn’t look, but in his peripheral vision and in his ears, he noted Bond sliding down to sit next to him. “Was that a back-handed compliment, Quartermaster?”

“Take it or leave it,” Q shrugged. Maybe his mood wasn’t so bad, if he was bantering.

“I’m a 00-agent. It’s part of the job description to take what I can get.” That was where the relaxed joking ended, however, as Bond’s tone suddenly went serious, “So do you want to talk or have me look at your knee first?”

Q winced. It was not a particularly appealing set of choices. But since he’d finally found a position in which his poor, over-exerted, quite damaged leg didn’t hurt, the smaller man defaulted to the first option because it didn’t involve moving. “Where do you want me to start?”

“The beginning.” Then, surprising Q again, 007 clarified quite calmly, “When you lost your wings.”

Lethargy aside, Q’s head snapped around, brows low behind his glasses as he sought any kind of derision or joke in Bond’s face. He saw nothing but open sincerity and serious, solemn interest. Next Q looked the other way, but it was clear that Alec was sleeping, preserving what little strength he had. Finally Q’s face turned forward again, knowing that Bond was watching patiently at his right, and with a carefully blank expression and a tone that was nothing but calm, Q answered in a quiet voice, “It was on a mission, but I’m sure that whatever your imagination was conjuring is quite an exaggeration of what actually happened.”

“I have a pathetic imagination,” Bond countered idly, probably lying, “What did happen? Silva seems to know, so I’d like to at least be on par with him.” At that last sentence, deep, seething anger just seeped into Bond’s voice like an oil leak spreading slowly across a calm lake. 007 kept it controlled well, but his hatred was obvious.

Leaning his head back against the wall was a little painful, since he’d obviously cracked his head on the floor when Silva had turned off his brain like a three-step switch. Still, Q didn’t much want to turn his head, and if he leaned forward he was relatively sure he’d just lose focus and fall asleep or fall over. “It was a fairly simple mission. An extraction of a Mundane agent. I was the only Angel on the mission, but I had sufficient back-up and intel was good. We actually got cleanly in – got the agent – and were back out before everything hit the fan.” Q sighed, closing his eyes and wondering why he hadn’t told this story before. It had just never come up, and he and the double-o’s had spent too much time playing angry cat-and-mouse with each other (the ‘Tom and Jerry’ kind), and the interest in sharing old, hard lessons was never there. “I think that the worst part was that it was a Mundane. After that, I refuse to underestimate them.” Q still had his eyes closed, but one hand was focused on slowly peeling his sleeve away from the blood-crusted skin of his other forearm – a focus point while words continued to pour coldly out. “My team became cornered so, thinking that Angels were indestructible, I told them to go on ahead while I held the metaphorical pass. Sadly, guns happen to be perfectly effective against Angels. I believe that the scar I have is very nearly in the same spot as yours, from when Eve shot you off that train.” Q’s eyes were open again, but he seemed only able to look deadly forward. He only jerked back to normal awareness with Bond’s hand unexpectedly grabbed his wrist, and only then did Q realize that he’d gone beyond clearing the wound to the point where he was making it worse. He hadn’t registered the pain, and for a second all he registered now was the almost-painful pressure of Bond’s hand. The agent’s supernatural energy
was racing, even though he wasn’t in a fight.

Q blinked up at him as if clearing away a fog in his head, belatedly noticing the warring emotions tangled over Bond’s face – he appeared more upset than Q was. “It’s really not that hard to talk about,” he gently assured Bond, making no effort to recover his wrist.

Bond just shook his head. Angry shock was winning out on his face, so Q sighed, extricated his wrist, and tried to calmly go on with his story. In his head, he treated it as just another jot of information that needed to be given out to an agent under his responsibility. “It turned out that the same man who had shot me also had a touch of psychopathic tendencies. In simple terms, he was crazy. A rather dangerous crazy, true – one who’d been pulling the legs off grasshoppers and mutilating neighbors’ cats as a child. It turned out that he was wanted on two different murder counts in which he’d killed some people rather slowly. Because I didn’t watch myself well enough, I was the one who paid the price when he graduated from killing Mundanes to mutilating Angels.”

“Q. Stop talking as if this is a grocery list.” Bond’s voice was harsh and strained.

“The bullet wound put me into shock. I have no memory of nearly an hour after that. At that point, I woke up to the realization that Mundanes, besides being far more common than Angels, have the strength to grip onto a wing at a joint and—”

"Q!" Bond was bellowing now, and his hand surged up to catch the Quartermaster roughly by the chin. At this moment, they were eye to eye, Bond looking on the very last threads of his control and Q sunk so deep into his own well of control that he was a veritable mountain: impenetrable, immovable. Ice and stone without emotion. This was the quality that made him deadly as a Quartermaster. He could look at everything as just so much data, even himself, turning what others would see as chaos and trauma into numbers and code in his head. He couldn’t do it all the time – sometimes, it just hurt, and not all agony could be reduced to emotional binary – but he could most of the time, when he needed to. Now definitely qualified as a time when he needed to.

Staring at Q’s determinedly detached eyes as if looking for something familiar within an alien skin, Bond didn’t let go and didn’t back away; his wings were half-spread in a dome around them, grey and tense. Too tired to be ruffled, Q just returned the frustrated glare with a look of his own that said, ‘This is who I am. Calm detachedness and winglessness and all.’

However, something in 007’s face – concern, Q realized with distant surprise – urged Q to lower the shield a little, even though it let waves of agony wash in. But it also let the viciousness out as he said in a low, hushed tone, “He’s dead now. Thanks to my own foolishness for letting myself get caught in such a way, I was beyond being able to fight back, but the agents that came and retrieved me riddled him with bullets. I only vaguely recall it, but I was retold the story. Those agents have since retired, hence the lack of knowledge readily available about my incident.”

Maybe it was that glimpse of normal, expected emotion in his Quartermaster’s tone that convinced Bond that Q wasn’t having a mental break. Either way, the blond agent took a deep breath (mouth still twisted in a grimace as if he didn’t like the taste of something), and skimmed Q’s face one more time with his pale blue eyes. The MI6 Angel’s wings relaxed slowly into a half-folded position against his back.

Q forced himself to crack a dry smile, even though it was difficult. “You can let go of my face now, 007.”

Apparently Bond wasn’t so off-balance as Q had thought. He replied easily enough, “Understood, Quartermaster,” and let his hand slip away. By now, that phrase was starting to become an inside joke – or at least Bond was smirking as though it was, and it reminded Q of their first eventful car-
ride together. It was a relief when the man changed the mood as well as the topic, but Q’s jaw felt cold when those fingers left it. “So, our new jailer Silva lost his wings, too? Or did he say he was born without?”

“The latter.” Talking about Silva was both harder and easier than relating his own horrific tale: the loss of Q’s wings was as visceral as horror stories came, but it was also older – in the past. Q had had years to wrap it in ice. Silva was right here and now, as hot and burning as fire too close to the skin. “I’ve never heard of someone like him,” he confessed honestly. The part of Q that didn’t shiver just thinking about the man was intrigued.

Despite his original options of talking or fixing Q’s leg, Bond was now doing both as he knelt up and bent his head over Q’s right knee. “Good. His breed of self-obsession and ego should only come once in a lifetime. Or less,” gritted out Bond. At least his tone had settled again, returning to something almost calm but laced with irritation and banked anger. Q almost wished that 007 were more like 008, wearing his emotions on his wings: where Brant Sim’s would have been twitching or shifting as the emotions took him, Bond’s were once again under rigid control.

“So says the man renowned as the egotistical peacock of MI6,” Q found himself joking. The dry smile was settling a little bit more easily on his face.

“Is that a reference to my choice in clothing?”

“I believe we are off-topic.”

“I believe you shouldn’t be insulting someone else’s ability to wear a suit when you dress like an eclectic scarecrow.”

Q couldn’t tell whether he wanted to glare or burst out laughing, but worried that a burst of laughter would definitely tip him over into the ‘crazy’ category. Thanks goodness Alec was out for the count – it was bad enough that just Bond was having to deal with him like this. As if the very thought coaxed him into self-reflection, Q looked inward and noted with somber fear that his supernatural energy was still a mess. He felt his momentary good mood falter, fall, and shatter, recalling how easily Silva had overcome him.

Silva. They were joking right now because Silva wasn’t there, but that didn’t make the threat of the man go away...

“You okay, Q?”

Bond’s voice, such a perfect balance of inherent strength and gentle concern, jerked Q back to reality. The Quartermaster’s smile was bitter, because he was far from all right, but both of them knew he was going to pretend he was anyway. “Let’s go back to the problem at hand. At what point did you wake up to Silva’s rant?”

Visibly giving up on trying to talk emotions with Q, Bond sighed, settled on his heels by Q’s knee, and replied with more than a little bit of tetchiness, “I had the distinct pleasure of waking up to the ‘winged Angels versus wingless Angels’ rant. As much as I had to agree with the basic premise—” Q quirked an eyebrow, surprised by the admission as much by the fact that James had been cognizant that early on in the encounter while hiding it from both Silva and himself the whole time. “—His delivery leaves something to be desired.”

Q hummed in consideration, and finally concluded, “Then you heard most of it. Pretty much everything before that, he repeated later, so you know everything.” Q hissed as Bond, lacking any other way to get at Q’s knee, hooked strong fingers into the rip at the side of the pant-leg and pulled.
The motion jarred Q’s limb, but Bond had used Angel strength, a surge of energy making the motion quick as the cloth tore. Beneath, Q’s knee was swollen and discolored – it pretty much looked as bad as it felt. “That’s what I get for running on it,” Q griped, chewing at the inside of his lower lip as he tried to deduce just how well he was going to be able to navigate on such a damaged limb.

“I know that we need to be out of here,” Bond said without turning his attention from his task, which now seemed to include prodding everywhere that hurt around Q’s kneecap. Bloody Bond. “As much as I want to just snap Silva’s neck, I think our little posse is a little under-equipped for an offensive maneuver.”

Chuckling mirthlessly, Q clenched his hands and tried to ignore Bond’s ministrations, focusing instead on the conversation and the feel of his blunt fingernails cutting miniature crescent moons into his palm. Still, the pain was horrendous, and Q had to close his eyes and lean his head back against the cold wall again. Maybe he’d drifted off – or just looked like he had – because there was Bond with his inexplicably considerate voice again. “Q?”

“If you ask if I’m all right one more time,” Q said, voice actually quite friendly – he was even smiling a little, because this was all getting just ludicrous, “I’m going to tell you the truth, and then neither of us are going to be happy.”

“We need to get you out of here, Q, because you’re already a wreck and it’s obvious that Silva likes you best,” said Bond with lethal softness. He understood the stakes as much as he understood – perfectly – the unique danger presented to his Quartermaster. For once, being someone’s favorite was the worst thing to be.

“So you just want to stick around?” Bond asked with a definite edge in his voice. Possibly it was from frustration at Q’s seeming lack of fight-or-flight response – possibly it was just the fact that double-o’s preferred action to sitting around, and this idea was unfathomable to the 00-agent. Bond’s wings were getting precariously close to twitching.

So Q tried for logic, sighing and gathering his thoughts. He sluggishly opened his eyes, finding them fixed on the dark ceiling, and used the patternless blackness as a blank slat for his brain to work with. From there, he laid out, “We’ve been checking in with MI6 regularly. Already, they’ll be getting anxious for a response, and M will doubtlessly send another team out to get us. You may be known for going off-grid for weeks, but I’m not.”

Bond’s hands had stilled on Q’s knee, and after what was probably a long, disbelieving look, the man said flatly, “You really are suggesting we sit tight.”

Tiring of the argument, Q dropped his head to fix Bond with a glare, defending, “If we try to escape, our chances of being killed rise tenfold. So far, Silva has shown, if anything, an interest in keeping us alive, which is good. Considering Alec’s condition, he’d be a dead-weight in any escape attempt, and the first to die if we tried and failed – however, I estimate only twenty-four hours before MI6 comes to get us. If Alec can hang on that long, I am sure I can.” The last was purposefully a challenge, set to appeal to Bond’s ego and competitive nature, but for once the 00-agent refused to take the bait.

Looking frustrated and angry again, Bond fixed Q with those glacial blue eyes of his, and started brutally laying out facts of his own: “Q, in probably less than ten hours, that madman is going to come back in here, and he’s going to want to talk to you. And if I know anything about the powers he’s teasing you with, it’s that you can’t stick around for lesson two.”
“I don’t have a choice, Bond,” Q snapped back poignantly.

Bond had his teeth in the argument, however, and was nowhere near ready to let go. “Pardon me saying, but from what I picked up, you barely survived just a taste of lesson two.”

To avoid the frightening sting of the truth, Q rolled his eyes and thus avoided eye-contact. “Well, maybe Silva will go back and do a remedial class over lesson one. I certainly didn’t do well at it.”

Bond’s eyes narrowed, and he paused a moment. Finally, he came to a slow but almost befuddled answer: “The fact that you’re more flippant than me right now disturbs me greatly.”

At that moment, Q froze for a whole three seconds and then actually broke down laughing. It was a hard, sharp, brittle laugh, but quite loud, and Q just sat with his head tilted back, leaned bonelessly against the wall, and waited until it faded. From the look on Bond’s face, this disturbed him even more. “D-D-Don’t worry…007,” Q snorted out past laughter that just wouldn’t stop now that it had started, “I’m not having a nervous breakdown. I’m just so beyond being scared right now that this is all ridiculous. James – we have no other options. How many ways can I say that to you?”

For a moment, it looked like Bond would argue. Or at least clamp a hand over Q’s halfhearted, cracked smile so that he didn’t have to look at it. Instead, he began tearing the already-ripped ends of Q’s pant-leg off so that he could at least make some sort of bandage for his Quartermaster’s knee. “I don’t like this, you know,” 007 said, so low and quiet that it was like the shiver of an avalanche miles away.

Q found himself leaning forward to catch the words. “You’d be insane if you did, 007.”

“You’re insane,” countered the larger blonde man, tying off the knot of fabric perhaps a bit more forcefully than necessary. “For a genius,” he added as if that softened it, although he didn’t sound a whit repentant.

“What I am,” Q sighed, tiring of the argument, “is your meal ticket, so far as this Silva business is concerned. Or survival ticket, really.”

007 finished binding Q’s leg in a way that would restrict movement a little bit; it was the best he could do under the circumstances. Then, with a wordless sigh of resignation, he returned to his spot by the wall next to Q. The agent sat closer than before, and Q found himself humming in either acceptance or maybe simple pleasure at the contact. Usually, he was Q, the Quartermaster, High King of all the Tech Minions, and therefore above mere human contact. Today was obviously not one of those days, and Q found that if he paid enough attention, he could listen in on Bond’s supernatural energy, using it as a blueprint to stitch his back together again. Internally, he was regaining his equilibrium, but it still felt like Silva had stuck a blender inside of him and turned it on high during that ‘taste of lesson two.’

If 007 felt the full-body shiver that skated delicately through Q, he made no comment. Q was indelibly grateful for the silence, because the thought of facing Silva again was petrifying enough without his own double-o’s contradicting him.

Bond gave Q’s arm one look before giving up, obviously deciding that they’d all be running around naked before they got enough cloth to bandage every little thing.

Seeing the look, Q assured 007, “It’s not deep. Look – already scabbed over it. Plus-” He shrugged philosophically. “-What was I going to use it for anyway? There’s little point in challenging Silva to an arm-wrestling contest.”
“Your attempts at joking are really more unsettling than comforting.”

“Then you, 007, obviously need a broader sense of humor.”

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Chapter End Notes

Okay, very subtle 'Bond'-ing - mostly verbal stuff (hope you got a laugh or two out of it). This was sort of a 'filler' chapter to set things up for Lesson Two...

Next chapter: Enter Silva once again...bwahahaha
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

The reprieve is over: it's time for lesson 2.

Or Chapter Unlucky Thirteen for poor, poor Q...

Chapter Notes

Thanks to the comment that inspired a particularly creepy scene in this chapter!
Remember how Silva took an interest in Bond's scar in 'Skyfall'....? *wicked laugh*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Q hadn’t realized that he’d fallen asleep until Bond’s soft growl woke him. Leaning against 007’s side, Q could feel the stiffness he’d acquired from sleeping on a hard floor (against the wall) even as he rocketed into wakefulness as quickly as he could. Because there were a limited number of things that could be waking them up this morning, he was neither surprised nor really unsettled to blink his eyes open and see Silva walking up to them, this time with a little squadron of men with guns. Bitterly, Q had to admit this was smart, because now that 006 and 007 weren’t suspended from the ceiling, even someone with tricks like Silva was wise to be wary.

Especially since Bond was radiating temper like a furnace radiated heat. “Take a deep breath, 007,” Q said in as idle a voice as he could manage, as ludicrous as that sounded. His own eyes never left the encroaching source of danger, but Q’s hand lifted up to press back against the 00-agent at his side. He felt the solid muscle of the man’s chest, the heavy heartbeat beneath. 006 was still unconscious, a condition that worried Q more by the minute: it was so unnatural to see 006 so still and breathing so shallowly.

“Ah, good morning!” Silva greeted brightly, still dressed immaculately as if to offset the grubbiness of his prisoners. “I see everyone survived the night.”

“I see someone I wish hadn’t—” Bond started to snipe dangerously under his breath until Q gave a hard tug on his port wing, a warning. 007 reluctantly bit off the comment, but his eyes were still full of reckless threats as they took in Silva calculatingly.

Silva noticed, and narrowed his eyes back while also trying on a menacing smile. “One round against me wasn’t good enough for you, 007? You look positively ready to eat me alive.”

“Try me,” came back the unhesitant challenge, and Bond stood up just like that.

Guns came out like an allergic reaction, one for each of the seven people who had accompanied
Silva into the room – more than enough bullets to take down a healthy double-o permanently. Seeing how quickly things were getting out of hand, Q tried to get up, only to find that his leg had stiffened up overnight, and obviously Bond wasn’t helping him get up and down at the moment. The hand Q had braced frantically against the wall slipped, and the angry Quartermaster likewise slid back down into a sitting position on the floor. “Stop it! All of you!” he roared in his best Quartermaster’s voice, and with far more volume than people usually gave him credit for when they saw his slight frame and general lack of size. Even more surprisingly, everyone froze, Silva included. Silva, of course, looked slightly intrigued and amused, as if his kitten had growled; Bond’s face had that shut-down, unreadable look, as cool and professional as ice and with that half-smile dancing at one side of his mouth that never reached his frozen eyes. Everyone else blinked in something gratifyingly like shock, and no bullets were fired.

“Silva, if you hurt him – or 006 – then I swear that you’ll get not the slightest bit of cooperation from me,’’ Q threatened with feeling. Next to him, Alec stirred, no doubt roused at long last by the sheer volume of command in his Quartermaster’s voice. “And he needs medical attention.”

“You’re speaking as if you have something to bargain with, my dear Q,” pointed out Silva without an ounce of regret, and this time Bond’s growl was audible to everyone and Q had to nearly topple over in his rush to stop the man. Bond was still just close enough that Q was able to lunge forward and trap a handful of flight-feathers in his grip. He was so frustrated by now that he could have screamed.

“I do have something to bargain with, Silva. You want to teach me things? Fine. I’m stuck here. A captive audience – literally. But have you ever tried to teach an uncooperative student?” Meeting Silva’s eyes with unflinching fire, Q finished, “It’s a lot less fun, believe me. Now help me up, 007.” The same knife-sharp tone he’d used on Silva he went ahead and used on Bond, because he was angry that the man was being so reckless when their lives were already balanced on a knife’s edge.

Never turning his back on Silva, 007 backed up until his boot nudged Q’s hip. Then he looked down – maybe he looked apologetic. Mostly, Q thought he just looked torn. “Can you stand?” 007 asked quietly, just for Q’s ears, but it was a legitimate question.

Q dodged it. “I don’t want to take this sitting down now, do I?” And when Bond just sighed in resignation and reached down with one large hand, Q took it, soaking in the strength as the blonde agent effortlessly pulled him up. What he wouldn’t do for a bit of that strength right now: painless, unforced, inherent strength. Q just felt small. He held onto Bond’s hand perhaps a moment longer than necessary, and looked down to avoid the pity he must be garnering from Bond for his clinginess.

Then Q let go and stood on his own, swaying on a little as he got used to the tenderness of his leg. “So, do we have a deal, Silva?”

Instead of being annoyed by Q’s forthrightness, Silva seemed to be smiling more broadly by the second. Apparently, playing with people’s lives was much more fun when the other person you were playing with put some effort into the game as well. Obviously, Silva liked the challenge from someone he considered his equal. “Are you saying that you’ll be a nice little student if I leave your precious agents alone?” he said in his honeyed, almost musical voice.

Q resisted the urge to shiver as well as the urge to look at Bond, because he already knew that 007 was not happy with his deal. “Yes. If you also ensure that 006 here does not worsen. He has lost a lot of blood.”

“ ‘M fine,” came the drugged-sounding mumble, and both Q and Bond looked over to see Alec groggily opening his eyes. Usually tanned, the man was now white as a sheet, but his eyes glinted
threateningly as they opened and focused on the enemies all around them. Like any injured, cornered animal, 006 was extremely dangerous, and Q raced to bring this to a close before a fight could be ignited – because if a fight started, people would die. And not only people Q hated.

“Those are my terms, Silva. The lives of my double-o’s for my cooperation.”

“Q…” Bond’s carefully warning voice was near his ear, the heat of the man’s body at his back. It threatened to undo him, because just giving up and letting someone else take responsibility was so tempting…! Bond was the strong one: not cripplingly injured, fully trained in nearly any combat situation, loaded with sleek muscle and strength, and not to mention wings that were damaged – but worked. Q was pretty sure that he was running on his last reserves of energy (if his supernatural energy would listen to him at all), and even before the loss of his wings, he’d never been the powerhouse Bond was. In short, Q was smart enough to look at Silva, and know he was outmatched.

But what Bond didn’t have was a connection to Silva – a likeness that was both sword to cut Q and shield to keep him safe. Silva would chew Q up and spit him out, but at least he’d leave Q alive at the end of it. But Bond?

Silva would kill him in a heartbeat and not even blink over the tragedy. Bond just didn’t matter in Silva’s scheme of things.

“I only have to keep him busy for a few hours,” Q murmured under his breath, barely moving his lips.

Bond was near enough to hear, but too stubborn to just give in and agree. “More like ten hours, Q. We don’t even know if MI6 is coming yet.”

“Well, I’ll just keep Silva out of the room for as long as I can then,” Q ended the argument by limping a clumsy step forward, away from Bond. He firmed up his voice again and raised it to address Silva, “Is it a deal?”

Still looking as intrigued by Q’s demands as he was by the exchange he couldn’t hear between Q and Bond, Silva let his eyes flick from Q’s stubborn features to Bond’s frankly-deadly ones. “I would love to agree to your terms, Q – they truly are quite simple – but I fear your 007 will do something foolish either way.”

“Bond…” Q stressed the name viciously, hating himself for being so harsh, “-Will not move a muscle. And neither will you, 006.”

Q had sensed the man’s supernatural energy rising, the sign of him waking even as he kept his body still. Those grey-green eyes snapped open, proof that Q had called his bluff. Whether 006 was capable of getting up after all the blood he’d lost was still in question, and Q wasn’t sure whether to hope that he could or hope that he couldn’t. One would mean he was healthy, but the other would mean that he couldn’t do anything dumb. Bond hadn’t moved, but Q thought he could sense the anger still spilling off him.

And since all of this was a game to Silva, the man chuckled and then half turned back towards the door invitingly. “Deal.” He turned to his men. “Do make sure that our Quartermaster keeps up. He seems a little slow afoot at the moment.”

Two men closed in on Q so fast that he startled, jumping even as hands gripped his arms and jerked him forward. He was being hustled out of the room, and the remaining men were smart enough to keep their guns trained on the two double-o’s, who were predictably unhappy with the turn of
events. “Q!” came Alec’s tense holler, and Bond made a stymied noise as if he’d wanted to charge forward but had been blocked – as he probably had.

If Q had said that he wasn’t feeling the sting of panic himself, he’d be lying. He was being more or less dragged after Silva faster than his injured state could accommodate, and the hands on his arms were like bands of steel. With Angel strength he could have broken them, but he logically knew that there would always been more men and more gripping hands waiting. Silva had become a force of nature – his will simply could not be denied.

The last sound Q heard was the sharp crack of the butt of a gun hitting flesh and bone, and suddenly Q’s panic peaked into terror for the safety of his companions. “James!!” he cried out, but then the door slammed shut. He was outside and they were left within.

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Q was left seething and boiling with hatred and fear and acidic worry as he was pulled along, not catching up with Silva’s longer strides until he was bustled into another room. By then, he’d called up enough of his Angel energy to make himself a force to be reckoned with, although not enough to pull free – Q was running on empty and he knew it. If he put up a fight and failed miserably, then everyone else would know it.

But he had enough power to pull back against those dragging him, and slowed their overall pace enough that he entered the room where Silva was with dignity if not calm. “If you hurt them, Silva-!” Q immediately seethed, no longer afraid for his own safety with the thought of 006 and 7 dead in that room behind him.

“How, Q, Q – since when is jumping to conclusions what they teach you in school?” Silva chided, his tone jarring Q’s rage in that it seemed completely sincere. Then, before Q could do or say anything else rash, Silva turned to the set of computers and screens in the room’s back left corner and typed something in, images immediately filling the upper screens. Q blinked and instantly felt as if half of his internal organs uncoiled as tension seeped out of him, seeing a video feed of the room they’d been kept in – a room that contained two angry, but alive, 00-agents at the moment, with the gunmen backing out. 006 had made it to a sitting position at some point, and Bond was pacing, wings outstretched in obvious anxiety that ensured the gunmen did not lower their weapons even as they disappeared from the camera’s range of view.

Still, no one had been shot. No one had been bludgeoned to death. No one had been killed. Bond had more blood on his face than before, but since he still walked with that smooth, predatory glide, it hadn’t fazed him much. Considering how angry Bond must be, probably nothing short of a nuclear missile would faze him much right now…

“See, Q? I am more than fair,” Silva chided pleasantly, waving a gallant sort of hand at the screens. “Not hurt at all. Removing you from the situation was simply a delicate matter, you understand.” The appeal to logic had Q sighing and tamping down on his anger despite himself. “There simply would be no talking to you with double-o’s loose in the room, and getting you somewhere where we could talk obviously wasn’t on 007’s agenda.”

The way that Silva was talking about Bond exclusively and watching Q shrewdly made the Quartermaster unaccountably uncomfortable, as if there were some special connection between Q and 007 that Silva was picking apart. Q narrowed his eyes behind his glasses slightly, focusing on making his face unreadable.

Undeterred by Q’s new stony expression, and perhaps encouraged by the fact that the Quartermaster hadn’t yet yanked free of the hands tightly holding his upper arms, Silva went silent and instead
ambled forward. He wasn’t being threatening, but Q still stiffened slightly as the larger wingless Angel drew closer. The grips on Q’s arms weren’t getting any looser, and if Q had trusted his leg not to give out on him the moment he moved, he would have called up some supernatural energy and ripped free when one of Silva’s large, pale hands began almost idly playing with the collar of the Quartermaster’s polo-shirt. Determined to do as he’d said he’d do – keep Silva’s attention on himself until MI6 came – Q pushed down the rising feelings of unease and tried to maintain his cool, calm, detached front.

“I’m enough of a gentleman not to eavesdrop with those cameras much, but I did hear part of your story to 007,” Silva commented, making Q’s heart jam in his throat and lodge there, as Silva continued carelessly, “Getting hold of your report was almost harder than controlling the mind of an MI6 agent – bravo, Quartermaster.”

“I’m glad you’re impressed,” Q tried to say levelly, but he was shaken – off-balance. He had only been able to tell Bond about his past because he’d done it quickly, with the story so wrapped up in ice that it couldn’t hurt him – unless he lingered on it too long. Then, as with anything frozen over, he got frostbite. Now, however, to have reminders of the tale dragged out in front of him when he was unprepared and outgunned, he found himself panicking at the possibility of emotions. His voice cracked a little as he spoke, giving him away.

Silva’s eyes were still idly focused on the neck of his shirt, however, as if the folds and buttons there were the most interesting of things – or perhaps Silva’s fingers touching against the fabric. “I overheard that you and 007 have matching scars. How delectable,” Silva finally approached the point of his rambling with a snicker, and then he was pushing the edges of Q’s shirt-collar aside, making Q suck in a breath and pull back. The hands on his arms kept him from moving very far as the men holding him remained as immovable as statues.

Breathing through his nose and trying to remain steady (while his head felt as though it were a pinball machine – thoughts and emotions suddenly ricocheting all over inside of it), Q tolerated the touch. Inwardly, he just growled that this was Silva being odd and annoying again, and that eventually the man would switch back to chatting his ear off and perhaps knocking him unconscious with a thought again. Instead, with a deft slide of his wrist and twitch of his fingers, Silva undid the buttons to the polo-shirt’s collar, giving him room to slide his hand in and run the backs of his fingers purposefully across the smooth skin of Q’s neck.

Now the breath that Q sucked sharply in was audible, and he began to feel a visceral sort of panic settle in. Silva’s hand delved further, moving Q’s shirt aside enough to reveal the expanse of a prominent collarbone, the pale skin around it – the paler circle of scar-tissue where a bullet had torn through. Q had been afraid before, but not this kind of fear, the kind that suddenly jittered like an electric current in his veins and made him want to be anywhere but here. His breathing was shallow and fast despite his best efforts to keep himself under control, and the sensation of Silva’s fingers smoothing slowly along his collarbone was intimate even though it felt as horrid as a spider’s legs.

“It truly is an elegant scar,” Silva breathed, seeming somewhere between amused and reverent. Silva seemed to have no qualms about tugging Q’s shirt around, cool air hitting the skin of Q’s upper chest as Silva supposedly sought a better look at the bullet-wound that had led to such a tragedy. Feeling fingers on the scar was like having a cord plugged right into the event, and suddenly Q didn’t know if he could take the emotions that were drumming into him like hail.

“Either teach me lesson two or send me back to 007 and 006,” Q grated in a voice low and feral with frustration and agonized emotions – and he was angry. There weren’t words for how angry he was that someone was messing with him like this, making him relive something that he’d thought he’d tucked away. “I’m sure that Bond and Alec would relish the chance to berate me for leaving them
behind anyway, if you have nothing better to do with my time.”

Silva backed off, eyebrows raising almost jokingly at the sound rebuff he was being given. He even caught Q’s eyes, as if giving him a chance to take it back. By now, though, Q was glaring at him with a scorching mix of hatred and disgust that would have peeled paint, and he didn’t care how ill-advised it was to taunt a man who could take out 00-agents. “Well then, a little stroppy this morning, aren’t we, Quartermaster?” But Silva’s hand smoothed Q’s collar back into place, even if the buttons remained undone.

“Was I mistaken, Silva, or was there something you desperately wanted to teach me?”

Q had finally pushed it too far. The pale man sharply turned to him and suddenly there was a hand on his chest imparting a shockwave of energy like a cannon. The men holding Q fell back with a cry as if scorched, but Q screeched in agony even as his back bowed. The speed with which he collapsed surprised even him, but somehow he ended up on his knees. This hardly seemed a victory, considering how much a wreck his right knee still was, but at the moment he could barely feel it over the raging agony of Silva’s energy.

“Ahhhh, yes,” Silva sneered, the cruelty in him showing through where Q’s words had sliced away the façade of gentility, “I guess there was something I had to teach you. You seem to just beg for this lesson, don’t you? First yesterday, then today?” He ignored it as Q coughed, braced on arms that were shaking so hard he nearly fell on his face. “Perhaps I should just keep beating it into you. Maybe it will stick eventually, hmmm?” Strong hands reached down and hauled Q up by his shirtfront, and this time it was Silva and not his henchmen. Q was unable to hold back a yelp of pain as he tried to get his feet under him and inadvertently put weight too suddenly on his right leg. Silva seemed to relish the noise, a manic glint all too visible in his eyes from this close. “Are you ready to listen now, or are more physical applications of this lesson in order?”

Q wasn’t proud of it, but he let his voice lower into a whisper, at least feigning submission. “I’m ready to listen,” he said quietly, eyes squeezed shut in a rictus of pain. “Considering it feels as though you channeled enough amperage into me to light up a house, I am wondering why you’re surprised.”

As always, Q’s dry replies – edged with very real irritation – made Silva break out in a delighted chuckle. “Oh, it’s not amperage, Q – don’t use such a technical term. You’ve got your head so wrapped up in computers and technology that you’re not seeing the big picture! We Angels have that energy inside of us. Being wingless, you and I have the added ability of being able to channel it, with practice.”

At this point, it was beginning to just feel safer with his eyes closed, but Q forced them open if only to keep Silva in his sights. Shifting them open, Q found Silva leaned back in a relaxed posture against one of the computer tables, far enough away that Q could actually feel a measure of safety.

A very small, small measure.

In all honesty? Still not safe at all. The skin of his collarbone still tingled where the man’s fingers had touched him. “Are you saying that winged Angels don’t have the capacity?” he asked with a sigh,
giving in to the fact that he’d have to keep up his end of the bargain by conversing.

“What I’m saying is that they lack the need,” Silva countered, lips thinning as he smiled with bitter knowing. “Tell me, when is the last time you’ve known one of your double-o’s to ever need anything more than their strength and their wings?”

Truthfully? Never. Although 007 dearly loved cars and guns as well, but that probably was beside the point. Although he still thought that Silva was just this side of insane, Q couldn't help but be intrigued by his theories, to say nothing for his impossible abilities. “What’s to say that this isn’t just a fluke you alone are fortunate to have?” Q pointed out, deciding that if they were fighting with logic, he could at least give as good as he got. “You have no corroborating evidence to show than another wingless Angel can do the same, since I’ll tell you right now, I’ve never managed to knock someone to the floor with my supernatural energy, and if I could control minds, I’d have much more control of Q-branch than I do at present.”

“Q, you have the potential to control 00-agents,” Silva hissed with a triumphant smile, and he was so obviously buzzing excitement that, when he walked forward suddenly, Q flinched and closed his hands into fists, expecting to get knocked off his feet again. Silva noticed and, after a brief pause and a look of puzzlement, laughed once more.

“Fear not, Quartermaster – we’re firmly in the verbal part of this lesson. No further harm will come to you,” he soothed as if Q were just a foolish, jittery child, and Q immediately resented the patronizing tone. Since its purpose seemed purely to annoy him, however, he pushed the irritation aside and refused to bristle. Besides, Silva couldn’t hold back his knowledge for long now that he had someone like him to talk to: “Surely you can see the potential for learning as I have, Q – already, you got up more quickly, did you not? You’re not as dizzy as before, and I can sense that I didn’t shake you up quite as much, hmm?”

Q froze for a second, senses turning inwards, and realized with a jolt that Silva was right. Yesterday, after feeling the full force of Lesson Two, Q had felt out of sorts for hours, but right now he could already feel the supernatural energy inside of him smoothing out. Frustratingly, he couldn’t pinpoint exactly what he’d internally ‘learned’, only that some instinctive part of him was regulating to deal with Silva’s attack.

“It’s all a matter of listening and mimicking,” Silva encouraged, watching Q’s face to follow his thoughts. “Although, I admit, learning this second lesson is somewhat more…what word am I looking for…?”

“I believe that ‘painful’ is what you’re wanting to say,” Q deadpanned, since that should have been obvious to both of them, “You seem intent on teaching me lessons that are not only intensely painful, but thus far impossible to learn.”

Sadly, Q’s attempts to convince Silva of the uselessness of his actions didn’t work out as planned. If anything, Silva’s eyes narrowed as if faced with a particularly delightful challenge. “Are you saying you can’t learn any of this? You? MI6’s brightest star – her prodigy?”

This was dangerous ground: if Q convinced Silva that he couldn’t learn, then their captor would lose interest, and they’d all be as good as dead. On the other hand, Q sincerely wondered if he could learn any of this. After all, so far all he’d done was lose consciousness and collapse every time. So he wasn’t even sure whether he should try lying or go for an uncertain truth. He decided to tread carefully and slowly, picking his words, “I’m not sure that I even know how to go about learning all of this…”

“Ah. Forgive me. My lesson plan is perhaps a bit abrasive.”
‘Your lesson plan is bloody horrid. Kidnapping and physical abuse do not a good teacher make.’

“Let us try again – perhaps on Lesson one, hmm? It may seem complicated, but I assure you: you are more than equipped to learn the trick.”

Silva was walking forward again, getting close enough to touch, and that was never a good thing. Although Q had joked about remedial ‘classes’ for lesson one, he nearly went into a panic attack at the thought of Silva taking control of his mind again. “How can you tell that?”

“Energy,” Silva shrugged, as if it were the simplest thing. “Whether you realize it or not, you and I are far more attuned to listening to it than those with wings. Think of it as a blind person having better hearing.”

This was sounding more and more logical by the second, and the facts were beginning to make Q’s brain whir with interest, chewing at this new puzzle like a dog with a bone. It wasn’t enough to make him oblivious to Silva’s encroaching presence, however, and Q took an almost involuntarily (and clumsy and limping) step backwards to maintain some of the distance between them. Embarrassed by his own skittishness, Q huffed a breath and forced himself to speak calmly, “Is that the basis for all of this? Because we lack one facet of our capacity – wings – we’re stronger in other areas?”

Silva made a delighted noise in his throat, clapping his hands. “Ah, yes – see, you get it! Extraordinary, isn’t it?”

Very, but Q would have loved to learn about all of this under other circumstances. His eyes drifted of their own accord up to where the computer monitors were still watching Bond and Alec. There would be no hope of them escaping with cameras on them, to say the least. At least Alec was sitting up now, Bond crouched near him with their heads together in conversation.

Realizing that the more time he kept Silva busy, the less he’d have to worry about the man tangling with Bond or Alec, Q took a deep breath and then stepped into trouble with both feet. “Fine then. Let’s go over lesson one again.”

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Q was so dizzy. So dizzy he couldn’t even connect with his own head anymore, much less his brain. He wasn’t sure when they’d moved on from lesson one to lesson two again, but it wasn’t a happy transition.

For starters, he’d learned that having someone manually shut down and take control of your thoughts again and again began to cause an unsettling dissociative feeling inside one’s head, and after Silva had done it for the fifteenth time, Q had just given up on control and flown into a physical rage. It had been a feral response – the actions of a cornered animal whose other options of defense had been taken away.

That was when Q had come to another unexpected conclusion – it turned out that after having someone take over his mind over a dozen times, he was beginning to understand how to break it. This knowledge was only on a primitive, instinctive level, but when Q had snapped and struck out, Silva had smirked confidently and just tried to gentle Q by wrapping up his mind again. Only this time, some part of Q’s energy had retaliated in such a way that nullified part of the effect. Silva had been surprised to say the least, and that was probably the first time that he’d switched to physically teaching lesson two again.

They’d…maybe…switched back and forth between lessons after that. Unfortunately, Q was totally unable to repeat his trick from earlier, and Silva showed that he could be even more ruthless – not only shutting down the mind but taking it, controlling it. He said that this was harder with an Angel,
harder even with Q, a wingless one, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t do it. Silva had mentally controlled a mole inside MI6 who was a Mundane; all he could do with Q was force him to sit down on the floor like a good little dog, right at Silva’s feet. The worst part was, part of Q was entirely aware the whole time, aware enough to be terrifyingly grateful that this was all Silva could control him to do. Apparently, being an Angel meant that only the simplest of commands were possible, and usually Silva had to maintain a physical touch or even eye-contact at times, or the mesmerizing effect faltered and Q would shatter it.

Q shattered it a lot. He couldn’t battle himself free as he had before, but if Silva gave him an inch, he could take advantage of it. Sadly, Silva messed up only rarely, and most of the time Q felt his eyes rolling up in his head and he’d be closing his eyes, sometimes standing like that with his chin tucked down against his chest, or falling to the floor like last time. It was a wonder he didn’t crack his head open.

But finally – finally – Q just couldn’t take any more. All that Silva did unavoidably messed with Q’s internal energy as well, until it was a veritable maelstrom. If it were a person, it would have been an incoherent mess, twitching in seizure right about now, and the effect on Q physically was sickening. He felt violated, out of control, and finally he vomited because the world was spinning inside and out.

And the horrid part was, he couldn’t say whether he’d learned a single thing from this, except that Silva was definitely a psychopath. Anyone who could inflict this much pain on another person and keep on doing it was missing something inside.

“So sorry, Quartermaster,” Silva tisked, not sounding near sorry enough for Q’s tastes. If anything, Silva sounded slightly put out.

“Well, I guess that’s all for today. I’ll fetch someone to look in on you, hmm? I think that progress was made.”

Q coughed, tasting bile, and curled in on himself. He wasn’t even going to try opening his eyes. At least his glasses were safe, although the memory made him snarl bitterly: Silva had shut down Q’s mind until he could only stand like a statue, eyes fixed on Silva’s, and the larger man had then used his control to force Q to remove the spectacles and place them on the nearby table. That effort had left Silva sweating, and he’d lost the hold on Q’s mind a moment later, but Q could still feel the vulnerability and complete loss of control like a knife in his spine. That was the most complicated trick Silva had managed to pull on him, but was enough to get the point across: Silva’s powers truly were something to fear.

Silva leaned down, patting Q’s head and making the Quartermaster flinch at the friendly, superior gesture – as if he were a dog.

“You’ll thank me later,” Silva assured him, and then walked out of the room.

For a full minute, Q just lay on the floor, trembling – but not with fear. No: with impotent, all-consuming, helpless fury. He felt like he’d been stuck in a cage for hours with someone poking a stick at him, and all that time he’d wanted nothing more than to take that stick and then bite off the whole hand. But he couldn’t. He couldn’t do anything. That feeling of helplessness was enraged, and the Quartermaster – alone now where no one would see – gave in to emotions that he usually kept locked down tight, and snarled viciously under his breath. He sounded like something feral and he knew it, but the utter wrath in his chest was just too hot to contain. What he wouldn’t do to beat Silva at his own game, if only to wipe that smug grin off his face!

Knowing that the anger would fade, leaving only exhaustion and helpless fear in its wake, Q dragged himself into a kneel and started moving across the floor. At least while he was angry he was motivated, and there was something he wanted to do, something he’d been planning to do as soon as
he’d seen the screens. After Q had emptied his stomach contents, it made sense for Silva to think that the Quartermaster was out for the count.

And he would be. After he gave Bond and Alec a helping hand. Virtually dragging himself up until his arms were hooked over the table near the computer keyboard, deciding that he’d have to work without glasses for the foreseeable (or, rather fore-not-seeable) future, Q began to type rapidly. Inside, he was a mess, but at least typing felt familiar. And for all of Silva’s genius, he obviously had let someone else set up his surveillance system. Q hacked in easily, and proceeded to set the footage on loop so that anything MI6 did to free 006 and 7 in that room would not be visible to anyone outside that room.

Task done, Q slid back to the floor, exhausted. Everything ached, inside and out, and all he could think was that he felt awfully cold with the fury draining out of him. He leaned his head back against the floor, hoping that at least 007 and 6 got out of here, because Q himself was too wrung out and used to even consider escape at the moment.

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Chapter End Notes

This chapter was so fun to write...which is bad, because I just beat the tar out of my main character XP But he held his own against Silva! Cheers for Q! ...Looking out for this double-o's till the end
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Bond and Alec bust out. MI6 comes. In that order.

Or the chapter in which 006 and 7 are very difficult to keep caged up, because they are both determined...and impatient.

Chapter Notes

I little bit more 'Bond'-ing!! :D Yay!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Bond was still crouching on his haunches, wings half-spread even though he could balance fine without the help. He was waiting for Alec to explode.

Having been resting up and regaining his energy, Alec was miles behind, and Bond had obliged to catch him up. 006 had gotten understandably miffed at what had happened while he was out, and had snarled wordlessly when he’d heard about Silva’s singular and dangerous interest in their Quartermaster. In fact, Alec had made no attempt at all to hide how protective he felt towards the ‘boffin’, as he kept calling him.

That was why Bond had been preparing himself for trouble as he began retelling the story about how Q had lost his wings. Alec had listened silently, the dried blood on his face cracking as he lowered his brows in an increasingly stormy glower. When Bond had finished, there had been silence. Bond had been Alec’s friend for quite some time, fortunately, and noticed the hair-fine tremor in those night-black wings.

Alec slammed his wings back against the wall so fast and hard that Bond would have been knocked over if he hadn’t already been out of the way, and the resounding crack should have been painful, but Alec showed no signs of feeling it. Wings now outstretched like gates of Hell, the 00-agent looked off in the direction where Silva had disappeared to with Q and began to swear with a fluency that even Bond wasn’t expecting. Since all double-o’s knew various languages, these venomous oaths also switched languages and dialects mid-sentence, and Bond just gave up trying to follow along.

“And you just let Silva walk out of here with him?!” Alec finally looked back to Bond and confined himself to English.

Feeling his own temper boil up, Bond touched a hand to his scalp where he’d narrowly escaped a concussion from the butt of a gun. “Believe me, I’m as unhappy about it as you are.”
Alec grunted, unconvincing and unforgiving. His eyes bore into Bond’s, saying as clearly as day, ‘I don’t know about you, but I’m going to get Q and pound Silva’s head in.’

In wholehearted agreement, Bond rolled his shoulders to get the kinks out, and felt the spike in Alec’s internal energy – the equivalent of a dog pricking its ears with interest – at the preparatory action. “So-” Bond kept his voice pitched low and easy, but Alec grinned, because he knew that that was 007’s most dangerous voice. Some men looked and sounded dangerous when they were about to do something lethal – but Bond was known for his charisma and charm, and the warnings were more subtle coming from him. “-How interested are you in waiting for MI6 to bust us out?”

“Probably about as interested as I was in getting shot,” replied Alec automatically, indicating his shoulder, where there was a lot of blood but all of it dried. Plus, the long period of unconsciousness had served a purpose – Alec wasn’t on death’s door anymore. Then, almost flippantly, he smiled his broad smile and added, “Although they should be here sooner rather than later. Right before that swarm took me down I hit that button on my earpiece that sends out a distress signal.” Surprise flashed visibly across Bond’s face, to which Alec took offense. “I’m reckless, not an idiot! So, if my earpiece was working, MI6 should be on their way by now.” The man shrugged with his good shoulder, finishing, “I figured that if we got out of that mess alive, Q could call up M and say that it was a false-alarm. See: I can plan ahead.”

“Yes,” Bond blinked, frankly astonished, “I have to admit you can.”

At that moment, they heard a door open and both of them tensed. Alec was a little bit more fit than earlier, but still weak, and Bond had just had a lesson in why he shouldn’t charge men with guns, so both of them tensed where they were. Bond got up slowly, leaning with a relaxed posture against the wall so that he would be considered less of a threat. Bond lowered his voice so that the words dropped like small pebbles for Alec to catch in his ears, “Think you can wait for doctoring until we get back to MI6?”

“Think you can take out three gunmen while I see if the doctor has any Angel-strength pain-meds?” Alec retorted just as easily. When Bond glared down at him for the unfair division of labor, Alec looked up with his best innocent look – which wasn’t very good, in all truthfulness, since the man would be a shark wherever he went and whatever face he put on. “What?! I’m an invalid, and I remembered to call MI6 – the least you can do is take out the gunmen. Three too many for you, James?”

Still arguing in whispers but now trying not to let his lips twitch into a smirk that would give their conversation away, Bond replied, “No, I was just wondering if maybe I needed to ask them to get you a wheelchair before I broke their necks.”

“Very funny,” Alec groused, “I hope you get shot.”

Bond snorted. His eyes were growing very dangerous even though the rest of him looked neutral and unthreatening to the casual onlooker. “With seven guns they only held me back because they got lucky,” he said with very soft eagerness leadening his tongue like coals ready to reignite.

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MI6 feared they were already too late when they reached the large building in the Canadian wilderness and were greeted by gunshots and mayhem. 004 stared out from the trees with rounded eyes, wondering what could cause that much chaos inside one building.

Someone was shot out a window and was followed suddenly by a second figure – and the second figure unfurled wings. The black-as-night feathers caught the air for a moment before 006 swore loudly enough to probably be heard a province over, tucking the wings in and landing rather heavily.

‘Ah,’ 004 recalled, ‘That answers my question about the chaos.’ 006 looked battered and weak, but he still had a rifle poised against the shoulder not covered in blood, and shot two more people before 004’s team could even get out of the trees to back him up.

For a moment, it looked like the black-winged Angel would shoot them, too, but then he relaxed at the sight of familiar faces. While the rest of 004’s team spread out to take control of the situation, 006 swayed and 004 reflexively braced him. Alec’s face unexpectedly split into his wide, wolfish grin as he looked around at his newly arrived coworkers. “Bloody about time you showed up. The party’s almost over.”

“Isn’t it protocol to sit tight after sending out a distress signal?” 004 had to ask, looking back over his shoulder for the medic they’d brought with them. Alec looked like he needed it.

“No, if you’re as impatient as James and me,” Alec said back as plainly as the nose on his face, and without a lick of remorse. And then he added more stonily, “And not if you have the Quartermaster to protect.”

Q was resting when he felt a hand at his neck, two fingers pressing against his pulse-point, and he reacted reflexively. His Angel energy had been so low as to be dormant, but it surged up with horrifying strength to lend speed to his muscles. The lanky Quartermaster swung his arm with a breathy cry, knocking the enemy hand aside and following through with his other hand locking over the other’s wrist. At that point, however, he also realized that he’d used his injured arm. Hitting his forearm (and the long gash it held) against someone else’s wrist was enough to send a spike of white-hot pain right up to his back teeth, and Q doubled over with a groan on the floor, curling over his arm and hoping that whomever he’d so egregiously attacked didn’t pummel him to pieces now.

Someone was panting, clearly startled, but when the hand came back it simply rested on Q’s shoulder, giving a companionable – and familiar – squeeze. Q managed to lift his head and narrow his eyes fuzzily at the face above him, wishing he had his glasses but not really needing them to recognize the blonde-haired agent. “Well, at least that means you’ve alive,” Bond grunted, “Where are your glasses? Are you seriously injured anywhere?”

Dazed by the turn of events – did he hear gunshots in the background? – the Quartermaster replied automatically to Bond’s professional tone, “On the desk over there. And no. I’m just shaken up.”

“By ‘shaken up’ am I to assume Silva ran a bulldozer through your head again?” Bond clarified with obvious ire, as he got up to get the glasses.

Q was still trying to figure out how and why Bond was in the room and it sounded like a war was
going on somewhere in the building. Therefore, he answered with the same detached sensibleness as he’d answered everything else, “Yes.” It was the truth, wasn’t it? “How in the world did you get out, Bond?” he asked in clinical bemusement, the same way you’d ask a student in an art class how in the world they’d gotten the color blue after being given only red and yellow paint.

“I’m rescuing you, and you want to know how?” the man asked in obvious consternation, and he was crouching down over Q now, wings a grey shield over him. He was lowering his hands towards Q’s face, but had the sense to inform him, “Glasses,” before the Quartermaster could bristle again. “Where did you learn that block, anyhow?”

“I was giving sparring lessons to employees of Q-Branch, so you should assume that I have hand-to-hand combat training,” Q said back distractedly, lifting his own hands to settle his glasses more squarely. Blinking at the new focus the room had taken on, he also frowned and noted, “Giving that I was an agent at one time and managed to make Alec’s lip bleed, you should also have come to that conclusion.”

Now Bond was chuckling, even if he was keeping physically busy as he did so: regardless of Q’s assurances that he was (to a point) uninjured, 007 was running his hands over Q’s body where the Quartermaster still lay on the floor, practiced fingers sliding down limbs and following the lines of bones in search of any breaks. Q wanted to feel annoyed, but instead felt inexplicably comforted, and relaxed with a sigh against the floor, closing his eyes again.

“Q?” Bond sounded worried, but in a controlled way. “You still with me?”

Q blinked himself into alertness again. ‘No time for drowsing, Q. Things are happening. Got to focus.’ “Yes, 007,” Q said, all business in his tone at long last, “Now, what exactly is going on?”

“Alec had a little bit more energy than we thought, so…” The pause meant that Bond was about to tell Q something he wouldn’t like/agree with. “…We improvised.”

Q gave Bond an even look that could skin a rat and deadpanned, “By that, you mean that you disregarded everything I said and decided to plan an escape?” It felt good to put words in Bond’s mouth the same way Bond had re-translated Q.

007 possessed the most ‘un-guilty’ face on the planet when he put some effort into it. Therefore, with a broad smile that could charm birds from their nests (and right down a snake’s gullet, Q was sure), 007 gripped Q’s arms and helped him to sit. “I’m sure that’s not what we did. That sounds downright unprofessional.”

Sitting up had brought back the dizziness, and Q sat a moment with his head in his hands, covering his eyes and ignoring the smudges he was no doubt leaving all over his glasses. “I’ll deal with you later,” he growled with threatening promise as he tried to swallow around the nausea. “Just tell me that we have a way out of here and that 006 isn’t dead.”

“I can do one better.” Bond sounded so smug. “MI6 is here. I sent Alec on ahead to meet up with them, so hopefully someone with actual medical training is seeing to him – as someone should see to you.”

“I don’t think that typical medical training is going to be able to make heads or tales of my condition,” Q protested even as Bond’s strong hands tightened around Q’s arms just above his elbows again, this time drawing them both upright. Bond had been prepared for Q’s one bad leg, but the crippling dizziness caught them both off-guard, causing Q to topple forward. With barely a grunt, Bond caught him, arms constricting now around Q’s back as he pulled him in close. Shadowy wings formed a second layer, reflexively curling like a cocoon around the Quartermaster’s unsteady frame
in case he somehow managed to slip out of Bond’s arms. Groaning and making no attempt whatsoever to push away from Bond’s warm, strong, and most importantly sturdy chest, Q lamented with more than a little irritation, “I don’t think walking is going to work.”

“Well, you have two choices,” Bond said coolly, still untroubled by the sounds of gunfire somewhere in the building. “Walking or I carry you.”

As humiliating as it was… “Then I’m afraid you’ll have to carry me, because the ground sincerely refuses to stay put, and I’ve never been this dizzy in my entire life.”

Perhaps for the first time the full impact of Q’s condition hit Bond, and his hands shifted. Q felt the muscles all around him tensing and Bond’s fingers tightening against his back – pressing against his ribs, his shoulder-blades, one palm almost right over the long scar that remembered where a wing used to be. It made Q shiver almost as much as Silva’s touch against the bullet-scar under his collarbone had, but in a different way – fire instead of insidious ice. Q sighed, trying to find words that would alleviate James’s anxiousness, “Honestly, 007, it’ll fade. Basically Silva just went through the same routine you saw yesterday only for longer, so it’s logical that it would take longer for the effects to wear off. Plus, if you recall, I have a bum leg, so walking was never an option.”

By the way Bond’s breath caught as if in the middle of starting a reply and cutting it off, he’d sincerely bypassed that piece of information. Now he instead made a grumbling noise which finally resolved into, “You’re supremely troublesome, you know that?”

“Careful, Bond,” Q lilted back with dry sarcasm, finding some amusement in all of this, “I might start thinking you like me if you keep giving out compliments.”

Instead of arguing, however, Q was given an unexpected, thoughtful silence from the 00-agent. Not what Q was expecting. And then Bond was shifting Q in that annoying way 00-agents did: moving people physically, because with Angel strength, it was barely any effort. Instead of picking Q up completely, Bond just bundled him over to one side until Q’s right arm was slung over Bond’s shoulder for support. “I might need my right hand free if we get into trouble,” Bond explained, all business again. Q noted that Bond’s arctic eyes were looking everywhere at once, calculating and effective. He also noted that Bond had acquired a pistol somewhere between here and there.

“I’ll move as slowly as I can for you, but you have to hold onto me and listen, all right?”

Fortunately, Q’s right arm was uninjured, and after only the briefest pause he tightened his grip around the back of Bond’s strong neck. With Bond’s left arm wrapped with iron strength around Q’s middle, he felt that limping along might almost be possible. The world seemed to tilt less when he was holding on to someone as familiar as Bond. “I’m not the recalcitrant one out of the two of us,” Q said by way of answer, deciding that if he couldn’t be mobile, he could be glib, because being glib with 007 was not only easy but surprisingly fun.

And with that thought, Q decided that he was more rattled than he’d preciously thought. “Not to sound like I’m begging, Bond, but could we please just get out of here?”

No more words needed to be spoken, because clearly only worry for Q’s condition had kept 007 in place for this long. His wings half-unfurled with a snap behind him that had wing gusting Q’s shirt tight to his back, the sensation of feathers so close behind him making Q’s breath catch. Then 007 was moving, his steps light and sure, and Q hopped along at his side, gritting his teeth against the surge of nausea.

Things happened quickly after that. Even hindered by the Quartermaster, Bond was surprisingly quick, moving with purpose like a shark through water. For his part, Q was actually keeping up quite well out of pure determination and an influx of Angel energy. Unsettlingly, after the initial sapping of
his energy under the strain of the past few days, Q now felt as if the energy at his core had come back faster, like a stiff limb being stretched again and again until it was flexible and supple. It was just a little terrifying to think that Silva had been right, and this power was just waiting inside of Q’s skin.

Q suddenly got a chance to become more intimately knowledgeable of that power when a gun went off from around the corner, just whizzing past Bond’s nose as he was already backing them up. They’d been as close to running as Q could safely get, avoiding pockets of what looked like all-out war between a large MI6 team and Silva’s probably-mind-controlled cronies. Bond had shot two already, getting the drop of them, but now it looked like their luck was taking a rather negative turn. Bond retreated so fast that Q nearly fell even with the 00-agent supporting him, and when he tried to get his balance, he looked behind them past the array of Bond’s feathers. “Bond – six o’clock!” he managed to yelp even as he saw the second man charge from behind.

If the second attacker had had a gun, things would have been different, but the situation was still dangerous. Bond managed to turn, wing leading and eyes narrowed in frustration and concentration as he tried to slam the man against the wall with the back-handed stroke of his wing. It half-worked, setting the man off-balance, but he still retained his forward momentum and slammed into Bond’s back hard enough to take the two of them forward into the room across the hall.

Q, fortunately or unfortunately, depending on one’s point of view, became unlatched from Bond and simply toppled to the floor instead, more or less straight down. He lay down and ducked his head as another shot went off, the first man trying to shoot as Bond toppled in and then out of view. Q pushed himself up enough to lift his head, wide eyes instantly taking in the sight of Bond and the second attacker, rolling and scrapping on the floor like a pair of dogs, vicious and wild.

And then what Q saw was the first man – the one with the gun – walking into view and lining up to shoot into the fray. If he was truly following Silva’s orders, then he wouldn’t pause just because his ally was in the way. Silva would just want 007 down for the count.

Getting his good leg beneath him and hoping that his bad leg would forgive him some day, Q scrambled up and make the clumsiest, more desperate leap of his life. The man didn’t even see him coming, but before he could get a shot off into the ferocious brawl, he had a bony mass of angry Quartermaster crashing into his knees, and then they were on the floor, too.

Truth be told, Q hadn’t planned much beyond this. Usually, he was a master planner – but usually, he was also behind a computer screen within the quiet and safety of his Q-branch office. Fortunately, Q’s dizziness had worn off under the force of pure adrenalin, and now his field-agent reflexes began to kick in again as his opponent rolled over to retaliate. Q deflected the punch aimed clumsily at his face and gripped the man’s shin under his arm when he tried to kick him, but winced because that was his injured arm. He felt his breathing increase with panic as another punch came too close to connecting, and the man suddenly twisted his body so that Q’s hold on his leg became a liability – Q was knocked over onto his side, his opponent nearly straddling him. Bond was still busy in the next room, roaring in either rage or pain – it truly sounded as if two lions were ripping each other apart in the next room, battling to the death. There was no way that Bond could help him, because right now 007 was just trying to stay alive.

Q dodged another fist and sent one back in return, infusing his strike with enough Angel strength to shatter ribs. That was the plan anyway – Q swore with frightened frustration as his internal energy, fickle to the end, instead sputtered out like a candle flame. He still punched his opponent hard in the ribcage, but it was a blow the man soon recovered from, and then he was grabbing Q’s wrists. Terror and anger mixed together into a volcanic bath in Q’s chest as he struggled, never hating the loss of his wings so much as he did now, with his abilities cutting out. This was actually something that had
been happening before, but he’d just hoped that, with the threat of Silva and this constant use of his Angel energy, it would hold…

The man had dropped his gun when Q had tackled him, but now he pinned both of Q’s wrists to the floor with one meaty hand and used the other to reach for his gun. Apparently Silva hadn’t left explicit instructions that included Q’s safety, because in another ten seconds, Q was going to die.

Q cried out in a sound of mixed desperation, fear, rage, and useless frustration and suddenly he felt his supernatural energy click back on. Really on.

A tsunami of lightning and fire built in Q’s belly and surged up the muscles of his stomach and chest before cannoning down his arms. The exact thing that Silva had been doing to him for hours Q suddenly managed to do himself, with a surge of energy that split past his skin with such power that his attacker was thrown back – either unconscious or dead. At that same moment, Q saw Bond – worse for wear and covered in blood that hopefully wasn’t his – charge out of the room, head whipping around and almost immediately falling on Q’s supine form. “Q!” he barked.

But Q’s eyes were already rolling up in his head. The surge of energy had felt like he was being lit from the inside out with a firestorm, but now, in the wake of it, he felt like an emptied vessel. He didn’t know how Silva could do this, again and again and again, when Q felt as if he’d just poured out every ounce of strength and energy though his hands…

“Q – Q! Stay with me,” Bond demanded, kneeling over Q with intensity like you wouldn’t believe in his blue eyes. Q could barely keep his own eyes open, and his mind focused fuzzily on how scoured out he felt inside, like he’d never fill up again. He couldn’t help but think it had hardly been worth it – that one shot was all he had in him? It was downright embarrassing. But at least he’d managed to do it to begin with, and he was weak, after all…and shaky, and cold, and Bond was warm and Bond was picking him up off the floor…

Q couldn’t stop his head from lolling back bonelessly as Bond’s muscled arms slid under him, lifting him and then carefully tucking him in close. As Bond’s hand cradled his head and situated it against the powerful curve of his shoulder, Q let out a little moan, brows beetling in annoyance at his own sudden, all-devouring exhaustion. “Quartermaster? Q, can you hear me?” Bond said from such a close proximity that Q could feel the man’s breath against his face, the words echoing directly from Bond’s chest into Q’s side as well. Bond was using his calm, imperative voice again, but Q read between the lines to the alarm nestled beneath.

“Bond…!” he tried to get the man to stop worrying, and nearly dozed off before the next word and had to start over, “James – I’m fine. Just…really exhausted. I think I did something I had no right to be able to do just yet, in my present condition.” Q probably wasn’t well-trained enough to pull off a trick like that in good health, much less right now, when he was an absolute wreck. He was like a novice who had decided to climb Everest on his first expedition, and who had tried this while also having a head-cold to boot.

“Q – just stop talking,” Bond growled, and even though Q couldn’t for the life of him keep his eyes open, he dearly wanted to, because he was pretty sure that 007 had pressed his head down against Q’s in something between relief and consternation. Q couldn’t tell. He was too exhausted to lift a finger, much less figure out the conundrum that was 007. Serious again, but still from no more than centimeters away, Bond said with mock sternness, “Do you think you can keep from pulling another trick like that while I get you out of here?”

“Oh, I think that I can happily manage,” Q mumbled with feeling.
Chapter End Notes

Just so no one jumps to conclusions - I do no plan on having Silva stop them. He's got self-preservation down to an art, so in my head, he's long gone already. Plus, Q is in no condition for a show-down right now (he's barely AWAKE).

But fear not: said show-down will come later...
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Aftermath

Or the chapter in which Bond never really puts Q down, Alec gets a bit protective, and it turns out that Q is more ill than everyone thought.

Chapter Notes

And oh - look! 004 is still here!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Alec stood up, artfully ignoring the medic that would rather he hadn’t. Everyone else nearby immediately tensed and stepped back, however, as they saw Alec’s handsome face shift dangerously at the sight of James – carrying a very battered, very still Q. “James, if you’ve killed our Quartermaster, I may have to violently terminate our friendship,” Alec pleasantly observed.

Although he looked strained and tense, 007 managed a biting sort of smirk and replied with perhaps a bit more worry than humor in his tone, “Don’t worry, I didn’t.”

“Good. I don’t feel up to killing you right now.” 006 collapsed back onto the bumper of the vehicle that was presently serving as an operating table of sorts. At least, it was where the medic had done a quick inspection of 006’s condition and patched him up so that he wouldn’t bleed out at least until he was back in Britain. Alec’s eyes were softening with very uncharacteristic worry, however, the wolfish smile gone as he instead took in the Quartermaster and his stillness. 006 had never been known for paying much attention to energy, but he intuitively sensed something wrong with Q beyond what his eyes told him. “How is he?”

Since 00-agents were nearly indestructible and Q wasn’t (at least to outward appearance, and to those who didn’t truly grasp that he was an Angel), the medic had left Alec’s side in a heartbeat and was now fluttering around Bond and Q. The instinctive reaction Bond had to the woman coming up to him and Q, though, was to arc his wings forward; that cut off the Quartermaster from all but Bond for a moment, until 007 relaxed and relented. Bond still refused to put the Quartermaster down, but balanced out that insubordination by concisely informing the medic of every injury on Q’s person he knew about – bad knee, lacerated arm, the knocks he’d taken to his head, as well as the less tangible damages done by Silva’s inconceivable powers. Alec had explained some of this already, preparing the medic, but Q’s condition still left the medical personnel clearly unsettled. There was something clearly wrong with Q beneath the surface, which tingled at 006’s supernatural senses and put a frown on the medic’s face even before any real examination began. Bond noted the same inexplicable ‘wrongness’ but had more facts to back up the disturbing feeling: Q felt unnaturally light in his arms,
and was completely devoid of any supernatural energy.

“Any sign of Silva?” Bond finished his dialogue, voice cold and hard to hide the fact that he was deeply unsettled – Bond had gotten used to sensing Q’s energy (after he’d learned that the man was an Angel; after he’d taken the time to look), but now he would have thought Q dead if he weren’t holding the slim figure close enough to feel breath and heartbeat. When the name ‘Silva’ actually caused Q to flinch in his arms, 007 tightened his grip and nearly seemed to vibrate with the influx of wrathful energy. Since it looked like 006 was going to follow suit and get riled as well, everyone began to get nervous again. The black-winged Angel opened his mouth to say that that monster Silva had yet to lift his slimy head, much to everyone’s chagrin.

That was when the building exploded.

The vehicle that Alec, Bond, Q, and the medic were clustered around was within the trees, away from the action – the sensible place for medical attention to take place. Bond had left the fighting without a backward glance as soon as he could, his lust to kill Silva pushed aside by his even greater need to get his Quartermaster somewhere safe. Now Bond tensed to fly, his own lesser injuries forgotten, and a battered Alec stood up to cover his flank instinctively, their four spread wings serving as a buffer around them.

“Do you think he was in there?” Alec asked, watching through the trees as the building went up in flames. There was no need to ask whom he was referring to.

Bond’s eyes were likewise glued on the explosion, which was now fading to leave flames and mayhem in its wake. After very little consideration, the grey-winged agent shook his head, jaw tight because he had the sinking sensation that their enemy had just made a good show of covering his tracks, too. And as much as Bond wanted to dive in and pick up the trail – hunting with that relentless skill that all double-o’s were known for and Bond most of all – he had his arms full with a Quartermaster whom he stubbornly refused to leave alone.

Every other time he’d left the man alone, the smaller man had gotten more and more hurt. Bond wasn’t going to let that happen this time.

The medic suddenly found herself very, very busy. People with burns and cuts from the explosion began to come limping back, most carrying the knowledge of others who hadn’t been so lucky. As worried as everyone was about the Quartermaster and the beaten double-o’s with him, the medic was forced to prioritize and stabilize people who suddenly had much worse injuries. “We weren’t expecting something like this,” the medic lamented, just barely keeping a cool head as she did what she could while shooting glances back constantly to the Quartermaster in 007’s arms. Finally coming to a decision, she snapped at another man – the shoulder of his shirt blackened and burned, but apparently he had some medical knowledge. “Check the Quartermaster,” she ordered, then calculated 007 and 6 into the equation, seeing that they were going to remain as they were: very, very close to Q. Finally coming to a decision, she snapped at another man – the shoulder of his shirt blackened and burned, but apparently he had some medical knowledge. “Check the Quartermaster,” she ordered, then calculated 007 and 6 into the equation, seeing that they were going to remain as they were: very, very close to Q. So the medic added, “Agents 006 and 007 will assist you.” She hoped they would; mostly, she just hoped they wouldn’t be a hindrance. Then, because very few people outside of Medical knew, she added in a lower voice, “He’s an Angel. Not a typical one, obviously…” She ignored the wide-eyed look she was getting. “-But keep that in mind. Now get moving!”

The man – a Mundane by the name of Simon – was smart enough to quickly swallow his shock over the revelation of Q’s status as an Angel. He also took one look at the agents in question and knew that it would be dangerous to try and tell them to move. Instead, Simon worked around them to get equipment out of the vehicle for checking Q’s vital signs, hands shaking either from the explosion and mild shock from his injuries…or because he didn’t have to be an Angel to feel the protectiveness flowing off the two large men he was working around.
In some ways, Angels were checked out the same way that Mundanes were, but there were other
tests that were necessary as well, and one of them caused Simon to check his readings and grow
bewildered. “Um…” he said, standing right between 006 and 7 – the former uncomfortably close,
looming at his back, and the latter standing right in front of him, patiently and seemingly tirelessly
holding Q – but not comfortable asking them questions, so Simon looked over uneasily at the medic,
“Are you sure he’s an Angel?”

Multiple heads shot to look at him as if Simon had lost his mind. “What do you mean,” asked Alec
acidly, now leaning over his shoulder so that his chest front was all but pressed against the other
man’s back, “is he an Angel?”

“Simmer down, Alec,” Bond murmured, but his eyes were locked on Simon with something just
simmering on the edge of deadliness. “Answer the question.”

The poor Mundane was shorter than both 006 and 7, and tilted his head to meet Bond’s eyes – cold
and calmly dangerous, pulling on a threatening nature like a second skin – and gulped. He pointed to
one of the medical machines. “This measures an Angel’s internal energy, and Q…the
Quartermaster…isn’t registering at all.”

“What?” Now the real medic spun around from where she was wiping a thick salve on a man’s burnt
hand. “Angels always read on that machine.”

Bond’s eyes caught Alec’s over Simon’s head, and he murmured before 006 could explode, “Lesson
number two. Q mastered it.”

Now Alec went from wrath to shock. “What?” he blurted intelligently, black wings giving a snap
that had to hurt his shoulder (now liberally covered by bandages and medical tape).

Since both Bond and Alec had been brief at best in their descriptions of the past events, no one else
was totally understanding, so Bond changed his wordings just enough that everyone else would
swallow the explanation, “He managed to basically electrocute someone who was attacking him, but
he took the backlash.”

Alec’s eyes narrowed, not liking the sound of that, so 007 patiently elaborated further, “He passed
out right after, and hasn’t roused since.”

“I have so,” said a quiet voice in a tone that could have been mistaken for tetchy if you listened hard
enough. Bond’s head snapped down, finding Q’s eyes opened to the barest fatigued slits. There were
dark bruises under them from pure exhaustion, and Q’s tousled hair was a mop on his head. His
words seemed to cost him, so he spoke in spaced sections: “But you were…working…so distracting
you seemed counter to survival.”

“Q, how are you feeling?” the medic hurried over to ask, and Simon escaped as fast as he could to
take over her job – the worst of the injuries were tended to, and he could figure out minor bandaging.

But Q’s eyes had fallen shut again like a kid awoken at six a.m. and asking for five more minutes.
Bond would have been in more of a panic, but he could still feel the Quartermaster breathing. “Q?”
demanded the medic again.

“Just see to his leg,” Bond suggested before sitting down on the bumper of the car, a gesture of his
wing wordlessly coaxing Alec to move with him. They’d worked together long enough that 006
understood what was wanted of him with only minimal instructions from Bond, and the black-
winged Angel sat down on Bond’s left so that the Quartermaster’s legs could be propped on his lap.
That garnered a response, in that the semi-conscious young man pulled his lips back from his teeth in
a hiss when his right leg was straightened out. He back arched weakly in Bond’s arms before he relaxed again, expression still tight and pained.

Watching this surprisingly gentle interaction, the medic just kept her peace and nodded, quickly unwrapping the rough bandage already in place. Bond watched the whole proceeding with silent, watchful eyes, and it was Alec who eventually looked up and recognized 004 walking up to them. 004 was an atypical 00-agent, in that he actually followed rules, but he was young yet.

He was also covered in soot with his short auburn hair spiked up in the front with grime and sweat. His wings – usually white with soft grey bars towards the ends of his feathers – were an unbecoming shade that could only be called ‘smudge’. Running a hand back through his hair, he proved why it was standing up in the front. “Report,” he said to one of his men, although the headcount was undoubtedly lower than it should be – there was no way that everyone had survived that explosion, but it helped that far fewer enemy agents had survived. “That’s what I get for leading a large team into the home of a bomb fanatic,” 004 could be heard muttering under his breath, a shockingly unprofessional moment for the up-tight Angel.

As always, when he looked over, his young face showed his reactions in quick flickers: he noticed the medic with a neutral face, Bond with a slightly less one, then the Quartermaster in his lap with something bordering on alarm. And, as always, he noticed Alec with a look of long-suffering resignation – Alec, the one-man destruction team. Bond was in that category, too, but he at least maintained an illusion of impeccable charm (right up until he was covered in blood/gore/debris/whatever he just blew up) so 004 was able to look at him without wincing most of the time.

Alec was the one who talked, however. “Please tell me that Silva is in little tiny pieces.” Watching 004 intently over the medic’s shoulder, one hand unconsciously grasping the ankle of Q’s good leg as if to make sure he didn’t disappear, Alec reconsidered with a sharkish grin, “Or, better yet, tell me you have him somewhere where I can cut him into little tiny pieces.”

“Silva is our mystery bomber,” Bond clarified helpfully, although arguably most of his attention remained on Q as the Quartermaster winced his way through his arm being cleaned (still not really awake). He gave a description of the dangerous wingless Angel.

004’s eyes tightened as did his mouth – a frown that wanted to be a scowl but wasn’t allowed to be. “I’m afraid that, so far as I know, a man of that description wasn’t even noticed by my team, but…” He gentled his voice to something more sympathetic, shrugging with his dirty wings. “But we can start going through the rubble. Since we’re in the middle of nowhere and unlikely to attract outside attention, we have time.”

“Careful, 004,” Alec clucked his tongue as the younger 00-agent started to turn, 006 with a teasing smile on his face, “Silva’s a wingless Angel. Dangerous stuff.”

004’s eyes narrowed, but apparently he decided that everything would be explained to him when it was deemed fit – he followed orders better than most that way. “I’ll advise everyone. Can you tell me more details about how to approach him if we find him alive?”

“Shoot him on sight,” Bond said coldly and without hesitation, “and from as far away as possible.” As much as Bond wanted to torture Silva for days for what the man had done to their Quartermaster, Bond knew that anything less than what he was prescribing for the situation would lead to disaster.

Bond still remembered a pair of dangerously smiling eyes and a horrendous power behind them reaching out and hooking into his mind with steel claws, shutting everything down.
Things went smoothly, which meant that Silva was not found. There was an underground tunnel found, however, leading to the assumption that at least someone had escaped, although the explosion had completely obliterated a few bodies. Bond and Alec had exchanged just one look before coming to the simultaneous decision that Silva had to still be out there, in the wind. 004 had sighed in resignation as the verdict was voiced, but just nodded in that military fashion he had and turned to organize his team to get everyone out of there.

Bond was still holding Q, and didn’t seem the least bit annoyed by this. Perhaps the Quartermaster would have been irritated by the coddling, but he had yet to wake up for long enough to speak, although the pain of his leg caused him to breathe in sharply through his nose while tight brackets of discomfort took up residence at the corners of his mouth.

“Give him something for the pain,” Alec finally exploded, from where he was now up and pacing (despite the medic’s patient commands that he sit down before his injuries caught up with him). The Quartermaster’s near-constant wincing obviously bothered 006. “Surely you have more medication geared towards Angels,” he coaxed, “You gave me something that just about bloody put me on my back.”

Bond was nodding his agreement with this idea and the medic was just opening her mouth to respond when Q shifted, managing to just hook a fingertip in Bond’s shirt – the most forceful movement he’d succeeded at thus far. “Don’t do well with Angel or Mundane medication,” the Quartermaster mumbled, and Bond couldn’t remember him ever sounding so weak. His voice was a breathy whisper and his eyes didn’t even open this time, and Bond found himself wondering for the thousandths time whether Q’s trick had done something irreversible and lethal inside of him.

“He’s right,” the medic confessed regretfully, “Since Q lost his wings, he hasn’t been able to take the same medications as other Angels, and Mundane medications just go right through him without doing much good. He’s still an Angel, but his biological make-up has shifted somewhat – I’d even say significantly – since the loss of his wings.”

“Q, why do you have to be so inconvenient?” muttered Bond in frustration as he looked down at Q, eyes intense as if he could find an answer in the Quartermaster’s exhausted features.

“You…blow up my stuff,” was the unexpected reply, followed by the teeniest shrug against Bond’s arms, “I refuse to take medication like any decent Angel or Mundane. Fair…is fair.” That seemed to take out what little energy the Quartermaster still had left, and he drifted off into a light dose despite Bond’s little shake to keep him awake and talking. As worrisome as Q’s tiredness was, there was no stopping it, so Bond soon let him sleep again.

Soon, 004 came back, all of his remaining team around him. “Load up,” he said in a voice that was fairly quiet but designed to carry precisely far enough. He looked to the new members of his entourage and seemed to consider whether he could give them orders, too, and expect them to follow them. He looked at 006 (who grinned), deemed him a lost cause, and turned to Bond to ask in a tone that said he knew the answer, “I want to split up the Angels in our group so that we can spread out our skills if there is trouble, but I assume you want to stay with the Quartermaster?”

Bond affected a cool, relaxed look. “I’ve been holding him this long, and he hardly weighs anything-” In fact, he still felt even lighter than usual, as if the decimation of his internal energy had
hollowed him out somehow. Because he was used to taking pain in his teeth and holding it there without a flicker of a grimace, Bond kept up a faint smile and hid the wince he really wanted to indulge in. “-So I figure I can just keep it up.” Then, to be annoying, he cocked his head at Alec. “But I’m sure Alec can ride in whatever car has space.”

A mutinous face showed briefly on 006’s face, to which 004 merely raised an eyebrow and sighed, but eventually the black-winged Angel gave in. He did not ask where he was wanted, however, instead trotting off to pick his own ride. 007 actually worried that the injured man would even insist on driving. Undoubtedly thinking the same thing, 004 looked up at the sky briefly for strength, then tucked his wings neatly against his back and led Bond to the car where the medic was. It was a smart, sensible move: typical 004. The fact that he saw Alec arguing with the driver of a nearby truck and seemed to contemplate whether to go over there and knock Alec unconscious was probably a mix of caution and uncertainty.

Bond walked past the youngest Angel, leaning over just enough to talk over his wing. “He won’t drive. He’s an idiot, but not that much of an idiot.” Without the need for another word, 004 gave his stiff nod and walked off to his own car at the head of their little caravan, leaving Bond to get into one vehicle and Alec to come to the realization that he was in no condition to drive a car.

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Because Bond was a 00-agent, and therefore bossy on a regular basis (or at least as stubborn as a cat), he took the whole back seat for himself and Q, even though it meant that one person had to find a new vehicle to ride in. With the medic looking on worriedly from the passenger seat, Bond organized his Quartermaster comfortably so that he was lying across the seats, head on Bond’s lap. A blanket was supplied to cover him with, and through all of this the Quartermaster actually woke up a time or two, although only Bond noticed: Q’s eyes opened a crack, keen but exhausted, and watched Bond curiously as if trying to deduce what he was doing and why. When the car started up with a rumble and jerked into motion, Q stopped subtly eying the blond agent and instead bit back a snarl as his leg was jarred.

Bond gentled him with a hand on the Quartermaster’s chest and another carding through his hair while everyone else was turning to look at the road. “Go back to sleep, Quartermaster,” he leaned over to breathe against Q’s forehead, a smile in his voice.

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“Considering his overall condition, he should live, but the Quartermaster is really doing poorly enough that he needs to be treated at MI6,” the medic was saying with certainty, and Bond had to admit that he understood her point of view. “Other places outside Britain might be able to treat his obvious external injuries, but Medical is his best hope for the issue of his energy.”

One hand still on Q’s chest – ostentatiously to keep the Quartermaster stable in case they hit bumps in the road – Bond narrowed his eyes a touch, assuming, “You don’t even think that anyone in Medical has seen this in an Angel.”
“Not even in a normal one – I mean, one with wings,” said the medic with an uneasy biting of her lip. She was looking at Q at a loss, finally shrugging, “Even if it weren’t for the Quartermaster’s unique physiology, I’ve never heard of an Angel who has absolutely no internal energy reading, but there are probably doctors far more knowledgeable than I back at MI6.”

“We should get back with all speed then. Get me 004,” Bond commanded deftly. He could still feel how eerily light Q was, frail where he lay against him – and despite his slender build, 007 had never been able to think of Q as ‘frail’ ever since he’d faced down 008 from inches away and then beaten two (nearly three, Bond admitted) 00-agents in sparring.

The Mundane agent driving obediently handed Bond a phone that had already dialed the pale-winged Angel, and since it was 004 – who never lost his phone or just ignored it out of impishness – he was immediately there. “004,” Bond addressed him formally because he realized he couldn’t recall the agent’s real name – go figure, “We need a plane. Preferably a private one that leaves yesterday.”

Since Bond’s voice held that edge that usually only serrated blades had, 004 was immediately serious. He got to the point: “The Quartermaster?”

The medic wiggled fingers for the phone, and after a moment of reflexively stubborn indecision, Bond handed it over and listened to her describe the Quartermaster’s unresponsive, unnatural condition. Then she handed the phone back and Bond snugged it back against his ear. When his free hand unconsciously drifted upwards until it rested against Q’s collarbone, he noticed Q shift anxiously in his sleep, so Bond moved his hand to the man’s shoulder instead. He recalled Q’s story about their ‘matching scars’ but couldn’t dwell on that now. “So? The plane?”

“Already being prepared,” was 004’s predictably succinct answer. He might have been new to the 00-status and an absolute dog when it came to following orders, but sometimes Bond had to respect the man’s sense of propriety. “However, I’m getting a message from MI6 saying that our Quartermaster might-?”

Bond’s expression darkened and hardened, shutting down to make it unreadable to everyone in the car even as he answered flatly, “Have an intense phobia of flying? Yes. We’ll deal with it when we get there.”

“Do we have medication for him? Something to calm him?” was 004’s sensible query, worry lacing his tone.

007 looked to the medic, who was leaning over the back seat enough to be listening in. Her eyes were sad. “No,” she said simply.

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Chapter End Notes

This chapter felt short - sorry for that! I'm actually surprised that I got this much typed this soon, because I almost never type while at home (spending time with the fam!)

Sorry that the plane scene hasn't happened yet - once again, I planned ahead and the
chapter snuck up on me and filled up with other stuff XD

But 004 is fun! He might stick around...
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

The evil plane trip.
That's pretty much the only way to put it...
Or the chapter in which Bond halts Q's panic attack...

Chapter Notes

Sorry - this chapter is a bit short! But it's the inevitable plane scene, so enjoy!

Note: this chapter includes panic attacks, although Bond and Alec's way of handling said panic attack is not something you should take as an instruction manual. In case of panic attacks, restraining a person is not the way to go. That's just the way it went in this chapter, which is fiction.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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There was a jarring motion. The first time, Q was so exhausted he ignored it.

The second time, the bone-weighting exhaustion fell off like a dropped cloak as Q realized what the jarring motion was.

Heartbeat immediately shooting up to a dangerous rate of speed and breathing following suit, Q woke up with panic holding his throat in a stranglehold. On a plane. They’d gotten him on a bloody plane...! He felt groggy, not unlike when he’d taken medication before his last flight, but nowhere near groggy enough. The exhaustion of calling upon the full force of his supernatural energy wasn’t even enough to keep the Quartermaster from thrashing into alarmed wakefulness.

When hands immediately gripped onto him, holding him down and confining his struggles, Q heard Bond swear with feeling from not far away. “I was hoping you’d sleep through this,” the agent grunted candidly, as Q took in the interior of the private plane. Q had pride of place with a couch along one side, tucked under neat little windows, with Bond in a seat perpendicular to where Q’s head rested – and, more distantly but now very definitely and frustratingly gripping Q at the ankles, Alec was in a chair opposite Bond’s at the end of Q’s makeshift bed.

Q tried to regain control of himself, pressing his head back against the cushioning and concentrating on the pain that elicited from his wounded scalp, relishing the throbbing as it cut through some of the anxiety like a knife. He focused as well on the feeling of strong, warm hands – both those around his ankles and Bond’s grip where it was just below his shoulders. It helped, but it didn’t change where
he was or destroy the clambering fear in his chest. Breathing quickly and raggedly as he pressed his head back harder, eyes tightly closed against reality, Q panted, “Of course I’m not going to sleep through this – I’m on a plane! Who-who-?!” He was going to ask who had bloody put him here, but then realized that he was stuttering and hyperventilating, not sure which was the cause and which was the effect.

What steadied him was Bond’s right hand moving from Q’s left shoulder to the side of his neck, cradling it while also likely taking his pulse. “Just settle down, Q,” he advised in a voice that hovered between calming and commanding, “Nothing is going to happen to you.”

“Says the man with wings who can just jump off the plane if it starts going down,” Q retorted with quiet ferocity, feeling every shift and vibration of the plane like a drill in his head and spiders on his skin. So high up…so high up… A height he used to love like Icarus before the fall, but now only created in him a sense of dread deeper than the ocean.

“Wow,” Alec noted, sounding impressed of all things, and he soon explained what and why: “We gave him that Mundane dose to put him asleep barely twenty minutes ago, and he’s already up?”

Q’s mind registered that fact and devoured what it meant in seconds: his own special medications were not available, and his reactions to normal Angel drugs ranged from deadly allergic reactions to unforeseen opposite reactions, so apparently Mundane drugs had been the best option left to sedate Q for this aerial trip. Too bad that hadn’t had a hope of working. Soon the frenzied Quartermaster was actually shouting, “Obviously my body burned through that!” He was so frustrated and so panicked that he felt as if he was going to combust, and the twitches of his muscles had reached the point where he was unconsciously fighting against 006 and 007 again, their restraining hands making his panic worse. Biting the inside of his cheek savagely to try and keep himself from flying into a rage, he explained with the speed born of exasperation and adrenalin, “I may not react precisely like a winged Angel would, but I’ve still got a metabolism that will devour most any Mundane drugs in a quarter of the time. Bond, you bloody sadist, get me off this plane-!!”

And suddenly Q found arguing very hard, as lips crashed down against his own. It was like the shock of slipping into a tub of hot water, shutting down the brain and commandeering every nerve-ending, so for a moment, Q’s mind was a pleasant blank as 007 ravished him with a very thorough kiss. Q’s body was still tense with remnant fear and anxiety, one hand half-raised where he’d been on his way to shoving Bond (and then probably making a break for the cockpit where he’d theoretically demand that they land). Bond’s large, strong hand had slipped around his neck to cover his throat, a possessive, demanding gesture as he teased the fragile neck with just a hint of a killer’s strength. Alec, having no morals to speak of when he didn’t want to, watched unabashedly and with a faintly fascinated (and wholly amused) smirk on his face, sitting back in his chair as his fellow agent efficiently distracted their panicking Quartermaster.

Before Q suffocated, Bond pulled away just far enough to shift his head, teeth coming down to bite the bridge of Q’s nose, a precise application of pressure that sent a visible shiver right down Q’s body. The Quartermaster released a belly-deep sigh as if the spark of near-pain had poked a hole in his tension, causing it all to pour out in a rush. Q’s eyes were still closed and the stubble of Bond’s cheek was scraping his glasses, but the Quartermaster didn’t care.

After a moment in which Bond hovered over him, eyes lidded and expression more than slightly smug – clearly ready to do the same thing again should Q begin hyperventilating again – Q managed to regain enough composure to stumble his way through a halfhearted and rather dazed rebuke, “M punishes unprofessional behavior rather severely, 007, and I believe that this qualifies.”

“It was all in the line of duty,” Bond shook that off without taking the slightest offense. “Medical told us that we could give you a Mundane sedative, but only so often, because apparently you can
overdose on the stuff even if you’ve got an Angel’s metabolism.” 007 shrugged slowly, a powerful shift of muscles even as he continued to maintained a level of proximity that was making Q’s nerves buzz. “I’m not going to pretend that I know how that medical stuff works, but it was obvious that something needed to be done to avert a full-scale panic-attack.”

“He’s actually telling the truth, our James is,” Alec put in helpfully, and only when Q’s ears detected the sounds of Bond sitting back did he open his eyes, now to direct a mistrustful glare 006’s way. The man was still watching with a voyeur’s complacent grin. “We’re not allowed to give you another dose for at least twenty more minutes. Ten if we want to push it.”

Not entirely sure that Bond wouldn’t scramble his mind again if he moved too quickly, Q looked between the two, feeling very outgunned. But calmer. It focused his mind to realize that he had to remain sharp and hold his own against 006 and 007 – at least until he managed to get hold of something that would blessedly knock him unconscious. “And we’re in a plane why, exactly?” he asked.

Bond noticed, apparently, the way that Q’s words got as succinct and delicate as glass when he was trying to control himself desperately. He kept his distance this time (kissing the Quartermaster was a guilty pleasure that he’d gotten away with because he’d caught the smaller man by surprise, something he’d not likely manage again), 007 nonetheless softened his gaze to one of sympathy. Just in case Q’s shaky control cracked, Bond kept a watchful eye over the conversation and let Alec talk.

“Do you not remember the past few days?” Alec asked incredulously, raising an eyebrow. He shifted his wings so that they draped on either side of his chair, meaning one spilled black feathers all over Q’s feet. The bandage on the Quartermaster’s knee was visible as a dash of clean white where his scuffed and dirty trouser-leg was still torn open to the knee. “You couldn’t be more wrecked if we ran you over with a truck, and MI6 Medical wanted to see you as soon as possible.”

“A boat would have been fast.” Q’s body was tensing again, the anxiety building up, visible where the long fingers clenched the cushions beneath him. Q wanted to sit up, clearly, but he was also still very, very tired from his inexplicable use of energy. So instead of sitting up, his body shook, feeling not only anxious and alarmed but useless and helpless also.

“Not fast enough,” argued Bond back, the voice of reason embodied in his calm voice so well that Q actually turned his head and just stared at him. For a moment, Bond stopped speaking, ice-blue eyes momentarily indecisive. Then he said without looking away, “Alec, go and get that sedative. By the time you get it measured out, we might be edging into the ten-minute minimum.”

“Sounds sensible enough.” 006 got up, and just the sight of someone moving in a tin can miles up in the air…

“Q, look at me,” Bond demanded patiently as Q’s wide eyes snapped back. The 00-agent was just looking calmly back at him. “I understand that you—”

Q interrupted by barking out a little laugh that was more a cough than anything else. “If you’re going to say that you understand my fear, I’m afraid you don’t. By dint of having a means of flying, you very nearly can’t.”

“Bad choice of words,” Bond allowed, and he actually sounded apologetic enough to distract Q in a whole new way – with shock. Surely he was in some bizarre dream where his 00-agents talked politely and kissed heatedly and then apologized without being threatened with pain of dismemberment. “You’re right. I don’t get it. But I can try to grasp the theory, right?” Bond didn’t wait for an answer, just went on, “Without wings, you think you’ll go down with the plane.”
“In a nutshell,” Q got out past the knot of panic edging up his throat again. He had the bed beneath him in a death-grip, enough so that he would have torn right into the cushions if he’d had Angel strength use… Ah, but he didn’t. Q had been only semi-conscious if not entirely asleep since leaving Silva’s residence, but he wasn’t as oblivious as everyone thought. “Especially since I seem to have shut down everything Angel about me, right down to the supernatural energy.”

“Ah, so he does know about that.” Alec was back, as unrepentantly tactless as ever. “Well, that’ll save on some explanations.”

“006, if you don’t stop being so flippant, I will gladly attempt to rip your throat out.” Q grated, wanting off this plane with an irrationality that ripped through him like claws - he was not able to deal with lippy double-o’s at the same time. Squeezing his eyes shut again (even if that still didn’t make the situation go away), he rasped out the rest of his threat, “I say ‘attempt’ because I do not currently have the supernatural energy on call to probably succeed, but I promise you, the attempt will be sincere and unsettling-”

“Q!” This time Bond’s voice was just sharp enough for Q to realize that he must have started rambling in a slightly insane voice. It made sense: he definitely felt like he was heading over the edge into madness.

“Do you remember how I was when you picked me up from the airport?” Q asked suddenly out of the blue, still managing to hold onto a conversation if not complete calmness, perhaps.

Set aback, Bond narrowed his eyes slightly. “Yes.”

“Remember how I didn’t pick up on everything you said right away?”

Still not following, Bond nodded, repeating, “Yes.”

“Well, that was just a fraction of how drugged up my medication had to make me so that I could get on that plane,” Q finally explained, then dissolved into a chuckle that sounded suspiciously like he really just wanted to cry past the defeated smile. Lips tilting upwards, he admitted because he had no dignity left to lose, “If I weren’t so out-of-my-mind exhausted now, I’d be a screaming, crying, rocking wreck that you would probably never forget. I vowed never to let you double-o’s see me on a plane.”

The bitter chuckles of manic resignation – or desperation – set off an uncomfortable pang in Bond’s chest, and simultaneously, both 006 and 7 looked away, embarrassed. It hadn’t really occurred to them that their Quartermaster might be embarrassed to be seen like this. While Q was, at the moment, doing an admirable job of controlling himself, their Quartermaster was still so threadbare and undone that he was hardly even himself. Even a week and a half ago, the sight of their ‘upstart Quartermaster’ in such a compromised state would have elicited the same response from them as the reactions of sharks to blood in the water.

Now, instead, 006 spoke in a surprisingly subdued voice, “I’ll go ask the medic how much longer before we can put Q out without hurting him.” Wings tucked like wedges of black against his back, he headed towards another section of the plane.

Bond remained where he was, watching Q quietly come undone beneath a thin and splintering veneer of control. “May I sit?” he asked – actually asked, as he came over to stand at Q’s hip instead of by his own chair.

One of the Quartermaster’s eyes cracked open. He looked so exhausted that it was painful, especially because his phobia was using up even more strength from him. “Will it get me off this plane?” Q
asked with understandable singlemindedness.

Just shaking his head, Bond sat, his hip snugged up against Q’s to make the best use of the narrow padded bench. He immediately took one of Q’s hands, gripping it gently enough not to be threatening but firmly enough that Q wouldn’t pull it out. Both of Q’s exhausted eyes opened, blinking in bewilderment at the new situation. “Nothing unprofessional,” Bond assured with a slightly crooked smile and invariably a touch of humor, but the look Q shot him was less a glare and more a look of wary caution. Bond’s thumb was sliding over the back of Q’s hand in a steady, soothing rhythm.

Then 007 tightened his grip until there was no doubt of the strength in his tendons and muscles, and with absolute certainty in a voice suddenly dropped very low, he stated, “Q, what makes you so sure that we wouldn’t catch you if you fell?”

006 returned at that point, and if he thought Q’s startled look and Bond’s intense (almost angry) one was unusual, he didn’t show it. Instead, he just looked between them with his hands in his pockets and made his brief report, “The medic says we’re good to go. The Quartermaster is just going to be very, very groggy when this is all over. Sorry, boffin.”

Sighing in either relief or exasperation, Q relaxed the barest fraction, although his hand shifted further into Bond’s almost reflexively as 007’s stroking thumb slid to caress backs of his knuckles. “I must be going insane, because I can’t even find annoyance at you calling me ‘boffin’ again, 006. I’m sure I should still be yelling at you two. For something.”

Both 007 and 6 lit up in almost identical grins, hearing how halfhearted the threats were and treating it as a compliment instead. Still, the unfaltering tension that was thrumming through Q’s body was worrisome and distressing – even to two men who had more deaths under their name that most cemeteries could comfortably hold. Alec handed Q a lid full of mint-green liquid. “Bottom’s up, brainiac.”

“I really am going to break both your knees when I recover from this,” Q griped but reached out with a shaking hand to take the medicine, throwing it back almost before he even had a proper grip on it. Since he was still lying down, he then almost choked on it, but desperation would allow for nothing less. “What was that?” he asked, nose wrinkling under the nose-piece of his glasses in distaste. Then the world swam before his eyes and he actually gripped Bond’s hand back (embarrassing) to steady himself. “Never mind,” he said tightly but sincerely, “I don’t care. Fuck, it packs a punch like an avalanche.”

“Nothing else sounded like it was going to put you out,” Bond noted ruefully, one wing shifting forward so that it touched Q’s free hand on the other side of his body. Q released a quivering little breath and his fingertips fluttered but didn’t grab as they felt the light touch.

“Thank you, 006,” the Quartermaster managed in a rapidly softening voice, so it was hard to tell if he was being formal or not, or if the gratitude was heartfelt instead. The same went for the second thanks he directed to Bond a moment later, mostly slurred.

Smirking and still touching the Quartermaster in three points – hip to hip, hand to hand, wing to wrist – James joked, “I thought you didn’t appreciate my unprofessionalism?”

For a moment, 006 and 007 thought that they could chuckle in silence because Q had passed beyond hearing, but it turned out the Quartermaster was more resilient than that. “I’m telling myself that unprofessionalism comes with the territory for a 00-agent, and to expect anything different…” Now the Quartermaster was drifting off, his fingers going lax in Bond’s hand. “…Would drive me insane.” For the second time, it seemed he finally fallen asleep, but then the Quartermaster’s lips
moved: “Nonetheless, thank you.”

And then the medication finally set in and dragged Q down into a deep sleep.

“He’s wrong, you know,” 006 commented, out of the blue. “Unprofessionalism doesn’t always come with the territory. 004 is so professional I could gag.”

“Go find something alcoholic, Alec. You’re thinking too much,” Bond advised, before returning to his seat so that he could sit at Q’s head and watch over him as he slept. He had meant it, after all: if the plane were the fall out of the sky, the only way that Q would fall would be if Bond did, too.

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Chapter End Notes

I didn't really impress myself with writing this chapter - EXCEPT THE KISS!!! That hopefully will make up for the shortness of the chapter and what-have-you :3 Plus, I had to make a 004 reference. Because I like him.

And I think Alec does, too.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Q heals and recovers, getting back into the swing of things.

Or the chapter in which Q is unleashed on Medical and not even 004 is safe.

Chapter Notes

A fun chapter! I know that I promised one of my commenters that I'd put in some sexy 006 in this one, but I didn't quite manage it XP I'll keep trying! He's in this one, and has a moment or two. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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00-agents were terrors of MI6 Medical.

Q was worse.

Medical had one day of peace. One day of peace that was actually one day of torment anyway, because that day saw 006 and 7 come through their doors, and of all the Angels, those two behaved the least. 008 would have been the third member of their dark triad, but he was gone, one irritant who would be missed. It took rather less than the whole day for Bond and Alec to wheedle/threaten/sneak/con their way out of Medical, but by then, all of the staff were leaning back against desks and walls as if a hurricane had just blown through.

Through all of that, the Quartermaster more or less slept. The Mundane drugs they’d given him for the plane had served their purpose and then some, and combined with the inexplicable decimation of Q’s internal energy, Q was lethargic and drowsy at best. And because Medical had learned long before this just how bad a patient their Quartermaster was, they ran most of their tests and saw to all of his physical injuries while he was still out like a light and docile.

And then he woke up, and suddenly Medical wished they were dealing with double-o’s again.

It was a known fact that 00-agents didn’t like to sit still and hated bed-rest. Ergo, they generally used what skills they had to escape – like cats closed up in a box. Q, having been a field agent in the past, did the same.

The trick was, most field agents fell back on generally physical skills – for example, 008 had once picked up a nurse in order to clear a path for himself out of Medical. Since this had also unintentionally proved his fitness to leave (and because no one else liked the thought of being unceremoniously lifted up and moved), no one else had gotten in his way. If things were particularly bad and an agent was truly feeling like making an irritant of himself, threats of physical violence would start up. Sometimes there was physical violence, but only until Medical wisely gave up and
made way for whatever agent was slowly going nuts in a hospital bed.

And those were their skills: threats and brute force. Some were also sneaky, 006 and 007 being at the top of that list.

But the Quartermaster had all of those tricks up his sleeve and more.

Q had behaved like a typical, irascible agent before the loss of his wings – and he hadn’t lost those traits after he’d been ‘grounded’ and had then risen again in MI6 as its youngest Quartermaster. Therefore, he was now a person with bad habits coupled with a whole new repertoire of skills. Q also hated hospitals on an additional level, by dint of the fact that his worst experiences had concluded in one, the recovery process being a slow and painful one after he became wingless.

It was amazing the threats a computer genius could come up with once the drugs wore off. Q had put up with the doctoring for a record total of two-and-a-half hours – long enough to be told multiple times in multiple ways that no one had any idea how, but his supernatural energy was totally gone. Outwardly, Q had held firmly onto his Quartermaster mask, presenting a look that was tense with annoyance but otherwise cool and collected. Inwardly, he was such a mess of nerves that you’d have thought he was still on the plane. Q liked puzzles, but he hated mysteries that he didn’t understand, and now he was one.

Still, before long he was acting like the most recalcitrant of children, all of his good behavior and patience used up in that first two-and-a-half hours after he reached full wakefulness. It was clear (to Q at least, but apparently no one else, no matter how he enunciated and clarified) that additional tests were not going to explain what had happened to him, and since his leg (now in a hard plastic brace) would actually hold his weight if he used a cane, Q saw no reason for the bed-rest.

“I have to get back to work.” He had no idea how many times he said that. Medical was deaf to his pleas (soon orders…eventually thinly-veiled threats), unfortunately, even if they were growing increasingly tart in return. It was one thing to have an agent demand to be let back into the field when he was bleeding out – it was another thing entirely to have the Quartermaster wanting to back to work on a computer when his own injuries were less concrete. True, it would be best if he didn’t walk on his bad leg, but it wasn’t as though he was going to be chasing down criminals in Q-branch. And it wasn’t like typing code was strenuous, although his left arm had stitches.

By the time everyone went to sleep after that second day, everyone within the whole wing that Medical took up was grouchy, right down to the last orderly. It had taken a minor miracle and some questionable applications of logic to convince the Quartermaster not to sneak out in the middle of the night. In the end, in fact, the only thing that kept Q in his hospital bed was the continued lethargy that plagued him now that his energy was essentially gone. He still felt like an empty vessel, hollowed out and light, and no matter how vibrantly he argued to be dismissed from Medical, he ultimately recognized his weakness. It was galling and unsettling and terrifying, but Q knew that he was in no condition to do more than snap reprimands and caustic remarks at people right now. He paced (limpingly, with a cane) when people were looking, but when the room was empty of everyone but him, he sat down heavily on the edge of the bed and wondered how it could be possible to feel so fatigued and tired.

Forcibly pushing aside the possibility that he might be stuck like this permanently, Q maneuvered his thin frame into bed, gritting his teeth against various aches and pains and then falling asleep far more quickly than was normal for him.

Ironic, that his messed-up energy had tangled up his sleep cycle, and now it was gone and he could sleep.
All of Medical breathed a sigh of relief once they heard that the notorious Quartermaster was unconscious.

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With his new mysterious condition keeping him exhausted, Q had gone to bed resigned to the fact that he’d have to start behaving a bit better – after all, if he was going to be stuck in Medical, it would be a nicer stay if he didn’t alienate absolutely everyone. It was a frustrating thought, making the Quartermaster’s spine itch all the way up to the twin scars alongside his shoulder-blades – wings yearning to fly him out of there, if he’d still had them. It wouldn’t be easy to curb his tongue, but if the doctors at least allowed him his laptop, maybe he’d be able to keep himself busy until he was deemed something more than an invalid.

Then he woke up to what felt like an explosion of light in his chest.

Q had been dead-asleep, exhausted and empty, but had risen towards wakefulness just a tiny bit, as if his mind had noted some subtle change and was wondering, ‘Now what is this…?’ And then his energy had all come back with a snap that filled his ears with roaring.

As Q gasped and his back arched near to breaking, he wondered in a distracted part of his mind if this was what a circuit felt like when you turned on the power. That hollow space inside of him was suddenly flush with energy, so much that it nearly blotted out the world and Q’s senses began to splinter. If this was what happened every time he used Silva’s trick to electrocute people, he was never doing it again. It didn’t seem as though Silva suffered the backlash like this, but Q did, and he wasn’t sure what was worse: being afraid that he’d lost his supernatural energy forever, or being afraid that he was about to die now that it was all coming back at once.

It probably actually just lasted a second – but then again, how fast did a nuclear explosion happen? It faded with one last blast of white behind Q’s eyelids and he felt his body finally relax like an unstrung bow, going limp so fast that he found himself slipping off the bed. Reflexively, Q shot out his hand to grip the rail (the rail that had not kept him from falling out of bed), hoping to at least land on the floor without injury.

Without warning, his newly returned supernatural powers kicked in like steel lacing down his arms, and it was with inhuman speed that he shot his arm out.

He still landed on the floor.

His arms was also tingling as if he’d come close to petting a lightning bolt and then thought better of it at the last minute.

Sitting in the dark on the floor and groaning as he massaged his now-bruised hip – his other hand still locked on the useless half-railing – Q did a mental triage of himself. Falling off the bed had jarred him, but not enough to undo the fact that his body was now buzzing and, for all intents and purposes, finally felt normal again.

Q had refused to go to bed hooked up to machines, but someone had still been around to hear him hit the floor even if there were no machines to beep and trill out alarms. It was also just after dawn, so the morning staff had the distinct pleasure of getting to deal with the new Q. The Q who was no longer tired, and abruptly in possession of his Angel skills and energy again.
M had been keeping her professional distance from everything, not visiting her Quartermaster even when reports reached that he might have had something permanently wrong with him internally. Everyone had thought she was just being distant and cold, as the head of MI6 has the right to be.

In reality, M was just a lot smarter than people realized, and hadn’t wanted to be anywhere near Medical when her Quartermaster fully recovered. Therefore, M was going through paperwork at her desk when a message on her computer screen told her, in glorious understatement, that Medical was requesting back-up and was under the attack of one MI6 Quartermaster.

M smirked every-so-faintly and pretended she didn’t notice the memo.

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Q was breathing a little hard but he wasn’t feeling tired – just frustrated that it had taken this long to get this far. Medical was a bloody death-trap! Everyone wanted him lying down in bed, and Q didn’t want anything more than to return to his computers and hard-drives!

Well. He’d talked some sense into the staff of Medical.

With doctors and nurses peeking out of doorways like fearful owls behind him, the limping Quartermaster was nearly to the exit when someone a little higher up on the food-chain got in his way. It was 004, undoubtedly called to try and subdue him, so Q’s eyes narrowed dangerously – coming from a man of his height and build, it was a remarkably intimidating look.

The Quartermaster was not in a good mood.

Before the pale-winged 00-agent could open his mouth and tell Q why he couldn’t leave, the bespectacled young man told 004 succinctly, “004, if you do not get out of my way, I will mangle your online accounts so badly you’ll wish you lived in the Stone Age. Is that understood?”

The commanding tone as much as the boldfaced threat had the 00-agent blinking, taken off-guard. His wings spread out a bit in an unconscious motion that Q noted, with cold amusement, was a reflexive response to a threat. “I’m waiting, 004,” he went on with a frosted imitation of patience, “In fact, I’m waiting, and it looks increasingly likely that you’re not going to move.”

“You haven’t been cleared from Medical yet,” the usually calm 00-agent got his tongue under control to say, voice admirably cool even if his eyes still sparked with surprise. He looked as though he’d reached to pet a friendly cat and had suddenly been standing in front of a hissing ball of fur.

Q wasn’t exactly a hissing ball of fur – on the contrary, he was cool and collected…which was somehow more scary. He retorted almost instantly with solid logic, “No, but that does not change the fact that I am perfectly fit to return to my job, and considering that the Silva dilemma— Everyone knew about that by now. “—Is as yet unresolved, I’m needed at my post more than ever. Considering that my post is a layout of computers in Q-branch, there is no reason for me to stay here.” He said that with a snarl lacing his words and a glance shot back at the staff-members behind him, who actually ducked away as if his eyes were lasers. If any of them hadn’t known before, they knew now not to try and keep the Quartermaster in Medical. Q turned back to 004, who was beginning to realize he was horrendously outmatched. Eyes collected and cold behind his glasses, Q finished, “So you can either move and let me go on my way, or you can insist on being a hindrance to my work-ethic and face the consequences later – because believe me, 004, I’ll get hold of a computer.
eventually.” He left the rest hanging, knowing that his ability to do damage over cyberspace was legendary, and rightly so. There weren’t words for what he could do to a person just with a few well-placed clicks.

004’s eyes were unreadable, but that was because double-o’s were trained to shut down their expressions in dangerous conditions. This qualified. Finally, after a long pause in which he undoubtedly tried to think his way through this time and again and kept getting the same outcome, 004 gave his wings a twitch – once snapped out, then snapped back in, a practice in economy of motion and military efficiency – and meekly backed off.

“Thank you,” Q said curtly, and limped his way determinedly back to his dear Q-branch.

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004 was in no way an idiot, nor was he half as naïve as he often seemed. True, he was new at this 00-business, and lacked Bond’s destructive charm and Trevelyan’s glorious disregard for anything resembling rules, but 004 was a 00-agent for a reason. He hadn’t survived this long by doing things thoughtlessly or foolishly.

He knew a lot of things – to know when he was beaten, to retreat when victory cost too much.

And when to find a better weapon when his present arsenal wasn’t quite enough.

Even as the volatile Quartermaster limped off with quiet, lethal dignity, 004 was turning down the hall and heading the other way.

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Alec winced, rotating his shoulder and feeling the tug against stitches. He swore a continuous litany under his breath, but it was a familiar sound not unlike waves in the distance – Alec swore that often. Bond walked next to him, shifting his bad wing a bit as he turned around and dropped onto the chair in what was effectively the break room for off-duty double-o’s. Typically, he managed to make even that motion look graceful, his toned body never entirely relaxing even as he eased back and draped his arms over the back of the couch, the arc of his wings paralleling the contour of his arms as he spread them, too. Like Alec, he winced. His wing hadn’t been that badly slashed, but it had taken stitches in the end as well.

“Bloody guns…” Alec was complaining, still standing and rolling his arm slowly as if he could will away the pain by force and repetition. More likely, he’d pull out his stitches, but that was pretty much par for the course with 00-agents.

“You like guns,” Bond pointed out, unhelpful but smiling.

“I like shooting guns,” Alec clarified, plucking now at his bandages where they peaked out past the collar of his shirt as if they offended him, “It’s like killing people, James – fun on one end and decidedly not on the other.”
“Bond? A moment?”

Only 00-agents could sneak up on 00-agents with any hope of success, and only within the safety of MI6 could this sneaking be accomplished without someone going for a weapon. Still, there was a predatory tension that slithered into 006 and 007’s muscles a second before they recognized the Angel who had just walked into the room. 004 raised one eyebrow but otherwise chose to ignore that he had come dangerously close to being attacked by two highly-strung 00-agents. There was no guarantee that any of them would have managed to kill each other in a knee-jerk reaction like that, but a scuffle between three 00-agents was messy. “004,” Bond greeted, again realizing he hadn’t bothered to learn the new agent’s real name. He pasted a charming smile on his face to hide that.

Still as stiff and disgustingly formal as always, the pale-winged Angel walked the rest of the way in until he was standing next to 006, who had a half-a-head of height on him and quite a bit of weight, too. 004 was unassuming, and Bond wouldn’t take the man seriously except that he’d seen him in a fight once. He was winged death with a handgun. “The Quartermaster has…er…escaped Medical,” he immediately got to the point, ignoring the fact that Alec had shifted position, trying to intimidate him. 004 kept his calm grey eyes on Bond as if the black-winged agent didn’t exist. “Stopping him at the moment seemed ill-advised, but I figure you know him best.”

Since 004 had not been present when Bond had kissed the Quartermaster, 007 affected an innocent look that he’d perfected over the years. “Really?” he said to hide his interest.

Not discouraged (if nothing else, 004 was truly impossible to faze), 004 continued as calmly as before, “You seemed very comfortable around the Quartermaster. Ergo, when he went on a rampage-”

“Why didn’t you stop him?” 006 was quick to interject. Bond noted that, by this point, the black-winged Angel had paced until he was just back and to 004’s left, effectively in a blind spot for a gunman – if 004 were to react and reach for the gun holstered to his right, 006 would be able to grab him first. Even though 006 had to be close enough for his chest to brushing 004’s left wing, 004 wasn’t twitching.

“I like my banks accounts with money in them,” 004 answered candidly and with an appreciation for Q’s destructive skill that was admirable.

For a moment, Bond pretended to mull this over, also taking the time to glance over Alec and 004’s interaction: 006 liked to intimidate people, but even Bond had to admit that Alec was overdoing it a bit with 004. It would have been amusing to watch if he didn’t have a building worry about Q weighing on his mind.

Abruptly, Bond rocked forward and onto his feet. “I’ll go.”

“Just like that?” Alec’s eyes turned up from 004 to instead eye 007. “Really?”

“What’s the worst that can happen? And besides, until I get sent on another mission, I’ve got nothing but time.” Bond stalked out past 004 and Alec – off to hunt Quartermasters.

004 might have smiled just a touch. After Bond slipped soundlessly out of the room, 004 waited to the count of three and then snapped back his right wing hard enough to jostle the larger Angel…and his stitches. Then, as 006 was swearing again, 004 walked out of the room as well without so much as a backward glance.
The real reason that Q had hared off so quickly had been because ‘lesson two’ was still all too clear in his mind. As the situation had escalated with the insertion of another Angel, Q’s internal energy had started buzzing like something biting at the pads of his fingertips with kitten-sharp teeth. He’d come rather instantly to the realization that he might possibly hurt someone.

Fortunately, 004 was a smart man, and of all the double-o’s he had been the most likely to follow orders – as he had after a few threats from Q. Now, with his energy still at an unpleasant, adrenal hum beneath his skin, the Quartermaster was working to calm himself down by delving elbow-deep into some of the bomb-fragments that the extraction team had so considerately salvaged and brought back for him. Some of Silva’s men had also been captured and questioned, but none of them knew anything about the dangerous man’s whereabouts – some of them even showed signs of having been mentally manipulated, which made Q shiver involuntarily at the memory of ‘lesson one’.

If Q hadn’t been so deep in his own thoughts, he would have noticed the fearful hush that fell over Q-branch. Granted, when Q had first come in like a force of nature, there’d be a hush, too, but usually that only happened with the arrival of a 00-agent. Q-branch techies – seemingly picked for their timidity as well as their computer skills – withdrew behind desks. It was like a repeat of Medical when Q had left.

“And just what do you think you’re doing?”

Q jumped at the low, charming voice suddenly appearing at his back, nearly yanking his whole project onto the floor. Thank goodness his supernatural energy didn’t react… Hands still occupied by wires and gadgetry, Q turned his head awkwardly over his shoulder to glare at Bond. “What are you doing in Q-branch?” he demanded.

Unflustered, Bond crossed his muscular arms and leaned his hip against a nearby desk. “I could ask you the same question, Quartermaster. Or was it someone else who was still supposed to be under observation in Medical?”

“ ‘Under observation’ means sitting around collecting dust for no good reason,” Q retorted without missing a beat, stubbornly turning back to his work even as he unconsciously put weight on his bad leg. Strangling a mewl of discomfort before it could get out, he shifted over onto his left leg again. “I am, as you can see, perfectly capable of doing my work.”

Q wasn’t watching, but Bond’s eyes had narrowed as he noticed something he hadn’t been expecting. “And what did Medical say about your energy miraculously turning on again?”

Despite himself, Q was surprised – in an unexpectedly good way – that 007 had noticed at all. Up until Q had verbally stated his Angel status, no one had ever noticed his energy, simply because no one had ever thought to look. Ever since the sparring match, however, Bond seemed to be paying more and more attention. The man truly did have a disturbingly steep learning curve. Looking back over his shoulder again in involuntary surprise, Q’s temper flagged a little, and when he started talking again, it was more of his usual detached calm, “Medical took enough tests to get the information they needed, but results are pending. They still have no theories on precisely why my power shut off, but the fact that it came back is enough for me.”

“I thought you liked finding answers.” Bond seemed disinclined to leave, and that was making Q nervous, because he couldn’t tell what the man was down here for if not to haul Q off bodily to Medical. Q – his mind already making connections – assumed that was what 007 was here for,
undoubtedly called by the capable 004 (who was much more cunning that Q had expected – he’d have to watch him more carefully).

But, for now, the banter was nice, and the techies who had been hovering worriedly around their healing Quartermaster were kept at bay as effectively as if Bond had been a shark and they little minnows fond of living. So Q bent his head to his work while keeping a section of his mind partitioned off for conversation. He snorted, “I already have answers, even if Medical doesn’t want to accept them as-is. You and I were both quite present when I effectively knocked myself down to the level of a Mundane.” ‘And part of me had feared I’d stay that way.’ Up until now, no one had even considered it possible to kill the Angel in a person.

Bond had wondered up closer, and if Q could hear him, that meant the man was scuffing his feet on purpose. Very thoughtful, for a man who usually moved without a sound. He appeared to be watching over Q’s shoulder, and the smaller man refused to be distracted by that, even as he felt the body heat. “So it all just came back this morning?”

“Like a breaker being thrown,” Q admitted ruefully, deciding that showing his human side a little wasn’t going to kill him. Besides, after the plane trip and all that it had entailed (Q forcefully pushed aside the embarrassment before it could eat a hole right through him), it seemed pointless to maintain the detached, aloof front he had previously upheld in front of the dangerous 00-agents. “It was distinctly unpleasant and I hope to never do it again.”

Bond huffed, a sound that was too lazy to actually be a word of agreement but could be translated all the same.

And then the silence stretched on. Q-branch was buzzing away again, still at a careful distance from the anomaly of a 00-agent among them; Bond seemed happy where he was, although Q couldn’t imagine what he found interesting about watching Q dig around inside a lump of battered circuitry. “So?” Q asked, suspicious, “That’s it?”

Bond’s voice held an unmistakable hint of amusement as he transparently played dumb. “What are you referring to, Quartermaster?”

Resisting the urge to stab Bond with a pair of pliers (if the bomb had been connected to power, he might have considered giving him a bit of an electric shock to remind him whom he was teasing), Q clarified, “No dragging me off to Medical? No long speeches about how I still need to be in bed, hooked up to monitors and what-have-you?”

Somehow 007 had moved close enough that Q almost felt the vibration of the laugh that went through him. “Well, that would be ridiculous, wouldn’t it, since I hold the record for ‘fastest escape from Medical’.”

Despite himself, Q found himself laughing, and that distracted him just enough that he moved his arm thoughtlessly, bumping his left forearm against a hard piece of mangled covering. The stitches were safely tucked away beneath bandages (once pristine white but now somewhat smudged with what Q was working with), but they were tender. “Shit,” Q growled, working one-handed for a moment while he rested his left hand on the tabletop and waited for the pain to fade.

“You’re sure you should be working?” Bond asked in his unimpressed-voice, or maybe it was his ‘I’m not entirely certain I should trust your judgment’-voice. A little bit softer, so no one but Q would overhear, the agent added, “Silva did quite a number on you.”

Q winced all over again, this time going completely still as he let the memory pass. It was just another type of pain, and he tried to speed up its fading by talking and burying both hands in wires
again. “If I can figure some of his bombs out, then maybe MI6 can do a number on him, next time we meet.”

“You seem pretty confident that we’ll meet again,” Bond noted, again with feigned disinterest but with an unmistakable, growled edge of a wolf circling a kill. It sent a shiver up Q’s spine, which he hid before Bond moved again, now to lean back against the actual table Q was working on so each could see the other’s expression more clearly. Q had been aware that 007 wanted Silva dead very badly, but the frostbitten cold in the man’s eyes said that the Quartermaster had underestimated the depth of Bond’s animosity.

“I’m counting on it,” Q said a little breathlessly, taking in that look of lethal intent on the face of the figure right next to him. Q had definitely spent too much time behind a desk, in which he’d heard rage from his 00-agents only through commandeered cameras and durable earpieces. Going out into the field just days ago had been a shock, and even now, he found himself slightly overwhelmed by the sight of that much quiet, contained fury leaning on the table next to him. 00-agents were a force of nature, their ability to kill and destroy so finely tuned that they just seemed to turn it on like a switch, and instantly the world shuddered a little.

Q wanted some of that strength.

“Bond,” he said nonchalantly, words careful because he was thinking them over, but even as he spoke the certainty was growing in him like an infrastructure of steel, “How would you like to help me on a project?”

The look of impending deadliness turned down a few notches instantly, replaced by suspicion. “Official?” he asked briefly.

“No, strictly a pet project of mine.”

For a moment, Q held his breath while trying to maintain a mask of polite carelessness, sure that 007 would decline out of wariness if nothing else. Then the man’s mood shifted subtly yet again, and he extended his undamaged wing in a grey-feathered shrug of acceptance. “Good. I don’t think that M wants me to do anything with you officially again,” 007 supplied quite idly, but then added, “She told Alec and me to bring you back in one piece, and when we didn’t, I think she was tempted to tack us up on the wall.”

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Chapter End Notes

Any wild guesses as to what Q's 'pet project' is? :)

Next chapter should have a lot of Bonding in it!
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Q begins to wonder whether Bond will really help him in his project...

Or the chapter in which Bond was having a really good day until he learned what Q's project was.

Chapter Notes

Here it is! I'm supposed to get to work on another art project, so the next chapter might take a bit...

I got a bit of charming Bond in here ;) I don't know if you'd call this 'Bonding', though...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

~^~

When M found out about the mole...she was less surprised than she should have been. Then again, she’d been aware of the nature of the missing information for some time. Nonetheless, with this weakness now in the open, she showed her hand a little more. By nature, Q had decided, M was a women who unabashedly hid things – and usually, that served the purpose of keeping enemies from ever knowing exactly what MI6 was going to do. This one time, it had come back and bitten her.

With everything out in the open and a few computers having more or less survived the explosion up in Canada, things were now moving very quickly. It turned out that M had been working on the problem secretly, and as much as Q was annoyed at not being trusted with this information sooner, he had to admit that the foundation that M had made in secret was impressive. And with a mole somewhere in MI6, keeping secrets just made sense.

So when Q got the email saying that he needed to issue materials for Bond to go on a low-risk mission, Q just did as he was told without opening his mouth. He’d submitted a thorough report to M about his mission, but had purposely been vague on the various ‘lessons’ Silva had attacked him with, as well as downplaying the crazy interest the man had in him. Bond and Alec had no doubt submitted reports as well, so Q was careful that he did not actually leave anything out or lie – but some of this was personal, and he couldn’t see why M had to know everything if she thought he didn’t have to know everything either.

Still insecure and nervous about the ‘project’ he’d coerced Bond into agreeing with, Q had made no fuss but instead signed off on the materials and let Bond go on his way. The mission was low risk, since 007 was technically still recovering, and this would give Q time to plan this project a bit more...or decide that it was a fool’s idea and give up on it before Bond came back.
From the salvaged computers, Q and his branch managed to find a few leads (one of which being what Bond was sent to follow, discreetly if possible, which was a laugh). At the same time, however, with the water being stirred up, M wanted to keep some of her 00-agents close. Hence, the sudden, vindictive little smirk on Q’s face.

Alec couldn’t leave – he was staying both as back-up in case there was trouble inside MI6, and because he was still unfit for action. That meant he’d be in and out of MI6, wreaking havoc on a regular basis.

So Q sent a sleekly-worded email to M saying that maybe it would be good to hold back 004 nearby as well. Surely 004 would have a calming influence on him?

Q hit send and went immediately back to work, but he didn’t stop smiling all day. ‘Teach him to sic 007 on his Quartermaster…’ Q was quite a vindictive creature when roused.

~^~

Usually, Bond was back late from missions. It was an open secret to pretty much everyone. That gave Q some time to think to himself about exactly what in the world he thought he was doing.

A future confrontation with Silva was inevitable, and considering how enamored the man was with chatting up the only other wingless Angel in existence, chances were high that Q would be involved. That meant he had to get on the ball and make sure he was up for the challenge when it came…and with Silva so dangerously skilled, the only hope Q had was to become like him.

The burst of energy that Q had knocked a man unconscious with had not resurfaced, and Q was deeply worried about the repercussions of trying too hard – not only was that skill obviously dangerous to him, but Q had no way of knowing whether his victim had been permanently damaged by the shock. Silva had enough control to cause intense pain or unconsciousness without killing, but Q had a feeling that Silva wouldn’t have had a problem with killing a few people in practice. Q wasn’t ready to accept that.

Taking over someone’s mind was such an ethereal skill, however, and Q was left to ponder that while Bond was away. He had only memories to go off – very vivid, traumatic memories, but memories all the same. Silva had said that being the recipient of such treatment often enough might make the skill rub off…

Just thinking about that made Q think about those large, deft hands pushing aside his shirt-collar and gliding with poisonous curiosity across his collarbone, hot as a brand. Pretending to snooze in his office on the couch acquired purely for that purpose, Q sat up with a shudder. Stubbornly pushing that unhelpful thought aside – but still feeling an icy prickle beneath his skin that was tenacious and harder to get rid of – the Quartermaster instead focused his powerful brain on the memories of the ‘lessons’. There was nothing pleasant about remembering how someone had reached in and locked your entire mind in a vice seemingly without effort, but if Q went over it enough times it was like rolling something sharp between one’s palms: slowly, laboriously, painfully the sharp edges began to dull, until it was easy to handle. In that way, Q was eventually able to look past the screaming helplessness and zero in more clinically on the facts. ‘It all comes down to Angel energy,’ he reminded himself, trying to reverse-engineer what had been done to him. He began to understand.

After a few days of understanding, he realized that there was nothing for it: he needed to actually see
if he could do it. He had to practice it on something.

And that was right about when he remembered everyone complaining about Jerry Perkins, one of his techies, who insisted on bringing his ornery cat to work in the lower reaches of Q-branch…

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In what was probably an MI6-first, 007 came back without injuries. The wound to his wing from earlier was still stiff and sore, but the intel-gathering hadn’t forced him to fly on it, and Medical was considering creating a national holiday to celebrate.

Unfortunately for Q, that meant he had to deal with 007 without any further ado. Unless 007 had completely forgotten, the man would want to know about whether Q still wanted help with that project…and Q had pretty much convinced himself that this was a bad idea. He consoled himself with the fact that 007 would undoubtedly agree, and withdraw his offer to help Q after the ‘project’ was explained to him.

“You mentioned something about my helping you with a project,” Bond walked right up to Q’s desk and pleasantly said, just as abrupt and to-the-point as Q had expected. The agent was now placing his gun on the table as well as the other items he was returning, and his tone was almost playful, “And then I got sent off on a mission and you didn’t even protest. I was beginning to think you’d forgotten about me.” That smile that could lead to the downfall of small countries was playing at the edges of Bond’s mouth, and Q internally dreaded the explanation he was going to have to give.

Q was numbering off how many items he’d issued and how many 007 had returned, unable to believe that the numbers he was coming up with were the same. Momentarily shocked out of his intentions about explaining the ‘project’, he eyed the things on his desk as if they might transform suddenly into spiders. “I’m very sure I will never forget you, 007.” he informed the man practically, still bewildered by the apparent lack of destruction, “Especially after this momentous occasion of you actually returning everything I sent you out with. I hear you avoided Medical, too, and not simply by brute force and carefully applied cunning.” Hands still uneasily braced on the edge of his desk and eyes narrowed at what Bond had put on the desk, Q finished in all seriousness, “I suspect Pod People.”

Finally, Bond laughed outright at Q’s suspiciousness, dragging a lot of heads up to look at him from around Q-branch. It was uncommon for a 00-agent to come this far into their territory, even if it was to personally return supplies. “I’m not always bad, Q,” Bond admonished, feigning that he was hurt by this.

Those pale blue eyes were indeed glinting. “My mouth can say otherwise, too,” noted the 00-agent in a significantly quieter voice and a different tone altogether.

Blinking in surprise, Q found his mind involuntarily flashing back to that moment on the plane when he’d been heading full-speed for a meltdown and had instead been met by lips and teeth and a rush that had left little room in his head for thoughts. Bond had a lot of practice in being wicked with his mouth, and Q felt his ears start to flush before he managed to clear his throat, look away, and forcibly change the subject before he could lose his grip on it. “The project is still ongoing. However, I will understand if you wish to retract your offer to help.” There was the short and long of it. If Q was
lucky, Bond would leave it before he even had to explain anything.

Q was not lucky and Bond never just let something be. Giving his healing wing a slow stretch (not even flinching, even if the movements were careful and unhurried), Bond settled his weight a little more firmly on one foot in a pose that was remarkably relaxed for a man who was trained to perpetually be on his toes. “If that’s supposed to make me go away, you’re sadly mistaken,” was the man’s reply, still a touch of amusement warming his voice. Usually he came back from missions either burning up from adrenalin or so battered he didn’t believe he’d ever laugh again, but on the rare occasions like this, when his missions were just challenging enough to defeat the boredom but not so challenging that they impinged on his continued survival, Bond’s mood turned almost disturbingly chipper. Usually, at this point, he’d hunt up Alec if the other was around, and the two would lay waste to numerous bars as well as any consenting, breathing bodies they could get hold of. Bond was terrifying when he was on a mission, but honestly, he scared just as many people when he was smiling like this.

And, unfortunately, that meant that Q was at least going to have to admit to what he was doing and what he’d hoped that Bond would be willing to help with. In retrospect, he was not entirely sure why he’d asked 007, of all people. Fingers drumming restlessly on the table – drawing Bond’s eyes, even if the man didn’t comment – Q ignored Bond’s continued teasing and said seriously, “If you want to know, come to my office.” And before he could lose his nerve, Q stood up, intentionally doing what most people would be afraid to do: turning his back on a 00-agent. Back straight and posture unafraid, Q got up without hesitation from the desk and retreated to his office, never bothering to see if Bond followed.

He did. The 00-agent closed the door behind both of them, wariness and polite curiosity replacing the insinuating looks of before that had come so easily to him. Still, Bond didn’t ask any questions. Instead, he just folded his arms, unfurled his wings a bit to get comfortable, and leaned back against the door. ‘I’m not leaving until you talk,’ was the implied warning, even if 007’s eyes remained cool.

For a moment, Q irrationally considered testing that threat, even if the most likely outcome would be him getting his butt handed to him on a platter if he tried to fight with 007. Common-sense came back quickly, however, and Q sighed deeply and then decided that he’d rather take this sitting down. Sitting on his desk and rubbing his eyes beneath his glasses, Q resignedly began laying out a plan that Bond would never agree to, “Remember ‘lesson one’ from Silva?”

If Bond had had any remaining intentions of sliding innuendos at his Quartermaster, they evaporated at the mention of Silva’s name to be replaced by tension and a frown that froze his eyes. “The same ‘lesson one’ that took both of us out – you multiple times, until you couldn’t stand?”

“Yes,” Q sighed, now just letting his weary face rest in his hands, ignoring how he was messing up his glasses, “I suppose you’d remember that. Of the two lessons, the mind-controlling one was actually the least damaging.”

“Don’t sugar-coat this, Quartermaster,” Bond snapped back in a low voice, “No matter how you say it, Silva needs to be put down.”

“And I’m not arguing that point,” Q gave in instantly, finally raising his head again. He looked tousled and tired but determined to say his piece. “In fact, I’m hoping to give us one more weapon in our arsenal when the day finally comes for us to ‘put him down’, as you so eloquently put it.”

A muscle in Bond’s jaw ticked as he tried to see where Q was going with this, but unfortunately, Q’s mind was known to be a labyrinth.

Realizing that there was no point in beating around the bush, Q blew out his cheek in a brief sigh and
then spat it out: “Silva, the sadistic lunatic, gave me enough opportunity to at least observe what he
did, and now…now, I’m trying to learn how, if only to turn it back on him someday.”

There were multiple ways Q had foreseen this talk going at this point, more than a few scenarios
including Bond either laughing in derision at Q’s aspirations or just going into a rage. Thankfully,
Alec was the explosive one and Sims had been the taunting one – Bond was the calm one. So the
blue-eyed agent chose shock instead.

Q hurried to explain before the shock wore off, possibly giving way to less favorable reactions, “If it
were simply impossible, then obviously I wouldn’t waste my time, but I’ve managed to grasp the
theory in just the time since we returned to MI6. I intend to master the skill with or without help –
which will be easier if M does not find out.” Q’s voice had been growing steadily more determined,
until he was the implacable Quartermaster of MI6 once again, staring Bond down even from his
shorter height, sitting on the table. “By that, 007, I mean that I am strongly requesting that you do not
inform M of this talk.”

“Q…” Bond was visibly floundering, and seemed to say Q’s name more to slow him down than
anything else. “What is it exactly that you want me to help with? To carry you to Medical if you fry
your brains?!”

As funny as it normally would have been to see Bond flustered, Q was serious, so he took another
deep breath and dove into the crux of the matter: “I need someone to practice on.”

The reply was just what he’d expected.


Q sighed and rolled his eyes, glad that they’d at least gotten this little talk over with, but then Bond
crossed the room in three long strides so that he was practically on Q’s toes, looking down at him
with an intense expression of disbelief and something almost like anger. “Theory and practice are not
the same, Q!” he said, raising his voice. “How do you know you won’t fry someone’s brains?”

“Because Silva didn’t fry mine, and from that, I got a feel for how to manipulate my internal energy
to do that,” shot Q back defensively. Some part of his brain wanted to know why he always did this:
when things escalated, they escalated, because Q seemed to respond to anger with more anger.
There was no way this trait could be good for survival, especially since it came up most often when
Q was frustrated with a double-o. Most people knew when to back down before it ended in
bloodshed (something that 00-agents were unparalleled in), but Q just got his hackles up and gave
what he got. Eyes flashing behind his glasses and tangle of hair, Q went on without ever breaking
contact with Bond’s furious blue eyes, “I’m a uncommonly good mimic, and if Silva can do it, so
can I!”

Strangely enough, instead of growing even more wrathful, Bond unaccountably backed off a
metaphorical step (although not a physical one). His eyes grew hooded, thoughtful, and when he
finally replied it wasn’t in an angry tone anymore, “Didn’t you say something once about 00-agents
being the ones with egos?”

Q was still fuming, but if Bond could get himself back under control, Q could try for the same. His
voice was still sharp as glass: “This isn’t ego, Bond. This is necessity. Silva’s powers are disturbing,
and you saw – no, you even experienced! – what he could do with them. Now, I for one want MI6
to have those same qualities.” Finally Q felt his reflexive anger die down. In fact, it died down so fast
that the monumental size of his proposal came in like a sucker-punch, leaving him winded. ‘I can’t
do this,’ he thought involuntarily. “That means I have to learn,” Q said in a deflated voice, not
looking at Bond anymore.
The last thing Q had meant to do was manipulate Bond. He’d asked him for his help on a reflex—a whim—and had since thought better of it, so that he was now prepared to let Bond walk out if the man chose to. Instead, Q showed weakness, and that unwittingly was what broke through Bond’s stubborn reluctance. The man sighed, a world-weary gust of breath, and Q looked up in surprise to see the man rubbing a hand over his face much as Q had been doing earlier, minus the glasses.

“Guarantee that you won’t turn me into a vegetable, and I’ll do it,” the man gave in, wincing as he said it was if the words had kitten’s claws that were snagging his tongue as he pulled them unwillingly out.

Eyes widening in utter disbelief, Q said feelingly, “Bond, I could hug you right now.”

“Don’t. Despite all of my jokes earlier, at this point, I might just punch you,” Bond ground out, looking as though he had a headache coming on. But his wings were hanging half-hitched from his back in a posture of resignation, and Q knew he had him. “You don’t have any practice at this at all, do you?”

“I have, actually,” Q said, standing up and thus forcing Bond back. Instead of stubbornly holding his ground as he might have two minutes ago, the grey-winged agent stepped back, reluctantly lowering his hands to his sides and giving Q a long-suffering look that would have been comical under other circumstances. Q was latching onto a project, however, and when the Quartermaster did that, he was as hard to remove as a terrier. “I practiced on a cat.”

“What?!” Bond exploded, and Q waved his hands around to try and get the 00-agent to be quiet.

“Watch it, 007—my office has drapes, but it isn’t soundproof,” Q admonished before addressing the exclamation, “Don’t worry—the cat’s fine. One of my minions owns the fuzzy monster, and he lets it run loose in the lower levels of Q-branch. If you’d met the cat, you’d want to skin it alive, but I just kidnapped it a few times to see if I could get hold of its mind like Silva did mine.”

Bond blinked, so clearly disoriented by all of this that that was all he could do for a moment. “Q,” he finally said, “you attacked a cat.”

“I’d like to point out that the cat chews on wires and already has multiple people laying bets on how long it lives. Even if that were not the case, I didn’t hurt it—I might not be very good yet, but I had enough control over what I was doing that I only frightened it a bit the first time.” The memories were frustrating, but there was triumph there, too. “Right now, I can effectively take over the mind of a cat.”

“And next would be…me,” Bond tested out the idea in his head, even if his face said it tasted bad on his tongue. He groaned low in his throat again and closed his eyes, wings giving an uncharacteristic snap. “Since when did double-o’s move from trained killers to lab rats?”

Since Bond had already said that he’d help (and since Q could hear the resignation even beneath his plaintive tone of argument), Q just tilted one eyebrow a precise fraction and said dryly and almost lightly, “Probably when you decided to work with me, 007.”

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Bond was the one leaning against the desk now, long, muscular legs stretched out in front of him, arms crossed, and a fractious look on his face that was only slowly fading away to something like
resignation. He was watching Q skeptically, the occasional clenching of his jaw showing just how not keen he was to do this.

“You can always back out, Bond-”

“Can it, Q, and do whatever you’re going to do.” Bond sighed, rolling his head back and then bringing it up to look at Q again warily. “That after-mission high always leads to poor decision-making on my part. At least my rash decisions will count for something for once.”

“That’s the spirit, Bond,” Q couldn’t help but tease and pretended not to notice the acidic glare those blue eyes directed at him. Q was instead focusing inwards, feeling his stomach do a flip as he realized that he was really going to do this. His light mood faltering along with his optimism, he gave a tight frown and added, “Chances are this won’t work anyway. Cats’ brains are much different than a person’s, and don’t even get me started on their energy.”

“Maybe asking a Mundane to work with you would have been better?” Bond asked, trying to be helpful. He didn’t tense or get up as Q walked forwards, showing no actual fear of what the Quartermaster planned even though he’d been arguing against it horrendously. “Silva said that Angels were the hardest.”

Hearing Bond quote Silva was strangely grating when the agent wasn’t also expressing anger – somehow, it made it seem like he was actually hearing the other wingless man’s voice. Hiding a wince, Q came forward until he knew he was close enough to touch Bond’s head, even though that meant he had to stand over Bond’s legs because the agent made no move to change his position. “I don’t have the luxury of time,” Q shook his head, “Or else maybe I’d try to take things slowly like that. Instead-”

“You’ve got time for me and a cat, I get it,” Bond grumbled, turning his head away and then back again – twice – showing the unease he was controlling so admirably.

Q decided to see if he could ease Bond into this. If the man was brave enough to put up with what was probably a ridiculously bad plan, the least Q could do was try for a decent bedside manner.

“What do you remember from when Silva knocked you out?” Q as gently and patiently.

Still watching Q narrowly, Bond nonetheless answered in a steady, measured tone that was brittle around the edges like ice, “Eye contact. After that, nothing.”

“Hm.” Q actually remembered more from all of the times Silva had manipulated his mind, making him wonder if this was another case of wingless Angel’s differing from those who still had their feathers. “Well…er…this will probably be different,” he hedged.

“How so?” asked Bond sensibly.

Q tried on a lopsided smirk. “I said I didn’t think it would work, didn’t I? Now, I’m going to put a hand on either side of your head. Silva…Silva was able to do this without touching. Sometimes. I doubt I’ll be able to.”

“Do what you have to, Q,” Bond sighed. Although still a bit fidgety, Q was humbled by the fact that Bond seemed to be trusting him. The Angel who could throw someone as light as Q across a room was instead sitting still and merely watching as Q lifted his hands and brought them closer. Q expected at least a flexing of muscles as his fingertips came uncertainly to rest against either temple, but Bond’s face barely shifted.

‘Okay…now or never.’ Q took a deep breath to center himself and pressed his hands against either
side of Bond’s head.

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Chapter End Notes

haha Cliffhanger! I'll try to get the next chapter up soon!

...Part of me wants to do a flashback of Q trying to hypnotise that cat...

And another flashback for how 004 survived his one-on-one 006-time ;) Oh, the possibilities! Bwahaha
Chapter 19 and Interlude

Chapter Summary

Q begins to practice ‘lesson one’ in earnest, with Bond’s obliging help.

Or the chapter in which Bond regrets his obliging help, and things get a bit dicy a time or two as Q manages to rile a 00-agent. Twice.

ALSO WITH THE INTERLUDE BETWEEN 006 AND 004! *non-004/006 shippers beware*

Chapter Notes

I'm pretty proud of this chapter :D I hope you enjoy the interlude - and for my commenter who wanted a bit of sexy 006, this is a little bit closer to that ;)

I was lol-ing so hard while typing up the Interlude *most fun I've had all day*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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A three-word system: one to captivate, one to capture, one to manipulate.

Q was flustered, wondering what to say, feeling his power tingling in his fingertips like the fluttering of ribbons in an uncertain wind. He’d barely needed words for the cat, but he could sense instinctively that this was different – Bond was different, obviously. The sensation of opposing supernatural energy was foreign, as was a person who could look back at him and understand him. Unnerved suddenly by being so close to the agent, Q focused somewhere on the middle of Bond’s head, trying to pull himself together. “Bond…” Q tried to use the man’s name as the first word, meant to capture his attention – it was like the first word in a trap, luring the foot into the waiting snare.

With the cat, it had been easy: a click of his tongue, and the previously-disinterested cat had flicked its eyes in his direction. After that, it hadn’t looked away as Q had quietly whispered, “Hey,” or something like that – the second word, which closed the trap and caught he mind that had leaned too close.

No such progress was made now with Bond. The man’s head twitched, eyebrows lowering, and he almost opened his mouth to ask what Q wanted. True, Q had his attention, but Q couldn’t do anything with it. He realized then that he needed something that would take his defenses down.

“James,” the new name fell out of Q’s mouth almost without thinking, and he felt the click inside of his head as his Angel energy focused, waiting for an opening. 007, startled by the use of his first
name, looked up to Q’s eyes in a different way than before.

The difference between someone just making eye-contact and making eye-contact reflexively was that the second was an involuntary action, in which the body out-paced the mind for a second, and in that second, Q had what he wanted. He gasped a little as he felt his power slip like fingers into a cracked door. The next word would open it, but Q was honestly just flabbergasted that he’d made it this far, and stood in shock with his fingertips lightly dancing at the edges of Bond’s rugged face and those blue eyes locked on his with strange stillness.

Q fought the urge to laugh a little hysterically, because deep down, he really had been preparing for utter, abject failure at this.

And suddenly Bond slipped loose. Q learned at that point why this trick was harder to do on Angels: that bridge of energy he’d created between himself and 007, sewn through the touch of his hands and the focus of his eyes, was suddenly disrupted by the surging tide of the Angel energy inside of Bond. Just like that, Bond gritted his teeth and looked away, and Q felt all of his progress go up in smoke and his energy turned right off with a snap. The feeling was jarring…uncomfortable…and Q’s triumph turned to a rage at himself, because it always seemed that no matter how much control he got over his life, he was still a cripple and his energy was so bloody fickle that it may as well have never bothered turning on. Q was so busy seething inwardly that he barely noticed Bond’s rough hands on his arms, walking him backwards until 007 himself had room to stand and cross quickly to the other side of the room. Only then did Q look up, pushing aside the annoyance and the emptiness in his belly where energy should have been, to see the Angel’s wings spread in agitation, rare tension written in every line of Bond’s back.

“007?” Q asked, voice steady and cautious. He didn’t ask any more, because he was pretty sure what the problem was. ‘What’s bothering you?’ seemed awfully redundant when Q had just been yanking at his mind. The real question was whether Bond was going to react like a calm person…or a startled 00-agent. The latter tended to react with violence, trained to survive. Q was a good fighter, and had prepared for that possibility, but he hadn’t planned on his energy guttering like a candle in a wind. Uneasy, he backed up himself, until he could just feel the door-handle behind him.

Bond was still on the other side of the room, facing the wall with one hand lifted and presumably scrubbing at his face, his whole body almost noticeably thrumming. Bond, whom Q had always pegged as almost annoyingly calm except in the most extenuating circumstances. Then again, this was probably an ‘extenuating circumstance’, so Q accepted the broad, extended wings as his due. Bond had a wingspan that was nothing short of impressive, and grey flight-feathers were brushing opposite walls of Q’s office. If Bond went ballistic in here, he’d probably destroy just about everything just by turning around, the space was so small.

The space suddenly felt cramped, too, as Bond did just that, managing to turn somehow without cleaning off Q’s desk with his wings but also without pulling those wings in at all. Suddenly Q was facing Bond again, with wings outstretched like vengeance and a stony, tense look on that man’s face. For a moment, Q felt ridiculous awe instead of fear like he should have.

But Bond didn’t attack. A muscle was jumping alongside his jaw and he was breathing a bit too quickly out his nose, but the tight bunching of his muscles lasted only a minute longer before he released it, sighing. “Sorry,” he said tightly, but in that rebellious tone of voice he’d apparently used once when he’d broken into M’s house, which indicated he didn’t really mean it. Q just nodded, ready to accept the gesture regardless of sincerity. He slowly slid his hand away from the door-handle as it became less likely that 007 was going to resort to physical violence.

“Your reaction is understandable,” Q said without any hint of his usual sarcasm or dryness, deciding
that a professional tone of acceptance was better if he wanted to keep his bones unbroken, "I was essentially taking control of your head."

"Silva did that to you for hours, didn’t he?" Bond asked shrewdly, this new experience giving him understanding even if he didn’t relax.

Despite the way the new topic was unpleasant and unexpected, Q kept his face calm and his voice detached and even mildly pleasant, "Well, Silva had a far better grasp on this. There are three steps to this skill, and so far, it seems I can’t get past the first one with anything but a cat." He didn’t mention that that was all he’d tried, or that Bond had been the one to stop him this time – blaming was pointless, especially with the 00-agent so tense already.

Surprisingly, Bond reacted to this by calming down, although it seemed to take effort. Noticing that his wings were still out like storm clouds, the agent made a grumbling comment (which Q could not interpret but was probably fairly derogatory to the world in general) and pulled them back in. He knocked over a mug with ‘Q’ written on it, but caught it mid-fall without even looking. Still eyeing Q with something between frustration and resignation, the blond agent returned the mug to the desk. "So – there are two more steps to this? Before you have complete control over my head?"

This suggested that 007 was going to let Q continue playing with his head, and that made Q blink in open surprise. "Theoretically. I’m already finding out that my practice on Perkins’s cat is decidedly different than working on you."

Jaded humor filled Bond’s eyes as he raised one eyebrow in a dry expression – and then leaned back on the desk again, still standing but returning to a more relaxed pose that made Q sigh quietly in relief. "You don’t say?"

"I still know what I’m doing, though," Q huffed as this finally ruffled his nonexistent feathers, and he crossed his arms. Then uncrossed them, realizing that Bond still hadn’t shown any concrete interest in being a guinea pig anymore. Uncertain, Q made himself ask slowly and carefully, "That is – if you still want to help me.” He hurried to add, keeping his impending disappointment off his face with the same ease that he usually hid frustration or temper, "I understand if you do not. Of anyone, I understand how hard it is – how wrong – to give control of your own mind to a stranger."

Surprisingly, Bond just blinked at this, nonplussed. He stretched his good wing out idly, and it was disconcerting that it was so big that the longest feathers would have touched Q if the Quartermaster hadn’t reflexively stepped back. Neither bothered by this nor amused, Bond held Q’s eye and said with utter sincerity, “You’re not a stranger, Q. Although I’m not going to lie…” Bond paused, running his hand over his face in what was becoming a familiar sign of irritation and unease. His voice dropped to a low and truthful growl, “I didn’t much care for this.”

Q winced in sympathy. Obviously, losing control would be anathema to a 00-agent whose whole life – especially the act of keeping it – depended on the utmost self-control.

"But,” Bond went on, voice unexpectedly returning to a normal octave, and then he was sitting on the desk again (seriously, was the man incapable of using chairs?), “if it’s helping you, then we’ll keep doing it.” While Q battled with pleasant shock at this turn of events, Bond even tried on a shadow of his roguish smile, adding tauntingly, “Besides, as you are so fond of saying, Quartermaster, you may never make it past this first step! I probably have nothing to worry about.”

The thin-lipped smile that traced its way across Q’s face was equally challenging as the dig got to him a little. “You’re talking to the resident prodigy of MI6 right now,” he reminded Bond with a sliver of pride and another sliver of warning, which only served to ignite a look of interest in 007’s pale-blue eyes, “I cracked MI6’s security system in under an hour to gain entrance as
Surprise flashed across Bond’s face, and Q gave himself a mental point even as he savored the rare look. This wasn’t widely shared information – in fact, it was an MI6 secret. The last Quartermaster, and the one before, and so on, had all had to pass that test. Q to this day didn’t know if it was to prove a Quartermaster’s hacking skills or to find out who was a threat to MI6 and then employ them just to be safe. No one had even come close to Q’s speed at completing this task, and M had looked at him askance for a month. He wondered what the entrance exam had been for Quartermasters before the prevalence of computer firewalls and security. “I intend to succeed at this, Bond, so all that remains to be seen is whether you want to help or if you want to walk away now,” Q finished, his voice letting it be known that both options were acceptable.

“Quartermaster, when have you known me to just walk away? I’m practically the king of running headfirst into foolish ideas – now lets get on with this.” Bond beckoned him forward with a repeated roll of his wrist, getting impatient now. “I might be attracted to foolish ideas, but only until my debilitated sense of self-preservation kicks in, and that will be soon.”

Q had to snicker a little at the self-characterization, because it was dead-on accurate – he had no idea how many times he’d been listening to Bond run through a hail of bullets while mentally (sometimes out loud) screaming at the man’s total lack of good decision-making skills. Nonetheless, it truly seemed that 007 was willing to keep helping him, so Q walked forward again. This time, Bon was considerate enough to not have his long, muscular legs stretched out and in the way, but Q still had to come forward until he nearly brushed the man’s knees. As calm and collected as a glass of champagne once again, Bond just idly watched him.

As Q started reaching up for his head, the Quartermaster paused, coming to a decision and looking at Bond seriously to inform him, “I think it best if I just keep practicing that first step, as that will probably be best for both of us.”

“Sounds fine by me, Q,” Bond said with an almost disturbing amount of acceptance. Damn – when the man decided to calm down, he did nothing by halves. Then again, Q had also heard him on missions, and knew that the man could lie like a dog and cover his real emotions just as easily. This calm, charmingly relaxed façade was actually one that Q had heard him use before, so Q worried that there was actually a lot of edginess hidden underneath.

Pushing worry aside (although his mouth was set in a grim line as he considered the eventual fallout of all this), Q nodded and placed his hands on either side of Bond’s head again, feeling fine strands of blond hair as his fingertips just nudged into the man’s hairline. The tanned skin was warm, and Q was momentarily distracted despite his best efforts. ‘Focus, Q.’ “All right, the only point of this exercise is really just capturing your attention.”

“Capture is a rather literal term.”

“You can be flippant about this or you can let me work,” Q retorted, since Bond had already given in to helping in the first place. He went back to thinking out loud and explaining, “I think that it works best when you take someone off-guard.” Which he’d done, unexpectedly, just by using Bond’s first name, a rather intimate fact that he was not going to contemplate right now. “-But I know that Silva didn’t need to do that, so it should be possible for me to grasp this even though you know what’s coming. You do, correct?” Q made eye-contact again, one eyebrow raised because he actually wasn’t sure – he himself remembered most everything about having his mind taken over, but Bond was different, and possibly didn’t.

Turned out he did: “The feeling of your world narrowing suddenly to one point is hard to miss, especially when you can’t change it back.”
“Oh,” Q blinked, surprised to realize that this was almost the exact description he’d had in his head more than once. Whenever Silva had caught his attention with that first word, it had been as if every sound but that word was torn away, every sight but those eyes fading out of existence…and when the second word hit, thoughts did the same thing until there was only the command.

Q shivered at the memory, at the heartless, cold way with which Silva had wielded his power – but then he steadied himself and focused on learning. He refused to be the sadist Silva had been, but he still had to match the other wingless Angel if he were ever going to hold his own against him in the future.

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In this manner, the next fifteen minutes were a waste of both their time. It was good that it was the end of the day, or people might have questioned the long absence of the two. As it was, there were probably rumors starting already, and Q had resigned himself to at least a week of brutally squashing those rumors. At least anyone listening at his door would be deeply disappointed by the near-silence in the room beyond, with the exception of Q occasionally talking.

Sometimes there was also Bond laughing, which was definitely getting annoying, although Q forbore lecturing the agent in favor of scrutinizing his failures. It truly was harder to succeed when there was no element of surprise, and Q felt like he was clawing for a handhold on a closed door. He couldn’t get any purchase.

Despite Bond’s increasing teasing as Q failed again and again to capture his focus as he had before, the Quartermaster was learning. He didn’t score so high on his IQ tests just by being lazy and batting his eyes, after all, and his mind was keen enough to notice little bits of useful data every time.

He’d learned that tone mattered. With Perkins’s cat, he’d realized that, but had discarded that idea as something unique to mind-controlling felines – without knowing words, of course tone would matter. But apparently it did with Angels, too, because Q failed magically less quickly when he used a quiet, level tone. It didn’t have to be commanding, surprisingly, and seemed to depend more on subtlety and a certain, focused gentleness.

“Quartermaster,” Q remembered Silva saying, voice like silk to bind him up in before he even knew how to struggle.

Q gave his head a small, physical shake to brush away the memory. He tried to keep his mind only on the useful memories, but it was like digging through mud to find tiny flecks of gold.

Keeping in mind that the words were just vessels for his internal energy – but important vessels – Q suddenly pulled together all of the little lessons he’d been gleaming and returned his attention to Bond without warning. “Listen to me!” he hissed, and his words held a new echo of power even in his own ears.

Immediately, Bond stiffened, and that playful, teasing smile he’d been affecting was wiped off his face in an instant. Q’s eyes were narrowed in determination and concentration, this time snapping Bond’s gaze to his with power alone instead of cheating and using surprise as a way in. Bond had been lazily making eye-contact and obviously underestimating just how quickly Q learned…

It was fascinating. It took a lot to maintain control, and the urge to go on to the second word and
solidify his hold was almost overwhelming, but Q’s intellectual side was just staring in wonder at what he’d accomplished. Clinically, he prodded mentally at the tenuous hold he’d created, even as he knew that the first step wasn’t made for this…the first step was supposed to be temporary until you could get the hook in.

As if to prove that point, Bond suddenly broke free again, and this time it was a little bit more physically dangerous than before.

Wings snapped out, the velocity and suddenness of the motion creating a veritable vortex of air that blew Q’s hair back from his head and nearly took his glasses off. Where there had previously been open space on either side of him, there were now feathers, and the sensation of being knocked out of Bond’s head so strongly was jarring to the point of making Q dizzy. His arms lifting reflexively to ward off trouble, Q nearly lost his footing as he squeezed his eyes shut against vertigo.

Looking back, Q realized how easily Bond could have killed him at that point. Off-balance and disoriented, the Quartermaster couldn’t have put up much of a fight, and if Bond’s survival instincts had demanded it, he could have snapped Q in two. Personally, Q recalled breaking free of a mind-control, and how raw everything was – for a field agent, that could turn lethal in a second even if they’d regret their actions later.

But instead, Q was given the chance to stand unsteadily, arms crossed in front of his face and shoulders hunched, breathing a bit raggedly as his mind recovered. Then, as he got over the dizziness and mental-fuzziness, he realized that he was still standing where he was, and Bond was still where he was, and neither of them were moving to either attack or defend. Bond was breathing fast, too, heavy sounds like his broad chest pulling in deep breaths of air. Q lowered his arms rather quickly, surprised that he hadn’t at least been thrown against the opposite wall.

His every muscle visibly quivering in the attempt to control himself, Bond’s blue eyes were so stormy as to be a shade darker, and it was clear how rattled he’d been. When under the control of another mind, it was hard to express one’s reaction – you could panic all you wanted, but only on the inside. When you got free, it was like opening a compressed container, and Q was lucky that the explosion of motion in Bond’s wings had been the worst of it.

Standing now with feathers walling him in and a very unstable 007 in front of him, Q began to truly reconsider the logic of this plan. Not moving a muscle other than he let his hands rest – open and obviously unarmed – at his side, Q stood and just watched Bond carefully, from the stiff clenching of his jaw to the deep rise and fall of his muscular chest. His hands were gripping the desk lightly, however, which Q knew was a bad sign, because that meant they were ready to move. If they tightened, they wanted to tighten around the neck of an opponent, not some useless desk. “007?” he said, very low and very slowly, also careful to make sure it didn’t sound anything like the voice he’d used earlier when testing out his powers.

For a moment, Bond just remained looking back at him, eyes just this side of feral and body just this side of unleashing violence. Then, with obvious effort, he held his breath a moment, and when 007 actually closed his eyes and counted to ten, Q finally breathed a subtle sigh of relief. “Bloody-“ the agent snarled, turning his head aside and finally relaxing his body a little while also swallowing repeatedly as if he’d just eaten something unpalatable.

“I’m indelibly glad you didn’t strangle me just now,” Q felt the need to note, his voice light only because Bond looked like he was going to throw up, and that was exactly how Q had felt on the plane. *Quid pro quo.* And the danger had obviously passed.

“Don’t forget – there’s still time!” Bond groused in a vehement, rasping tone as he leaned over to the side, vaguely in the direction of Q’s trashcan, although he didn’t vomit. Wings still mostly spread and
eyes closed as he focused on calming himself, the 00-agent exploded, “Q, I could have killed you just then!”

“I noticed,” the Quartermaster pointed out. He realized that he was speaking as if he were untouchable right now, but he was the Quartermaster, wasn’t he? With the exception of M, no one dealt as closely with the 00-agents and their lethal nature. It paid to pretend you were unbreakable.

Sitting back up and delivering a gimlet glare, Bond pressed, “And I nearly did.” It was what 007 said next that surprised Q. “If you keep taking things only halfway like that, I’m going to come out of it and do something that gets you killed – and then me killed, because M has a low tolerance for me murdering fellow MI6 employees.” Bond grimaced, and now he was tightening his grip on the desk, as if to keep his hands there while he glared to the side at the wall.

“So…” Q tried to puzzle this out, wondering if he’d heard correctly. “You’re actually encouraging me to take this further? You want me to take control of your head? That’s the next step, you know.”

“Of course, I bloody know!” Bond snapped, still very tightly strung by 00-standards. It was rare to see one so undone like this, but Q didn’t take any pride in this. He knew perfectly well that the only thing more dangerous than a typical 00-agent was one that was stressed. “But that’s the point of this, right? You need to get this figured out, and I’d rather not kill you somewhere along the way. So get smart about this.” There was actually a lot of threat in that tone, because Bond wasn’t playing around. At long last, however, he seemed to notice that he’d startled the Quartermaster with all of this, and rolled his head back on his shoulders with a sigh. Purposefully, he folded his wings away, and Q felt their absence like a new loss as they receded past his own shoulders and then tucked behind Bond’s. “Look – I’m not going to lie. I’d be an idiot to lie and you’d be an idiot to believe me. I hate this.”

“I gathered that. Do you still want-?”

“Don’t ask me if I want to do this, Q,” Bond snapped irritably and with a grimace, still facing the ceiling with his eyes closed. Then he threw Q for another loop by giving in with perfect grace and a calmer tone: “I said I’d help you, and I will. I’m completely amoral on the field, but inside MI6, with my Quartermaster, I keep my word.” One sage eye opened a crack and slanted towards Q. “Just make sure that the next time you try that, you take control of my mind and you hold it. You’re good enough to do that, I know it, so stop being an idiot by holding back. It’s a dangerous thing to do with me, and you can bet it will be even more dangerous with Silva.”

That was easily the longest speech Q could remember hearing from Bond, and also had a ring of truthfulness in it that struck right to his core and left the Quartermaster feel unaccountably moved. He shifted from foot to foot, trying to grasp and feelings that were flitting about just beneath his subconscious.

What he decided to say, however, was, “I think you’re the first person to ever call me an idiot to my face,” in a completely aloof, slightly dry, tone.

Bond just smirked. “Don’t expect it to be the last. Now do you want to get back to work or not?”

INTERLUDE

about a week earlier

The Trials and Tribulations of 004
004 peered around the corner, his face still as unreadable as a vault but his pale wings twitching slightly. Spending a couple of days cooped up in MI6 with Alec Trevelyan for company would make anyone twitch.

Alec had already been bored out of his mind, what with his healing injury keeping him from doing anything reckless and/or exciting. Combined now with the orders to remain at MI6, the agent was just about ready to climb the walls. And the only game he seemed to be able to think of that kept his mind off the boredom was ‘Let’s Hunt 004’.

Theoretically, the threat of the mole in MI6 was what prompted the orders for 004 and 006 to stay in residence. If trouble happened, they were the fire-power waiting in reserve, nearby so that action could be taken quickly. So far, however, there was no sign of any kind of trouble they could fix, and 004 was increasingly certain that his addition to this assignment was an act of sadism on the part of the Quartermaster.

Seeing that 006 wasn’t in the adjoining corridor, 004’s wings settled lower on his back in a relaxed posture. 006, who was actually padding up with relaxed stealth behind him, fought the urge to laugh and give himself away.

Unfortunately for Alec and his games (and his ego, to be honest), 004 was not easy prey. Already assured of victory and not quite as alert or tense as he’d usually be on a mission, Alec failed to notice that 004’s weight was still settled on the pads of his feet, evenly distributed, and when the calm voice spoke with was totally lacking in surprise, “If you want to talk to me, 006, it would be much easier to just walk up to my face like a normal person.”

Alec deflated even as he found his mouth stretching in a smile, frustrated at being called out but secretly amused and impressed that 004 could be that alert and still hide it. “What would the fun in that be?” Alec asked as he casually strolled now up to 004’s side, as if that had been the plan all along.

What had the plan been all along? Well, 004 wouldn’t get to find out now, poor man. Alec had a high opinion of his wiles, and was finding it increasingly funny to try them on the stoic and straight-laced 004. Just to be a pain, he bumped his wing against 004’s – dark against pale – as he came alongside him, hard enough to jar lesser men.

Lesser men who were not fully-trained double-o’s, who apparently refused to be jostled. Still, 004 shot him a mildly annoyed look. “So – what is it you wanted to talk to me about, 006?” the smaller man asked nonetheless, because that was the polite thing to do.

Quite unabashedly – obviously, really – Alec was admiring the way that 004’s brown hair spiked up in the front even when it wasn’t stiffened with blood or sweat like before. The black-winged Angel wasn’t much for subterfuge (let 007 play that game), and let it be known by his appreciative gaze how fun he’d find it to run his hands through that hair and spike it more. “Forgot. But give it a minute, I’m sure it’ll come back to me.”

Now 004 was actively frowning at him, but still too much of a ‘good boy’ to just punch him in the nose and tell him to stop playing around. “Care to explain why you’ve been following me around for the past few days then?” 004 asked, obviously fighting not to sound demanding. That was 004 – keeping it cool.

006 loved to take apart that cool. Lips stretching a broader smile and eyes still taking time on different facets of 004’s face – wondering why he hadn’t taken the time to appreciate the man’s face before, with its straight, clean lines and sharp angles – Alec just shoved his thumbs into his belt-loops and replied, “Is there anything wrong with that?”
004 blew out an annoyed breath through his nose, finally giving in and muttering under his breath as he turned his head away, “Why do I even bother…?”

“Admit it, 004 – you wish you were reckless and daring like me,” Alec rejoined shamelessly.

“No, I’m pretty sure I’d just die if I were reckless and daring like you. Lady Luck is running herself ragged keeping you and 007 alive, I’m sure.”

That actually set Alec to laughing, and he let his wings flare a bit. He’d been obvious before, but now he tried for a bit more subtlety: his left wing extended behind 004, a slightly possessive gesture like an arm thrown behind a theatre seat during an intimate movie. 004 noticed, gave 006 a look, rolled his eyes when he was sure that Alec couldn’t grin a wider without splitting his face, and walked away down the hall.

When Alec – again going soundless like a cat – began to follow him, 004 snapped a wing back without looking, hitting Alec full in the face just as he turned the corner.

Rubbing his jaw a moment later as he watched 004’s straight, receding back, Alec decided that 004 perhaps looked like a lightweight and acted like a nube, but he sure knew how to use his wings like no other Angel 006 had met. That made Alec smirk.

A challenge was just what he needed to pass the time, and it was so nice of 004 to oblige and prove that challenge. It helped that those grey eyes were just a few shades too pale for 006’s liking – but he figured they’d darken with a good bite or two. Now fully dedicated to the game, 006 headed off down another hallway, knowing at least a dozen ways to cut off 004 in the maze of MI6.

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Chapter End Notes

Sorry if the bit about Q’s powers is hard to understand - it's a concept I've had in my head for ages, and it's grown into such a monster that it's hard to pull out, not unlike a weed that has grown through a sidewalk. So I perhaps describe it over and over again to try and smooth out its rough edges.

I hope you at least liked Q’s 'Bonding' time!

Coming soon: The Trials and Tribulations of Jerry Perkins's Cat
Chapter 20 and Interlude

Chapter Summary

Q gets a little bit further with his hypnosis technique.

Or the chapter in which Bond is a little bit dangerous and a little bit endearing.

NOW WITH FELINE INTERLUDE!! :D

...I sound like a commercial...

Chapter Notes

At long last - a brief summary of how Q got along with Jerry Perkins's cat. It's not a comprehensive study of their time together, because that would be too long, but I think I got the highlights ;)

Warning: I don't own a cat. Therefore, ignore any mistakes I might make in regards to this one XP

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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By this point, Q’s leg was killing him and he was perfectly aware that Bond was just one sliver of self-control away from snapping him in half out of pure reflex. It was also getting late, even by Quartermaster standards. Therefore, it went unspoken that he had one more chance at this, and then it was over for tonight – possibly forever, if a night of sleep convinced Bond that this was lunacy.

“All right, 007,” he sighed, shifting his weight onto his good leg again, thankful at least that he hadn’t needed the cane yet, “Once more unto the breach and all that. Ready?”

Bond was inspecting the smaller man with the beginnings of worry in his eyes, and opened his mouth as if to ask if Q were tired – which Q was – but then just closed it again. Hands gripping the edge of the desk again to ground himself and perhaps resist the urge to defend himself, the grey-winged Angel nodded sharply. His expression twitched in a patently unhappy grimace as his Quartermaster once again approached him and placed a hand on either side of his head. But he locked eyes with Q and said forcefully, “Remember, Q – it’s all or nothing. Can you do this?”

“I can most certainly keep you from attacking me,” Q replied with bravado that he didn’t really feel, but at least he managed to keep his face impassive, “And I give you orders well enough without taking over you head, so hopefully that’s a positive sign.” Bond didn’t laugh, but he released one hand from the table just enough to drum his fingers on the edge as he looked away. Then everything was all business again.
Truthfully, upon a frank internal inspection, Q didn’t think that he had the energy to make Bond do anything. That had been the hardest part for Silva, clearly, and with Q even now resisting the urge to turn around, walk away, and plop down on the couch for a nap, he couldn’t see himself doing it. But stubbornness had always been a downfall of Q’s, and he was going to do this.

“Listen,” he said, and his words whispered across the air with a serpentine vibration, almost a hiss like wind hitting dried rushes, and instantly he had Bond’s eyes.

Already, Q could feel that this was harder this time. The first step was the easiest, but it had a cost, too, and Q had to work to snag the whole of Bond’s concentration. He kept his next word simple, making up his mind on what he was going to do: “Just…”

Bond’s breath caught as the claws of Q’s energy reached in and finally just latched on – taking control. The tenuous grip of that first word solidified into steel, one innocuous word like a Trojan Horse to carry Q’s power home. Q remembered this step clearly, and knew that this word and the intense look of Q’s eyes would now encompass the entirety of 007’s world: everything else, every sight, every sound, every thought, would be muted and muffled. It was a horrible feeling, and Q sighed with regret even as he held that proud head between his hands.

With his flicker of regret came a splintering of his attention, and Q knew that he was losing his hold. Before Bond could slip free and do anything instinctive (a.k.a., deadly), Q pulled together the last of his energy and finished his sentence hurriedly, “…Sleep!”

It had been a hurried effort, but Q had remembered Silva saying that putting a person to sleep – shutting them down – was far easier than trying to coerce them into physically doing something. It was uncomplicated, and could be likened to removing something’s battery rather than programming it.

Q must have been more tired than he thought, however, because he realized in that second that he wasn’t totally prepared to deal with an unconscious 00-agent any more than he was prepared to deal with an awake one. With a deft twist of his power, Q succeeded in his last efforts, and immediately 007’s eyes rolled up in his head – then, as if someone had cut all of his strings, he toppled forward off the table, and Q’s leg gave out when he tried to catch him. With a lot of noise and yelping on Q’s part, the two ended up on the floor, Bond a dead-weight on Q’s chest and most of the things from the top of Q’s desk now strewn on the floor where Bond’s wings had inadvertently swept them.

For a long minute Q just lay on the floor panting, a man possibly more than twice his weight sprawled over him. Q told himself that this would be funny later, then told himself to shut up. He was a little bit too stressed and tired out for humor, and pretty much all of his healing injuries ached now. Taking a deep breath and concentrating on infusing his limbs with Angel strength, Q managed to roll 007 away. Then he lay still for a minute more and tried to collect himself, until his breathing had calmed enough that he could hear Bond’s steadier, smoother inhales and exhales next to him. Then the Quartermaster spared time to feel guilty, and scrambled awkwardly up onto one knee by the 00-agent’s side, grimacing as his other leg protested the position.

“Bond,” he called, suddenly realizing that he knew precious little about mentally knocking people unconscious. Again – he’d done so with the cat. But his mind was just stressed enough that he couldn’t remember how he’d awoken the furry little monster. Now he had a big, muscular monster, and he doubted that 007 would forgive him for accidentally putting him in a coma, although Q was pretty sure he hadn’t. Pretty sure. He leaned forward to slap lightly at the man’s cheek. “Bond! Wake up!”

The man didn’t. This from a man who was trained to awaken at the drop of a pin.
Truly worried now, Q firmed his jaw and forced his brain to work like it was supposed to, realizing that he’d gotten into this with Silva’s tricks so he should try to use them to get out of it. Braced with one hand next to Bond’s shoulder with a wing stretched out haphazardly beneath him, Q used his free hand to urgently cup the side of Bond’s face, initiating rough contact via touch since he didn’t have a gateway through the man’s eyes. “Bond!” he snapped, more loudly, glad that everyone in Q-branch must have gone home already not to have heard all the ruckus. Q was so focused that he missed the extra echo his own words had in his head, the subtle sign that he’d gotten his energy working. “Wake up!” he finished his command and was surprised to find that his tone was more furious than anything else. Honestly, double-o’s were nothing but trouble. Bond’s breathing had shifted, though, and one wing gave a twitch. “James-bloody-Bond, wake up,” Q growled, and might have said more, but 007 did exactly that, one arm shooting out so fast that it was nearly impossible to believe that he’d been forcibly knocked unconscious barely moments ago. The hand locked around the same arm that Q had stretched out to slap 007’s face – the problem? At least it wasn’t Q’s neck, but it was the same arm that presently sported stitches.

Q hissed and collapsed back, his bad leg finally clamoring too loudly to ignore as well, giving the Quartermaster no choice but to sit down heavily against Bond’s hip, trying to stretch out the leg. He hadn’t truly minded the brace on it before, but now he felt sore and clumsy, and James-bloody-Bond still had a fist locked around his left forearm. Considering what he’d put Bond through, he figured he didn’t have room to complain, so he just sat where he was, eyes closed in an exasperated, pained grimace while he took steadying breaths.

Groaning as well (he’d fallen off a table onto the floor, with only a rather bony Quartermaster to soften his landing), Bond shook his head and cracked open blue eyes. For a moment, both men just focused on recovering some measure of equilibrium, and then Bond belatedly noticed the tense arm wrapped in white bandages beneath his hand. “Sorry,” he said tightly, but this time sounded more sincere than the last apology. Calloused fingers unlatched. “Well, I’d count that as a success,” Bond noted cautiously.

Q still had his head rolled back between his shoulders, utter exhaustion weighing on him. “Yes,” he articulated dryly, “We’re both on the floor and it’s a miracle neither of us need to go to Medical over this. Quite a success.”

Bond grunted as he sat up. “You need to go to bed, Q.”

“Are you implying that I sound cranky? I’ll have you know that I sound cranky even when I’m not tired.”

“I know that,” Bond retorted, and Q finally rocked his head enough to see Bond’s expression if he opened one eye. The man looked strained but not on the edge of violence. Always a good sign. “I’m just saying that I didn’t exactly expect to be laid out cold on the floor by my Quartermaster.”

That tricked a throaty chuckle out of Q’s chest. “Being underestimated is an art form. I nearly laid you out on the floor in that sparring match before, too.”

By the way Bond was smiling, lines forming at the corners of his crystalline eyes and curving mouth, he found the Quartermaster’s rare brand of humor pleasant. Still smiling, the 00-agent stood up and reached down with an inviting hand. “Up you go, Quartermaster. Everyone else is asleep like sensible people, but I imagine someone is up in Medical. We’d better see if you’ve sprained anything.”

Q scoffed but took the offered hand, feeling a little rush at how quickly and easily Bond pulled him up: one minute he was sitting on the floor, the next he was upright, Bond’s hand warm and tight. “It would make more sense to send you in for a CAT-scan – I’ve been artlessly playing around with
your mind for the past hours.”

“Ah, but you want this to stay unofficial, don’t you?” 007 countered, moving his hands to his pockets and idly stretching one wing, then the other – the right one still perceptibly stiffer and slower. “And you and I both know how nosy Medical is. At least if you go in there, you can just say – truthfully – that you’ve been working too hard and had a little fall.”

“If I have to go to Medical, I’m going to drag you down with me,” Q maintained while he determinedly began setting his office to rights. This was difficult, because his leg had decided that it had had enough of cooperating. Therefore, the first thing that Q limped over to was his cane, leaned against the wall. “I refuse to go quietly into that good Medical wing.”

Bond was doing a halfhearted job of trying not to laugh; his low chuckle reverberated from his chest as he watched his Quartermaster with a fascinated sort of amusement. “If we both went, I think we’d get thrown out of Medical!”

“All the better.” Somehow, Q’s mug had survived being swept off his desk, and he reached down awkwardly to get it only to have Bond at his side, reaching down past him with significantly more grace to snag the mug off the floor. Flashing a winning, charming smile at Q’s faintly surprised face, the 00-agent straightened and returned the mug to its former position.

Q was still staring at him when Bond guessed, “So either I subject myself to the tender mercies of Medical with you, or you won’t go at all, is that how this is going to work?”

Q completely bypassed the comment to eye Bond shrewdly and say cautiously, “You’re never helpful. In fact, you and 006 are usually the opposite of helpful.” And yet here he was, picking up abused mugs.

Lifting one brow the barest fraction at this dogged change of topic, Bond still smirked secretively. “Maybe I’m not quite as set in my troublesome ways as you thought, Quartermaster.” Still with that slight smile tucked into the corner of his mouth, 007 began walking to the door. “No trip to Medical then,” he conceded, “Good night, Quartermaster.”

And with that, he was out the door, shutting it behind him considerately. Q was left leaning on his cane and wondering if maybe he’d misjudged 007, and if maybe he was better off misjudging him than coming to terms with the fact that he might like this new, helpful, charming side.

**INTERLUDE**

About a week earlier

*The Trials and Tribulations of Mr. Perkins’s Cat*

Q-branch was a spread-out piece of work, but most people preferred certain sections of it – and likewise avoided working in the lower reaches of Q-branch, sometimes called ‘the Bunker’ by employees, or even ‘the Dungeons’ depending on what atmosphere you were trying to create. That was generally where a lot of the grunt-work and building (and rebuilding, considering the 00-agents’ track-records for destroying and damaging things) went on.

Jerry Perkins had been moved down there recently when his computer skills were found to be so abysmal that no one knew how in the world he’d been given the job. The only perk was that Perkins turned out to be quite handy with soldering, hence the move downstairs. He seemed happy enough
with the move, as much as it seemed like a demotion.

But perhaps Perkins was harboring more resentment than his coworkers realized, as he started bringing his cat to work. Considering the temperament and habits of said cat, bringing it with him could only be seen as a vindictive gesture.

The cat probably had a perfectly reasonable name, like Stripes or Tom or something like that, but pretty soon every just called it Mothra after the Godzilla monster. Mothra was big and grey and troublesome, and only because Perkins insisted that an animal was just what morale needed did Q allow the animal to stay after finding out about it. Besides, Mothra seemed quite good at mousing, and there was indeed a bit of a pest problem in the low, old wing of Q-branch. Ironically, the cat loved to chase moths.

Soon Q realized his mistake in letting the tomcat stay, however.

Mothra was a monster in striped feline clothing. And not even a very smart monster. Sure, he was a pro at catching any unwanted critters that wandered into the Bunker, but he also had a decidedly suicidal habit of ‘hunting’ wires as well. And if anyone were trying to build something and a nut or small bolt rolled free, Mothra would be there to chase it. He was by no means a young cat, but seemed determined to hunt things down as he had in his distant kittenhood. Mothra presently had an assortment of small metal bits going through his system. Workers had taken to looking over their shoulders and around their feet at odd intervals to make sure that the kleptomaniacal cat wasn’t waiting eagerly for them to drop a washer. Perkins lamented that he kept finding his cat locked in broom-closets, but no culprits ever stepped forward, and it became a hidden secret that at least Mothra couldn’t destroy anything of great use in a broom closet.

Mothra also bit people. Perkins said it was because the cat’s eyesight was bad and he ‘got confused’, but everyone had seen the grey tabby-cat chase an unfortunate mouse: the precision with which Mothra worked precluded any ocular degeneration. The cat’s eyesight was fine: he just liked to bite people’s toes.

Therefore, when Q sat at his desk pulling out his hair over how to practice his new skills before he tried to not kill Bond with them, the cat’s green-eyed face came to mind.

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“Heere, Mothra,” Q called, sitting on the floor and feeling absolutely ridiculous. It was late, of an hour that only insomniac Quartermasters were still up, so at least he wasn’t worried about someone walking in on him.

Mothra stood not far from him, eyeing the bag of cat-treats Q had in one hand with a predator look. Q hoped the cat didn’t attack him, because his leg wasn’t up to anything but sitting and standing – and going from one to the other took a painfully long time.

Luring in Mothra was also taking a long time, for a cat who often liked to be underfoot. “Come here, you buggering little monster.” Q said just as sweetly, and Mothra twitched his ears and raised his tail as if pleased by the words he didn’t understand. Q put on an unpleasant grin. “You get called that more than your name.”

Now the cat – having walked almost to Q’s stretched out, injured leg – seemed to have the presence
of mind to realize that it was being offended. When Mothra laid back its ears and hissed, Q lifted his cane enough to prod at the cat with it, reminding it who was Quartermaster. “Don’t think I won’t go after you with this. You might be a cat, but I’m a cripple, so don’t expect sympathy.” When Mothra continued to glare at him, back arched and offended green eyes slitted, Q glared right back, adding in a low hiss of his own that was entirely too dramatic, “Or mercy!”

Mothra was a dumb cat, but had the sense to realize that it was being threatened. With another throaty hiss, it batted the sole of Q’s shoe impertinently and then retreated. If it had been at all a smart cat, it would have left the Quartermaster alone entirely – then again, if Mothra had been a smart cat, he would have stopped chewing wires and eating metal nuts and washers. Instead, Mothra saw the familiar bag of treats again (pilfered rather elegantly from Perkins’s desk, an act that Q felt no guilt over), and a light of interest returned to those green eyes. Ears tips forward, the sounds of feline anger turned to meows of endearment.

Sighing as he decided that he’d catch more flies with honey than with acid (or, in this case, more Mothra’s with cat-treats than with his cane), Q let his cane rest at his side again and opened the treat-bag. Mothra’s whole body became alert, although he stood sideling to Q as if disinterested. The wingless Angel tossed out one little chunk (to Mothra, a chunk of ‘deliciousness’) and sat back to watch the tabby-cat come forward delicately and eat it as if it were his due. Q did nothing, returning the cat’s look of faked disinterest, which Mothra apparently didn’t recognize as false.

“Hey, Mothra,” Q said in something close to a coo, a voice that he vowed no one would ever hear. He’d never live it down if they did: their wiry, tough Quartermaster, sweet-talking a monster-cat. “Come here, kitty.” He placed another piece of the cat food by his side, pulling back his hand automatically because Mothra was known to even bat at Perkins’s hand – all in play, of course, but it usually included claws. Predictably, Mothra did so, meowing as if offended by Q’s lack of reciprocation. Then Mothra took up the treat and began crunching it loudly and obnoxiously with his yellowed fangs all bared. “Do you crunch on washers that way?” Q felt forced to ask in disbelief, even though the cat wasn’t going to answer. Mothra looked up at him with one eye, a jaundiced sort of look coming from a cat. Q felt as if he’d asked a silly question. Then he felt silly for talking to a cat.

“Okay, Mothra, time to get down to business,” he said in a firmer tone, and began to practice.

The next hour, Q learned quite a lot.

First: Cats win staring contests. Always.

Second: When they don’t want to win, or when you get close to hypnotizing them, they squall. And scratch. Q’s first near-success was met by claws on the back of his hand. It took another half hour to lure Mothra in with treats again. Thank goodness the cat wasn’t very smart, or at least didn’t have a very adequate memory.

The third thing Q learned took a few hours, and that was that the treats would probably run out before Mothra exploded. Because Q would actually feel very bad if he made the resident Dungeon-cat sick, he put the bag away.

Fourth: putting the bag away was considered a declaration of war.

It was a smack-down of epic proportions, if a lame Quartermaster versus a delinquent cat counted as epic. Or even as a smack-down. Had anyone still been at work, they would have been disturbed by the unique duet of howling cat and swearing Quartermaster, as Mothra jumped into Q’s lap and proceeded to try and climb up him towards the hands (now raised above Q’s head) that were sealing the bag of cat-treats. Mothra’s complaints grew more insistent the longer Q refused to open the bag
again, the young man now shouting that Mothra was fat enough and that he’d end up puking if he ate more. To Mothra, these arguments were invalid, and Q acquired a few needle-point claw-marks through the material of his shirt.

Eventually, it ended with Q gaining a totally unexpected victory as he locked eyes with his whiskered foe and snarled something incomprehensible. Suddenly, the cat went still, lambent eyes large, and Q realized that he’d just gripped the cat’s mind.

What there was of it. It slipped loose a moment later as Q’s unpracticed hold loosened, and then there was just Q lying on his back, Mothra on his chest, and the bag still stretched out of reach as if they were small children fighting over a gift from Grandma that had not been labeled clearly enough. Mothra blinked, eyes now less vacant…no, they were still pretty vacant.

Then Mothra reached up and snagged Q’s glasses with a paw and tossed them off his face, dashing away down the hall a split-second later. Q spent the next five minutes trying to find his glasses in the dimly-lit hallway, but the next two hours he spent with the warm glow of victory. And lots of Band-Aids.

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He expected to have a hard time coaxing the cat to come back for another ‘training session’, but it turned out that Mothra’s memory was truly atrocious, or perhaps just selective. The cat came without hesitation the next time Q sat down gingerly on the floor and shook the bag of cat-treats. After that followed a very dysfunctional relationship that depended heavily on bribery and Mothra’s bad memory, and Q’s tolerance of scratches and Mothra’s begging yowls when he put the food away.

During the day, it was noticed that Mothra caught less bugs and mice, but also that he ate fewer bits of metal. Q overheard and commented – as guilelessly as possible – that maybe Mothra had just been hungry before. Seeing as the cat still liked to nibble on the toes of people’s shoes (hard enough that the toes beneath sometimes suffered), this did not improve anyone’s disposition towards the cat.

And if Mothra often looked at Q as if unable to recall whether he loved or hated the human, then that was Mothra’s problem.

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Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed! I'm not really sure where I'm going from here... Don't get me wrong - I have PLANS. Lots. Just not for the next chapter. I've managed to get ahead of myself XD

Just a random note: That saying Q plagiarized is usually something like "I will not go gently into the good night." Not Medical. And that's probably not a verbatim representation of that quote anyway...
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

The chapter in which Silva once again enters the picture, or at least stirs things up a bit.

Or the chapter in which just about everyone is various degrees of riled, peeved, and on edge. Except for 006. 006 could laugh while the world ended.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long pause between posts! And just fyi, I LOVE THIS CHAPTER!! I'm leading up to some really good 'Bonding' time, and even have some snippets written up for later (^u^)

haha I can give people snippets if they ask nicely ;) I did it once before, because I had a snippet that would probably never make it into the actual story. But I don't mind giving out sneak-previews, if people don't mind spoilers.

Anyway - ENJOY! This chapter was fun to write.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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M was well aware that her Quartermaster had his nose out of joint with her, and it was only a short jump from that to conclude that he was likely holding his cards closer now – distrust to combat distrust. If she were being truthful, she’d say she was more proud of her Quartermaster than annoyed over this. From the moment he’d stepped into MI6 not as an agent but as a Quartermaster, he’d built a reputation of being tough as nails and too smart for Mensa to keep up with, and it only made him a better employee to now have him wary, too. And since this secret-keeping had started with M, she had no real right to complain when someone was smart enough (or just stubbornly vindictive enough – both were Q’s style) to follow her example.

Since M trusted more than anything else that Q had the best interests of MI6 at heart, just like she did, M decided to put off on torturing information out of him. Best not to make a mountain out of a secretive molehill that she only had suspicions about. Sipping her morning tea, M opened up her computer, meaning to go through files.

For a moment, she just thought that she’d mis-clicked. M was sharp even first thing in the morning (a trait that she’d been told Q did not share), but little things like a slip of the mouse did happen from time to time. That was her first conclusion as her email popped up instead.

She tensed all over and her silvered wings – usually as motionless as carvings – gave a rustling shiver as she read the first line, written with informal elegance:
Ah, the Dragon of MI6. Despite knowing where you work, you’re a hard woman to reach.

M was holding perfectly still, her hands clenching the arms of her chair. The signs of her unsettled shock were subtle things, and only a handful of people would have noticed the little ticks or the subtle shift of the energy beneath her skin. The Dragon of MI6 was the Iron Wall of MI6, immovable. But not impenetrable. Beneath the mask of her face and her sharply narrowed eyes, she felt emotions spark off, hot as heated silver shards.

The email went on and she read swiftly. It was a fairly brief email, for all of its shuddering impact.

I’ve had a few deep talks with your Quartermaster, but you and I haven’t had the decency of being introduced, have we? Maybe that is for the best, hm? I keep secrets – you keep secrets. Of course, I have found out your secrets.

It was almost possible to sense the chuckle, and beneath the steely layer of control, the leader of MI6 was crackling with something between violence and fear.

Because I am a fair sort of fellow, I’ll go ahead and tell you: I plan to misuse all of that information you’ve been gathering. Very naughty of you, collecting so much information on your fellow Angels. What can help them can also hurt them.

Quartermaster?” M had jabbed the buttons for the intercom, connecting her to Q-branch. There was no telling where in Q-branch the Quartermaster was, but if he had an ounce of ability to read someone’s tone, he’d be running to his office. Once there, he’d route the signal and secure a line.

The email went on:

I’d keep an eye on that Quartermaster of yours, if I were you. People that impeccably smart can be dangerous, don’t you know? And ignoring that, I will have you know that I don’t plan on leaving him alone.
Oh no. I’ve got plans for that one.
Much love, Silva.

Not a moment too soon there was a faint click and the background noise over the intercom cut off sharply, leaving only the sound of Q’s quick breathing as he skidded into what M assumed was his desk-chair. “Yes – M, I’m here. What is it you require?” His voice was just the slightest bit frazzled, proving he’d been startled by the obsidian-shard-sharp edge to M’s voice, a hint of feral temper that was obscured like a shark beneath ice. It was a compliment to Q’s self-control, however, that he
mostly sounded calm and detached except for the faintest waver.

M didn’t even bother with detached. In a voice of vinegar and acid, she snapped, “Check the firewalls, Quartermaster. Silva just sent me an email that opened automatically when I opened up my computer, and I want to bloody know how.”

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Q-branch had already been hectic – after all, its Quartermaster had had a full night’s sleep for once. Granted, it had been on his office couch, but when Q had come out of his door he’d been a veritable typhoon. The fact that he was groggy for at least an hour after that didn’t do much to blunt his energetic determination to get everyone working, although it did prevent him from working anything more complicated than basic binary until he fully woke up.

That difference now was the difference between a row-boat and the Titanic, however. After the strange summons from M had flushed Q into the seclusion of his office, there was silence, and then suddenly Q was storming out again, slamming the door and ignoring the fact that he got a spike of pain up his right leg with every other step. “Haftston, Smith – budge over! I’m using your computers!” he barked in a voice more befitting a general that the usually dry, aloof Quartermaster, and the thunderous look on his face matched that description to a disturbing degree. Something was wrong, and it hadn’t made the Quartermaster’s day in the slightest. He was across the room in seconds, taking one of the hastily vacated seats and beginning to work with both screens. Images reflecting rapidly in his glasses as he began to open programs and windows, he continued to bark orders as Q-branch roused itself. “Whittecker – I want you and your team to look at some data. I’m linking in to M’s computer and will send it to you.” He’d barely snapped that before he added, “Done. Open the file and take it apart – I want to know what its innards look like.” Then the Quartermaster was up again. “Take your seats back, you two – I’ve set up a program, and I want you to run it. It should be bloody obvious when it hits a snag – then I want you to call me.”

Whittecker lifted his voice timidly from across the room, where he and another man and two women were working on their computers in a little pod, “Um…sir? Why are we looking at one of M’s emails?”

“Think that I’m invading her privacy?” Q turned and said back without an ounce of amusement in his voice. He had to shift his weight swiftly as the turn landed him too hard on his bad leg, making it shake. He’d left his cane in his office and had no intentions of going to get it – it would slow him down too much. The brace and whatever healing his Angel side had managed to complete would have to be satisfactory. “Don’t think that I can’t. It just so turns out that that email should never have gotten in. I wired up that program to check the firewalls.” He jerked his chin towards Haftston and Smith, now back and their computers looking owlish. Q’s program was good enough that they’d be able to work with it, however.

And Q had just gotten started. He’d had a deep abiding hatred of Silva and his games before now, but to think that the man had gotten past his security systems – even if only to slip in an email – was a final cut to Q’s thick skin that he couldn’t stand for. The Quartermaster of MI6 was well and truly roused now.

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It turned out that an email was all Silva had managed to sneak in – no viruses or hidden programs attached, with the exception of one that was a trigger to open it automatically. Q’s program saw the loophole that had been exploited like a tiny little tear in the mesh of MI6’s electronic defenses, barely big enough to even notice. Q himself had a far tighter mesh of defenses around his own systems, which explained why M had been emailed and not him, although Q rather figured that he’d been meant to read it eventually. The final words and their obvious threat sat like a ball of thistles in his stomach, and it took some effort to keep working and not dwell on it.

Per M’s orders, things continued to be busy in Q-branch long after the email was evaluated as unthreatening – one hole meant the possibility of more, and even if M hadn’t ordered him to, Q would have just about overhauled the system to wipe out the problem. He could stand 00-agents laughing at him, but he couldn’t stand the thought of his systems being shown as less than perfect, so he continued marching around Q-branch. Somehow, even with glasses, a limp, and a body that wouldn’t intimidate a kindergartener, the Quartermaster was no less intimidating than a full-grown Komodo dragon.

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The next thing that M did after making sure that the rogue email was being safely (and probably viciously) taken apart by Q-branch was to sit back, take a deep breath that it wouldn’t do to have her underlings see her taking, and then call for 007. He had just made it home yesterday, and she knew the habit of 00-agents for sleeping at least their first nights back in their break room – after missions, emotions were rawest and reflexes were on unpredictable triggers, and the double-o’s realized that they needed the inherent safety of MI6 while transitioning from a state of ‘danger’ to ‘safety’. In keeping with this theory, the man was in her office within fifteen minutes, enough time for him to make the walk from the break-room to there with a minimal pause to make himself look presentable. He still looked very much like he’d been sleeping moments ago, but that only served to make him look more handsome, in a ruffled, just-had-sex kind of way instead of in his usual, impeccable, and well-dressed kind of way. “What is it you need, M?” he asked in a variation of Q’s question only hours earlier, although with a lot more calmness.

M simply slid across a printed version of the email to him. 007 had been about to sit down, no doubt, but M’s cryptic nature put him instantly on the edge of action. The blonde man instantly took the few strides up to her desk to lean forward and swiftly peruse the printed letters, wings pulling away slightly from his back like an old Western gunmen keeping his arms loose and hands unencumbered. “What is this?” he said in a low and dangerous voice.

“Mr. Silva is obviously not out of our hair yet,” M replied frankly, hands folded one wrist over the other and wings preternaturally still – a skill that she was known for. “This was sent to me this morning and opened itself up, making it rather difficult to miss. Q has already tracked down where it got in and is fixing the problem, and has informed me that the email itself is in no way a threat.”

“It is a threat,” Bond countered in a voice that was somehow even lower than before as he looked down at the paper. Almost unconsciously, two of his fingertips swiped across the word ‘Quartermaster’.

M approved. “Q has also found where the email was sent from, but says that the ease with which he
tracked it – and the location he tracked it to – suggest that it’s a dead-end. I’m sending out 006 to look into it anyway, before he drives us all nuts.” Briefly, she thought of 004, who had been doing a great service to his country by taking up most of Alec’s attention, but knew that she would throw him under that particular bus (or agent, as it may be) again if the need arose. She turned her attention more firmly to Bond. “What I called you in for I consider more important.” M never beat around the bush. “I want you to watch Q.”

Bond looked up from the email for the first time, but his eyes didn’t look very surprised at the order itself – if M were to guess, she would guess that he was simply surprised that he’d gotten the job. But still, not very. “You’re thinking in a bodyguard capacity?” he guessed sensibly, the contents of the email making this leap of logic easy.

“Yes. I rather like my Quartermaster, and words cannot describe the levels of temper I feel when I so much as think about this Silva character somehow getting hold of him,” M informed 007 with prim tartness and a level of warning in her voice that Silva would have done well to be wary of. She was entirely serious. “MI6 should keep him safe, but if Silva can get an email in, who knows what else he can get in? So keep an eye on him, Agent Bond.” She tapped a few keys on her keyboard before looking back at him and adding, “I have sent him a message to inform him that you and 006 will be on your way, explaining the details.” Maybe something that almost hinted at humor replaced a fraction of the cold fury in M’s eyes as she admitted, “Considering all that is going on, I doubt he’ll read it before you get there, but that might be for the best. I can’t imagine the Quartermaster being welcoming of the idea of you as a bodyguard.”

Bond had the audacity to grin, even if the slow pulse of his energy still spoke of violence. “Why wouldn’t he be welcoming?” he asked in a mild and falsely offended voice, “I’m told that I’m incredibly charming.”

Ignoring the fact that Bond was smirking like the fox in the henhouse, M reminded her best agent in no uncertain terms, “You’d better do this right, 007, because 00-agents are replaceable.” She let that sink in before adding by way of dismissal, “And if Q ends up in any way hurt, you’ll think fondly upon my last lecture on the subject. Now go collect 006 and report to Q-branch.”

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In true Alec Trevelyan fashion, 006 took the news quite well, as if the same psychopath who had nearly killed them were not making threats now. He even managed to hide the vicious hardening of his eyes when he heard about the threats to their Quartermaster. The mission itself sounded easy enough on 006’s part, especially since his shoulder was on the mend enough to survive a simple information-gathering. Alec’s cheery mood was infectious, especially since Alec had no qualms about teasing Bond about his own mission as bodyguard. “Want to share?” Alec asked as they walked, the shameless cast to his leer giving the question double-meaning.

“The job or the Quartermaster?” Bond returned in kind while keeping his eyes focused forward, although the smile that played on the corner of his mouth was probably taking lessons from 006’s lecherous one.

By the time both 006 and 7 reached Q-branch, both of them were in maddeningly playful moods. 006, standing next to 007, had been chuckling this whole time as if he were watching a circus instead of a veritable human storm inside Q-branch. Then again, Alec had probably been the kind of little
kid who could throw a rock at a beehive and still laugh until he got stung at least three times. Q-
branch certainly looked like the metaphorical unsettled beehive. Because laughing wasn’t quite
cutting it for 006 anymore, he raised his volume without warning to say in a voice that conspicuously
carried even as he ostensibly directed it at Bond, “Our little boffin looks just adorable bustling around
like that, doesn’t he? With his little limp and all.”

Up until now, Q hadn’t even noticed them there, but now he swing around with laser accuracy, the
most lethal of looks on his face. Q-branch hadn’t calmed down an iota since this morning, least of all its
Quartermaster. Bond actually felt his stomach drop, although Alec somehow managed to continue
grinning as broadly as a shark. A beat later, and the Quartermaster was heading right towards them
like a shark as well, a threatening fin cutting through the water; his minions smartly parted and got
out of the way of his quick but uneven stride. The cane was nowhere in evidence, which suddenly
seemed like a good thing, as it was far too useful as a weapon.

Just as he came up to the two double-o’s, Q seemed to take a deep breath and control himself a little.
His temper was still clearly burning just beneath the surface, and even Alec (who was not as attuned
as Bond was to the Quartermaster by this point) noticed the way that Q’s supernatural energy
snapped and crackled. It was reminiscent of the dangerous charge of a downed power line.

Apparently biting back the blistering rant Q wanted to give them before sending them out on their
tails, Q sliced a shrewd look 006’s way and said with a layer of acid on his tone and a sliver of a
very false smile, “006. Haven’t you caught 004 yet?”

But Alec wasn’t so easily deterred by the distraction that was meant to sting him. His grin remained
and his eyes glinted. With a flick of his black wings that substituted for the laugh he was now
holding back, he smoothly returned, “Hasn’t 007 caught you yet?”

Bond nearly choked on his tongue and Q’s eyes went comically wide behind his glasses, and anyone
could tell that Alec had won this round.

After at least a long count of ten, the Quartermaster regained himself, and then he was bellowing
loudly enough that Mothra probably flinched all the way down in the lower levels of Q-branch.
“OUT!!”

The tone of command was so strong that 006 and 7 twitched and very nearly scurried away as half of
Q-branch was doing – Bond even more so, as he remembered Q’s hypnosis practice with him the
night before. Q wasn’t using anything more than his voice with a lot of volume, however, and as
intimidating as it was, it wasn’t intimidating enough to go crawling back to M with failure.
Fortunately, Alec was the king of moxie, and he managed to maintain just enough of his relaxed
smile to hold his ground and give the purpose for their rather annoying arrival, “Hey, calm down,
Quartermaster – we’re here on orders! M messaged him, right, Bond?”

Bond had his face under control again, and cool blue eyes flicked from Q to Alec as he answered
smoothly, “Should be an email waiting.”

Q opened his mouth, looking for a retort, closed it again, and repeated a few frustrated times without
actually saying the blistering remarks he wanted to. His supernatural energy had died down, but
Bond knew that it did that, and not necessarily in time with the younger man’s emotions. Finally, Q
just narrowed his eyes murderously in impotent temper and spun on his heel to check for said email.

This would have gone a lot better if he’d consider which heel he was spinning on, because the
Quartermaster had been storming around as if he had two good legs when he didn’t. Therefore, he
nearly ended up crashing to the floor as the sharp movement centered on his right leg proved just a
bit too much.
“Slow down, there,” came Bond’s slightly breathless voice near his head in the same second that Q’s quick downward descent was stopped by hands on his arms. Silent as sin, both of them – 007 and 6 had dropped their teasing to rush up to Q’s side, leaving Q feeling faintly flustered at the attention but glad not to be sprawled on the floor. He let them lift him back onto his feet, trying not to stare at the cocoon of black and grey wings that had formed as if by magic around him – a sign of Angel protectiveness, and if Q had to admit it, he was somewhat moved by the instinctive gesture. He also suffered from a spark of jealousy, as he always did, looking at those broad, sky-grabbing appendages and feeling the emptiness that seemed to extend both outwards and inwards from his shoulder-blades.

“Well then,” he said, to give himself time to collect himself while he also absently straightened out his clothing (with far more attention than was necessary), “I suppose that answers your question, Alec.” When he got a nonplussed face from the agent in question, Q looked at him and said with perfect dryness, “Has 007 caught me? Yes, he has. In fact, you both did, and thank you for not letting your Quartermaster fall ignominiously onto his face. Now…” As much as it galled him, Q preferred the embarrassment of using his cane to the embarrassment of overestimating his ability to walk. “…Where is that cane?”

“Use me, Quartermaster,” Bond said in that smooth, cultured voice that was so hard to read, both on missions and now. It contained perfect aplomb and gentility, and just enough charm that ensured you looked at him, and Q could never tell how much of it was faked. Q narrowed his eyes and tried to see through the ruggedly handsome face, but all he could tell was that Bond sincerely seemed to mean it, and wasn’t judging Q for needing the arm he was offering. A little warily, the smaller man took the proffered limb and directed them towards a computer. From there, it was barely a moment’s work to bring up the orders M had sent. Q only read as far as 006’s assignment and began rapidly typing up messages himself, sending off orders with deft clicks and feathery brushes of keys. “006, if you’ll report to Miss Lillis, she’ll be gathering your supplies already. I’d do it myself, but as you just saw, I’m a little less than fully able,” Q said without looking away from the screen but also without flinching at his admittance of weakness. Watching, Bond saw the fine tightness in the lines of Q’s neck and the way his lips had thinned, and 007 was good enough by this point to interpret this as a sign of stress as the Quartermaster unconsciously braced himself for someone to take advantage of his weakness. No one did, however, and Bond hid a smile expertly as the faint signs of defensiveness receded. “Well? Do you not know where to go, 006?” Q prompted as he began to get distracted by other projects he was bringing up, reflected as bursts of square light on his glasses.

006 was trying to hide a smile and failing utterly, and he just crossed his arms and continued to stand behind the chair Q was sitting in. “Actually, I’m just waiting for you to read the rest of the email.” As Q twitched, startled to realize that he’d completely forgotten that there had been more words on the email, Bond shot the other agent a purely venomous look, to which Alec just grinned wider. Crossing his own arms (in a position of unease rather than relaxed amusement like Alec was), Bond waited uneasily as the wingless Angel expertly reverted back to the original window and read further.

He went completely still and utterly silent, and Bond sighed quietly and counted to ten, feel all the while as if he were watching an explosive timer count down. He decided to try and divert the explosion he saw in his near future: “The orders make sense, Q-”

“That M has given you to me as a babysitter does not make sense,” Q rapped back even as he began to compose a no-doubt-sharply-worded email.

“And that’s my cue to report to Miss Lillis,” Alec smartly turned to escape, slapping Bond with a wing in a departing sign of support. Seeing as 006 was abandoning him, the gesture was useless. Bond promised to strangle him later.
“I’m no more your babysitter than you are a run-of-the-mill techie,” Bond tried to reason with Q, feeling he was being ignored as the bespectacled man hunched over the keyboard. His dexterous touch of earlier was replaced now with sharp poking of the keys, as if that would somehow convey more of his discontent to M by imbuing it in the email. “Q!” Bond finally settled for being forceful and gripped the back of the chair, feeling satisfaction at the rolling sound of the wheels as it obediently and abruptly turned at the bidding of his hands. Q looked startled at the sudden motion for a moment, hands gripping the flimsy adjustable arm-rests, and then he leveled a glare at Bond while breathing out tightly and evenly through his nose.

Bond made sure to start talking before the Quartermaster could rip into him, “Q, just think of this logically for a second. You’re the one who’s always wanting everyone else to think logically, right?”

Although he still looked as though he were considering how difficult it would be to barge through Bond (the answer was very: Bond was a wall of muscle and had the advantage of height right now as he leaned over the chair), Q sighed again and took a mental step back. “Fine,” he said, slowly and diplomatcally, although it was just a shallow layer over top of what was still a very annoyed Quartermaster.

A quick flick of Bond’s electric blue eyes was all it had taken for him to assess that everyone had either left the room or was at the far edges of it, making every effort to ignore the existence of the 00-agent and the cross Quartermaster. He also pitched his voice a little lower so that it wouldn’t carry past Q anyway, “If you were going to spend time with me anyway perfecting that hypnosis trick, then this is a perfectly reasonable set-up, wouldn’t you say?”

Bond had to be totally aware that when he dropped his voice like that it took on an intimate, husky cast, and considering their positions it was impossible to ignore. After spinning the chair, Bond had lowered his hands to brace them on the arm-rests, even though Q’s arms were there, simply inserting his hand underneath so that Q could feel the man’s knuckles and the tendons along his thumb against the underside of his forearms. Bond’s face was hovering a few inches above Q’s, expression reasonable but no less handsome for it, especially with his eyes slightly narrowed with calm seriousness as he tried to talk sense into Q for once instead of the other way around.

“People were bound to question eventually why we were spending time together,” Bond continued his case with the most annoying show of logic the destructive agent had ever exhibited, “But now they won’t, because I’m supposed to be your bodyguard.”

For a moment, Q gritted his teeth, still intensely disliking the whole idea and feeling constrained by it. He said so, meeting Bond’s gaze fearlessly, “Be that as it may, I’m only useful as a Quartermaster so long as I am productive, not when I’m being treated like porcelain!”

“You’re not being treated like porcelain. M is simply concerned that something might happen, Q,” Bond said with dwindling patience visible in the way a muscle in his jaw was tightening and bunching. Finally he blew out a gust of breath, turning his head away and admitting, “Plus, if I go back to M saying that I’ve been sent out of Q-branch like a dog with his tail tucked beneath his legs, she’ll skin me and put my hide on the wall.”

As much as the mental image made Q grimace, he also found nothing about his experiences with M to deny that she might have it in her to actually do it. The bespectacled young man took pity on Bond, showing down his pride for the greater good and all that. “When you put it that way…” he grumbled, finally making an attempt to stand. Thankfully, Bond let him, backing up to stand a few feet away expectantly and with an easy posture that Q knew to be deceptive. Any agent could go from nothing to motion in under a second. Q just turned to delete the angry email to M instead of sending it. “Fine. You can follow me around or whatever it is you’re determined to do, in the off-
chance that Silva managed to mount some sort of attack that can reach me all the way in the bowels of MI6. Just don’t get in my way or slow me down in what I choose to do.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Bond said ungrudgingly, nodding as if pleased with the arrangement himself.

“Good.” Straightening, Q once again pulled at his clothing as if it were somehow out of order, realizing that he’d developed a nervous tick somewhere along the way and determinedly stilling his hands. “Then I’m getting back to work.” Limping into motion again (cane once more forgotten), Q paused as he was about to walk past Bond, recalling the man’s track-record with Q-branch tech. “Don’t. Touch. Anything!” he hissed.

Bond let him walk by, hip braced against an abandoned desk and a cheeky smiling crinkling the corners of his outh. “Alec’s right, you know,” he called out as he let Q get a distance away from him. Suspicious at the inflections he couldn’t read in Bond’s tone, Q turned around, afraid what he was going to hear.

Therefore, it was no surprise when Bond smiled wider with something sexual in his grin, finishing in a low and teasing tone, “You’re adorable when you’re stroppy.”

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Chapter End Notes

;) Hope you liked the subtle increase in flirting. I also hope that it’s getting clear by now that Bond is romantically interested in our Quartermaster, and Q is starting to come out of his oblivious bubble.

And, as always, writing about 006 was hilarious...and writing angry-Q never gets old

XD
Giftart for No Rest for the Wingless!

Chapter Summary

I got an awesome message yesterday from Anna - an obviously awesome reader \(^u^)/
She drew up some art inspired from this fic, and I'm so elated!!!
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!! *bouncing up and down a lot*

This is her interpretation of Q back when he was still an agent in all of his winged glory
- and I think she got him spot-on!

...This reminds me that I still haven't colored my picture of Bond yet...Oops! Thanks again, Anna!! Here is the original link she sent me: Q with wings (if you can't see the image here)

Chapter Notes

For those of you who were hoping for a full chapter - fear not! I don't suspect that this next chapter will take me as long as the last to write!

I'm hoping to turn the heat up a not, if I can ;)

![Image of Q with wings](Q_with_wings)
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

The chapter in which Bond plays his role as bodyguard.

Or the chapter in which Q and Bond both find out that long days make them rather volatile. At least the collateral damage is kept to a minimum.

Chapter Notes

Whew! *wipes sweat from brow* That was a fast turnaround - I've got another chapter for you guys! And I managed a little bit more of charming-Bond.

I also managed a bit of homicidal-Bond, but Q is feeling the same way. With Q's temper and Bond's instincts, things are bound to stay interesting ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

~^~

Bond made a very decent impression of a shadow all day, managing to watch Q while keeping a silent, sensible distance. Usually while leaning against the wall in this place or that, he'd watch over the heads of the scurrying Q-branch minions as Q stalked this way and that. The Quartermaster sporadically used his cane, but Q-branch was still hectic, and the tousle-headed young man kept putting the cane down and then rushing off without it. At one point, noticing this and watching how Q’s limping gait was growing increasingly strained, Bond snagged a young woman as she charged by. She looked terrified, but Bond’s eyes were coolly focused over her shoulder, still following around his Quartermaster with practiced shifts of his blue eyes. “You make sure he never leaves that cane behind, you hear me?” he said in a deceptively gentle tone of command.

“But I-” the young woman protested.

Bond overrode her without lifting his voice a hair, but his wings twitched just enough to bring attention to the fact that he was a 00-agent and not to be messed with, “You’ve got a new job now. So go.”

And for the rest of the day, the young woman scurried after the frenetic Quartermaster, snatching up the cane when he distractedly or frustratedly put it down and then chasing after him to make sure he had it on hand almost before he realized he’d left it. Fortunately, Q was far too focused on the work at hand to realize that one of his minions had been suborned by Bond to become his personal cane-fetcher. It all boiled down to the fact that Q was not Bond’s most recalcitrant assignment, even for a bodyguard duty, and 007 had picked up some tricks on keeping a person alive while also remaining unobtrusive and even occasionally helpful.
It was a long day, even by Quartermaster standards, which occasionally included staying up for days on end living on nothing but tea. Thanks to Bond once again waylaying one of Q’s minions, Q actually had lunch (just a sandwich, but that was one sandwich more than he would have had without someone fetching it and shoving it into his hand when he wasn’t looking), but the pure chaos of the day made up for it. Since the rest of Q’s underlings were Mundanes, they tired more quickly than he did, and eventually Q had to show that he had a heart, letting them go home before they fell over from exhaustion or cried from stress. Q worked for hours after that, and all the while Bond watched placidly. The man hadn’t said a word to Q all day, and at first that had made Q surprised, then grateful, and then suspicious. Finally he’d just been forced to accept that Bond was, indeed, a perfectly tolerable presence in Q-branch.

But Q had pretty much forgotten that 007 was even there by the time he finally staggered off to his office, remembering his cane on his own for once even though his assigned cane-fetcher was at home sleeping. Bond detached himself from the wall silently and was soon padding like Q’s shadow as both entered the Quartermaster’s office.

Q noticed him. Bond was as silent as a cat, but he was still a big cat, and in the pristine white atmosphere of Q-branch, the man stood out once he was moving. Even if Q felt a slight bit of surprise as he remembered the man’s presence, he was too tired to show it. The day hadn’t been his longest by a long-shot, but it had been stressful, and Q entered his office and walked straight to his desk, not bothering to look at Bond but just coming to lean forward against the front of his desk, hands braced as he let the cane rest against the fake wood, head hanging as he sighed.

“Bond,” he finally addressed, hearing the agent shut the door quietly behind them. Q figured he had more control of the situation if he talked first, and he’d spent the whole day keeping control of situations, so now it was just habit. “I hope you’re not up for witty conversation, because today was just a little bit too trying for me to be much of a conversationalist at the moment,” he said sincerely. But Bond just continued to move within the room, a presence defined by a quiet energy (a familiar vibration in the back of Q’s mind) and a lack of words (a velvet silence that soothed the nerves that, by the end, had been grated by the noise of constant voices).

In the end, Bond took up a position behind Q as if he belonged there, finally speaking in a smooth and conversational voice, “006 is really the conversationalist. Silence I’m good with.”

Maybe Q wasn’t. He found himself snorting as he remained leaning against his desk as if needing its support. “006 is a bloody terrible conversationalist. You don’t get to listen to him on missions. He nearly talks himself into fights more often than out of them, and the disturbing thing is, I’m sure he actually thinks about what he’s saying first.” The laughing rant left Q unexpectedly tired, and he sighed, closing his eyes. “I’m rather glad you’re not the conversationalist 006 is,” he managed to close off his argument, in a decidedly less robust voice.

Instead of addressing that, Bond just stepped a little closer. Since Q could hear the man’s footsteps, it meant it was on purpose, because 00-agents were only heard when they wanted to be. “Sometimes Alec does bring up some valuable questions, though,” Bond mused.

With more effort than he’d expected, Q pushed himself up and managed to stand, resigning himself to this chat but not minding it as much as he’d expected to. “Really? Like what? His attempts to get me to kill him this morning were stunning.”

Unexpectedly, however, it turned out that that was exactly the conversation Bond was thinking about, and with uncanny ease, he slipped in where 006’s teasing had left off. “Have I caught you, Quartermaster?” came Bond’s voice, low like a rumble of sound that now came right up through Q’s spine, because Bond was that close behind him. An involuntary shiver rose up Q’s back to tingle at
his shoulders, feeling 007’s intense heat eclipse his scars. The Quartermaster tried to compose himself, but didn’t get the chance. Arms slipped around his waist, startling him enough that his mind went embarrassingly, exhaustedly blank; it was a note on just how tiring the day was that instead of reflexively breaking a rib with his elbow and then trying to break 007’s nose with the back of his head, Q just let himself be overwhelmed by the man’s body heat for a second.

In a voice that was still rough but now had the seduction suddenly turned down – replaced by rueful sensibleness – Bond said next to his Quartermaster’s ear, “How exhausted are you exactly for you to be allowing me to do this to you?”

Q’s eyes – which had, without his express permission, slid shut – snapped open as Bond’s newly serious tone reached him, rebooting some of his brain that was shutting down. He abruptly worked to disentangle himself from the 00-agent’s arms, and Bond let him.

“How long since you slept? And last night didn’t count. It was 3 AM, and you got up before I did.”

Q glared a little at not being allowed to count his rest last night, but then dutifully delved into his head to begin looking for the necessary answer. He sat on the desk – blithely finding some humor in how the positions were now reversed from the last time they’d been in his office – and slid one hand under his glasses to rub at his eyes tiredly. He found, to his consternation, that finding the answer was difficult both because his brain felt fried from overhauling MI6’s defense systems and because the answer was quite a while back…

“Q,” Bond’s low voice brought him back on point again. One gliding stride and the blonde agent was close enough to be violating his personal space again, leaning down enough to put their faces even. “How. Long. Since. You. Slept? A full night? I won’t even ask about eating.”

“Long day,” Bond said simply when they were facing each other again, now from a few feet away. The statement should have been a question, but 007 had literally been there for most of the day, so he had a pretty good idea.

It was unexpected, but Q noted with gratitude that 007 did not appear interested in taunting Q for his lapse in common-sense and decorum, and because of that, Q found it in himself to say back dryly, “Is it that obvious?”

“You’ve got a reputation as the least social and most stroppy Quartermaster in MI6 history. At this moment, yes, it’s that obvious.” While Q looked away and grumbled at his own transparency, Bond’s tone lost the joking quality that had slipped into it and once again shifted back into concern, “How long since you slept? And last night didn’t count. It was 3 AM, and you got up before I did.”

Q’s head jerked up, staring at Bond with narrowed eyes as he realized just how much attention the double-o had been paying to him. This surprise combined with Q’s overall consternation at Bond’s mothering caused a stalemate, as Q and Bond simply glared at one another. Once again, however, Bond had a plethora of cards up his sleeve that Q couldn’t even dream of. As easily as putting on a hat, Bond let his expression shift subtly – there was no one thing that Q would later be able to catalogue, but suddenly 007 had bedroom eyes, the subtle heat entering them without a whisper of effort. Q felt outmatched in a category he hadn’t considered before. “You, Quartermaster…” came 007’s voice, low and slow enough that the words were almost predictable, but not quite. He’d shifted his head forward with that same slowness that meant Q should logically have been able to notice and avoid, yet somehow Bond’s breath was warming his ear before Q
realized it. The Quartermaster held his breath despite himself, not knowing what he was waiting for and too stressed to keep an overabundance of thoughts in his head.

And then Bond shut it off again. His words clipped and quick but still right up against Q’s ear were like a bucket of water over the Quartermaster’s head. “…Are going to go to sleep if I have to send for Medical to tranquilize you.” No doubt feeling the swift rise of outraged temper flooding Q’s system and making his supernatural energy crackle, Bond did the unexpected and placed a remarkably considerate and chaste kiss against Q’s ear, effectively taking the wind out of Q’s sails before 007 stepped back and straightened, looking as professional and controlled as ever. He cocked an eyebrow at Q. “Your call, Quartermaster. Unless you want me to prove again just how fried your sense of self-preservation is?”

“Self-preservation?” Q tried to echo with derision, but mostly he was just unsettled by how easily Bond had wormed his way in past Q’s defenses, igniting little fires where common-sense was supposed to be. The man had skills, truly. Disturbing, disturbing…sexy…skills.

Bond actually deigned to respond to Q’s weak protest, “I could kill you in a heartbeat. How’s that for self-preservation?”

That, unaccountably, made Q angry. The day had been long, and the resurfacing of Silva had scared where the bypassing of his systems had rankled – Q’s mood was already dangerously reactive. And since he couldn’t remember the last good night’s sleep he had, maybe he should have thought twice about how he was going to react to things.

Maybe James should have, too, because he’d slipped into that ever-so-faintly superior tone.

Q stood up with only a slight wobble on his bad leg and was in Bond’s face in under a second. Q didn’t even know what he said at that point, only that the words shivered in his ears and his energy twisted like vicious, dexterous fingers, and suddenly Bond was staggering.

Q’s hold hadn’t been perfect. Hypnosis wasn’t a trick to try when one was emotional – it demanded focus, not fierceness. Therefore, Bond found his balance and jerked his thoughts away before he ended up as an unconscious heap on the floor, wings jerking outwards in an unconscious grab for balance. All hell broke loose at that point.

Triggering 007’s fight-or-flight response was never a good thing, and while he’d noted quite blatantly that Q hadn’t eaten much today and barely slept the night before, the same held true for Bond. He’d slept in only a few hours more, and the mission before that had taken away hours of sleep prior. So it would be fair to say that both of them were slightly miscalculating just how wrong things could go if they pushed each other. His mind so recently ripped free of Q’s unpracticed grasp, Bond was surging forward almost before he knew it.

Q, just as violent after a day spent thinking about the growing threat of Silva, was startled but managed to react in time. He tucked his shoulder, instinctively knowing to use leverage to make the best use of his smaller size and more lightly muscled frame. He didn’t manage to throw Bond, however, as the larger man twisted, and then they were grappling. Grey wings were spread out, shoving Q’s desk aside, and Q yipped and then swore as one of his hands was dragged up behind his back. He quickly braced his weight on his good leg, calling up his Angel energy with a grunt of effort as he hooked his other leg clumsily around Bond’s, the brace making it difficult and Bond himself making it more so. The flair in Q’s energy had been a dead-giveaway, and Bond was far more used to ‘listening’ to Q’s energy than he wanted to admit. Bond shifted his leg free and would have won then, but Q – who had forgotten about his cane all day long – suddenly remembered it, and managed to twist just far enough to reach under one of Bond’s wings with his free hand, grabbing and missing for an adrenalin-filled moment before his long fingers wrapped around it.
What followed after was a flurry of motion that can only be found in two Angels, moving at a speed not possible for Mundanes. Bond was faster, but he continued to underestimate just how much his Quartermaster had practiced fighting against people who were likely going to be bigger and stronger than him. 007 managed to wrangle the cane away before Q broke his head open with it, but a second later Q succeeded in tripping him while still having an arm pinioned behind his back. The two of them were on the floor in seconds, and the shock of hitting it finally knocked the fight out of them.

They were on their backs, panting, Q sprawled on Bond with his poor arm stuck between them. He grimaced and groaned, rolling over to free the limb, and Bond let him without a sound. With a complete lack of grace, Q flipped over, off Bond’s torso but onto his wing, landing in a cushion of feathers. He just lay there, gasping in breaths as the adrenalin wore off and normal mental function returned.

“I am so sorry, Bond,” he said as soon as he was sure he could talk without stopping for breath. For once, the Quartermaster pushed aside every ounce of ego and aloofness he possessed to make it a very heartfelt apology. He truly meant it from the depths of his heart. “I’d tell you that I didn’t mean to do that, but it would be a boldfaced lie—”

“Don’t worry about it,” Bond cut him off unexpectedly, waving a hand before letting it drop in favor of getting his breath back. “If we’re in the mood for admitting out shortcomings, we can add that I was being a complete bastard to the list. Fair?” Suddenly Bond half sat up (with Q still lying facedown on his wing, anything more was impossible), realizing something. “Bloody-!” He cut off the curse, instead reverting to practicality. “I grabbed your bad arm again, didn’t I?”

Q winced as he noticed that for the first time, unwilling to get up but also noticing that his left arm throbbed. He should have expected it: 00-agents were trained to go for weaknesses automatically. “Bloody wonderful bodyguard you are,” he commented while making an effort to infuse some wry humor into the words, removing their sting.

Apparently 007 was good enough at what he did to read the attempt at humor instead of taking the line seriously, because he chuckled, using hand and wing to help his Quartermaster sit, then stand, and finally get over to his couch. There, Q collapsed, bonelessly letting his head drop against the back of the couch while Bond moved around, digging in his drawers. Q ignored it, figuring they were past worrying about privacy after Bond watching him all day, flirting with him, and then fighting with him until they’d both ended up on the floor.

“You can take these?” Bond asked, uncertain, and shook a container of pills so that Q could hear it. Q kept his eyes closed. “If you’re referring to the prescription bottle with the nearly unpronounceable name written on it, yes. I assume you were looking for painkillers?”

“Well, I figured that if I have a headache, you must have one.”

The Quartermaster snorted, and his dark lips thinned in a smile. “I haven’t the faintest idea what those would do to your system – just give them to me.” Eyes still shut, he reached out a tired hand and waggled his fingers beckoningly.

The purposeful slide of shoes on the floor signaled the agent moving closer, although Bond also asked carefully as he placed the container on Q’s waiting palm, “Any particular reason you won’t open your eyes, Quartermaster?”

“I figured, since I just tried to hypnotize you without permission or warning, you’d be more comfortable if I didn’t,” Q admitted, a little embarrassed but determined to make up for the drastic break in trust.
Bond’s laugh was low and rumbled like the echo of distant thunder. He sat down heavily next to Q, wing shoving him because that was just what wings did when you sat next to people – Q remembered. “Your being considerate of me is touching, Quartermaster, but I assure you, I’m not easily scared off,” Bond let him off the hook with warm humor in his voice, even as Q felt an arm thrown carelessly over the back of the chair behind his head. Bond truly was more touchy-feely than he remembered him being, annoying as that was. Q opened his eyes to frowning slits just enough to twist the cap off the prescription bottle, dry-swallowing one.

“It says take two.”

“You’re just crossing all sorts of social boundaries today, aren’t you, 007?” Q retorted primly but not without a bit of exasperated humor. Despite himself, he liked the warmth of a body next to his, and the wing shifting against his left shoulder wasn’t all that bad. “Reading my medicine bottles now?”

“Well, I figured that if I grabbed one without reading it, I’d probably hand you something for indigestion,” 007 joked back easily and with a completely straight face. “So – care to explain why you don’t take the required dose?”

Bond probably hadn’t expected him to answer, but Q gave in and did so anyway while screwing the lid back on, “Because I rather dislike having my hands quivering like an earthquake. Do you remember how I was a little slow when you picked me up from the airport?”

The apparent non sequitur didn’t phase Bond beyond urging him to narrow his eyes in brief memory. “Yes. I thought you seemed…”

“A little slow?” Q volunteered, unembarrassed by the unvarnished truth. “Well, that was just a fraction of what the medication actually does. Pretty much everything that I can take also has the abysmal side-effect of either making me shaky, making me distracted, or making me so bloody numb and sleepy that I could be mistaken for a vegetable.”

The long string of words had the effect of raising Bond’s eyebrows in a faintly amused and faintly impressed expression, and he seemed to be playing with exactly how to respond. Finally, he just nodded, saying, “Not a bad reason to halve the dosage. Does it work when you do that?”

“Mostly. Half the time, ironically.” Q let his hands flop to his sides again. He sighed. “So have I ruined our working relationship forever?” he asked bluntly.

Bond chuckled. “I wouldn’t say that.” Bond looked over at him to change the subject, nudging him with the edge of his wing and commanding, “Sit up a bit. I like sitting next to people, but it’s better if I can stretch this out a bit.”

Q realized that 007 meant to extend the wing behind him, and he grew a bit uncomfortable. As much as he was embarrassingly willing to put up with Bond’s almost-natural flirting, the thought of one of those long, powerful wings unfurled behind his back brought up memories like a spike through his soul, and the most frustrating part was that he couldn’t untangle the painful thoughts from the pleasurable ones. As with any thing when deeply missed, the illusion of having it back was both the height of joy and the pinnacle of misery. Q started to object, but Bond was quicker with his tongue.

“Come on, Q. I’ve seen the look on your face any other time one of us has stretched out a wing next to you,” the man said with a careful mix of gentle prodding and compassion.

Q flushed, but had it in him to counter, “I believe that every time 006 felt the need to bat at me with one of his wings, I’ve given him a look specifically designed to peel the paint off walls.”
“Shove forward, Q, and quit arguing. Consider it a bit of indulgence to make up for bloody taking over my brain five minutes ago.”

Grudgingly and with ill-grace, Q gave in, crossing his arms moodily but leaning forward enough for Bond to stretch out the feathery appendage across the back of the couch. Then, with a sense of resignation, Q sat back again. The sensation of muscle and bone and feathers sent a shiver through him, and Q closed his eyes, something bittersweet suffusing him from head to toe. Despite his protests, the Quartermaster drank it in, closing his eyes and – for a moment – pretending this was his.

“How’s my babysitting so far?” Bond joked when the silence stretched too far.

The attempt at humor was appreciated, and Bond’s smooth, practiced tones were good for providing stability. “Oh, I’ve had worse babysitters,” Q revealed airily, “I had one who left me locked in a closet once.” When it looked like Bond was about to choke, eyes widening a fraction, Q was quick to amend, “She didn’t do it on purpose! I got myself stuck in there, but the poor old woman was just too deaf to hear me wanting to get out.” Q actually laughed at the memory, settling his weight more comfortably back against the 00-agent’s wing. “I got to spend the next hour listening to her shuffling around the house, calling for me in this distracted voice.”

“And then your parents came home? I bet they were thrilled.” Bond seemed intrigued by this instead of annoyed by the segue, and had a curious smile just tilting the corners of his mouth and lighting his eyes.

Q was having a fun time telling the story, too. He wasn’t sure why he was telling Bond of all people, but he was, and it was comfortable, and quiet 00-agents like Bond apparently made good listeners. “No, then she forgot she was looking for me and wondered back to her sewing. A half hour after that, I figured out how to throw the lock from the inside, and only shortly after I’d released myself did my parents come home. Really, it was quite a debacle, but it ended well.”

Because it was the nature of a 00-agent, Bond didn’t press for particulars – the babysitter’s name, the reactions of Q’s parents, how Q’s childhood had been in general. He just hummed his amused approval and slouched a little more. “Are bodyguards supposed to relax this much around the person they’re supposed to protect?” Q asked, just to be impish. Maybe the painkillers were kicking in.

Bond snorted but didn’t try to improve his posture, which somehow still looked charming due to his cut physique and natural, sprawled grace. “No, but I don’t think I was supposed to attack you either. Although…” Now a decidedly wicked smile curled up the side of his mouth as he took a page from Q’s book and closed his eyes, making himself an unreadable enigma with a smile meant to charm birds out of nests. “…Testing the levels of your self-control and patience was rather fun.”

Only because he knew that Bond was actually alert despite his closed eyes did Q not try to elbow him out of reflex. “You’re truly the most unprofessional agent I’ve had the pleasure of working with,” Q huffed. He still liked the feeling of feathers touching either shoulder too much to pull away.

Bond just grinned wider, cracking an eye open to pierce Q with a sliver of pale-sky-blue. “But you still said it was a pleasure.”

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Chapter End Notes
I'm hoping to get some real cuddling by the next chapter or the next - but tell me if I'm moving them along too fast! I always hate the story where two characters just suddenly look up and realize 'Ohmahgoodness gotta have you' without any actual reasons for them to grow affectionate. This chapter was the first bit of build to an actual 00Q relationship.

So: if there is actual kissing and cuddling in the next chapter, will that be too big of a stretch?

I usually HATE criticism, so if you disagree, please be gentle with me! XP
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

The chapter in which progress is made on finding the original mole who gave Silva his information.

Or the chapter that starts out well...and then takes a sudden turn for the worst.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long! I enjoyed planning this chapter greatly, so I took my time to do it right - I hope you enjoy!

You get to see everyone in this chapter: Q, M, 004, 006, and 007! It's a party! Plus, a new character, just to mix things up :) 

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Bond jolted awake to an annoying series of trills, a noise that he identified a heartbeat later as an alarm coming obnoxiously from Q’s phone. The noise was quite loud, and most people would have awoke with a scream or something, but Bond’s reaction was just a series of twitches that flowed through his muscles before his body settled again, analyzing the situation coldly and finding no danger. Fully awake and relaxing now, Bond looked over to see that Q had done one better: asleep on the couch, the Quartermaster just growled something incoherent and rolled over, otherwise completely unaffected.

The trying events of yesterday had ultimately proved enough to convince the mighty Quartermaster that sleep was a good thing, and Bond had opted to take the office-chair. He’d told Q – truthfully – that he could sleep anywhere, and sleeping while sitting meant that he didn’t have as far to go if trouble came and he needed to be on his feet in seconds. Even inside MI6, Bond was taking his job seriously, and his sleep had been light. It was a half-sleep, and after a week of it, he’d be a wreck, but it had been proven that 00-agents could go long stretches while subsisting just with this form of light dozing. True sleep was too dangerous on missions, and not sleeping at all caught up with you too quickly.

The phone was on the desk, but it had apparently given up on the alarm and fallen silent, and Bond noted the early hour it showed before the screen went dark again. Q obviously had no intention of listening to it, and Bond’s memory flickered back to the mission in Canada, and how poorly Q had gotten along with mornings. Because he was awake now and because he could, Bond reached forward and picked up the phone, finding that it wasn’t locked in any way. This made the agent’s eyes narrow with unease until he noted what an outdated phone it was – from what he knew of Q, the Quartermaster wouldn’t use a old thing like this for anything more than alarms and maybe the
occasional call for take-out. Unrepentant of his nosiness, the blonde agent stretched out his wings idly, feathers slipping along the arms of the chair, and checked to see that Q had no less than three alarms set on this phone, to say nothing for the possibility of hitting snooze. Snorting in amusement, Bond put the phone back on the desk and got up, stretching the stiffness out of his body from spending a night sleeping on a chair. A very comfy chair. Go figure the head of Q-branch would have the best chair in the place.

Pacing the room on silent feet for the few seconds it got his legs to perfectly wake up again, Bond came to a stop by the sleek, black-cloth couch where Q had eventually crashed. Without his glasses, the Quartermaster looked younger, but maybe that was just because there was nothing stopping his hair from falling into his eyes now.

Contrary to popular belief, Bond did not live to annoy people, but it was definitely a highlight of his life – when most of his time was spent on missions with a perpetual adrenalin-high that came with killing or nearly being killed, the light things like being an imp had a whole new level of appeal. He squatted down next to Q (who was stretched out on his side, face to the back of the couch as if to hide from the alarms on his phone), and then boldly reached forward to fish with dexterous fingers for the keys he knew were still in Q’s pocket. He’d noted them the day before, and figured that at least one would secure the office. Pickpocketing completed without so much as causing Q to twitch, the 00-agent got back up again and this time exited the office, checking the lock so that he knew that he could get back in but no one else could. Calmed by the thought that he’d left the head of Q-branch in as safe a location as possible for the moment, Bond stuffed his hands in his pockets and folded his wings back tightly. Also contrary to popular belief, he was aware that Angels were imposing, especially ones with a track-record for killing like he had – he was also quite capable of making himself unassuming. Therefore, with his posture as idle and unthreatening as a 00-agent’s could be, he found a techy who was getting some morning hours, and requested that the man find some coffee. If the man scurried and still looked frightened, it wasn’t Bond’s fault. There was only so much he could do about the wings when a person already recognized him as MI6’s best killer.

Contenting himself with making slow rounds of the room and its cubicles clustered like little nests throughout, Bond kept near the Quartermaster’s office and soon intercepted the returning techy with the requested coffee.

“You should be proud of me, Q,” he said as he came back into the office, easily using the keys while balancing two cheap coffee-containers. The Quartermaster was by no means awake, but made irritated noises as the sound of 007’s voice reached him. Unmoved by the groggy Quartermaster’s annoyance, Bond shut the door behind him with a wing and continued his proclamation, “I said please and thank you and didn’t blow anything up. Who said that all interaction between Q-branch and myself ended in trauma?”

Q growled, slender body coiling as he tried to hunch deeper into the couch. This was the extent of his input.

Knowing that he had a distinct advantage – and feeling almost humbled by that knowledge – Bond made a mental decision to be less of a pain and set one coffee on the desk as he brought the chair around. Sitting now next to the couch, he held one coffee still in a negligent hand as he simply observed the wingless Angel. Quiet, piercing blue eyes followed the graceful curve of the spine as it pressed against Q’s shirt, the artistic lines of tensed shoulder-blades, the shape of a bony shoulder wired with lean muscle and no extra flesh. Bond remembered teasing Q’s ear with a kiss the evening before, and was tempted to do the same, but it felt too much like kicking a kitten when Q so obviously didn’t have his faculties about him in the morning. The phone went off again, another series of annoying trills, and Q’s entire body bristled. Voice slurring out invectives in a hoarse morning-voice, the Quartermaster rolled over.
Bond could have moved, but chose not to. He tensed the muscles of his back and wings in preparation for having to calm Q down when he startled him out of his mind, but instead the Quartermaster just froze, now on his other side and gazing at Bond shortsightedly. The green-hazel eyes narrowed. “What you…?” came the horribly condensed, demanding question.

Resisting the urge to laugh but not to smile (hopefully the Quartermaster’s vision was bad enough and/or his mind slow enough that it went unnoticed), Bond responded, “Bodyguard duty, remember? If I don’t stick to you like a bur, M tans my hide.”

The Quartermaster’s eyes narrowed further, and then – after almost half a minute – he managed to understand. Then he realized how long it had taken him. That spark of self-awareness was apparently galling, because Q closed his eyes with a frustrated groan. Lifting his hands to press against his eyes, he ground out, “Coffee,” and said no more. One hand moved away from where he was trying to rub wakefulness right into his eye-sockets to beckon for the cup he’d probably smelled, because his vision didn’t seem up to the challenge. When he didn’t immediately feel the beverage pressed into his hands, his tone hardened to something more like a threat than an order, “COFFEE.”

Usually, phrases like that were followed by, ‘Or you die’ in Bond’s world, and the fact that Q wasn’t actually threatening his life was a pleasant change of pace. Still smirking, the 00-agent relented and gave Q his much-needed dose of caffeine. The Quartermaster dropped his hand from his face, flopping forward enough so that he could more-or-less lean on the couch and sip at the coffee without getting up. After three mouthfuls, he risked getting up, and Bond watched as the stretched-out limbs pulled together, folding until Q was perched like a buzzard on the couch. A buzzard with hair sticking every which way and a glare that he managed to maintain even if he couldn’t focus it. Apparently, the Quartermaster reacted to movement, however, and his glare would focus in the vague direction of Bond’s face whenever the man moved. Q must have been too drowsy to be sensing energy like he usually did, however, and Bond felt unexpectedly sad about that: Q was usually so sharp, keeping himself armed with skills and knowledge at all times, but in the mornings, Q was defenseless. “Better now?” Bond asked, nodding towards the coffee as he leaned back in the chair.

No answer. Bond remembered that Q had barely had the sense to put on his own glasses that last morning, so Bond just watched and made sure that Q continued to drink coffee.

It wasn’t until the first cup of coffee was practically gone that Q reached over and began feeling around clumsily for his glasses. “Wha…? Wha’ time izzit?” he asked, grimacing as he heard himself talk. Q was awake enough to hear that he was practically drunk on sleep, even if it took an extra beat before it sank in. “Drat,” he snapped briefly in glorious understatement of his titanic annoyance.

Bond got up and grabbed the glasses that kept evading Q’s grip, returning them to the Quartermaster before moving so that he could check the time on Q’s phone. He would have checked the digital clock in the room, but it appeared to be in binary or something. Go figure Q would get a clock that was indecipherable to the average agent. Before he could reach the phone, another alarm went off. “According to this third alarm, it’s 8 AM,” Bond observed, untroubled by the hour. He was usually up far earlier than this, so the chance to sleep in was actually rather nice, even if it had been spent in a chair instead of a nice bed.

The company was somewhat different from the ideal as well. Most people would have pictured Bond with a leggy blonde or some exotic brunette woman, but instead he got a Quartermaster who was the worst morning-person in the world and thus far drinking coffee like he wanted nothing more than to OD on it. Bond turned with a raised brow as Q staggered up to his side, dropping the empty cup and reaching past Bond in annoyance towards his phone. He turned off the alarm with a sleepwalker’s grudging grace before turning around, eyes half closed and frowning stubbornly, to
walk right into Bond’s chest.

“Whoa, there!” Bond exclaimed in a soft voice that did an impressive job of hiding his amusement. He caught Q’s arm reflexively even though he hadn’t been behind this accidental human contact – for once, Bond had just been standing there and Q had crashed into him. Because he was worried that Q might punch him for it anyway, Bond was quick to set the Quartermaster on his feet and let go, even if he kept a wing out carefully.

“Bloody mornings…!” Q snarled quietly but with a vicious tone that couldn’t hold anything but pure sincerity. He leaned back against his desk and closed his eyes, and for a moment, it looked like he might fall sleep again while standing. Then he turned his eyes and slanted an eye open just enough to catch sight of the second cup of coffee – Bond’s, untouched – and snatch it up. He began chugging it as if it were an energy drink instead of hot liquid, and Bond had to resist the urge to pull the drink out of Q’s hands. The only reason he didn’t was because he knew that the coffee had cooled enough that it wasn’t going to scald anyone.

“That was my coffee, you know,” he noted, just to test the waters and see if the second helping had jump-started the Quartermaster’s systems any.

Apparently not. “Sod off.”

Bond tried another, more sympathetic tact: “Do you want another? I’m sure I could bully another of your minions into fetching one.”

Something in Q’s brain finally seemed to stutter and to grasp at that, because he looked up, eyes narrowed through his glasses and unsalvageably tangled hair. “You were bullying my minions?”

“Actually, no, believe it or not. But they seem to get this peculiar scared look on their face when I so much as look at them, so ‘bullying’ might be a term up for debate.” He dipped his head of short blonde hair towards the cup in Q’s hands, reminding the smaller man, “It did get you your coffee.”

Q growled for a moment, cupping the warm container in both hands and staring at it. “Noted,” he finally gave in, even if his voice was still hoarse from disuse and sleep. He started chugging more coffee.

“I’m not sure coffee is meant to be drunk that fast.”

“Do you want me coherent or do you want me to tear your head off?”

“That,” Bond was impressed enough to say, “escalated quickly. Do you just want me to ask Medical if they have pure caffeine and an IV bag they could inject into you?”

That tricked a chuckle out of the Quartermaster, low and throaty in his morning voice, and it was a singularly enticing sound to 007, standing nearby and smiling. Pausing between gulps and letting a dry smile of his own stretch his lips, Q retorted, “If Medical had something like that, I wouldn’t hate going there so much.” He took another swallow and then twisted his face in a scowl as if being this groggy hurt. “Sadly, that’s a miracle not known to man yet. Give me a minute, and I might be coherent.” He went back to drinking.

After another glance over Q – seeing the sloppy posture, the half-closed eyelids, the hazy eyes behind them – Bond made a decision, “I’m going to get you another coffee.” He left Q in his office again, feeling that he understood the Quartermaster just a little bit better after watching what was undoubtedly a regularly morning routine. When Q had first told 006, 7, and 8 about his Angel status, Bond had just thought that Q’s lack of wings meant that he lost the gift of flight, but it seemed that
he’d had other disadvantages hoisted onto him. Disadvantages that he’d had to overcome.

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When Bond returned, Q was up and about instead of in the office where he’d been left. With most everyone showing up for work now, things were bustling, and Q was leaning over a techy’s shoulder to oversee whatever he was working on. Bond was aware of heads turning like ripples around him as Q-branch minions took note of an Angel’s presence, but he walked up behind Q in complete silence.

Still the Quartermaster noticed him. “Did you take my keys?” he asked with perfect calm, not even turning his head. Well, at least he was awake enough not to be sensing the energy of other Angels approaching him.

Bond stood, impassive, right at Q’s back, considering the question for a moment. “Do you need them?” he asked back instead of answering, while at the same time reaching past Q to put the new coffee down at the desk. The techy sitting there was smart enough to realize that it wasn’t for him, and glued his eyes on his screen in an attempt not to get involved in the little drama being played out right behind him.

“I might have,” the Quartermaster said idly, eyes still on his employee’s screen as if it were just the weather he were discussing, “if I had been trying to get into my office instead of out. Fortunately, unlocking my office from the inside isn’t hard. But you did lock me in.”

Unrepentant, Bond shrugged. “Bodyguard duty,” he reminded, “I was out of the room, you were in it. Besides, I figure you’d want the coffee enough to forgive me.”

For the first time, Q’s eyes shifted, dropping down to the coffee cup. He held himself back for only the count of three before reaching down and snatching it up, immediately sipping at it. “Thank you, 007,” he said tightly but professionally, and the only evidence that he was still as sleepy as all get-out was that he didn’t say another word until he’d downed at least half of the cup.

Bond, by then, had retreated to one of the walls again, knowing that his presence could only disrupt the flow of Q-branch. It was packed with Mundanes, and most of them were pretty skittish of an Angel with a license to kill. Hands in his pocket and wings folded back so that they showed only as much as was necessary, he watched the Quartermaster with eyes that looked uninterested but were actually picking up every minute detail. He’d noted yesterday that Q was a very involved boss, not looming but constantly commenting, facilitating thought as he added thoughts of his own and caught mistakes before they could become an issue. That had been in the evening, however, and not after a long nap of any kind. Now, it was obvious the way that sleep was clinging to Q, in that he made his rounds mostly silently, his eyes tense and his motions occasionally clumsy. Bond could tell by the way Q’s lips thinned that he was frustrated with himself but hiding it well. The man whose brain was a machine had, for the moment, been knocked down to a level of ‘normal’ that was singularly exasperating.

Q didn’t need his cane that day, but he did need another two cups of coffee, which Bond didn’t condone but had to put up with when he kept finding them in Q’s hands. A Mundane would have been a shuddering wreck on the floor by that point, Bond figured, but Q’s Angel metabolism seemed to be handling it. Still, Q should have been bouncing off the walls, and Bond frowned his
disapproval.

Things heated up, however, when one of the techies suddenly shouted, “Quartermaster! I found something!”

Q-branch was usually a quiet place, a low buzz of activity unless things were in a crisis like yesterday. Bond had been watching Q, and Q had been standing around looking useless as he got the last pieces of his brain online when the voice suddenly pierced the relative quiet, making Q physically jump. Then he was hurrying over to his employee and Bond was tensing with increased alertness.

Something was going on, and Bond didn’t have to be a mouse from Q-branch to know it.

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Q finally felt as though the last cobwebs of sleep were being cleared from his head, so he managed to take in what the computer screen showed with his usual keen precision. Even as the techy was explaining himself, Q was grasping the situation purely from what he saw. Taking over the mouse, Q was soon way ahead of the man, his brain working faster than the conversation was going.

It appeared that Q’s overhaul of the MI6 system had turned over more stones than expected. Q had gone just about insane to make up for Silva breaking past his system, and instead of just fixing the break, had practically torn everything down and built it up again – his techies were working on it now. One of them, however, had just found something amiss.

This wasn’t Silva’s work – if it was, Q would have been suspicious more than anything. No, the little rips in Q’s system didn’t have the man’s cyber-signature to Q’s eyes. This was someone else, and Q was pretty sure what he was looking at.

This was where someone else – someone inside MI6 – had dug up and stolen the information gathered on Angels, which was now in Silva’s hands.

Q immediately brought the information up on a free computer, and his hands began flying over the keys. “We found our mole,” he said grimly, and began to hunt that mole down like a weasel being released into a henhouse. Nothing was going to stop him, or even slow him down. Q-branch came alive again all around him. “007, I’m going to need you in a minute. You still have your gun, I presume?”

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M came out of her office, raising a few brows from the desks that flanked the doors to her office. Some were actually guards, but most were just secretaries, and it was towards one of these secretaries that M walked, her eyes sharp and unreadable.

Velvet Lockrin looked up from a form on her desk quickly, large, almost violet-blue eyes igniting with surprise. “M,” she said, quickly sitting up straight, “I didn’t get a page from you – is there something you want from me?”
By now, the head of MI6 was standing quite firmly in front of the Mundane woman’s desk, eyes carefully skimming over the other in precise, calculating glances, something about her energy making the temperature of the room drop several degrees. Velvet quailed a little, looking flustered and confused, but continued to sit with her elegant hands folded one over the other on her desk.

“Are you happy with this job, Miss Velvet?” M asked, tilting her heard, her words carrying that characteristic mix of challenge and levity. It was impossible to tell what prompted the question.

Trying not to show that her hands were shaking, Velvet dropped her eyes briefly before lifting them, answering, “Yes. Very much so, M. Has there been a problem with my performance?”

“You know very well that there hasn’t. In fact, Velvet, you’re one of the most useful secretaries I’ve ever employed,” M said primly with one eyebrow rising towards her silver hair, matching wings still held in perfect stillness. “However, I’m told that this isn’t your fault.”

“M…” Velvet’s eyes skated across the older woman’s face. “I…I don’t understand.”

“Miss Velvet, by any chance did you break into my computer files?” M asked without any warning or mercy, and everyone flinched as the temperature dropped another degree. The question was so sudden that it was like being stabbed with an icepick.

Velvet jumped, and panic was written all over her, from her straight nose to her small, petite figure to the very ends of her auburn hair, but she never broke eye-contact with M as she spluttered, “No! M, no, I wouldn’t do that! I’d never.”

Still standing immovably in front of the secretary’s desk, M let that sink in a moment without giving any indication that she’d actually heard a word said. However, while poor Velvet looked on the verge of shaking apart, M finally answered in a clipped, aloof tone, “My Quartermaster says otherwise, but I wanted to hear you say your piece to my face.” As if her words were a whistle to call in a pair of dogs, 004 and 007 stepped into the room.

Neither had their guns drawn, but both had them as they walked forward, cold-eyed and dangerous, towards Velvet. “You can go back to your charge, Mr. Bond, I think that 004 has it handled from here,” M said stiffly, eyes never leaving Velvet, who looked sincerely like she had no idea what was going on. “Miss Velvet will not cause any trouble, will you, Miss Velvet?”

The woman’s eyes shot back to M’s before darting back to the 00-agents, unable to take her eyes off the two killers for long. “–no! No, I…! But I didn’t!” she stuttered and tried to form sentences, even as she got up. The moment she got up, 004’s wings flared, a pale pair of sails in the room, raised in warning. 007 remained impassive, but he’d stopped going closer, waiting to see what the verdict was – whether he’d be needed to control the situation or whether he could go back to Q. The small sign of readiness and tension that 004 had displayed made everyone hold their breath, however, and Velvet froze, speechless and well aware of the danger to her.

“My Quartermaster said you were coerced, Miss Velvet, by the criminal named Silva. Nonetheless, you have been found smuggling information out of MI6, and that does nothing to endear you to me,” M explained coldly while 004 came forward, moving around the desk (007 or 6 would have jumped over it, just for theatrics). Velvet, by now, was so stunned that she did nothing as the pale-winged Angel took hold of her wrists, turning her and pinning them behind her back. M finished, seeing that the situation was under control, “You’ll be questioned later. Take her away, 004. Bond, didn’t I tell you to get back to the Quartermaster already?”

“Yes, right away, ma’am,” Bond immediately complied, giving his head a smooth nod before turning with elegance on his heel to stride out of the room again. Unbeknownst to M, Q was standing in the corridor just outside, close enough that Bond could sense his supernatural energy if he tried. The
Quartermaster leaned against the wall, looking past Bond to the way he’d come with practiced indifference. “We’ve got our mole then?” he asked lightly, looking back to Bond to raise an eyebrow. It disappeared under his mess of hair.

“We’ve got her,” Bond said with a triumphant grin.

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004 had felt almost sorry for the woman. Velvet was well-known throughout MI6 as an efficient, friendly, smart woman, and if Q hadn’t found irrefutable proof that she’d been the one stealing information for Silva, no one would have believed it. As it was, it seemed that Silva had messed with the girl’s head, for she wasn’t being very forthright in questioning. Both Q and 007 had been called for because they were the only two people around who knew something about being controlled by Silva’s mind. However, word was out that 006 had also just returned, although his mission had been both unsuccessful and uninteresting, according to the 00-grapevine.

From what 004 had heard – and he realized that he didn’t understand by any stretch, having never dealt with Silva and his hypnosis – Velvet was completely confused and didn’t recall anything going on, but when asked specifically about the time during which she’d done the deed, her eyes had gone glassy and cold as if some other part of her had come to the fore. So far, no one had managed to get through to her after that point, although the Quartermaster had paced and looked on the verge of doing something.

004 was now left rather adrift, with his mission of dealing with the mole effectively complete. Not needed in the interrogation, he walked the halls of MI6, mulling things over and waiting for further orders. A mission would turn up for him, or else he’d be given leave to go home. There were a limited number of options.

One of those options was a wild-card, however, as 004 caught something just on the edge of hearing, and then he attuned his senses to the energy of another Angel padding up behind him. 007 was very obviously attached at the hip to the Quartermaster (even if he didn’t have orders, 004 would have wagered, although he wasn’t saying anything), so that pretty much just left Alec. “I don’t know why you keep trying to sneak up on me,” 004 lamented without turning, although he did know. “Even if I couldn’t hear you, we’re both Angels – you’ve got energy, I can sense it.” Now he turned, putting on his best jaded expression as he met 006’s lopsided smile. Although, to be entirely truthful, that energy could be hidden, and 006 would undoubtedly try that now.

004 knew that perfectly well. He just didn’t want to admit that he liked his game a little bit, too, and liked to even the odds a touch. 006 wasn’t the only one who liked a challenge.

Grinning so that his eyes crinkled, 006 continued walking up to 004, knowing that his attempts at sneaking up on the man always worked to make him stand still, if nothing else. Alec stretched his wings out in a confining fashion (he was a domineering person and very proud of it) until he was right at 004’s side again, watching the sigh of annoyance lift the man’s chest. “Miss me?” he got right to the point, grinning unabashedly, “Come on, tell me you missed me a little bit.”

“You’re incorrigible,” 004 scoffed, crossing his arms and backing away as Alec crowded him. 004 maintained a calm and collected expression throughout, even managing to look completely disinterested. “Shouldn’t you be reporting back to Q-branch or M?”
“Tried,” 006 said, shrugging expansively with his wings, showing off their glistening blackness and long, stiff feathers. “Q and M were both AWOL. I’m starting to wonder where the party is.”

Since 006’s eyes said that the party was right here, 004 was inclined to keep Alec’s attention to himself for awhile… but that would probably be too much encouragement. Just because 004 liked the turn of Alec’s face didn’t mean he was willing to admit that to Alec. Besides, 006 was so recalcitrant that he likely wanted to play around before checking in anyway, and ‘playing around’ inevitably involved bugging 004. “The Quartermaster found something in the computers that led to the mole. So now they’ve got Velvet in interrogation.” As Alec’s face suddenly went blank, 004 shrugged and went on, “Who’d have guessed? I mean, apparently Silva can take over minds, but Velvet is just such a friendly-” 004’s words cut off in a grating grunt as 006’s arm suddenly came in, leveled across his windpipe and slamming him into the wall with precise, Angel-assisted force.

With his air cut off, 004 couldn’t get in air for another sound – incapacitating a target’s ability to scream was a staple move for a 00-agent – so he immediately tried to break the hold, giving up instantly on calling attention to himself. 004 was reacting on instincts, ignoring for now that this was 006 attacking him with merciless efficiency.

Never before had it been proven so blatantly, but 004 was new to his 00-status and Alec Trevelyan was a pro. As soon as he felt 004 trying to fight his way free, 006 reacted ruthlessly. Black wings hit white, slamming them against the wall hard enough to send spikes of pain not unlike hitting one’s elbow, tingling numbness channeled from fingertips to shoulder. Taking advantage of that small window of shock, Alec moved one hand to cover 004’s mouth. And with the other, turning his Angel abilities on full, he broke 004’s forearm.

The smaller man’s scream was muffled, and with everyone so interested in the interrogation, no one was nearby to hear the other sounds of the struggle. Any chances of someone wandering near enough to look down the hall and catch sight of something off was eliminated as Alec, eyes as flat and cold as steel in winter, dragged 004 and himself into a large side-closet. In the sudden dimness, 004 panted as he was allowed air again, the pain too blinding to allow other sounds for the moment.

006 was looking at him. The two of them hadn’t been this close before (as much as 006 had tried), nearly chest to chest, and yet there was nothing sexual in Alec’s eyes – nothing at all but a detached, alien coldness. He’d boxed 004 into a corner, fully aware of his now-broken arm, the calculating look in his gaze saying he was ready to use it to his advantage. If there was anything that 004 was good at (not fighting more experienced double-o’s, apparently), it was compartmentalizing, and now he pushed his feelings for 006 (whatever they were) and his utter shock at his betrayal down deeper into his core and gave the black-winged Angel a simmering glare.

“The mole,” 006 said, his words coming out clipped so that it barely sounded like him, “You caught her?”

004 had already gone over this, but 006’s brain must have been glitching, because he seemed not to remember. At first, 004 wasn’t going to answer, but then 006 grabbed his right wrist – it had been 004’s good hand, inching towards his gun. Now the effort was wasted as Alec took the weapon instead, pressing it to the other man’s neck. 006 didn’t have a weapon, probably because he’d dropped it off at Q-branch while looking for Q. Breathing heavily as the pain of his arm raged like fire, 004 kept calm and refused to show the fear on his face. “Yes,” he admitted.

Then he tried to escape again.

It was a move trained into him, as deep as his own heartbeat, so deep he probably couldn’t have resisted the urge if he’d tried. But 006’s training ran deeper, and he’d simply put in more hours in the field than 004 had had the chance to. And there was something wrong with him now, something that
made him as brutal as if he were still on a mission and 004 was on the other side. 004 barely had the chance to struggle before 006 was retaliating. 004 felt a knife scrape past one of his own ribs and then knuckles were grazing his jaw hard enough to send his head whipping back into the wall, the tang of blood exploding in his mouth. Gritting his teeth hurt but he did it anyway, because showing panic still seemed worse. 004 cursed himself for not noticing that 006, while minus his gun, had still kept a blade.

“Where?” was the next question, spoken in a low breath. 004 couldn’t use his wings because Alec’s were again pressing them to the wall, and the confines of the room felt small and claustrophobic with the larger agent taking over the space. The knife that had slipped into him and then back out had left pain like acid in its wake, and the blood that pumped out was uncomfortably hot because it was on the wrong side of 004’s skin. “Where are they interrogating her?” 006 asked, completely unmoved.

Panting painfully now and fading beneath the onslaught of the more experienced agent, 004 looked one last time for any sign of remorse or recognition – anything! – on 006’s rugged face before he came to a decision. “Second floor, room 204. They’re keeping her there,” he finally said. Every word sent a horrendous vibration through the wound in his torso, making the break in his arm almost fade into the background.

In fact, by now, 004 was so damaged that his eyes rolled back in his head, and he sagged against the wall so that he was held up only by 006. Startled by this but otherwise unaffected, the black-winged Angel let 004 slide to the floor, looking at the bleeding body and deciding that no finishing blow would be needed. He’d all but killed his fellow agent anyway. 006’s face was still impassive, as if the sight of the grey-speckled white feathers didn’t disturb him when they brushed against 004’s body and came away bathed in red.

Without another word or looking back, 006 exited the side-room to begin striding swiftly away.

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As soon as he was sure that 006 was gone, 004 coughed painfully and rolled over, just enough to reach back with his good arm and fish his phone out of his back-pocket. He quickly pulled it out, and with fading vision, he punched a number. It answered on the second ring, and he immediately grated out, “Quartermaster, this is 004. Something is wrong with 006. He just attacked me, and is after the mole. No…” He gritted his teeth as a wave of pain went through him, but answered Q’s question, “No, I didn’t tell him where she was. I sent him to room 204, near you. Tell 007 to be ready for a potentially homicidal 00-agent.” 004’s face was twisted in pain, but his eyes were hard and determined even as they began to flicker and fade.

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Chapter End Notes

So - anyone know what's wrong with 006? Will 004 die? And if he doesn't, what will happen to the budding relationship between him and 006?
Yes, I am an evil writer of cliffhangers - but don't worry! The next chapter is planned out, so it will hopefully be up before the weekend is out!
Chapter Summary

006 vs 007. 'Nuff said.

Or the chapter in which Q finally gets to test his powers, and two double-o's of equal training have-at-it

Chapter Notes

*whew* Quick update! A little shorter than the last, but it’s got lots of good stuff in it! You finally get to hear 004’s first name!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Bond was standing in the room when 006 stormed into it, standing calmly while 006 skidded to a halt. “Hey, James,” the man said, but somehow the familiar words sounded unfamiliar on his tongue, as if his voice had grown clumsy since coming back to MI6. Or perhaps since leaving it. “Why the long face?”

“Why the surprise?” 007 returned, his tone light even though there was something of a bite to it. “Am I not what you were expecting?”

006 didn’t have an answer for that. His internal energy spiked, matching the way he was suddenly walking like a cat, circling to Bond’s right.

“Bond!” came Q’s voice, as a door on the empty room’s far side opened, and the level of annoyance Bond felt at the intrusion was nearly lethal. He’d actually never wanted to strangle anyone so badly as he wanted to strangle the Quartermaster now. But Q was there nonetheless, despite strict orders from Bond to bloody stay put in Q-branch. But Q had something to say and rarely could be kept quiet when that happened. “The woman who was monitoring 006’s mission said that he was unreachable for a period of four hours, and his gun is missing three bullets from his clip that are unaccounted for. The only conclusion I can reach is that his mission wasn’t as uneventful as reported – Silva might have met up with him.”

“Little rat,” 006 bit out with some of the derision he used to show for the Quartermaster, a sneer peeling back his lips to bare his teeth, “Just can’t keep your nose where it belongs, can you?”

As 006 glared at him, Q glared uncertainly back, feeling a familiar tremor of fear at the pure animosity in those dangerous eyes – then his more practical senses kicked in, and he noticed the shift
in 006’s supernatural energy. “James, look-!” he started to warn in a yelp.

“I know, Q!” Bond cut him off with a snarl. He’d learned a thing or two since sparring with Q, one of those things being to pay attention to that energy inherent in all Angels. He’d noticed Alec going on the offensive almost as fast as Q had, and was reacting barely a heartbeat later. Grey wings fanned out, flight-feathers like spikes of smoke.

Even then, 006 was making an animal noise of warning and charging in to attack.

Black wings snapped out to their full length like the plague, but it was just a distraction, and then Bond was cursing and jerking to the side as 004’s gun came out in Alec’s far-too-capable hands. “Get OUT, Q!” Bond ordered a second before the first bullet whistled past him and imbedded itself in the wall.

Q flinched and withdrew, but when Bond and Alec were too busy trying to kill each other to notice, he slipped back in, morbidly fascinated. He’d seen double-o’s fight Mundane opponents, and he’d on occasion seen double-o’s sparring with each other in recreational situation, but never before had he seen two Angel operatives truly out for each other’s blood. It was unheard of. There were so few of them, and even if they were not on the same side, it was common-sense not to fight someone who was equally able to cause destruction and dismemberment. And now, to see 007 versus 006, easily the two best that MI6 had to offer…it was like watching an explosion and knowing that you should be running, but also knowing that you’ll never see this kind of raw power again in your life. Q hovered just behind the door, transfixed.

Guns were in the hands of both agents now, but Bond didn’t want to kill Alec, something that was slowing him down. As soon as projectile weapons had come out, the Angels had tucked their wings away, creating smaller targets of themselves. Still, in such a small room, it was inevitable that two expert marksman would be able to hit something other than plaster. 007 was unpredictable as a marksman (sometimes it seemed like he only passed his marksman tests out of luck, other times it seemed like he could do it in his sleep, leading everyone to think that he was making fun of the test), but had brought all of his skill to the table this time. Even shooting to wound, he won the honor of first blood by sending a round skimming alongside 006’s leg. 006 snarled and faltered as a bloody furrow was dug in his flesh, and Q watched, hopeful…but no, the hypnosis didn’t break. It was sewn in deeply, unlike the temporary sort of hypnosis Q had been practicing.

Obviously, the commands locked in 006’s head included him finding – and probably eliminating, Q was willing to bet – the mole, not fighting 007 to the death. After a few more attempts at shooting 007 were hampered sorely by 007 shooting back and moving with preternatural speed, 006 made a break for the door. Bond swore again, presented with the target of 006’s back that he didn’t want to shoot and the possibility of 006 getting loose on the rest of MI6. There were too few people with the capabilities to fight 006, and right now, all of them were either out on missions or bleeding out. There was only James Bond.

It seemed like Bond had a choice between a lethal body-shot and letting 006 escape, but 007 was always one for making his own choices, and he lowered the gun to instead charge forward bodily. The beat of his wings would have cleared the room if it had had anything in it. 004 had been thinking smart, however, and had given Alec a room that was currently in a state of disuse, empty of possible weapons and obstacles. It meant that Bond had a direct line of attack in which to leap and tackle Alec.

It also meant that Alec, who’d fought with Bond before and therefore knew how Bond’s mind worked, had a clear shot when he suddenly turned and shot under his wing.

Q yelped, stepping forward and into the room involuntarily and calling out a too-late warning in fear.
By then, 007 had already bit out a harsh cry of pain and twisted midair, a bird curling in on itself when a hunter pegs its. 006’s shot had been clumsy and poorly aimed, but it had had the element of surprise to it that made it impossible to dodge. Before 006 could put a final bullet through Bond’s brain, James suddenly had his gun up, and Q flinched from the echoing bark of another shot. This time, it was 006 who cried out and flinched – but once again, it was an off-the-cuff shot, all speed and no time to aim, and the only casualties were feathers.

This had to stop. 006 and 007 were killing each other slowly, and if this didn’t end in gore for both of them, it would be a miracle. Back-up was coming, but by the time it got here, there’d be blood painting the walls. And if 006 were still standing by the end of it, he’d make mincemeat of any other person who came through that door. Bond was down on one knee on the ground, either because he was too wounded to get up or because he simply hadn’t had opportunity to try yet. All Q could see was that there was blood darkening his hair, never a good sign. 006 was towering over him, startled by the shot that had torn a bunch of feathers from his wings but recovering quickly.

Q took a deep breath, pulled together all of the calmness he possessed, and stepped boldly into the room.

Time felt like it slowed as Q walked forward, back straight and frame erect. He used to walk like this when he had wings, when he still thought he was invincible, when he wasn’t a scarecrow with glasses walking towards an activated sleeper agent who was holding a gun. Q tried not to think about the fact that he’d only had success with taking over an Angel’s mind under optimal, calm conditions, and with the help of physical contact.

“ALEC!” he roared, pulling together all of the volume he possessed so that his voice consumed the room with echoes, making it impossible to ignore. He didn’t know how resistant 006 would be to mind-control, what with Silva already staking claim to Alec’s mind. Bond was swaying dizzily, on hands and knees on the floor, however, and Q couldn’t just leave him that way to die. His broad, gorgeous grey wings were spread out, spilling down his sides in dappled shades of ash that suddenly looked so breakable before the power of 006, still active and dangerous.

Q didn’t stop walking forward until he was just as far behind James Bond as Alec Trevelyan was in front, and then he snarled out, voice full of frustration, exasperation, command, and impatience.

“-Mine.” He could feel it. The power. The control. He had the niggling knowledge at the back of his mind, telling him how easy it would be to slip and release 006 as he had 007 just the day before. Another part of him knew that he controlled Bond now, too, despite never meeting his eyes once. Both 00-agents were frozen, their thoughts completely entangled where Q reached out and controlled them.

His.

He’d said Alec was his, and they truly both were his now.
Bond, between one blink and the next, went from some blank, silvery place to looking at Q’s face, which was tense and on the verge of cracking to reveal worry. Or maybe panic. The Quartermaster was holding onto his mask of calm by unraveling threads. “-James,” he said, as if he’d been saying more, but Bond’s sense of hearing hadn’t been online, “You can come out of it now.” Brows beetling with wary bewilderment, Bond became aware of dexterous fingers on the side of his face, brushing the line of his cheekbone.

Somewhat less gently, Q’s other hand was pressing a cloth to Bond’s head, and suddenly everything rushed back: the fight, the bullet just kissing the side of his skull, 006, Q’s voice like a hurricane sucking up the room and everything in it. Bond groaned loudly and dropped his head, trying to duck the pain a little longer.

Making a rueful but also relieved noise, Q sat down on the floor in front of Bond, the brace still on his knee making any other posture but standing rather uncomfortable. “Sorry about that,” Q said, and Bond could hear other people moving around them, but no signs of fighting. The situation was under control then. Q was also still talking, slowly and patiently, “I needed to break whatever hold Silva had on 006, and I took you into the mix without realizing it.” Q paused, considering, one hand unconsciously dropping down to Bond’s shoulder while the other continued to stop the bleeding from Bond’s head. “I didn’t actually realize I could do that.”

“Glad it worked,” Bond grunted, willing to be magnanimous. He shifted, his knees getting stiff from kneeling, and lifted a hand to take over the job of keeping the blood inside of his scalp. His fingers slid along Q’s, feeling the tremor of surprise that jerked their tendons before Bond’s calloused hand was firmly over top of them. Q pulled loose, but slowly. “I take it Alec isn’t trying to kill our mole anymore?”

“I knocked him unconscious,” Q admitted a little guiltily, “But what I did should have reset his brain.” He sighed, breath whistling past his lips. “Or he’s my thrall for all time and I’ve just accidentally acquired one of the most deadly, loyal pets on the face of the earth. At least he’s paper-trained.”

Bond started laughing, even though it made his head ring. Sitting now, he draped one arm over a drawn-up knee and rearranged his wings when it seemed someone was going to trip over them. Medical personnel were in the room, dealing with Alec’s wounds as he lay insensibly on the floor just a few meters away. They were looking furtively to Bond as if they wanted to deal with him, too, but were unsure how smart an idea that was. Bond was awake, after all, and fresh from a fight. “I’m sure Alec’s fine – I’m not fighting any urges to obey your every word, after all,” Bond grinned cheekily at his Quartermaster.

Q huffed out an annoyed sigh, and then, as a form of ingenious retribution, beckoned the Medical staff over. Bond grimaced but pulled his hand away, aware that he was likely to be getting stitches. Right here. Possibly right now. The doctors wasted no time in prodding at the long gouge.

From the fixed look in Q’s eyes, however, Bond could see that all Q was looking at was an inch to the right, and Bond’s brains scattered all over the place. Trying to keep his head still so as not to disrupt the doctor’s work, 007 reached forward carefully with a wing to brush Q’s arm with grey feathers.

That jerked Q out of his dark reverie, and he looked away, suddenly uncomfortable and embarrassed. He pulled away from the brushing feathers to stand up a little hurriedly and a little
clumsily, murmuring, “I’d better make sure 006 is all right. I don’t know if Medical will want him awake anytime soon, but I’d feel better if I knew he was himself again. And I have to decide when and how to wake him up to do that.”

“Of course, Quartermaster,” Bond replied, becoming professional again in turn. He wasn’t put-out, however. Today had been a hectic day, but Bond was still Q’s bodyguard until further notice, meaning he still had plenty of excuses to get Q alone and deal with all of the hectic thoughts and emotions of the day. Q may have been an active field agent once, but he was a Quartermaster now, and it was evident in the tension of his shoulders and the uneasy shaking of his hands that he had been rattled by the danger he’d been in. The fact that he was still maintaining composure and functioning only served to increase 007’s respect for the ex-agent.

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The day calmed. Slowly. Alec wasn’t awakened until hours later, when he was restrained to prevent another attack. Q was present, as was 007 and M.

“We’re going to have a talk about this new little trick of yours, Quartermaster,” M told Q tightly, and Q went tense like a spooked hare, wincing almost visibly at the warning. The cat was out of the bag now, and secrets almost invariably stung when they were dragged out into the open. He was not looking forward to having that talk with M, but at least it meant that he could show off his new skills without worrying about who saw.

Feeling a lot like the main attraction at a circus, Q had gone up, awakening 006 with a few soft words and a careful application of focus. 006 had actually woken rather quickly, and it had immediately been proven that Q was on edge – because his reflexes immediately kicked in, and he snapped off a three-word sequence before Bond could even try to calm him down. Therefore, barely a second after jerking awake, Alec was sitting stiffly (handcuffed to a chair) with his eyes wide and locked on Q’s face again, awaiting orders while Q tried to calm his breathing. Embarrassed at his overreaction, Q clenched his fists and did his best to conduct himself more like a Quartermaster as he began to see if Alec’s mind was in order. Q couldn’t read minds, but he went through a few more commands before releasing 006. The man, by then, was quite angry, but by the flavor of his swearing, the anger was partially directed at himself. Then, after a bit more intense interrogation from M, it became clear that Q had succeeded in overriding Silva’s control.

006 was deemed himself again in a little over an hour, and then, instead of being locked up for a few days extra just in case, submitted to being under 007’s charge – with the mole now found, it was decided that Q was a little safer. Besides, Q’s next assignment was to try and do to Velvet what he’d done to Alec. This would put him in the thick of MI6 security, so Bond could be spared from bodyguard duty for a bit.

Q gave Bond an epicly mournful look when M called the Quartermaster off for a talk. Bond tried to look sympathetic, but figured he just looked on the verge of laughing, which earned him a glare before the Quartermaster obediently followed the female Angel off. It was promising to be a rather unenviable evening for the Quartermaster: he’d just ‘broken’ the control on 006 and now had to see if he could repeat the feat on Velvet, all with the knowledge that he had a meeting with M in his immediate future, in which she’d no doubt make him explain every minute of his training and practice. Bond would have laughed himself silly if he weren’t also feeling so sorry for Q. That was the point of long days, however – they seemed made to get longer.
As everyone else turned to focus on Velvet and Q, Bond and Alec wandered down through MI6 as it headed into evening. They were probably supposed to head to the break room and stay there, as it was secluded and virtually indestructible after years of containing 00-agents between missions. But everyone was going home for the night except those in on the interrogation, and the few that stayed weren’t going to argue with two 00-agents.

Nightfall found two shadowy figures in a darkened room, the lights of Medical turned off except for emergency lights and the omnipresent glow of machines with their gentle beeping. Bond had taken up a seat in a chair by the door, fulfilling his duty of keeping 006 on a short leash while also being essentially invisible as Alec walked up to the figure lying quiet and still on the bed. The scene was painted in muted shades of grey, and Alec’s dark clothes and darker wings stood out by being only a few shades blacker. It was a mercy that it was so dark, because 004 would have looked pale under Medical’s harsh lighting. As it was, 004 had lost so much blood that he was still unconscious, and an IV drip was taped to the arm that wasn’t in a cast.

Alec said nothing. Usually so talkative, he was now mute, simply standing impassively over the other agent. One hand moved, stroking with measured speed and gentleness up 004’s shoulder; as if following an unspoken ritual, he next touched the tousled spikes of his hair, which for the first time were most or less plastered against his brow after being bundled off to Medical. He’d nearly bled out, and 006 moved his hand so that it hovered over – but did not touch – the mass of bandages around 004’s middle. The knife had slid in just under his ribs on the right side, nicking one and doing enough internal damage to kill a Mundane and nearly do the same to 004. Medical had him stabilized now, but it would be awhile before he woke.

Still with his face in shadow and everything about him radiating a kind of quiet that would otherwise seemed totally alien to the garrulous agent, 006 leaned forward, unembarrassed and unhesitant. Fully aware that Bond was watching him like a shadowed, patient hawk from across the room, Alec laid a kiss to 004’s forehead, to his eyelids – left, then right – and finally a chaste touch to his lips, not so much a kiss as a surrendering. He was dropping an apology upon those lips. With one last kiss, this one to 004’s chin like a closing of the silent conversation, 006 gave a verbal apology, very quietly. All he said was, “I’m sorry, Aiden.” 007 was well-trained not to show surprise, but he felt it when he heard 004’s name for the first time – he hadn’t realized that Alec actually knew it. Apparently he did. And apparently he was much more serious about 004 than just some fling he chased around for fun. Leaving with a touch of his hand to 004’s chest and then a squeeze of the man’s unmoving fingers – assuring himself that 004 was alive and there – 006 turned back to Bond without actually looking at him. “I need a drink,” he said hoarsely, and seemed to age decades as his shoulders sagged with weariness.

Bond knew a thing or two about regret, and nodded and shrugged acceptingly before jostling 006 with his wings and taking the two of them out to get thoroughly plastered. Sometimes, that was the best thing you could do.

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Chapter End Notes

I think that Aiden is actually canon for 004, and I had help finding his name *helpful, life-saving commenters* Expect cuddles in the next chapter! I figure this is enough of an
excuse for Bond and Q to have some time together, eh? ;)}
Cuddles

Chapter Summary

The commenters have spoken! It is time for 00Q cuddles...

Or a chapter in which I made Bond sexual, but not too sexual, and made it all work by adding in the fact that Q has had a REALLY long and trying day.

Chapter Notes

I hope you like it! I had no real plan for what would happen in this chapter, and just sort of flowed through it and typed what felt natural. It might be different than my usual style. Anyway - enjoy Chapter Cuddles!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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Q had been looking forward to nothing more than going home and collapsing on his bed, or the couch…or maybe just the carpet in front of the door. Whichever was closest. Q couldn’t remember sleeping this much in such a short time in almost forever, but the stress of the past few days was monumental. Q felt that a night’s sleep was warranted. All that disrupted his plans was the realization that Bond still had his keys.

It was late and Q-branch was a ghost-town, meaning Q didn’t try to hide his limp as he retreated to his office. He was intent on hunting up his spare keys, although he honestly didn’t even know where they were – he just figured that the junk-drawer of his desk was a veritable black-hole for random items, and his best chance of finding things. However, after the verbal dressing-down that M had given him on the topic of self-taught hypnosis, Q didn’t have the energy to hunt for anything. He simply stumbled into his little office and shut the door, unable to find it in him to even turn on the light as he leaned his head against the door, hands to either side and trying to soak in the solidity of the door. Sleeping standing up seemed a distinct possibility.

When he felt hands, gentle against his sides, he nearly had a heart-attack instead, his heart-rate going from nothing to racing-pace in a fraction of a second. Before he could try and fight off the interloper in his office, he was hearing 007’s familiar voice, low and soft in his ear, “Shhhh, shhh. It’s just me, Q. Just me.”

It should have been annoying that Bond didn’t remove his hands, taking liberties with Q’s personal space – basically pretending that personal space didn’t exist, mostly. But after a long day of using his head for everything, having hands touch his body felt like warm sunlight in a cold place. Q relished it, dropping barriers that were already cracked and ratty anyway. He sighed, letting his head fall forward between his hands again, thumping unheeded against the door. He shivered as lips brushed the nape of his neck. He considered breaking Bond’s nose for it. Gave up on the idea.
As it was, Bond decided to pull back, not pushing even though he’d met no resistance for once. He’d had many partners before, and knew the difference between an eager one and an exhausted one. The latter sometimes did a good impression of the former, simply because the fatigued mind didn’t want to think or make decisions.

But perhaps 007 was a little bit greedy, a little bit selfish – common traits for someone whose job might put him six feet under on any given day. Either way, while he did cease in his kisses to the back of the Quartermaster’s neck, 007 didn’t move away, instead sliding his arms around Q’s slim waist. After the briefest hesitation, he snugged his grip tight, muscle and bone creating their own reality that Q sunk into with a sigh. “I’m not going to bed with you,” Q said, sounding very in control of himself, which was actually far from the truth. His head had rocked back on Bond’s shoulder and his hands had come to rest over the hands around his stomach, making no effort to remove them.

Bond had his head against the side of his Quartermaster’s, and his soft chuckle went into the collar of Q’s shirt. “I know,” he said simply, without surprise or argument. There was no judgment in his tone either, despite the fact that Bond was known for making problems disappear by taking people to bed. Q fit the bill of someone with problems in need of disappearing for a bit, but he wasn’t just anyone – he was Q. “Sit with me, though?” Bond coaxed. And Q allowed the 00-agent to walk him slowly backwards, easing his feet back through the darkened room.

Feathers whispered against things, acting like whiskers on a cat to test where things were in the dark. Bond bumped into nothing, and Q closed his eyes, content to just listen to the sound of feathers brushing objects: the wall, his desk, the chair, the couch. As the backs of Bond’s calves touched the edge of the couch, he squeezed Q a little bit closer, some of that greediness edging in, urging him to curl the fingers of one hand against the flat, sleek planes of Q’s stomach. He dragged his fingers like blunted claws, bumping over remarkably toned abdominal muscles and listening to Q suck in a breath. Bond growled appreciatively under his breath, finally internalizing that this was an ex-agent he was holding.

“How’s 006? You’re supposed to be watching him,” Q interrupted again, a reflexive, self-preservative attempt to keep himself grounded, to deny that this was happening and he was doing this.

Unperturbed, Bond replied in a patient and wholly unoffended tone, “Drunk.” For the first time, Q noted that he could smell alcohol on Bond’s breath, too, but only a whiff, not enough to impede him. “I took him out for that express purpose, and then he surrendered to being put in a holding cell for the night, like Velvet is. He said that it hardly mattered where he spent the night, as he was on the verge of passed out, and I was your bodyguard first anyway.” Bond pressed one slow, open-mouthed kiss to the side of Q’s neck, the hot rush of his exhale almost covering Q’s. “Alec is an understanding person.”

“But I meant it, Bond,” Q reasserted, and it turned out that he was returning to an earlier topic even as he gripped Bond’s wrists as if to clutch them tighter to himself, “I may not be exactly in the right state of mind, but I know that I do not intend to sleep with you.”

“I know – I know, Q!” Bond exclaimed softly and with surprising sympathy. He lifted his head so that his cheek was pressed in against the side of Q’s head, and his words had a short, ghosting trip to his ear, where they came out gently, “Do you notice me trying to get your clothes off? I’m just here to distract you. That’s all.”

There was so much compassion in those words that Q nearly whimpered. Any worries that Bond was just on an adrenalin-high and simply itching for some sweat and skin to bring him down were
dispersed and Q heard understanding in those words. Bond didn’t sound aroused, or amused, or devilishly charming. Instead, he sounded like a voice of reason and a voice of comfort.

Then Bond shifted, just enough to lower his head against the back of Q’s neck, teeth pressing on either side of the protruding vertebrae and making Q shudder. “Distraction indeed,” the Quartermaster said, but his voice was a breath, a tired ‘thank you’. The faint discomfort of the bite was washed away by hot breath.

Instead of coaxing them both down onto the couch, Bond remained standing, turning Q to face him. There probably wasn’t any reason for it. So far as Q was concerned, there didn’t need to be a reason for any of it, so long as Bond fulfilled his promise to keep the monsters at bay for a bit – to turn the exhaustion into something tolerable instead of an empty, yawning ache that was threatening to swallow Q from the inside out. He bowed his head as Bond’s practiced mouth sought his forehead, so wrung out that thinking hurt, and the no-strings-attached affection that Bond was offering tasted like water to someone lost in the desert.

And truly, there were no strings. Bond, as promised, didn’t push him – he simply pressed kisses to Q’s face and neck in a steady, heated rain. There was definitely something erotic about that (it wasn’t just some paternal or fraternal exercise), from the way the kisses felt hungry to the way 007’s muscled body remained close enough that touching it was unavoidable, muscles constantly shifting. Q allowed his hands to rest on Bond’s waist, telling himself that this was neither a discouraging nor an encouraging gesture, even as he felt a tingle at his fingertips as they just grazed the strong curve of his hip.

There was a shirt between his hands and Bond’s skin, but it felt like the thinnest of barriers, and it was clear that Bond wouldn’t mind him bypassing it.

Q slid his eyes closed in the dark room, cataloguing the touches, the contact, viewing them as sparks in a landscape that was otherwise dark. He noted, analytically, the ways in which 007 was holding back and controlling himself, even as a far less analytical side of himself noted the ways in which 007 was still very much there and radiating enough sexual energy to make Q crackle like a live-wire beneath his skin. Still, Q noticed something. “I heard somewhere that prostitutes try not to kiss on the lips, which is exactly what you’re doing. Or not doing,” Q said, surprised at how observant and detached his voice was, although that could likely be blamed on the fact that emotion took that much more energy.

Bond’s chuckle was low and throaty, pushing back strands of Q’s wavy hair with his breath. “They do that so as not to become emotionally attached,” he supplied with an obvious smile in his voice, even if Q couldn’t see his face. He made no comment other than that.

Turning this over with a brain working light-years slower than usual, Q allowed a kiss to his left eyelid, 007’s hands strong and warm on the sides of his head to hold him still. For a sudden, muscle-clenching second, he felt the ludicrous urge to pull free and, under his own power, catch those lips in his. But he saw the logic in maintaining the distance: he himself was on the verge of being delusionally tired, not thinking straight, and (to quote Spock in a movie he’d never admit how much he liked) emotionally compromised. But while he had the sense not to throw caution to the wind, he did not have the sense to push Bond away altogether. If there was a fallout for this later, he’d take it later. Meanwhile, he let his head rock bonelessly in Bond’s grip and sighed, “I’m sorry for hypnotizing you. And 006. I don’t know how to express how much I hate having a power that takes the ability of self-control away from people.”

Bond’s hands tightened, going from merely guiding and supporting to possessive. His palms flush against the side of Q’s head, fingers buried in his hair and scratching tantalizingly at his scalp, Bond leaned down a little more to unexpectedly push close to Q’s glasses – in a familiar move, he pressed his teeth down on the bridge of Q’s nose. The memory of the plane combined with the heat of the
moment to make the Quartermaster gasp, back arching involuntarily until his belly and chest touched
007’s. “Don’t apologize for that,” Bond said roughly, voice vibrating right into Q and almost edging
into a threat, and that was that. He did add, however, as he turned so that his rough jaw was nuzzling
Q’s, “And I already talked to 006 about it. He realizes that it was either let you play games with his
head or die. So he’ll act professional about it.”

“I…” Q started, then sighed, realizing that he had no idea what he wanted to say. He was a
conglomeration of emotions right now, guilt still high on the list, followed by an unsettling fear of his
own skill. He’d hypnotized not one, but two Angels, one without even looking, neither with physical
contact. If Silva could do that, he was hiding the skill – from what Alec had admitted once Q had
gotten his head screwed on straight, it sounded like Silva had actually taken three goes at him: the
first time back when he’d been collared with a bomb (apparently he hadn’t been unconscious the
whole time of his kidnapping), again when Silva had captured the three of them in Canada, before Q
had awakened, and the final knot had been tied in 006’s noose on his last mission, which wasn’t as
uneventful as he’d originally reported. That had also included the implantation of dormant
commands, something that Q hadn’t even considered trying yet. Finally, he satisfied himself with a
soft, sincere, “Thanks for talking with him. I probably would have botched that.”

Another chuckle from Bond; the sound was intoxicating. Q managed to babble through it, “I’m not
exactly the best conversationalist.”

By this point, Bond appeared to be ignoring him. Another kiss pressed warmly to Q’s cheekbone as
Bond turned his head, unrepentantly shifting the Quartermaster to suit his needs. For all of 007’s
greediness, however, Q found that he was being treated fairly and gently. The strength in Bond’s
hands didn’t scare him – although it did impress him – as the 00-agent shifted his hands down slowly
to cup his jaw, the side of his slim neck, and finally his shoulders. Bond was still carefully avoiding
his mouth, like some unspoken rule, and Q found himself reevaluating Bond’s motives a bit. Or
perhaps his morals. 007 was known to be basically amoral in the field, using his body and charisma
like a weapon as much as any gun Q-branch gave him.

But if Bond were just using his skills and strengths as a means to get what he wanted, then why
wasn’t Q naked and shivering already, chilled except for the heat of a demanding body over him?

The realization – however fuzzy it was – that Bond truly wasn’t going to take advantage of him
seemed to cut the last legs out from under Q’s reserve. He released a tired breath and let his head fall
forward against Bond’s chest. His glasses ended up scrunched uncomfortably against his face, and
he felt a lot like a poorly made puppet with weighted limbs, but the sloppy kiss he pressed against
Bond’s throat was sincere. Now, for the first time, Bond’s breath caught, and Q had a moment to be
distantly impressed with himself. Those shadow-and-smoke wings curled around them, sealing out
the last light in the dark room.

When Bond’s hand drifted, his thumb finding the hollow of Q’s throat briefly while his fingers
stretched of their own accord out along Q’s shirt, a sudden memory made Q flinch. For the first time,
his quiet pleasure ceased, and he pulled away as everything froze. Bond’s left hand had been
hovering over his right collarbone, reminiscent of the heavy touch of another hand – a threatening
hand. Feeling exhausted, wrung out, and now guilty of embarrassment, the Quartermaster stumbled a
half-step back within the cocoon of wings. Bond, without even a hint of protest, stopped what he
was doing, hands lifting away from Q’s body, palm forward to show them empty.

It said something for Q’s state of mind that he felt the need to be mannerly. Sighing and wanting
nothing more to go back to leaning on Bond (so long as he didn’t have to depend on his own two
feet, it didn’t matter when he spontaneously fell asleep), he murmured out a patient explanation,
“That’s where I was shot – the ‘matching scar’ I so glibly mentioned sometime back.” His eyes
tightened in a wince as he admitted the more uncomfortable bit of information, “Silva was rather interested in it.”

He need not have worried that Bond would miss the message sewn between those simple lines: for a brief second, 007’s supernatural energy flared, a dead giveaway that he was furious when he realized what Q was alluding to. He controlled himself quickly, though, fascinating Q by never showing anger on his face – or at least not enough to be seen in the shadowy room. Bond returned his hands to Q’s body, one hand to Q’s left shoulder and the other to buff the backs of his fingers lightly against the right side of Q’s neck. Eyes intense and hard face impassive, Bond asked obliquely, “Do you mind…?”

Q just blinked at him blearily, far beyond the point of hiding anything, including obliviousness. “Bond, I’ve been doing laps through a metaphorical gauntlet all day. I haven’t the foggiest what you’re insinuating.”

That made the man laugh, his mouth curling up at the edges, but then he seemed to come to a decision on his own. He pressed a kiss in under Q’s jaw, teeth and tongue soon providing a whole world of distractions so that Q, quite involuntarily, soon had his hands fisted in the material of Bond’s shirt. The agent’s pectoral muscles were defined and firm beneath his hands, flexing minutely as 007 moved now to bite gently at the juncture between Q’s neck and shoulder. The motion started to push his shirt-collar to the side, but it wasn’t like when Silva had done it – that memory was being erased with a combination of drowsiness and continued stimulation.

“Scars like that hurt sometimes,” Bond mentioned, and Q realized that at some point the man had stopped kissing him and was just holding him, keeping him upright against a wall of muscle and bone.

“Memories hurt worse,” was Q’s instinctive response, and then he sighed, realizing he was being cryptic. He let his head be pillowed on Bond’s shoulder, but couldn’t find the energy or drive to form more words. Fortunately, that also meant he had next to no energy for surprise, as he felt Bond encircle his wrist with strong, calloused fingers. Turning his head against Bond’s shoulder to try and pick out shapes in the dark, he felt more than saw as 007 lifted both of their hands until the Quartermaster’s long, deft fingers were pressed against the right side of Bond’s shirt-collar. Q felt a little jolt of interest and surprise as his fingertip connected with the skin at the hollow of the man’s throat.

“Show me,” Bond commanded, “Show me what he did.”

The command was vague, but it was simple – it also contained a wealth of difficulties. Despite having the brain capacity of a small (and perhaps rather horny) cactus, Q understood the order. 00-agents understood better than anyone that actions not only spoke louder than words, but often hurt the psyche less to get out: Bond wanted to know what Silva had done to cause Q to flinch, and was smart enough to realize that a verbal rendition would probably end in tears or another fight. Still, just because showing Bond was easier didn’t mean it was easy. Q’s emotions were already in a tangle, and while Bond’s tender, heated attentions had narrowed down the range of emotions, they all still had the power to bite. Q felt fear and desire, tangled up both in the memory and now in the doing. Silva had touched him as if he wanted to take him apart, a poisonous insinuation that there would be more to come if he ever caught Q again – and now, touching Bond, Q wondered where the line between coworker and lover was, and if he’d crossed it already. Or if he was about to in a minute. He was reasonably sure he could not imitate what Silva had done without feeling some of that low-burning heat that he’d seen smoldering in Silva’s canted eyes.

But he moved his fingers anyway, pushing them beneath the neck of Bond’s shirt, because self-
control had fled on broken wings long ago.

Q let his entire world narrow down to what he was doing, to the point that he wouldn’t have continued standing if Bond’s hands hadn’t both lowered to encircle his waist; he was distantly aware of a warm, feathered presence of a wing at his back, cupped around him. ‘Odd. A very gentle gesture for a 00-agent,’ the remaining analytical part of his brain mused, conveniently forgetting that both Bond and Trevelyan had already formed a habit of all but herding him around with their wings, always gently. He could see only vague outlines and shaded impressions of contours in the dark room, but going by touch wasn’t so hard when the rest of his senses had turned off and gone home ages ago.

Skin. Hot and smooth and stretched over sinew, bone, and muscle.

The leading edge of a collarbone, in stark contrast to the vulnerability presented in the unprotected skin before, with its tantalizing pulse. The strong line of the collarbone leading after, the skim of fabric over the backs of Q’s knuckles as his hand slid, unhindered, under Bond’s shirt. He almost missed the sharper inhale of the man’s breath, but heard it in his ear where it was pressed flat now against Bond’s body.

The memory surfaced, and Q shivered, but being on the other end of the encounter dulled it; he was able to continue. For a split-second, he felt like an audience to his own nightmare, but there was something so different about Bond – broad and muscular where Q was slim and lean, to say nothing of a body-temperature that made Q wonder if he himself was too cool or Bond too warm – that the connection was instantly lost.

Here. On Q, the bullet-scar would be just below. Fascinated despite himself, Q stilled his hand on its trip across Bond’s collarbone, pushing the fabric of the man’s shirt further as he dropped his fingers. The scar was slightly to one side of where Q’s was, but it still sent a sudden jolt of pure shock to feel, on someone else, the texture of scar-tissue that had become so familiar on himself. Q didn’t even realize that he’d startled and stiffened until 007’s arms were tightening around him, bands of warm steel and dexterous fingers. “Shhh, Q. It’s all right.”

Under other circumstances, Q would have bristled as being coddled when he was supposed to be this man’s boss, but instead he just blinked and tried to hold still as the fleeting panic receded. He still had his hand in Bond’s shirt, fingers unintentionally curled against his skin and the muscle beneath, and released his grip guiltily. Bond’s tone more than the words washed over him, helping the exhausted Quartermaster come back to himself.

“Let’s get you to bed,” Bond suggested in a surprisingly practical tone, and Q realized that at some point their positions had gone from sexual to simply supportive. His knee ached and his arm hurt, but he noted with gratitude that he also no longer had the energy to replay the day’s events over in his head. Q sighed as he realized that that had been Bond’s intent: 007 had skillfully pulled Q out of his thoughts in the time it took the Quartermaster to weather the last stages of exhaustion. Q had been thinking about Bond’s hands and his mouth and his curious refusal to kiss him on the mouth instead of beating himself up over what he’d been forced to do to two agents (not to mention Velvet) under his command.

Now Q put up no fight as Bond rotated the two of them slowly – like two dancers, slow but not clumsy – and then pressed back until Q’s legs bumped the edge of the couch. The brace made bending his knee a problem, and Q reached down with a thoroughly incoherent growl to claw at it in the dark, never wanting something removed from his person so much in his life, except maybe Silva’s hands. Bond caught his wrists, stilling them even as he used wings and sheer proximity to get Q sitting on the couch. “Leave it, Q,” came 007’s voice in the dark, hovering between commanding
and sympathetic. Q left it alone, but only because he lacked the motor control to undo Velcro right now, probably. He simply slouched, with a sigh, hands dropping to his lap and eyes giving Bond a ‘What do we do now?’ look in the dark. 007 just looked back, steady and calm as he remained bent to Q’s level.

At first, it looked like the agent was going to finally claim Q's mouth, the heat in his blue eyes evident even in the darkness. But after a moment of just looking at him, expression lost in shadow, the blonde agent just said, “Go to sleep, Q.”

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Chapter End Notes

Next...I think I must wright 004/006 cuddles...they needz them.

Plus, I've got some snippets backed up that need to happen between Q and Bond. I've typed them, but they haven't happened yet and need to be sewn into the story XP
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

The chapter in which 006 finally has to face up to what he's done.

Or the chapter in which Bond gets to have a bit of fun, even if Alec certainly doesn't.

Chapter Notes

I promised cuddles, buuuuut...yeah, no cuddles. Sorry for the long gap! I'm supposed to be working on a paper for class, and it's tripping me up a bit *dumb school papers*

The chapter is one of the shorter ones - but hopefully worth it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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“Well then, I should have known you’d be in the thick of this mess,” M retorted sharply, her wings actually moving for once as she cocked an eyebrow at the 00-agent standing calmly in front of her desk. The room was otherwise empty, giving her free reign to berate him as she saw fit (not that an audience would have slowed her). She continued to eye 007. “Although at least you picked a loyal person to be corroborating with – I do believe that Q would have kept your name out of it to the last breath if you hadn’t been such integral part in this reckless training he was doing.”

Bond flashed a smile, broad and false but very truthfully cheeky, unabashedly proud of his choice in cohorts. The man was standing in an elegantly relaxed pose, something that no one else in MI6 was capable of while facing M – the only thing that gave away Bond’s awareness of potential danger was that his wings were offset from his back by about a foot, loose and ready to move. Otherwise he could have been a rather rugged, impish model on the front of a men’s fashion magazine.

“Actually, you’re into everybody’s business.” M didn’t have nervous ticks, but she did tap one fingernail on the desk now – a fleeting tap where most normal people would have drummed their fingers. Her wings had stretched out once in matching arrays of pale grey and silver, but now folded away again neatly. “Or should I assume you left 006 unsupervised to visit Agent Matsuda?”

It took Bond a minute to realize that M was talking about 004. He’d heard the first name, and now had the second, but it was still embarrassing that it had taken this long to learn them: Aiden Matsuda. The man didn’t even really look Asian, but family lines and family names went a long way. Bond filed the information away for perusal later. Calm and for all the world unperturbed, 007 replied, “He was supervised, as you ordered.”

“Don’t hide behind orders,” M snapped, and Bond had to fight another smirk. He liked getting under the woman’s skin, at least up until the point that she truly got angry. Fortunately, she was calming
again, the seriousness of her eyes hiding the sincere sympathy that she felt for all of her agents. Her voice softened. “I take it that 004 and 006 had a nice meet then?”

“004 was still unconscious, but I think that checking on him did Alec some good,” was Bond’s honest opinion, to which he added more seriously, “006 is back to himself now. He agreed to be locked in a holding cell overnight, but whatever Silva did to him – and Velvet – Q broke.”

It seemed that M would argue (it was her job to be suspicious of the loyalties of those working under her), but instead her sharp eyes narrowed shrewdly again. “In your experience, is Q strong enough to do that? Does he have the necessary skill to fully undo Silva’s handiwork?” she asked in a voice that demanded utmost candidness.

Bond met her eyes unflinchingly so that she could see that he wasn’t hiding anything – he meant every word he said. “Q took over me, too, when he stopped Alec’s rampage, and he used that power without even trying. With me…” Bond swallowed, forever uncomfortable with the memories of having someone take over his head, even if that someone was the Quartermaster – but he still refused to blink or look away. “With me, the Quartermaster showed both control and skill, and goodness knows he’s got the power. If he says that 006 is cleared, he is.”

M’s wings gave a whispering twitch, then she paused, and then she unexpectedly sat back in her chair to type something on the nearby keyboard. “Done. I am not going to reinstate 006 on active duty yet – as with any compromised agent, he is due for evaluation – so don’t smile at me like that.” She glared, but 007 just continued to grin like a cat about to be handed a piece of tuna. “By all rights, I should have you and Q quarantined along with 006 for being with Silva, but since Q has conveniently shown knowledge of Silva’s tricks and you’ve equally conveniently been his guinea pig – why you’d sit still for that and not debriefings, I’ll never know – means that you’re both in the clear.” She gave one wing a flick, a motion like she was dispelling water, clearly irritated. “Now go see 006.”

Off-put by the new instruction, Bond blinked, shifting his weight to the other foot and asking hesitantly, “Um…any reason why? I mean, I like spending time with Alec, but you usually tell me that we cause catastrophes when in each other’s company.” It was true – M said that all the time. She was also correct: James and Alec could cause a lot of trouble all alone, but the chances of destruction rose by an order of magnitude the closer they got together.

M cocked one eyebrow imperiously, fixing Bond with a look that said he was dense – also something he’d learned to get used to. “I want you to see him to let him out of the holding cell, of course.” Now the intimidating woman looked away, however, pretending to preoccupy herself with sorting papers across her desk as she added, “Beyond that, I just got a notice that said 004 is awake. I assume that he and 006 are still keeping up that ridiculous charade that they’re not interested in each other, and it’s driving me bloody insane. If this puts them off each other, I’ll never get a wink of sleep. Do you know how long it took me to find someone of 00-material who also followed orders?” She didn’t give Bond time to answer, rapping off her own response as she shuffled papers together with entirely too much force. “Too bleeding long. And if he’s traumatized by 006 turning on him, I’ll have to start over again.”

“So you want me to take Alec to kiss and make up?” Bond couldn’t help but summarize with a smile that was heading dangerously close to a leer.

Eyes snapping up to him, M looked ready to cut him apart slowly with a razor if he used any more cheek. “I’m saying,” she reiterated crisply, “that 006 did a lot of damage, and it’s the least he could do to fix some of it. Now get out of my office.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Bond smiled, and he might have winked. He must not have, because he didn’t get a
bulldog-shaped figurine thrown at his back when he turned and left. But it sure felt like he winked…

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Bond was known for recklessness and shooting from the hip on missions, but in truth, he had a truly conniving nature. Therefore, he didn’t head directly to the holding cells and 006. Instead, he made other trips, setting things up. Since M had giving him permission (ordered him, really) to play matchmaker, he decided to do it right. This whole thing made him grin involuntarily as he walked into Medical to stop just outside 004’s room.

004 had been watching something on the television, one arm in a sling and the other lazily flipping through what had to be atrociously boring channels. Bond knew from experience that the cable in Medical never seemed to bring in anything good to watch. Still, the hope of a good show kept 004 from noticing his fellow agent lurking near the door.

Right on cue, a doctor hurried in, sparing Bond a glance. Flashing her a smile with all of his charm, he waved her on as if he’d just be passing by. In reality, he lingered, because he wasn’t going to miss this for the world. He’d been using his best espionage skills to set this plan rolling for the last hour, cajoling and hinting until he got his way. This was what happened when a 00-agent wasn’t given a mission for too long.

The doctor immediately turned on a warm smile for 004, who was enough of a gentleman to smile back – go figure he’d be the only 00-agent able to tolerate Medical. “Your tests came back – you’ve got healing to do, obviously, but there don’t seem to be any complications to worry about. You just need rest now.”

“That sounds good. Thanks,” 004 nodded, unaware that 007 was listening in. Aiden clearly didn’t know what to add to his comment, but thankfully, the woman had more to say.

“It’s been decided that the best thing for your recovery will be to return to your own home – you’ll be more comfortable there, and unless you pull out your stitches, the fact that you’re an Angel should make healing just a matter of time and rest. Besides, everyone knows how quickly Angels get stir-crazy in Medical.”

This was actually a blatant lie in 004’s case, who thus far had behaved – still, it had gotten the ball rolling. Bond had merely needed to cite his own previous experiences to make at-home rest for 004 sound like a gold-mine to the staff. 004 probably would have behaved, but they didn’t have to know.

004 looked both surprised and pleased at the unexpected decision, but the doctor wasn’t done yet. “However, you’ll need someone to look after you. I don’t want you doing anything strenuous – actually, I’d rather you moved around as little as possible.” She was glaring now, used to having to threaten double-o’s into submission.

These mixed messages were obviously getting to 004, who preferred cut-and-dried orders any day, and felt that the glare was more befitting to 006 or 7 than himself. He hadn’t earned it. Bond watched his confused face with increasing amusement, still keeping just far enough back from the open door not to be immediately noticed.

Someone walked up to him. Bond didn’t blink or turn his head, instead acting relaxed. He knew that it was 006, coming a bit more slowly and reluctantly. “You’ve got that horrid look on your face that
says you planned something,” the black-winged Angel observed under his breath, looking and sounding rather horrid after his night of drinking to excess then sleeping in a holding cell. “You know, when you plan things, it’s always somehow worse than when you didn’t.”

“Shut it, Alec,” Bond admonished pleasantly, watching things unfold.

Any other person would have argued with the doctor, but 004 was an anomaly that way. He’d frowned when he was told that he’d need someone to stay with him if he was to go home, but had held his piece as the doctor reiterated the need to keep things quiet and restful, not aggravating any of his wounds. Ultimately, the logic seemed to be winning, and 004 had already started nodding and murmuring that he understood.

“Will one of your nurses be staying with me at my flat then?” he asked with sensible decorum as he shifted a wing slightly. No beds could be properly made for Angels, unless those Angels were healthy enough to move around and/or sleep on their stomachs. With a knife-wound in his middle, 004 was stuck as he was – another reason to get him to his home, which would have more chairs for him to sit in and stretch his wings a bit.

“We haven’t decided exactly who will be staying with you yet,” the doctor answered, once again smiling, now that the threat of a temper tantrum had passed. She obviously hadn’t worked with 004 enough, or else she would have realized that he was always behaved, the minx. Bond smirked, recalling that he’d threatened to throw this very doctor out a window the last time he’d been stuck in Medical.

Standing next to Bond, Alec was motionless, listening. He wasn’t his usual chummy self, and Bond had known him long enough to be able to say with certainty that the damper on 006’s temperament had little to do with the hangover he was doubtlessly enduring. From this angle, Alec could just see into the room, but couldn’t actually see the man inside of it.

Bond felt the flickering snap in Alec’s supernatural energy when he realized that this was a set-up, and what Bond had set in motion. “You’re a real piece of work, you know that?” he asked in a growl, wings beginning to shuffle uncomfortably. “This is never going to work.”

“Give me the benefit of the doubt – this is my first time matchmaking under orders,” Bond couldn’t help but retort back, tongue-in-cheek, still never letting his eyes leave the scene unfolding in the hospital room. 004 had accepted that he’d be allowed back to his home as soon as a suitable caregiver was found, a situation that sounded quite good – in fact, it looked like the idea of being in his own house was truly tugging at 004’s mind now. The bait had been taken. The doctor left, quirking an eyebrow now at the two 00-agents who were there. 007 just smiled at her with perfect gentility, looking quite disarming for a man who could kill with his eyes closed. 006 balanced that out with an effortless glare that could have eviscerated someone. Accordingly, the doctor’s eyes widened and she picked up speed down the hall, not looking back.

And then, because 006 had a track-record of not looking out for other people’s wings even when he was not hung over, Bond snapped out his right wing to shove the man aside, back down the hall. While 006 was busy regaining his balance and cursing as quietly as possible, Bond waltzed into 004’s room. He heard Alec’s growl behind him as the man gave up on trying to stop him.

Thinking of all the times that Alec had gotten him into fixes, Bond smiled, knowing he’d enjoy this. Thinking of all the times that Alec had saved his life, Bond tempered his smile, knowing that Alec deserved this. After a night sitting back while Alec drank himself not quite close enough to oblivion, Bond was well aware of the guilt that 006 was feeling. And the root of that guilt was sitting right there, looking guardedly perplexed on a hospital bed in Medical. “007?” Aiden asked, “What are you doing here?”
“Can’t I visit a fellow agent?” Bond asked cheerily, hands shoved in his pockets and posture relaxed.

004 narrowed his eyes, wary. “There are no rules against it, no,” he hedged slowly, then he sighed as he came to a realization. He thumped his head back against the pillow, showing off an impressive bruise across his jawline that made Bond wince. He and Alec had had their scuffles in the past, and knew therefore how hard Alec could hit, but this injury hadn’t been the result of some drunken argument. “Seriously? You were listening in at the door?” Aiden guessed, looking at the ceiling as if trying to find the strength to deal with agents less moral than himself. “And now you’re going to offer to take me home?!” Now the edge of incredulous panic was taking his voice up a pitch, although he was doing a remarkably good job of staying civil.

At the same time, Bond was put on the back foot slightly by 004 coming to that conclusion. Quickly regaining his equilibrium, Bond chuckled and pushed the idea aside. “Of course not – well, yes, I was listening at the door. But I’m not fool enough to take up the job of an at-home nurse. I can barely keep a goldfish alive,” he informed 004 with a rueful tone but entire truthfulness. “Besides, I’m supposed to be guarding the Quartermaster,” he couldn’t help but add.

004 gave him a cool look, waited exactly to the count of three, and then lifted one eyebrow towards the tousled bangs of his hair. “Uh-huh,” was all he said, in a patently unconvinced tone, and a look that said, ‘So that’s what they’re calling it these days.’

Since Bond was never one to be teased without giving as good as he got, the larger Angel folded his arms and leaned against the footboard of the bed, cocking his head and keeping his smile small and unreadable. “But I have a few people in mind who might like the job.”

Head turned so that he was looking at Bond askance, clearly not trusting the man who had more international infractions than some databases could hold, 004 bit his lip to keep from asking what Bond meant.

004 was sore and uncomfortable with his injuries, a little hazy thanks to the pain meds, and irritated by the way his wings feathers were all scrunched no matter how he stretched them – but he was not so off his game that he’d forgotten who Bond was. The man was a trickster and a predator when he wanted to be, and rather good at it, which 004 respected. It also meant that he felt the urge to throw up his hands and give in to the fact that mayhem was about to happen.

And he wasn’t wrong.

Just as 004 was about to face the music and ask Bond to elaborate, 006 stepped into the room, a jerky motion that hinted at trying to hold back and failing. “Stop it, James,” he said, the demand in his voice broken and sharp with edges. He looked haggard – 004 was the one who had nearly died, but it was 006 who looked a wreck. Bond didn’t bat an eye only because he’d seen the man a moment ago, but that didn’t stop the smile from slipping completely from his face. Alec and James had been in MI6 together for what felt like ages, and in that time, the former had become known for showing emotions while the latter had become known for his gentlemanly mask. Now, those emotions were showing more clearly on 006 than ever – and, for once, they were real. There was no baring of teeth in a joking leer, no too-broad smile that hid the truth like leaves and crossed sticks hid a pit-fall. Instead, 006 couldn’t keep his eyes off Aiden even though looking at him seemed to tear him apart. “You’re trying to do something nice-” He said the word ‘nice’ as if it sliced his tongue open, and his hands twitched as if he didn’t know whether he wanted to strangle Bond or not. There was something between agony and crippled gratitude in his voice now that he was talking, unable to hide outside the door anymore. “-But it’s too little, too late, and you know it.” A bitter bite laced his words even as the tension around his eyes spoke of pain. His face, for once, was locked down – looking old with new lines, hard like stone – but his eyes...he couldn’t seem to ice them over like Bond could. Alec was fire, Bond was ice, and fire just couldn’t stop burning.
Finally, his eyes jerked so that they were meeting 004’s. Swallowing once – determinedly ignoring Bond, who was holding himself perfectly still, just fine with being ignored – he grated out with more effort than most people would be able to understand, “I never wanted to hurt you…but I did. I bloody fucking nearly killing you, and I remember all of it, right down to the way the knife shivered as it scraped across bone.” 004 flinched, the memory as visceral and fresh as if 006 had reached out a hand to yank at the stitches, although 004 had received enough training that none of it showed on his face. He just continued to meet Alec’s gaze, tense and unwavering.

Bond was still bent over at the waist, leaning on the end of the bed – a weak defensive position, even though his eyes said that he was ready for anything. “Just because you remember it, Alec, doesn’t mean it was you.”

“IT DOES!” Alec roared back, and Bond was grateful that he’d let loose that cat Mothra at the other end of Medical. Now, people were running around there instead of coming to investigate the violently raised voice. 006 was glaring at Bond, breathing fast with his hands clenched into fists. His energy had climbed steadily until even 004 (who wasn’t used to sensing energy as Bond was, after so much time watching Q) blinked, eyes widening. Alec’s wings were half-spread, shaking with emotions that were nearly boiling over. “Do you know how it felt?” he demanded, forgetting 004 to glare daggers at Bond, who blinked calmly back, “I was as cold as a bloody glacier, but it was still my energy that went into my hand and snapped-” He stuttered, the reality of what he was saying hitting him like a punch in the stomach, and he looked back at 004 suddenly with a gutted look on his face. Eyes dropping to 004’s arm, white in its sturdy cast, 006 looked horrified. But still he forced himself to finish his sentence, even if it was at a whisper, “-Snapped the bones in arm like it was just something I did to pass the time.”

004 was breathing a little fast now, the replaying of events getting to him, too. His pale wings twitched, ruffled and unkempt like his hair after spending the night in a bulky hospitable bed. “Leave us, 007,” he said suddenly, even if it was in his usual, sensible tone.

Not surprisingly, Bond didn’t immediately budge. “Is that an order?” he drawled, but his eyes were watchful and calculating as they pegged 004’s face.

004 looked at him, becoming more himself. “Did M order you to keep an eye on Alec?” He raised an eyebrow, sincerely curious.

Unexpectedly, Bond gave up on being recalcitrant and straightened. “No, but even if she did, I don’t fancy getting in the middle of this.” He indicated the space between 004 and 006 pointedly while turning towards the door.

Still on the verge of violence, 006 bristled and spread his wings further, like inky shadows spreading. “You put yourself in the middle of this, so don’t think you can just sod off now-!!”

“Alec!” 004 barked in a commanding tone as 006 began to turn to pursue 007 out of the room. A silence fell, and at the same time, 006 went still. The words were chains, holding him. His head dropped defeatedly even as he stood, frozen, between the door and the bed with his back to the one person he’d never wanted to hurt but had nearly slain in cold blood instead. Smartly, 007 disappeared into the hall without a word, shutting the door behind him. Alec glared at the door, feeling as though it were the lid of a grave and James had closed it on him, the sadist. That anger was matched only by his fear, however, which spiked with painful intensity as he heard Aiden talk again, “Turn around, Alec.” A sigh followed, then 004 added in a more familiar exasperated tone, “Or just ignore me when I tell you to do things. That’s more your style, ignoring orders just for the fun of it.”

The tone and the lament was almost normal enough to get 006 to smile, but the reality of the situation was just too stark: turning, he could see the bruise on 004’s face, the cast on his arm, the way he held
himself rather awkwardly because there was no good way to sit after a stab-wound, even if you were
an Angel. Usually, 004 looked professional and crisp in a naïve sort of way, but right now his hair
was a mess...and Alec wanted nothing more than to run his fingers back through it, replacing those
spikes and tufts of hair over 004’s forehead. But he knew he’d lost that right the second he’d
slammed 004 against the wall with his arm across his windpipe.

If 004 hated him for eternity, it was only his due.

Instead, 004’s eyes flicked over Alec in a brief, assessing way. His face was torturously unreadable,
eyes narrowed slightly, although that could just have been because the room was so bright and
medically white. And instead of addressing anything that either Bond or Alec had said, 004 merely
said, still in a calm and unreadable tone, “Take me home, Alec.”

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Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much to commenters tobiismycat and others for helping me with some ideas - I had terrible writer’s block, and needed some ideas to jump-start my brain for this chapter! Hopefully this chapter was a success! Ryouseiteki helped me, too, although all of that will happen next chapter...hopefully. Cuddle stuff.

I don't thank my commenters enough - I luv luv luv reading what people liked, and ideas for future chapters never go astray ;) I can't type everything, but new ideas keep me moving along!
The chapter in which CUDDLES

Okay. Yep. That's the chapter. It's actually more complicated: the chapter in which Alec takes 004 home, deals with some guilt, and finds out that Aiden isn't the passive pansy he thought he was.

Plus, the fallout of Q and Bond's sort-of-tryst at the end.

Chapter Notes

If you do not ship 004 and 006, just skip to the end - there's a short angst-Q session that you'll probably want for plot reasons. But hopefully you'll like Alec and Aiden <3

Oh, and beware: I just realized how alike the names 'Alec' and 'Aiden' are. I'm pretty sure I didn't ever mix them up, but if I'm having a hard time, just be aware that you might have to read carefully! I called them by their numbers often enough that the two 'A' names shouldn't be tricky. Hopefully.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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"Why did you want me to take you home?" Alec was driving, unsurprisingly, since the only other occupant in the car had required a wheelchair to safely leave MI6.

Now comfortably placed in the passenger seat, 004 just looked out the window. 006 couldn’t help but watch the tense line of his straight jaw, always firm but now tightened as he clenched his teeth against pain. Despite what the doctors had said and believed, the car-ride couldn’t be doing him any good.

"Why, Aiden?" Alec pressed, tone hardening relentlessly, even if it was in the search for pain. Part of him wanted an answer that would cut him to ribbons, because he wanted some sort of justification for the pain he was feeling. His hands clenched against the steering wheel as he peered forward again, pushing his foot a little harder on the gas, pushing the speed-limit likewise.

"If you don’t want to, you just have to say so," was all Aiden said, quite calmly and without rancor. It left 006 just as frustrated as before.

Eyes locked on the road and wings a tense mess behind him (no car was built for an Angel, it seemed), 006 said in a softer voice than he usually ever showed, “That’s the problem. I do want to.” And then he fell silent.
Aiden, still turned to mostly look out the window, worked his throat as if to answer, but couldn’t seem to find the words he wanted. As much as he wanted to, 004 couldn’t completely dismiss the memories of 006 surging up like a tidal wave, eyes as unfamiliar as another planet. An uncomfortable silence sat between them the rest of the drive back to Aiden’s home, which 006 already knew the location of. 004 hadn’t even bothered to give directions, making it clear that he was aware of this, although he didn’t seem uneasy about it.

Still silent and still moving with the stiff tension of a kicked but very large and dangerous dog, 006 parked the car and got out, knowing that 004 was too obedient to go against doctor’s orders and try to get out on his own. The smaller Angel waited patiently for 006 to get the wheelchair out, and then swung his legs out onto the pavement when 006 opened the door. The two just looked at each other for a moment, 004 with his bandages and unkempt appearances sitting at the edge of the passenger side of the car, 006 standing over him, haggard and drawn and with eyes that begged for understanding even when they withdrew from the compassionate look that 004 turned to him. Looking away, 006 nonetheless carefully bent down and used his considerable strength to help his injured comrade into the wheelchair. Like most Angels, 004 preferred to live higher up in buildings, but the elevator was easily accessible, and the building was quiet.

Another silence. The elevator seemed to take years, and the confined space made Alec buff his wings against the walls as if he wanted to push them away. Before they even reached 004’s floor, the dark-haired man reached out and grabbed one of 006's pinions, effectively stopping the obvious nervous twitch. “You’re going to hurt yourself,” he said softly, pulling the inky wing back away from where it had been flicking repeatedly against the wall.

The juxtaposition of an injured man telling 006 – the man who had hurt him – to avoid injury was almost too much, and it didn’t take the level of awareness that Bond and Q had developed to notice the way that 006’s supernatural energy roiled. 004 winced, sensing the torment in the handful of seconds it took for Alec to push it down. Nonetheless, 006 stopped fidgeting, and then wheeled 004 out into the upper-floor hallway as the elevator dinged cheerily and slid open its doors to spit them out. He didn’t know if Aiden did it on purpose or not, but the smaller Angel had left his wings out a bit, and 006 couldn’t stop himself from cupping the edge of one in his hand to keep it from bumping against the edge of the elevator entrance as they left. What was he supposed to do? Let the injured man bruise himself on a doorway? The touch of those soft, pale feathers breathed life into a whole different set of emotions, nearly overthrowing the guilt for a moment. But the grief wouldn’t fade, so instead the desire mingled with it until it burned.

Alec removed his light touch from 004’s wing, keeping his hands to himself the rest of the way to 004’s flat.

It was a fairly spacious place, in keeping with the general space needed for people with a wingspan. A living room with fairly cozy couches and wood floors of a warm brown was as neat as 006 had expected, and a smile tried to creep onto his face but cracked and shattered in infancy. He distracted himself from the brief, broken fondness he felt by looking more around the inviting, very tidy place: the kitchen that was separated from the living room by a simple half-wall, the open doorway that looked like it led to some sort of laundry room or bathroom. Another door, closed, that had to be the bedroom. It all fit 004 so perfectly that Alec felt that he’d lived here all his life, or as if he’d gotten to know the house as he’d gotten to know the man.

“Help me onto the couch,” 004 said, still subdued, tone hovering between a request and a light order. He didn’t sound irritated or fearful or put-out, which only served to make 006 more tense, because those were sounds he was expecting. Nonetheless, he’d gone far past the point when he could say ‘no’ to anything Aiden requested, so he breathed a small, tired sigh and gave Aiden an arm up.
Two arms, actually. He carefully gripped the arm he hadn’t broken at the elbow, while his other hand found its way to 004’s side. It was cruel, bitter irony that at least Alec had stabbed him on the opposite side that he’d broken bones, allowing him two locations to hold onto on either side of Aiden’s fit body. Being this close – close enough to feel the shape of the bandages wrapped around 004’s torso, close enough to feel the way his muscles tensed at the pain of movement, close enough to hear his tight hiss of breath – made Alec’s head swim, and when he had 004 sitting comfortably on the couch, his head falling into his hands. He didn’t know how to cope with this.

“They let you drink?” Aiden’s slightly flabbergasted question startled him. 006 lifted his head wearily.

The expression on Aiden’s face was so familiar that it made 006 want to laugh as he used to, before this: 004, the goody-two-shoes of the 00-agents, was almost morally offended by the fact that Alec had apparently gotten drunk and was now hung over. Brows drawn down in a pensively annoyed fashion that looked quite handsome on him (‘handsome’ meant ‘cute’ so far as Alec was concerned, looking at the pale-winged agent). “I could still smell it on your breath, and you look like death warmed over. When in the world did-?”

“James took me out drinking,” Alec decided to tattle, a shadow of his usual, roguish grin stretching across his teeth. He felt no qualms whatsoever for throwing James under the bus, since the devilish man had gotten Alec into this conversation in the first place.

004 successfully stifled a groan, but still rolled his eyes skyward. “I can’t believe M puts up with this…” he tutted under his breath. On instinct, he was finally stretching his wings, spreading them out against the back of the long, broad couch now without any pesky, medical-bed guard-rails to bump up against. “How do you pass psych-evals??” he asked with evident bewilderment.

The tone of Aiden’s voice said that he’d wanted to ask this question for awhile, and despite the regret still lurking like a hot coal in his chest, 006 maintained his smirk and replied easily, “You know the phrase ‘if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em’? We take the former choice. James and I are too set in our ways to bend to the wills of our betters by this age. But we’re awfully good at driving them nuts until they boot us back out into the field.”

004 snapped on a surprised smirk, then he was biting his lip to try and pull it back. “I’m not smiling because I condone that – I think it’s the morphine I still have in my system,” he defended himself. His stretching wings had finally hit the far arms of the couch, and he dragged one back in to pull distractedly at some bent feathers.

With a wince, Alec realized that he was probably responsible for some of the state of disrepair the wing was in – even without blaming the hospital stay on Alec, it was fair to say that he’d battered Aiden’s wings a bit. He couldn’t stop staring at how many feathers were out of line now, the broad, white wings with their neat bands of pale-grey at the end usually so pristine but now as ruffled as the Quartermaster’s hair in the morning (not that 006 knew anything about that, but he figured Bond did by now).

Then Aiden surprised him again. Belatedly, Alec realized that the other man had been looking at him, his grey eyes open and calm. “Give me a hand?” he asked, and unexpectedly reached the wing out towards Alec’s lap.

006 didn’t know what to do. The wing was like an offering hand, long feathers standing in for fingers outstretched entreatingly, and Alec felt overwhelmed for a moment by the feeling of invitation. He’d braced himself all night and all morning for harsh words, but Aiden was offering him trust anew instead.
Of course, it wasn’t being blatantly advertised. Aiden just continued to watch him, his face giving away nothing besides a comfortable sort of expectation – the trust was evident only in his movements, stretching out his wing so close to a man who’d exhibited the power to break him into pieces not long ago. Alec tried to understand more from Aiden’s expression in the hopes of finding more tangible absolution, but Aiden wasn’t making it that easy. Not quite. “I’ve got a broken arm, so untangling feathers gets awkward.”

The reminder of the damage stung, but it wasn’t said maliciously, so Alec took a risk and finally touched the feathers in front of him, starting with the long primaries that were usually so sleek. At the first run of his fingers through them, he noted the way 004…relaxed. Alec blinked, having expected the opposite.

But 004 looked tired now, and if he’d had any fear of Alec Trevelyan left, the lengthy process of leaving (escaping) Medical and the rough car-ride here had knocked it out of him. With a sigh very unlike his usual professional self, he sunk back into the couch, just remembering to keep his right wing out where Alec could reach it.

Alec just stared at him for a minute or two, while Aiden – eyes half-closed and seemingly disinterested – stared back. “You trust me,” Alec blurted, just about as disbelieving as he’d ever been in his life.

And the answer only surprised him more. “Of course I do,” said 004 very simply, “You’re my coworker and a fellow Angel.”

“You invited me into your house. I tried to kill you yesterday.”

“Everyone I’ve talked to says that you had no control over that. None. And that you’re back to yourself now.” He looked at 006 with tired frankness, saying slowly while trying not to sound condescending, “M would have ordered you stay locked up if you were still under Silva’s influence.”

“Who listens to what M says-?” 006 cut himself off as he realized whom he was talking to. He resisted the urge to burst out laughing. “Ah. You do. Never mind. No wonder you’re M’s favorite.” He rolled his eyes dramatically, unable to help the spark of humor that was coming back to life in his gut as he avidly watched 004’s reaction.

The smaller man had been sinking back into lethargy again, lulled by the repetitive brushes of Alec’s fingers, but now he blinked his eyes open in sincere surprise. He nearly burst out in some exclamation of surprise before he composed himself, but Alec grinned at coming so close to breaking that professional façade. “I thought 007 was her favorite – or you.”

“No,” Alec shook his head, having fun telling the truth for once, “James is her favorite in the ‘he gets the job done’ sort of way, but the truth is, he’s so annoying to her that what she really wants to do is give him cement shoes and sink him in the nearest river. You’re the favorite.”

004 was actually blushing, although the look on his face said that he was wisely a little worried about being the favorite of a woman as dangerous as M. Then the careful motions of Alec’s hands straightened out a long feather that had been curled against another one for ages, and 004 tipped his head back in a groan of relief that was very unprofessional. “I think I understand why 00-agents hate Medical,” he finally admitted, “It does murder on feathers. I almost wish I was Q right now.”

Knowing that jokes about Q’s wings were a sensitive matter, 006 dodged the topic and instead noted in return, “That just about sounds insubordinate, you should know.”
004 just shrugged, and Alec didn’t realize that he’d been gripping the edge of the man’s wing until Aiden used the hold to tug Alec onto the couch. 006 was a little too startled to let go, and ended up sitting next to the other man with a huff of breath, a tired, tussled wing across his lap like a stiff blanket. Aiden explained casually, “I’m in my own house. Orders are for work, but I can lay off a bit at home.” He rocked his head against the back of the couch so that he was looking at Alec again, light-grey eyes still devoid of accusation or anger.

Alec had to look away, not yet ready to see forgiveness he wasn’t prepared to grasp yet – it was like being offered something precious to hold, but your hands were still healing from burns. Instead, he found himself focusing on gently preening the downy underside of 004’s unkempt wing with his fingertips. For all that they could break bones and end lives, those hands ever-so-gently teased apart the tiniest of plumage, straightening it tenderly. “Is there anything else you want?” 006 asked, making himself subdued again because sounding jovial just felt too much like he was forgetting what he’d done. “I’m here now, so I’ll be useful.”

To his surprise, 004 merely continued to laze on the couch, answering only, “You could straighten out my other wing once you’re done with that one.” His eyelids had drooped, and 006 was actually rather unsettled that Aiden was at ease enough to be almost falling asleep. The man should have been wary of him, or at least stubbornly discontented. Alec seriously considered calling Medical and asking if they’d given the smaller man the wrong medications or something. But then he carded his fingers through another set of feathers, feeling them slide like silken barbs between his fingers, and 004 groaned softly, briefly letting his eyes close the whole way. He was enjoying this. 006 canted his head, feeling a more predatory hunger sharpen his gaze, but he kept it firmly in check.

It didn’t stop him from soothing down a few more feathers, his knuckles sliding in a smooth caress down the back of 004’s wing after the feathers had been put to rights. By that point, Alec realized that he was enjoying this as much as 004 was – or, rather, enjoying watching the smaller man enjoy himself – and shook himself sharply back into reality. Reminding himself that he was the reason 004 was such a mess in the first place, 006 grumbled something incoherently and tried to just focus on the task at hand and not the inherent intimacy about it.

“Oh, come on, Alec,” 004 said unexpectedly, voice quiet but for him, forceful. He went on without an ounce of hesitation, eyes open and alert again as he fixed them bluntly on Alec’s face, “You actually sound like you might behave for once, and I haven’t had the nerve to tell you for weeks, but the truth is, I like you better when you don’t.” While Alec blinked in shock, Aiden just met his gaze, raising one brow as if to see if Alec would challenge him on his seriousness. Nope. 004 looked indeed very serious. And not in the least embarrassed over his admission, which Alec had never expected. He’d been chasing the man shamelessly for ages, and had always expected to be the one to make the first serious move – 004 just gave off vibes of being a prude as well as being sickeningly suited to following protocol. Now, to have the man looking at him like he was dense, 006 wondered when he’d missed something. “I think I need a drink,” Alec said suddenly and sincerely, standing up and stumbling more than walking towards the kitchen. Then he stopped and turned, asking with terrible suspicion, “Wait – do you even have alcohol?” He couldn’t even picture 004 getting buzzed in the comfort of his own home.

004 shot him another ‘are-you-slow?’ look, an expression that was so novel on his clean-cut face that Alec resisted the urge to jump. “Of course I do. Bring me something, too.”

Having walked numbly the rest of the way into the kitchen to begin his search, 006 asked in a dazed voice, “What do you want?” It turned out that 004 was full of both surprises and alcohol, and two
weren’t mutually exclusive. He wouldn’t have thought that Aiden could even hold his liquor, but suddenly he had plenty to choose from.

And Aiden, while doing everything in his power to show that he wasn’t mad at 006, was apparently not in the mood to alleviate 006’s off-balance state. Vaguely, he simply called back, “Just pick something.” Suddenly, this sounded like a tricky situation – like a girlfriend using those same words in regards to a birthday present. Always a trap… 006 had never been so unexpectedly outmatched before, so he just grabbed something and poured it into glasses, knowing that he was drinking purely for alcohol content now and not taste. Maybe he’d be able to deal with this new, bolder Aiden better if he was drunk. Throwing back a glass – feeling the burn and wishing it was doing more to center him – 006 refilled his own before returning to the room.

Fortunately, despite the fact that 004 was no longer hiding behind a professional mask, he was giving off the impression that he was too tired to do anything drastic. This was good, because Alec worried that he’d just collapse under much more stress and strain. He sat down next to the man again, carefully navigating the glass into his good hand, brushing his cooler fingers. Briefly, he found his treacherous mind wondering what a drunk 004 looked like…felt like…and then he realized he was going down a dangerous train of thought and put on the brakes. He sat back with a sigh, loosening his wings as much as he could before one was halted by the pale wing next to it. Black and grey-touched-white rested comfortably together for a second, and when Alec made to pull back and give Aiden space, the smaller Angel sounded like he choked on a laugh, or maybe his drink.

006 shot him a glare, bristling at being laughed at, although his instinctive irritation was tempered by the fact that the laugh obviously hurt. Wincing, 004 nonetheless got his game-face on and commented only a little breathlessly, “Seriously? You purposefully invade my personal space bubble for weeks and now you want to give me space?”

Unsure whether to laugh or be offended, 006 narrowed his eyes and let his black wings relax, testing the waters, so to speak. When his wing was once again rested easily against 004’s, however, nothing happened except that Aiden took another leisurely drink, draining his glass without batting an eye.

“You’re driving me buggerin’ mad.”

Slowly, slowly Alec’s mouth stretched out into his trademark, wolfish grin, and the tendrils of unease, confusion, and guilt slipped away from his eyes, which now glinted roguishly. He got up to go and sit now on 004’s other side (he planned to give special attention to that wing, and to sit much closer, too, while he was at it), he remarked, “I think I can follow orders for a bit…”

004 just smiled as – in passing – Alec buried his fingers in his hair, creating a sea of dark-chocolate-brown spikes upon the smaller man’s head.

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The nightmare started as it always did, with Silva closer to Q than he had been in the actual
encounter – every breath touching – and his invasive fingertips pushing aside Q’s shirt to stroke like a spreading poison along Q’s collarbone. But this time the dream faded and changed, and Q was tipping his head back, sighing in bliss as a head of short, gold-blonde hair bent close instead of Silva’s fingers, sucking and biting at Q’s collarbone with something precariously poised between tenderness and violence.

Q came awake with a jolt, his usual lethargy making him sway and nearly fall off the couch before he realized that he’d actually jerked all the way into a sitting position. What in the world had come over him?! Q was by no means a vivid dreamer, even though he had an eidetic memory – even after the incident that had cost him his wings, he hadn’t suffered from nightmares as badly as most people did, perhaps a side-effect that went hand-in-hand with his chronic inability to wake up. Now, though, to be dreaming not only in vibrant detail about Silva’s sickening touch but also in equally vibrant detail about Bond’s arousing presence…

Groaning in utmost exasperation, Q blamed it all on last night, rubbing at his eyes and only belatedly realizing that no one else was in the room with him. This stung him unexpectedly, and he hunted around for his glasses as if his eyes could find what his sense for supernatural energy didn’t. But no, Bond really had seduced him within an inch of nakedness and then left him to wake up alone.

Q felt angry, and then felt angry at himself for feeling angry, and then just got frustrated at the whole vicious cycle when he recognized it in himself. Determined to distract himself, he got up from the couch, only remembering belatedly that he wasn’t at his best and brightest for at least a few hours after waking: he staggered and actually hit his desk, just bracing his hands on it and cursing his feet, which were still blissfully asleep along with almost all of the rest of him. He felt the phantom tremor of wings behind him, a memory, telling him that he would have caught himself a lot more gracefully if he’d had a pinion or two to flap. And, of course, that just made him angrier – Q’s range of emotions this early in the morning was limited. Maybe he was actually more frustrated than angry, but the line was blurry.

He knew from experience that caffeine would speed up the process of waking up, even if it didn’t work miracles. Therefore, fully aware that he was stumbling like a zombie (reminding himself to never fall asleep in Q-branch again – or anywhere but his house), Q went in search of coffee and hoped desperately that 007 wasn’t around. The activities of the night before had left behind a tumult of emotions that had seemed just fine – even wonderful – the night before, but now the light of day had revealed the thorny briar-patch they really were. Q found himself shivering, anxiety having hooked its claws under his skin, and he didn’t know whether to feel used, embarrassed, or even a bit scared. His own actions had been inexcusable, Bond’s deplorable – but at least Bond was known for acting deplorable. Thinking back to how far he’d allowed Bond to go, Q gave a mortified, quaking little sigh and labeled his own actions as firmly inexcusable. He wasn’t even sure what to call last night. He’d awoken with his clothes still on and only slightly rumpled, and not once had he locked lips with the agent, but there had still been so much sexual tension in the air that it couldn’t be labeled as anything less than a make-out session, which made Q feel suddenly like a naughty school-girl. His deep embarrassment increased, solidifying into painful shame in his stomach as he made his way to the break-room and its lauded coffee-maker. There were Q-branch minions already hard at work, but they’d taken one look at Q’s shuffling gate and his pinched, stormy expression and labeled him as hazardous. Smart.

And 007 wasn’t anywhere in sight, and Q didn’t know whether he felt hurt by that abandonment or viciously glad the man had the sense to stop while he was ahead, and scram.

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Yay! \(^{u^}/ Aiden and Alec are better now! At least some people are ending up happy...

Shoot, I'm reeeeeally starting to neglect my other fics XP I feel bad. Bad author! Bad! *hits self on head with a rolled up newspaper*

Plus, I've got another 00Q fic in my head. Hopefully this weekend I'll be a nice writer and make my other fics happy (hopefully).
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Q has been avoiding Bond, but 007 finally forces the two of them to talk. Argument ensues.

Or the chapter in which Q and Bond fight, and then Bond goes off to do a mission...which doesn't go as planned.

Chapter Notes

Long chapter is long! Usually, I try to post at least 6 pages of a Word document - this time is closer to 10!!! Hope you enjoy! I'm heading home for the fair, so the next post might be awhile in coming, but don't worry, I've got it planned out, at least. Just need to type it...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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“You, Quartermaster, have been avoiding me.”

Q swore inside his head, cursing how focused he gotten on his project so that he didn’t even notice Angel energy coming up behind him. It was ironic, that the same supernatural energy that made Angels so powerful also allowed them to be noticed at a distance – Q had been sensing Bond’s energy and using it to avoid him ever since he’d come back from his mission that morning. For the week prior that, the man had been away in Japan, but Q had been perfecting his avoidance techniques before that anyway. The Quartermaster had quite quickly decided that the best way to deal with the intimate evening in his office was to keep as far away from it all as possible.

That was what a person did with temptation, wasn’t it?

*That* thought was completely out of line, so Q suppressed it firmly before turning to face the inevitable. As always, Bond looked impeccable, having been on multiple planes for most of the night and day before managing not to even wrinkle him, it seemed. He also looked cautiously annoyed, blue eyes fixed on Q with a steady, unflinching look as he folded his arms.

He should have left them at his sides – Q was in a fiery mood and had been for over a week, and crossing one's arms wasn’t a very good position to start a fight from. Q looked Bond over, his detached look clearly on his face, and then dismissed him by typing a few more keys onto the computer he was leaned over and walking to another terminal. “No, I haven’t,” he said as neutrally as he knew how, which was very. He sensed 007 following him.

“It wasn’t a question, Q. You *have* been avoiding me,” Bond maintained as if they didn’t have a
whole, mortified Q-branch as an audience, everyone within hearing range either rapt or trying to be invisible. The former were going to regret their curiosity if Q ever got Bond out of his hair long enough to punish them.

Q kept his voice light and dry, easily being the Quartermaster he’d been trained to be as he settled at another terminal. “I can’t see how I could have. You’ve been in another country, on a mission that hardly required my supervision.” The business with Silva had been progressing slowly, but Bond’s mission had been unrelated and relatively minor – just an irritant that M had wanted taken care of. Q barely realized it, but he’d started moving again, alighting on different computers and workstations like an inconsistent hummingbird. It was an expression of the frustration, tenseness, and unease snapping beneath his skin.

Not only could Bond – trained in watching and reading people – see and interpret that, but he could feel it in the minute fluctuations of Q’s Angel energy, too, and it made him narrow his eyes thoughtfully. He continued to unabashedly follow the slimmer man around Q-branch, eyes fixed on the bareness of his back where his wings should have been. “There were three days before that,” he noted, more softly so that fewer eavesdropping ears could hear.

It was clear that Bond was reducing his count to the time after their encounter in Q’s office, indicating that he knew what this was all about. Part of Q had furiously considered that Bond had thought nothing of the elicit meeting, after it had run its course. Part of Q had furiously considered that Bond had thought nothing of the elicit meeting, after it had run its course. By now, Q and most of the staff knew that Bond had been dealing with 004 and 006 at the time (a worthy endeavor), but he also had kept in mind that Bond was the king of one-night-stands anyway. It seemed that he remembered that strange tryst with his Quartermaster perfectly well, however.

At the oblique reference to that day, Q froze, either realizing that he was buzzing around uselessly or that he wouldn’t be able to keep this conversation neutral or professional for much longer. His tone was as crisp as frost as he commanded, “Walk with me, 007,” and started striding out of Q-branch without waiting for signs of acquiescence. Q was buzzing with energy and emotions just bordering on violence now, and if he ended up throwing a punch, he wanted it to be where none of his employees could see.

Out of wisdom – or foolishness – Bond followed, and they were silent until they reached an adjoining, empty hallway, where Q spun around, the fury now much more thinly veiled on his face. To his surprise, Bond was now standing with his hands clasped loosely behind his back, and Q’s brows twitched as he tried to decide whether this open, non-combative stance was deliberate or coincidental. If nothing else, Bond’s face was calm, unreadable, those glacial eyes attentive to Q’s face.

“What?!” Q snapped, surprised himself at how sharp his voice was. “What do you want to talk about?”

“I already said: you’re avoiding me. I’d like to know why.”

“If I am, indeed, avoiding you, it’s entirely within my prerogative,” Q replied rapidly, barely even needing to scout around in his brain for the appropriate response. As often happened, his brain was running ahead of this conversation, seeing where it would go and accommodating that. He stood up straighter (he’d instinctively been slipping into a fighter’s stance without realizing it, a motion he now corrected) and tried to pull on a mien more like a Quartermaster should, and wasn’t sure how effective it was.

Bond’s eyes tracked across his face, and Q knew that the man was using his 00-training to pick him apart. The feeling was unsettling, and only served to fan the flames of Q’s aggravated temper, especially since he couldn’t do anything about it: Bond had the skills he had no matter the
circumstances. Unless Q blacked his eyes, maybe…

“You’re pretending that nothing happened,” Bond guessed with instant accuracy.

Q flushed, but refused to admit it. However, he also wasn’t foolish enough to say, ‘Pretending what happened?’ “Aren’t you?” he said simply in return.

“No,” was the response, the sincere tone matching the candid look on Bond’s face.

Maybe Q was hoping for another answer – maybe he was hoping for a lie. Either way, he felt another string holding his control snap, and the anger was back on his face again. “Well, I have to,” he hissed, aware that voices carried in hallways like this. Out of reflex, he stepped forward into Bond’s personal space, finally explaining the reasoning that had been going through his head for almost two weeks now, “I’m the Quartermaster, 007, and regardless of what you think, my position isn’t built on goose-down and flights of fancy – it’s built on my efforts to get here and my ability to maintain it.” He waved a hand when he sensed the faint flicker of Bond’s energy that said he was taking in breath to reply; Bond blinked in consternation at being read so easily form the inside out.

“Your job is the same. What’s different is that unequal levels of decorum are expected from each of us, and I’m fully expected to be professional. Do you understand that?” He jabbed Bond in the chest, knowing that it would provoke a response and not caring. Therefore, he shouldn’t have been surprised when the man’s wings shifted forward, a subconscious sort of reflex that had their grey tips just whispering over Q’s shoulders and upper arms.

And despite himself, his breath caught at the gentle friction – always a reminder of what he’d lost.

And Bond, blast him, caught the reaction. Never let it be said that the man wasn’t perceptive. Instead of immediately pouncing on that snippet of knowledge he’d gleaned, however, the man asked in a lowered, serious voice, “Did I ever do anything that you didn’t want, Quartermaster?” The touch of grey feathers never left, as if the tips had become frozen to Q’s lean frame.

They were back to titles again. The most disturbing part, however, was that Bond sounded completely in earnest: if Q told him yes, the Angel would take it seriously, and that would be that – there’d be guilt on both sides then. However, as much as Q wanted to lash out, he couldn’t force the lie past his teeth. “No,” he seethed quietly.

“Am I doing anything now that you are opposed to?”

The questions were calm and gentle, but they were traps even if Bond didn’t mean them to be, and Q could feel himself sinking into them. Right now, he could read between the lines and see that they were talking about the wings sending shivers down his spine. “Get your bloody wings off me,” Q retorted, but he’d lost the first in his voice, and just sounded worn out now. He had more than enough will to turn and bat the offending feathers aside, however, even if he only got about three paces before he came to a stop again. He decided to bring the facts out into the open, because while Bond was perfectly okay with subliminal messages and subterfuge, Q had always felt safest in the cold, sharp realm of facts. “If we’re talking about personal space issues in regards to wings, then I’ll save you some time mulling things over: yes, I like them. But they’re yours, and I’ve lived without mine for years now.” He remained with his back to 007, aware of the man’s energy and his silence and nothing else. A little bit more quietly, in a detached-sounding tone as if he were outside himself and looking in, the wingless Angel murmured, “But I will admit to a stab of envy.”

There was silence for awhile now, and not a comfortable one by any means. Bond was still there, separated from Q as if by a wall instead of just intervening empty space. Q was still submerged quite firmly in a temper, and saw no reason yet to come up for air – he’d already slipped up once and made an unprofessional fool of himself, and was shy of doing the same again. Still, he was about to
open his mouth to propose some clumsy sort of truce when Bond managed to say one of the most ill-advised things of his life.

“You’re the technological genius – why don’t you just build yourself some new wings?” Bond said, tired of the argument and perhaps a bit stung by Q’s attitude towards him.

The look Q sent his way when he spun around was so hard and so cold and so cutting that it was as if he slashed mercilessly right into Bond’s core.

But maybe it was because Bond had slashed first. Because the truth was, Bond’s suggestion wasn’t novel – Q was a technological genius. It simply wasn’t possible to make wings from scratch. That didn’t mean his most painful dreams didn’t include that exact though, however, and now it felt as if Bond had gripped it in his bare hands and ripped it out.

“I think it would be best if you left now, Agent Bond,” Q said with frigid politeness like a host of winters on his cultured breath. He watched as Bond’s eyes narrowed, proving that the spark of anger now lit between the two of them was mutual.

Bond’s phone started vibrating. It was usually off or on silent, but while off-mission, all of the double-o’s had them on. He slipped it out of his pocket and put it to his ear without moving or shifting his eyes from Q. “Yes.”

A beat later, and Q’s phone was going off, too, and he briefly stated, “Q,” in a likewise curt fashion. While Bond was quite clearly showing his annoyance with Q’s attitude, the Quartermaster had already pulled on a detached mask over his face, and gazed at 007 with careful indifference. By the time both men were halfway through their [very one-sided] phone conversations, they were glaring guardedly at one another.

“I’ve got a mission,” Bond said, hanging up the phone and still eyeing Q, who blinked back.

“I’ve heard. I’m supposed to equip you and then guide you as necessary. M’s orders.”

Had anyone walked in on the conversation, they would have likened the situation to two tomcats facing each other, not growling yet but swishing their tails threateningly.

“Apparently a woman by the name of Severine has defected from Silva’s side of the equation,” Bond continued to dish out snippets of information like someone feeding goldfish flakes to a shark.

For a shark, Q was very quiet and patient. “What matters is that she’s got the information that Silva stole, which you had better manage to retrieve without blowing it up.”

“Contrary to popular belief, I don’t destroy everything I touch,” Bond quipped, and Q twitched, unable to tell if that was meant to sting him or soothe him. 007’s face gave him no clues.

Q was the one who ended the silence, goaded by a work-ethic of steel that could carry on through any emotional trauma. “Let’s get to work then.” Without any further indication that Bond made him uncomfortable, the smaller man slipped past the agent and stalked back to Q-branch, getting right to business the second he was back in his own domain. He began shouting out orders, delegating only a fraction of his attention to keeping track of Bond’s supernatural energy signature. It was supposed to be a medium-risk mission: go in, make contact with this woman Severine, get the data (and her, if possible), and get out. If things went as planned and Bond didn’t feel and itch to shoot anyone, it would be smooth. If not... then it became a high-risk mission, hence Q’s involvement. He handed Bond the earpiece that would connect the two of them, making it clear how little he liked the situation. To be entirely fair, Bond grimaced as well.
All the Mundanes of Q-branch fluttered about, unable to sense the turbulent supernatural energies growling beyond their ken, but able to tell that this was a very, very awkward situation.

“Let’s get this over with,” Bond growled, checking his gun with a swift, efficient movement before holstering it. His eyes flicked up when one last item was slid last-minute across the table: a watch.

“Standard issue,” Q said, not meeting Bond’s eyes, for all the world detached. He’d tamped down on his internal energy so it was hard to read, but the dexterous hand sliding the watch towards 007 was insistent. In a more defensive tone, Q explained himself as he snuck his hand back, leaving the watch, “With any luck, it’ll survive as much mayhem as you do.”

Bond just made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat, but he strapped it on before turning and striding swiftly out of Q-branch.

Q was aware that everyone was staring at him. He turned to glare and berate them for pausing in their work to watch the spat between himself and 007, but immediately everyone went back to work. Q still had to retreat into his office to try and get his head on straight, though, now that 00-bloody-7 was safely gone where he couldn’t notice. Why were things always so difficult when it came to dealing with Bond?!

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The first part of the mission went very smoothly, and Q was able to let underlings take over in monitoring Bond’s signals. He got constant reports, but saved both himself and Bond the distraction of being in each other’s ears. Severine did indeed have the information they sought, as well as additional information on how to locate Silva, and she was wary but very willing to let 007 spirit her back to London. At this point, it was just a matter of a plane-ride or two, and MI6 would have their best agent back with a wealth of information in tow.

The victory was sweet, but the timing eventually meant that Q had to talk with Bond – only the Quartermaster regularly stayed in Q-branch for whole days on end, and inevitably took pity on his employees when the hour grew late and those monitoring Bond’s earpiece began to grow droopy-eyed. Sighing and telling himself he had to stop being such a dramatic child about this anyway, Q shooed them home and soon found himself sitting, alone, in the mostly-dark cavern of Q-branch, 007 in his ear.

“Plane’s been delayed. No other complications,” came the bored reply, as Bond still thought he was just idly reporting to some random minion of Q’s.

“A pity your companion doesn’t have wings. The two of you could just skip the plane and flap on home,” Q remarked dryly.

He heard a startled choke as Bond recognized the new voice and tried to sublimate his surprise. “Q?”

“The only people up this late, apparently, are Quartermasters and agents with jet-lag.”

“Hm,” Bond made an unreadable – but not displeased – sound of acknowledgment, then responded, “I thought that Q-branch must have just gotten deathly boring. Why else would the Quartermaster deign to listen in?”

A few days had blunted Q’s anger a bit – besides that, it was much easier to deal with a frustrating
problem (which 007 was) when it was able to reach him only through a tinny earpiece. “I’m listening in, as you put it, because it seemed like cruelty to minions to make any of them listen to your dull reports late into the night.” After a pause, he added less tartly. “And if there had been a problem, I would have been on the line. It is my job, and I only divvied you out to other attentive ears because there was no indication of complications.”

“Noted,” Bond said, and it was still clear that he was cross with the Quartermaster. Just as Q was beginning to wonder what Severine thought of this conversation that she was only hearing half of, Bond said as if reading his thoughts, “Sev is sleeping. She’s neither a Quartermaster nor a jet-lagged agent, so she decided to catch some sleep while we waited on our plane.”

“Sev?” Q could have bit his tongue the second the question came out, and did thump his fist quietly on the desk in exasperation with himself for talking without thinking first.

“Jealous?”

Good Heavens…Bond’s charming tone was back. Q thought he preferred the flinty tone of slow-burning anger. “We are not having this conversation.”

The man chuckled, softly and lightly, but it still went right through Q’s blood to tingle at the ends of his limbs. “Indicating that there is a conversation to have.”

“You are drawing wild conclusions from data that doesn’t remotely support them,” Q argued in an exasperated tone that said he knew this was a losing battle. He felt like Spock trying to argue logic with a grinning Captain Kirk. In fact, the similarities were disturbing.

The burgeoning argument died in infancy when, even through Bond’s earpiece, Q began to hear waves of screaming. Bond swore, the sound loud by contrast and making Q jump, and then there was gunfire. Immediately, Q was focused and serious, hands began to fly across the keyboard as he sought to bring up images of where Bond was. Truth be told, he’d been visually tracking the man for some time now, telling himself it was in case of trouble.

Like now.

“Status, Bond?” While he talked, Q was sending messages to M, setting off warnings that would immediately get her attention as well as the attention of anyone else necessary to quell a situation like this.

“A gunman.” Bond was breathing slightly faster, muffled in the way that meant he was ducked behind something close with his arm up near his face, training his gun. There was a barrage of shots and more screaming from the airport surroundings. “Multiple gunmen,” the agent corrected grimly, “Severine is still with me.”

“Good. Get her someplace safe. I’ve got directions to an exit that should take her to a safe location – somewhere bullet-proof and able to be barricaded.”

“Fine,” Bond agreed with sensible brevity, relaying Q’s words more quietly and succinctly to Severine. Q had brought up images of the airport, hacking into multiple feeds so that they filled numerous screens in front of him – a nimbus of action, poor color, and light in the darkened Q-branch.

“I’ve got directions for you as well, 007,” Q continued in his rapid-fire tone.

Go figure Bond still had a sense of humor, even if battle soured it a little into sarcasm. “Oh, really? I just thought I’d shoot my way out of here.”
Q smiled – just a bit. A small and fierce thing as he spotted the shooters on his screen. “You will – but with more style. Follow my directions to get Severine out of your hands, and then I’ll see if I can lead you to where there are fewer civilians. I have nothing against you shooting people, provided the people you shoot are the same ones guilty of shooting you.” Q began to list off directions, watching tensely as the image of Bond moved to obey, a woman close behind him. Looking at the way the gunmen reacted, they were definitely after the two, and not just part of some random act of airport terrorism.

“Severine is safely away.”

“Good. I’m already having our people contact airport security to know that her safety is a priority.”

“I thought that all of your minions had gone home?”

A ghost of another smile flitted across the Quartermaster’s face. “Just because they went home doesn’t mean Q-branch is ever sleeping, trust me. I’ve got more people on it than you’ve got fingers to count.” Q’s fingers continued to dance over the keys, conducting their own symphony. “Follow my directions exactly and I’ll have you somewhere as clear as a shooting range, but with more advantages stacked on your side.”

“Understood, Quartermaster.”

Bond had always been a wild-card when to following orders: some days, he was a pleasure to direct, being as exact as a machine as he followed Q’s voice in his ears. Other days, it was like commanding a cat, although Bond always claimed his insubordination was necessary. “Problem, Q.”

“No – no problem,” Q argued, frowning and feeling a headache coming on – today was going to be an insubordinate day. “I gave you a direction, and you follow it. Or are your legs broken?”

“No, I mean the direction you gave has bullets. You can’t hear them, but I sure can.” The following bark of a gun was closer, louder, coming from Bond’s gun. “What do your bloody cameras say is down that hall?”

Q clicked a few windows, switching screens, but he had to admit, “There is no feed for that area. It’s a hallway that is out of use, so I assumed it was empty, since beyond it is clear.”

“Well, it’s not empty,” Bond grouched, and then he was moving, finding a more defensible position. There were still too many bystanders around. “Any other ideas?”

“Checking.”

“You’ve got…” Another bullet rang out, so close by that Q flinched as if it were in his ear instead of near Bond’s. “I was going to say a minute,” Bond gritted, “but I’m cutting down your leeway to five seconds.”

As if by magic, Q-branch was already beginning to fill up. A glance and a sense of incoming supernatural energy informed Q that M had made the trip as well, her face tense and her steps quick. “Bond!” Q squawked, hearing the time-limit, “That’s not-!” Q stopped, flinching again at the noises coming through his ear, then stared with a slack jaw at the screens.

M was at his shoulder. “Q? What is it? What’s 007’s status?”

“007,” Q said slowly with something between grim exasperation and impressed respect, “has just shot out a window and taken the fight outside.” He blinked, reflecting that the window normally wouldn’t have given way that easily…to a normal gun, anyway. “I’ll have to be more careful what
M didn’t even seem surprised that Bond was carrying so much firepower in such an innocuous weapon, and just sighed. “You truly haven’t been working with the double-o’s long enough. Now get him back on screen and tell me what the devil is going on.”

The problem was, Q couldn’t get Bond back on the screen. Airports were wondrous places for cameras to be, but when your person of interest could fly, things got difficult. Even after hacking practically everything and then some, Q found that he couldn’t catch even a glimpse of Bond. Ignoring M’s taut presence near him, joined now by Tanner and scores of ever-moving Q-branch employees as well, Q spoke to Bond, “007, you’re off our radar. Where are you?”

There were still gunshots, but more sporadically, and Q could hear the rushing of air and the crack of wind as wings beat. “Outside?” came the attempt at helpfulness, “Honestly, I’m a bit busy.”

As much as he wanted to demand more information – or, better yet, that 007 get somewhere that would allow Q to see him – Q forced himself to back off. “Understood.” Muting himself, he turned his best calm, controlled look to M, quickly explaining, “007 is off-radar, handling the situation. I’m awaiting further reports when available.”

Q sounded like a machine, but M was just as hard and cold, even if her eyes held more fire than ice. “All right then. Keep an eye on him as best you can – I’m going to deal with airport security.” She didn’t grimace distastefully, but she came close, silvery wings twitching before she turned to walk away. “I’m sure they’ll be turning up soon, and I’d rather they didn’t take our witness away from us.” Tanner followed her, both of them cringing at the politics that would undoubtedly get involved with this, making them wish they’d booked Bond on a boat that last stretch back instead of on a plane. Not that Bond couldn’t get into trouble on a boat.

So Q was left to listen, his face tense and his fingers constantly touching keys – almost like a nervous twitch. He still couldn’t find any camera that located 007, but he watched as Severine was recovered – safe, her beauty somehow compounded by the trauma, if that were possible – and injured people were treated. There were two people dead, both gunmen. Q felt fierce pride in his 00-agent, something he often felt when one of the agents he was directing did something well, but the feeling had a different edge to it now with Bond.

Despite having no cameras to work with, Q knew where Bond was…roughly. No one had asked how in the world he had a red dot bobbing on one of the screens, simply taking for granted that Q had a marker showing where 007 was. Only Q was able to connect that dot with the sounds of breathing, movement, and occasional gunshots in his ear. He remained silent, even though he occasionally heard Bond murmuring. Sometimes the murmurs were curses, sometimes they were that low, challenging whisper – “Come on now…closer…” – that told Q that Bond was waiting for a kill. Still Q said nothing, well-trained as he was. The double-o’s were trained to be flawless killers, but Q’s training was no less severe, as he sat and listened with perfect patience and silence interrupted only when he muted his side of the line and spoke commands to his minions.

He only spoke when he saw where the red dot had moved to. “If you are still heading south, 007, I suggest you continue that way. The trees will provide cover so that shooting you out of the sky will be more difficult.” He’d been listening carefully, able to tell that Bond never took to the air for long,
because the space surrounding the airport had been wide open – shooting an Angel would have been easy.

Bond made a startled noise. “How do you know that I’m-?”

“Follow directions or come up with a good reason to explain why you can’t,” Q cut him off with a snap, already going over what data he could collect on the area. He wished this was one of those airports near a town, where there were electronic eyes everywhere, but he wasn’t so lucky. At least there would be no innocent bystanders… “You headed in the most deserted direction possible. Did you do that on purpose?” Q sniped, half to himself and half to 007 now that he’d broken his silence.

Slightly out of breath now but still alive at least, 007 huffed a laugh. “Miss seeing my ruggedly handsome complexion on your screens?”

“It’s more that I hate being blind,” Q managed to remain detached. “How many gunmen?”

“Alive or dead?” was the ferociously frank reply.

“You can tell me later how many are dead. Now, only the live ones count.” Q’s fingers itched to do something. If Bond were in a city, the Quartermaster could wreak havoc, but this was like the Canadian wilderness all over again – only this time Q wasn’t there with a gun. “Before you went off my screens, I had counted five.”

Bond growled, “I wish there were only five.” There was another bullet, unsettlingly close for comfort. “Bloody lot more of them now.”

“There is no report of defining terrorist characteristics on the bodies that you left behind,” Q began to read off a report he’d pulled up, freshly sent his way. “Can you see anything that might tell you whom these nuisances belong to?”

“You call them nuisances,” Bond grunted, and the noises were all getting louder – closer. That combined with the location of the little red dot told Q that 007 had reached the trees, although he didn’t sound like he was flying above them yet. “I call them homicidal maniacs.”

Sighing as he tried to push through his own frustration and Bond’s persistently flippant tone, the Quartermaster repeated, “Any idea who they are?”

“I’ll give you three guesses, and the first two don’t count,” Bond quipped, “How many madmen do you know employ hitmen in large numbers and use them like hypnotized canon-fodder?”

Q felt his breath freeze, and his supernatural energy must have rippled like a cracked sheet, because M twisted around to face him from across the room where she was on the phone. Panic bubbled up Q’s throat and he didn’t care who noticed. “Bond, get out of there!” he roared, never feeling so unable to help in all of his life. Energy began to crackle at the ends of his fingertips, and his eyes jolted to the sparks, realizing that he was pulling off another of Silva’s tricks – again without knowing how or even meaning to. He focused on the agent in his ear, hearing the familiar sounds of bodies closing in. “If this is Silva, he plans things. You know this. He’ll have realized that you had few escape routes from the airport and designed a strategic response ahead of time.”

Bond swore, colorfully and loudly, making it obvious that hiding had gone out the window long ago. Although Bond had been the first to draw similarities between this group of foes and the men who had swarmed them in the Canadian forest, he hadn’t truly grasped the full horror of the situation. Silva had rigged a whole forest up for them when they’d last met.

By now, everyone in Q-branch was rushing towards Q again, and someone had pushed the button
that made the whole conversation available for everyone to hear. Most of the important information had already been said by Q, however, and all that everyone got was the noise of gunshots now magnified in the broad room.

“No bombs as yet,” Bond said, still keeping his cool because that was what he was trained to do. He could be panicking on the inside and still sound like it was water under the bridge. A burning bridge.

Q was the same, but with less finesse. His voice had acquired an edge, his shoulders a line of tension that was visible even through his clothing. However, his eyes were sharp and clear. “Doesn’t mean there aren’t any. I had to find most of them for you, remember?”

“Bloody wish you were here.”

A lump had formed in his throat. Before he could say “Me, too,” there was the sound of something snapping and then underbrush being wildly disturbed. The gunshots had stopped mysteriously just a moment before, giving Q a ability to hear something snap under Bond’s foot with perfect clarity even though the earpiece. Bond was now yelling phrases fit to blister ears, proving he was still alive, but that was until the gunshots started up again.

Q was standing, leaning over his desk as if he could focus on the computer screens and somehow see the agent through them. One hand pressed the receiver of his own earpiece in a similarly useless attempt to hear more. “007? James – please respond. What’s going on?!?”

Somewhere within the tumult of noise was the vicious snarl of the word “Snare!” but then came an equally vicious sound of flesh connecting with flesh. The sound was so clear that everyone in the room winced, imagining damage to skin and muscle and bone beneath, the grinding sound of contact.

And then, in the newfound quiet, an all-too familiar voice filled the room. It was on speaker for everyone to hear, but as Q stared wide-eyed, he knew the message was for him. “You really need to learn how to hold onto your agents better, Quartermaster,” came Silva’s voice, playful and smooth like warm honey on the tongue, “I seem to keep catching hold of them.”

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Chapter End Notes

Yeah, the cliffhanger wasn't supposed to happen... I'd planned this out, see, for this chapter to INCLUDE MI6's/Q's actions in retaliations to Bond's abduction. But then the chapter got long. This appears to happen to me a lot... *smiles with unrepentant embarrassment*

This of this all as karma for Bond getting on everyone's nerves on that last Cuddle's chapter with 006 and 004.

Anyone wanna guess how Q is tracking Bond still? ;) Think the watch...
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

The chapter in which they find Bond...but not quite.

Or the chapter in which Silva decides to teach Q a lesson through his prisoner.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long break in between updates! As I said, I was at home, and don't type much then.

(I was also working on my bbQ fic, because it was just so adorable I couldn't stop myself, lol)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Q was stunned, but refused to give up the receiving earpiece in his ear. All around him, Q-branch was in a tumult, and Q was the same, albeit on the inside. While Q wasn’t asked to explain precisely how he had a little red dot corresponding with Bond’s position (wasn’t it normal for a Quartermaster to put a tracking device in a watch?), that information was quickly made use of. Sadly, it was not exact – it simply gave a radius where Bond could be, and it was flickering and fading.

“Underground,” Q said briefly, still listening to the small sounds coming from the earpiece, “Or within a building with thick walls that might block the signal.” He was already littering his computer screens with any and all images from the area, but it was a veritable snowstorm, due to the large area they were covering. M quickly sent out a team, using numbers over exact directions.

Frustration and tension coming off him in waves – his internal energy spiking, but only noticeable by M, as a fellow Angel – Q was told to remain where he was, to monitor the earpiece and continue hunting through the barrage of images. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack, a very, very big haystack filled with many needle-shaped objects that over and over again tricked Q’s eye until he got his facial recognition program up and running. Then he was left waiting as the computer did the work for him, trying to hunt down Silva and 007.

Still, forty-five minutes later, there was no progress reported by anyone. Q kept his gaze glued on his computers to avoid the looks of sympathy and pity that were starting to be directed his way, and he wondered when it had become obvious that he cared more for 007 than for any of the other double-o’s under his care.

This whole time, he’d been able to hear the faint noises of motion but nothing else, which told Q’s brain many small things: either the earpiece had been removed or Bond was unconscious and silent (there were no sounds of resistance either way), Silva’s men wisely said nothing to give away what
they were doing (possibly because of hypnosis keeping them in line), and whomever still had the earpiece (Q was guessing Bond, just by the familiarity of what he was hearing) had made various changes in venues, from outdoors to indoors and through various vehicles.

The earpiece and its owner were indoor again now, and Q had heard the scrape of a chair-leg and the clink of heavy cuffs. Bond was still connected to the earpiece then, and alive – there’d be no other reason for the handcuffs. In other situations, captors often didn’t realize how strong the Angels were, and only found out later when the agent snapped the cuffs with a burst of supernatural strength (shortly before making their captors very, very sorry). Q doubted that Silva, being essentially an Angel himself, would make that mistake, however.

Then Q heard a groan that was all-too familiar, and he felt his heartbeat spike in an instant. “Bond?” he asked, voice so embarrassingly hopeful that he was glad everyone around him was busy.

The voice that answered him had the too-loud quality of someone leaning close to the earpiece, blocking out the comforting sound of Bond’s breathing as the line to Q was taken over secondhand. “Yes, actually, our friend James is still wearing his earpiece,” came Silva’s voice jovially, crawling like acid into Q’s ears and down his spine until the lithe Angel squirmed. He had to take his hand off the computer mouse before his tensing hands crushed it, his supernatural energy too close to the surface. “I couldn’t see any harm in it, so long as I kept quiet so your little hunting hounds wouldn’t find anything. Is anyone else listening but you, Q, by the way?” Silva finished with a definite hint of curiosity.

The smirk he could hear behind those words made Q curl one deft hand into a fist, his blunt fingernails beginning to cut little arcs into his palm. “That is hardly information that I should give you,” he said with forced neutrality that came out like ice. In reality, the answer was no. Q was responsible for relaying any useful information to the necessary people (or computer programs), and it seemed that no one had expected to hear from 007 again anyway, at least through his own earpiece. It was a sobering thought.

Silva chuckled, undaunted, and the breath of his laughter made chills go up Q’s spine because he knew the man had to be leaning over Bond, mouth right up to his ear, to be talking to him this way. “And you haven’t a clue where either of us are, do you?”

“You’ll find out when a score of armed men barge in with orders to kill you on sight,” Q bluffed without a hitch, bluffing being something he’d grown very good at since losing his wings.

Still, Silva didn’t believe him, instead backing off to laugh, and then there was a stinging slap and Q’s ears were filled with the sound of 007 hissing between his teeth. “Bond, status. Are you awake?” Q began to ask automatically.

Silva couldn’t have heard anything Q said by now, but it didn’t matter. Voice still audible from further away, the manic, wingless Angel prodded, “Say whatever you want, Q. You’re in James’s ear, but not in his shoes.”

Apparently Bond was awake, because Q heard his breathing steady, and then the low, venomously accusing growl: “Silva.”

The voice was already dispelling the last tones of grogginess before it finished the hated word, so Q slipped into Quartermaster-mode with the urgency of a diver slipping right into cold water, ignoring the chill bite. “Give me your location, 007. Anything you can give me. M has a team on the way, but your location has not yet been determined exactly.”

Without any apparent fear of talking in front of Silva (some days it helped that Bond was a brash sort
of fellow, not to mention cheeky), Bond rapped off unhesitantly, “Large room, unadorned, windowless, poorly lit. Just old light-bulbs, no fluorescents. Possibly underground.”

Silva cut him off then by interrupting in a voice edged with impatient menace, “Your agent is quite talkative, Q.”

Before Bond could be confused by that, the Quartermaster sighed in his ear and admitted, “He knows perfectly well that I’m here and listening through your earpiece.”

“I imagine this must be quite frustrating to you.”

Q sighed again, unable to dampen his overall irritancy at Silva. “He also cannot hear me unless he is right up next to your head, but he seems to enjoy talking to me more than you.”

“Charming,” 007 mumbled, holding a note of resignation and exasperation of his own. Bond raised his voice just enough to make it clear that he was addressing Silva now, “So you’re going to talk like I’m not here then?”

Silva chuckled, “Oh no, James. How rude of me would that be? Besides, I’m very appreciative of the opportunity you have provided me with.”

Only 007, who got into more trouble than most people knew was possible, had enough experience to respond in a completely unperturbed (but maybe a slightly threatening) voice, “And how is that?”

The low, hard tones didn’t seem to upset Silva, who answered quite smugly, “How else am I supposed to get a message across to our little Quartermaster? I can’t very well just march into MI6 and say hello.”

“You’ve got quite the mouth, haven’t you?” Now Silva was talking to Bond, his good mood apparently fraying. Q would have been proud if he weren’t so worried. “But that’s fine,” Silva continued, “I don’t really need you to talk at all to relay a message.” The honeyed tones in his voice increased Q’s unease exponentially, like an electrical charge plugging into his spine.

And then Silva leaned in close, Bond growling to voice his impotent displeasure at the nearness. It went without question that Silva was talking directly to Q. “How about we play a little game?”

That made Q stiffen, able to feel the impending danger even through the earpiece. It was so thick that Q-branch may as well have melted away as the Quartermaster stiffened, demanding in a voice that was trying for calm but failing, “What do you want, Silva?”

By this point, Q didn’t even notice the people watching him, fear flickering over their faces, even though they were not in Bond’s place or having to listen to him in the presence of a dangerous Angel. When someone turned on the speaker that would let both sides of the conversation be heard, the Quartermaster didn’t even take note.

The man had leaned away again, possibly not even hearing Q – or totally ignoring him, both being equally likely. “I hear you’ve been practicing those lessons I gave you – I applaud you, Quartermaster!” Silva’s light tone darkened. “What I don’t applaud is this false sense you have that you can play with the pros. You’ve got quite an inflated sense of self, don’t you, Q?”

Silva wasn’t close enough to hear Q, so he must have been forcing Bond into the position of
translator. Frustrated and boiling with it, Q grated, “Tell him whatever he wants, Bond.” In the field, the agent knew best, especially when the Quartermaster was effectively blind.

“Come on, James!” Silva barked, clearly growing impatient, “What does our Quartermaster say?”

“That maybe he has ample reason to think he’s good.”

On his end of the line, Q swore and slapped his palm against his forehead. Maybe Bond didn’t always know best. The defiance in the agent’s voice was enough to get him killed on its own.

And it certainly incited Silva to acts of violence.

There was the sound of motion and the chair-legs scraping, of Silva making a noise of effort and Bond snarling in useless response, and Q knew that there was nothing he could do. “Bond, stop antagonizing him!” he commanded even as he felt his muscles strung so tight they could snap. He was terrified. And he wasn’t even the one facing Silva right now, outgunned and stripped of all defense.

Again Silva’s voice was too clear, too close, more breathy as he obviously has to physically fight 007 to keep this close to the side of his head, “We’re going to play a game, Quartermaster – I’m not asking anymore. I’m telling.” There were more sounds of a scuffle, feral noises that raised the hairs on the back of Q’s neck because he knew he was hearing Bond in a full-fledged killing mode. If he weren’t so well restrained, he’d be taking Silva apart piece by piece with his bare hands. “So here’s how it’s going to go, Quartermaster-”

“I’m not here to play games with you, Silva,” Q gritted out, finding his detachedness harder to grasp onto than ever before. He could hear how his tone wobbled in and out of stability, his calm crumbling into pieces.

“Oh really?” Silva was not perturbed…which was the most horrid part of all. It was clear that he knew MI6 couldn't find him or his prisoner. “Then I suppose you won’t mind me just taking over James’s mind then, will you?”

Q felt a ball of ice form in his stomach, and if all of Q-branch was now watching him in stunned silence, he didn't notice. Didn't care. He felt a quiver starting in his hands and traveling up his arms, trying to encompass him. He opened his mouth to say something, and Bond must have done the same, because there was the start of a sentence and then another throaty sound of violence cut off by a choking gurgle – the sound of a stranglehold being swiftly applied. “Silva!!” Q barked, the tone of command coming instantly to him, a sharp whip-crack that would have even the most recalcitrant double-o’s jumping to attention. It was a threatening tone, even if half of its biting edge was formed by desperation. “Let him be! Your argument is with me, not 007.”

“Very true,” Silva admitted, and although Q could hear Bond breathing, it was labored and difficult and swift, proof that the wingless Angel hadn't let go of him. “But he’s the lucky boy who gets to be the point of contention between the two of us, isn’t he? That’s the sad truth, when you have two great powers.” He must have turned, because Silva sounded like he was playfully addressing Bond now, “You’re a little behind in the arms-race, 007, I’m sorry to say. Although you do look dashing in those wings, outdated as they are.”

The constant reminder of the similarities between himself and Silva grated on him like fingernails scratching at his bones. “Silva…” he started to warn again, knowing how useless it was but desperately trying to regain some control.

But deep down, he and everyone else listening in knew that there would be no control to be found.
“Here are the rules, Q,” Silva continued, grunting as he obviously tried to get Bond’s to cooperate – no mean feat. “I’m going to hypnotize your agent here. Seeing as he’s an Angel and not a Mundane, I imagine I’ll have to struggle a bit, but I think I’ll manage. Now you – you, Quartermaster, get to try and see whether you can stop me.”

Q thought of protesting that it was impossible, that he was only a voice in Bond’s ear, not a presence at his side, but already he could feel everything slipping through his fingers. He was deflating defeatedly, knowing that this wasn’t a game designed for playing fair.

So he didn't wait for the torment to start, instead snatching for whatever advantage he could get. The Quartermaster leaned forward again close to the microphone, words coming out fast: “Bond, listen to me. The last time I used this power, I didn’t need to look at you, correct?” He didn’t wait for an answer, because he was pretty sure that Silva was still calmly throttling the blonde-haired agent. “So focus on my voice, and I promise you, I’ll do everything in my power to keep your mind mine.”

“Oh, I’m not going to hurt him, Quartermaster,” Silva protested in his honeyed tones, proving he was still close enough to listen in. “This is all for boasting’s sake – I could care less whether I took over his mind. After all, I know that as soon as he gets back to MI6, you can undo any damage I’ve done.” He chuckled. “I didn’t expect you to take out 006 so easily, but every game requires a few losses on both sides.” Abruptly, he must have loosened his hold, because Q could hear Bond gasping, dragging in breaths of air swiftly before starting to level out.

Apparently, 007 was far from cowed. “What makes you think I’ll be a loss?” he said hoarsely, and Q was quite frankly awed by his fearlessness.

“Simple,” was the dispassionate answer, “Because you are not like Q or I. Now-” The word had a ring to it that echoed even into Q-branch, making everyone shiver as most of them heard Silva using his power for the first time.

Before Q could do anything, the other word was shivering into place to solidify the first step of the hypnosis: ”Listen.”

And Q felt desperation join with anger, a catalyst in his system that didn’t manage to banish the terror – but at least managed to force an icicle of determination through it. “Listen to my voice, James. The only words that matter are mine.” Now the people in Q-branch were twitching to look at Q, hearing a faint echo of that same power shivering whenever he used the possessive, as if the were word a bell that he struck gently and repetitively.

Everyone heard Bond drag in a ragged gasp after a long pause, and then the man was saying, “I’m still here, Q.” The sound of assurance in 007’s voice was almost as rewarding as the sound of Silva swearing in the background, and Q felt a fierce stab of pride at being able to thwart the man even that much.

“The first word’s the easiest to break, James – you possibly even did it yourself,” Q cautioned, falling back on being Quartermaster again, ignoring Silva as a rogue piece of data that he had no control over and simply had to work around. “So keep paying attention to my voice…” Tone a little quieter, Q admitted, because he’d always hated when people hid truths from him in the past, even when those truths were ones he didn’t want to hear. “…Because I don’t know how long I can hold Silva off.” Somehow, speaking the thought allowed made it seem alive, a thing of ice grabbing at Q’s lips with icy, tiny talons as it left.

As if to prove his point, Silva’s voice rang out before Bond could even take in a breath to speak again in response. Q felt a crippling sense of defeat begin to sink in even then, as the other wingless Angel snapped out the first word only to try and move brutally on to the second. In all honesty, Q
didn’t even know if his frantic calling helped at all – if Bond was ever in control of his own head enough to snap off vicious curses at Silva, it was possibly because Bond himself was no easy prey for mental powers, or because Silva was toying.

This game had been set up for Q to lose. Logically, he knew this, deducing it more and more thoroughly with each second that he wished he could leap through the earpiece and reappear in that room – from here, he literally could make no different. His words were like mist on a forest fire, and Silva took great pleasure in gobbling up that desperate mist. The few times that Q somehow managed to grasp victory were mostly due to startling Bond, thus jerking his mind around manually while Silva tried to use his abilities – and in all honesty, Q feared what that would do to someone’s mind. But Bond was stubborn, and the last thing he’d want would be for Silva to take him over, so Q kept calling out through the earpiece.

He was a voice wailing over the edge of a ship as a crewmate was taken away by the sea, so pathetically out of reach no matter how he stretched and grasped, able only to watch as the other was dragged away by tides and waves.

It was like listening to someone die on the phone.

It was *exactly* like listening to someone being tortured over the phone, only with the teasing, false idea that you could somehow help and deflect the knife a time or two by slicing your own fingers in defense.

And because Bond was stubborn and Q’s words, somehow, kept distracting him and snapping up his attention, the game took a long time to play out. But finally, Silva’s words were just too much:

The first were gentle, power alone drawing the mind in like a hole in the sun. “Now, Bond-” Silva purred.

“-Lights-” Q felt himself failing, even as the supernatural power shook him even all the way from Q-branch.

And Silva seemed almost to chuckle first, knowing that he’d won as brutally as possible. The last word he said almost lazily, the conclusion already foregone.

“-Out.”

Bond had been panting and straining and biting out obscenities when he could, but now Q let out a whimpering cry like a small animal as he heard the 00-agent finally relax, cut down succinctly by words. After the torment of the drawn-out fight, it left Q shaky and weak, everything suddenly silent. Everyone was staring, shell-shocked, as their defeated Quartermaster sat and shook, his body tense and his face as mask roughly hewn in rock. It was a mask that he stubbornly kept on even though it was riddled with fissures.

There was the buffeting sound of someone touching the earpiece, pulling it free of 007’s ear now that the man was beyond protesting. When Silva spoke, it was directly to the little device, “So you see, Quartermaster, your celebration of yours skills was premature. I hope that this little game has reminded you that you still have a lot to learn from the master.”

A few voices in Q-branch were muttering angrily, “That doesn’t mean Silva is more skilled – he just stacked the odds impossibly in his favor!” but Q himself made no reply at all, his every muscle tense and his clenched fists shaking. His screens, full of programs still searching without success for Silva’s face or Bond’s, reflected sharply in his glasses, his wavy hair throwing dark slices of shadow.
“Now then,” Silva’s voice continued melodiously, and it sounded like he took a deep breath and pushed a hand back through his hair, likewise brushing aside the exertions of overcoming an Angel’s mind, “I’m so glad we had that little heart-to-heart, but now I’ve got a message to give to Bond. You’ll be happy when you get it, I’m sure!” And with that there was a crunch and then static as Silva destroyed the communication device, before Q could do more than start to shout.

The silence was total now. Q, slowly, settled back into his chair from where he’d rose to a useless and tense crouch. No one dared speak, even though practically everyone was now in Q-branch – M included.

The woman recovered first, because she was the Dragon of MI6, was she not? “I’m calling 006. The teams aren’t working fast enough, and even if Silva has shown a penchant for overcoming Angels, I still think we need someone on this with a license to kill and the temperament to bloody do it right. Tanner?”

“Yes?”

“Send instructions to 006. He’s still staying at 004’s flat, but he’s the only 00-agent in the country right now.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Tanner immediately darted off.

M’s voice was still serious, but the faintest bit gentle as she turned next to her Quartermaster, who hadn’t otherwise moved, nor had anything shifted to destroy the last pieces of his ice-and-steel mask. “Quartermaster, get one of your underlings to drive over and deliver Trevelyan his equipment. You yourself can stay at your computers. Maybe that tracker will come back online.” The red dot had been a beacon of hope until it had faded into obscurity. What M really wanted to do was send Q home and tell him to rest, but she knew how ridiculous that sounded. If someone she had cared about…cared deeply about…had just been taken hostage and mentally tortured right in her ear, sleep would be a long, long time coming, and no friend when it came. Her orders for Q to stay on his computers were as close as she could come to dismissing him, and a sharp glance around Q-branch was all it took for her to warn them off. Q was a dangerous entity now, she could tell by the way his energy crackled on a level Mundanes couldn’t understand. “Quartermaster?” she pressed carefully but warningly, waiting for confirmation.

It came a beat later, in an unreadable tone, “Yes, M. Right away.” He got up to begin giving orders. M returned to her offices.

And everyone gave Q space not because of the way his face was carved from ice, but because twin tracks of tears had been painted haphazardly down his sharp-featured face.

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Chapter End Notes

Once again, this chapter got away on me...so, basically, the last chapter, this chapter, AND the next chapter were meant to be ONE chapter. Obviously that didn't go as planned...
Oh well - the next chapter is still planned, at least, so it should be up soon!
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Q still wants to find Bond, and 006 has been ordered to.

Or the chapter in which Q refuses to let one failure keep him out of the game.

Chapter Notes

Yay! A quick update! I felt bad hitting you guys with two cliffhangers, so I tried to get this one out pretty quickly. This chapter and the two before it (and even the next one, kinda) were meant to be one chapter XP Oh well - better I write too much than too little, right?

As always, please ignore random discrepancies: for example, location. Bond was in an airport waiting for a plane...the suddenly he's in London. My theory? Silva took him there. But honestly, I really don't think about details like that until it's all written and it's too late, so please don't try to correct me or anything! Just enjoy :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Q wasn’t out of the running yet. Being defeated once just meant that he was angrier now, and more likely to do something rash. Or simply something unexpected.

This included delivering 006’s equipment himself, startling Alec so much that he just let the irate Quartermaster in. “Q...?” he said in bewilderment, in the process of getting ready to leave already. The call from Tanner had explained everything, and Alec was planning to leave as soon as possible, once he’d been properly outfitted by Q-branch. He’d been led to believe that an underling would be playing delivery-boy, though. “What are you doing here?”

“Do you dare kick me out?” Q asked back in an even tone that suggested, no, they didn’t. Q dumped a bag down on the couch even as a healing 004 walked in, his grey eyes flicking between the determined Quartermaster and Alec. Ignoring them both stoically, Q simply proceeded to drag equipment and weaponry out of the bag, bringing to mind Mary Poppins with her bottomless purse. “I assume you have all the details about what has transpired?” Q rapped out next.

Usually, Alec didn’t bother much to sense Angel energy, but he’d started paying more attention to it since spending so much time with 004 – that meant he noticed the dangerous unevenness to Q’s energy, which was like a hot fire snapping and biting viciously at dry wood. This jived with what Tanner had told him (Tanner had been kind enough to give more personal details along with the mission specs). “Yes,” Alec admitted slowly, even as instincts had him waving a wing slightly, a command for 004 to back off. The Quartermaster was actually giving off vibes of being quite
dangerous right now, and Alec felt his survival instincts extending to protect the injured Angel that he’d been spending so much more time with. Being both obedient and sensible, 004 met Alec’s eyes with a nod before retreating subtly to a more distant part of the room.

For all intents and purposes, Q couldn’t care less where Aiden was. He was focused like a laser-sight, and all that mattered at the moment was the mission, which included 006, not 004. Q turned around with the handgun 006 would be carrying, depositing it in the agent’s hand before going back to his bag. As it turned out, most of the equipment in there was actually of the technological side, including a laptop that looked a lot like Q’s…

“I hope you don’t intend me to use any of that,” 006 tried to make light, slipping the handgun into his holster after checking it over automatically, “You know how hard I am on anything with a hard-drive. Plus, I’m really not seeing how a laptop would be useful.”

Unexpectedly, though, Q was rearranging the bag before closing it and then slinging it back over his shoulder, turning to 006 with a determined look. “To you, it wouldn’t be,” the slimmer man informed 006 candidly, “But to me, it would, and I’m coming along.”

Both 00-agents jumped a little, Aiden walking over to Alec with a bewildered look just stretching into his grey eyes. “What?” Alec blurted bluntly, never one for delicacy anyway.

“I’m. Coming. Along. It’s not that complicated.”

“I think it might be,” Alec argued, “Because this sounds like a foolhardy idea. Did M clear you for this?”

Q stepped forward until he was chest to chest with Alec, radiating threatening energy even while his face became a mask of ice. Surprisingly, it made 004 bristle, a grey-banded white wing coming out to just touch Alec’s. 006 didn’t move except to tense and hold his breath slightly while Q demanded of him from close-range, “Do you want to get Bond back?”

There was only one answer. “Yes.”

“Good. Then bringing me along is the only way to do it. If the larger teams haven’t found any sign of him, you’re as good as a missile without directions, but I can track Bond.”

“And why wouldn’t it be more practical to track him from Q-branch?” asked 004 in a more level tone. He wasn’t usually the type to question superiors, but he’d also been spending a lot of quality time with 006 – things tended to rub off.

Q snapped a look to him, emotions brutally held in check beneath the surface – from experience, most 00-agents knew that emotions held in like that tended to burn the user, like grasping lightning in the hand. “Because my system for tracking Bond has proven inefficient from a distance. I’ve got a lock on the general location where he was last, but it’s still a large area. Beyond that…you need me personally.”

006 asked the million-dollar-question, putting his hands on his hips and spreading his black wings slightly to show that he wouldn’t be moving until it was answered, mission or no mission. “Why?”

“Because the only other way to track an Angel is by our supernatural energy, and I’m the most sensitive one that you’ve got.”
They’d left 004 behind, not surprisingly – the man still had his arm and torso in bandages, and while he could walk around now without hurting himself, he was in no way ready for the field again. Understanding this, Aiden had simply stood by as Q and Alec made last-minute plans and preparations, stepping forward only as they headed for the door.

Q cocked his head, trying not to stare, as the usually-reserved and professional 004 fisted one hand in Alec’s collar and pulled his head in for a hungry kiss. No other goodbyes were said.

Since then, 006 and Q had been in the car, making good time considering the London traffic. There were times when walking would have been faster – and then there were times when Q would actually bolt from the car, because it was faster. He always found 006 again, but not before the black-winged Angel had a heart-attack or two.

No amount of berating could make Q repentant. “You know as well as I that time is precious,” Q told him, having not mentioned 007 specifically since they’d left.

“And so are you,” countered Alec, running a hand back through his hair in exasperation as he maneuvered through traffic, “What would M say if I managed to let the Quartermaster be kidnapped as well?!” The thought was actually quite terrifying to him – to say that M would destroy him would be an understatement.

Outwardly quite calm despite the fact that he was a storm on the inside, Q simply leaned over his computer screen, where he was running through more image-data while his other senses stretched to their limits to sense Bond. “I won’t get kidnapped. And I will find my agent.”

And there was too much steel in that statement for 006 to argue with him.

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They found Bond in just under an hour, a veritable miracle considering all of the odds stacked against them. By then, Q had been a live-wire, body tense and head snapping this way and that as he tried to pinpoint exactly what he was sensing: at his back (having left the car behind), 006 was a steady wall of energy, but somewhere beneath their feet, he’d sensed something more. “There’s a building beneath us. It’s not visible from here or on most of the maps, which is why the other team wouldn’t have thought to search for it,” Q explained briefly, like someone dropping off information while his mind was already running miles ahead. Indeed, the Quartermaster was already squatting down to dig out his laptop, and soon had all manner of maps and blueprints whizzing across it. “Ah – there. We go in there. I can lead us from there.” 006 was still trying to figure out the information from over Q’s shoulder when the Quartermaster slammed the laptop shut. To 006’s befuddled look, Q explained, “Photographic memory. I don’t need the maps anymore – and that means that you don’t either, so long as you don’t manage to split up from me.”

Gaining more respect for the Quartermaster by the moment, 006 just nodded. “Noted. So you think you’ve found Bond?”

“Either that or I found Silva,” Q admitted grimly, already slinging his bag up on his shoulder and starting towards a worn-out building. “There isn’t a lot of difference between one Angel’s energy and another, especially at this distance. All I know is that I only sense one Angel.”
Alec grunted an affirmation under his breath before pulling his gun out, entering the building close behind Q. “Any way that you can give directions from behind me? Seeing as I’m the armed one.”

It was true, Q hadn’t brought a gun for himself – although he’d been smart enough to acquire a bulletproof vest. “No, not unless you want to slow down. Shoot around me.”

“Smarmy little thing,” Alec could be heard grumbling at his back, but the agent complied. As Q led them through rooms and eventually to a stairwell that Alec would have honestly missed the first time around, Alec kept nearly on Q’s heels. The few times that there were unexpected sounds, he found that a touch of feathers to the shoulder made Q freeze, and the Quartermaster never flinched when Alec sighted his gun right over Q’s shoulder. A moment later, after no dangers presented themselves, they’d move on.

They came across no one. The building was deserted, and it made unease crawl up and down Alec’s spine until the feathers on his wings were stiff. He wanted to ask Q whether he would be able to sense Bond if he were dead, but didn’t dare make a sound. As it was, 006 hadn’t sensed a thing. Was Q really that much more attuned to supernatural energy after all of his time spent wingless? Or was he just that much more hopeful?

Finally, it hit Alec like a caress to his senses, so faint he almost missed it before he recognized what he was noticing and stiffened. Q let out a relieved phrase before approaching a door swiftly. Then he swore.

Fairly sure now that the building was empty except for whatever Angel was on the other side of that door, Alec asked quietly, “Trouble?”

“Locked,” replied Q briefly, letting the image before them speak for itself: a cast-iron door that a vault would be proud of and a handle that didn’t budge under Q’s hand. There was a keypad next to it, though. Q immediately fell to rifling through his bag again.

Curious, 006 watched between intervals of surveying the area around them for possible dangers. “I assume you’ve got a way to unlock it?”

“Shortly,” Q murmured, finding the wires he needed with a purr. He began to pull the keypad apart until he could connect his own wires, hissing as something unexpected sliced open three fingertips on his left hand. “It’s nothing,” he mumbled around his fingertips as he sucked on them briefly, “Just a sharpened edge in here I didn’t suspect.” Then he connected the other ends of the wires to his laptop, and knelt in front of it on the floor to begin running a program that MI6 probably didn’t know he had. Lines of rapidly scrolling numbers flashed past on the reflective surface of the Quartermaster’s glasses, one by one going still and falling into place.

As Alec saw the last of the numbers deduced, he quickly set down a few rules: “Once the door unlocks, I go through first – got it?”

The Quartermaster was looking between his screen and the lock, as if willing it to go faster. “Yes,” he nonetheless answered, proving that he’d learned a thing or two about using people’s skills: Q’s skills were good for opening doors, 006’s skills were good for wading into a room full of potential enemies. “I still sense only one Angel behind the door, and the blueprints I found showed only one entrance to this room, meaning whoever is in there isn’t getting out except via this doorway – likewise for getting in.”

“Good,” Alec grunted, even as there was a click as the lock disengaged. He raised his gun readily even as he left last instructions: “You guard the door then, at least until I clear this dismal place.” He
deftly opened the door and shouldered through, gun leading.

He stopped pretty quickly, taking in a breath, as he cleared the room in one look – there was, after all, nothing to see but the familiar form of a rather battered James sitting in a chair in the middle of the room. And Q, blast him, hadn’t stayed behind as promised. “Back, Q,” Alec growled, seeing the Quartermaster edging in at his heels. As much as Alec wanted to rush over to Bond, who was sagging forward limply against his restraints without any signs of life, he was trained too well for that. So instead he made sure that Q was staying put and then did a quick circuit of the room, mindful of prepared traps or hidden obstacles. All the while, Q watched, so tense that his energy was crackling.

“Clear,” Alec finally said, voice like a deadened bell.

Immediately, the Quartermaster rushed forward, although he said before he even reached the motionless agent, “He’s not dead. I wouldn’t be able to sense his energy at all if he were, although it was bloody difficult with him unconscious.” Fortunately, Q was too focused on 007 to notice how 006 was nearly unstrung with utmost relief, and he began checking around the room again before ultimately heading to the door to make sure they didn’t get their exit blocked. “Is he rigged with a bomb?” Alec asked as the thought occurred to him.

Q was right next to 007 now, and his dexterous hands skimmed over Bond’s body, which appeared to be nicked and bleeding in places but overall hadn’t sustained much damage. The blood seeping from Q’s lacerated fingertips was in good company nonetheless as he brushed a few scrapes. “No, nothing of the sort,” Q replied professionally, although his voice darkened then into a growl, “I think that after Silva played his game, he must have realized we’d come, or else he simply tired of maintaining a hostage. James seems relatively uninjured.”

It didn’t escape Alec’s notice when Q slipped into using his friend’s first name, but it also didn’t escape his notice how easy this was. “Silva doesn’t seem like the type to just give up a hostage,” he murmured to himself. Since the man obviously wasn’t here to question, however, all Alec could do was check the hallway beyond and make sure that no one was planning to ambush them and box them in. Very belatedly, he finally called up MI6, who were by now frantic about the abrupt disappearance of their Quartermaster.

Inside the room, Q could nearly feel his knees buckling from relief. He honestly hadn’t expected to find 007 alive. The whole way here, he’d been preparing himself to face a corpse, and, at best, a gloating Silva that he could try to kill with his bare hands. There was no Silva to be found right now, but finding a living, breathing James Bond far trumped that loss of revenge. Q’s hands fluttered over the restraints latched onto Bond’s every limb – he had lock-picks with him, as well as the skills to use them, having expected to need them. However, he knew that releasing 007 now would be a folly. Chances were high that Silva had done to Bond as he’d done to 006 and Velvet, so there was no telling just what orders were lying in wait should Bond be awakened and freed. There was already evidence of how 007 had tried to enact his escape himself, probably in that prolonged scuffle Q had been privy to, and Bond’s wrists and ankles were a mess of raw skin.

So despite the fact that the urge to free the blond agent was painfully strong, Q just let his hands flutter over 007’s torn wrists for a moment before he regretfully raised himself up, knowing what was required of him.

Taking a deep breath in through is nose and blowing it out in a gust past pursed lips, Q took Bond’s head in his hands, lifting it gently. The grey-winged Angel once again had blood on his head, proof of how he’d ultimately been incapacitated after the trap had mostly immobilized him – it was no joke that Bond seemed attracted to probable concussions. Q couldn’t stop his thumb from quietly stroking
one stubbled cheek. Extending his energy gently but forcefully, Q coaxed, “Bond, wake up.”

In this case, it could have been the touch, the words, the coercion of the energy, or just good timing. The hypnosis technique really didn’t work very well on sleeping people – it was based on a person’s attention, on grabbing and manipulating that attention. However, when Q repeated his call a few times and even gave 007 a little shake, he ultimately got the result he wanted as the agent shifted and groaned low in his throat. His pinioned wings shifted and strained, accompanied by the creek of powerful tendons as they began to awaken and shift. 007 was soon nearly awake, his eyes beginning to twitch as he fitfully jerked his head.

“Bond, look at me,” Q coaxed gently, his long fingers patting at 007’s cheek to get his attention.

Slits of blue appeared as Bond just managed to force his eyes open a grudging crack, blood stiffening the lashes of one where redness had dripped down from his forehead. The true sign that he was awake was when he mumbled groggily, “You were calling me by my first name earlier.” He closed his eyes to swallow thickly before continuing in a more coherent and familiar voice, “What changed?”

“006 is around,” Q quipped back, although his voice remained soothingly soft. When Bond shifted, the larger man noticed that his body was still tied down, and Q instantly picked up on the tension that flooded 007’s system again. An agent was trained to react quickly, and they noticed immediately when they didn’t have the freedom of motion they needed. The Quartermaster placed a belaying hand on Bond’s shoulder and explained calmly without being prompted, “I haven’t had time to ascertain whether you were compromised yet, like 006 was.”

Although it clearly irked him, his displeasure evident in the tension around his pale-blue eyes, 007 nodded acceptance. “I understand.”

“Are you all right, though, firstly?” Q asked, unaware of how his hands seemed to be constantly moving but somehow never leaving contact with Bond’s frame for more than a few seconds. The one on 007’s shoulder had slipped up to the juncture between neck and shoulder, from there back to touch his fingertips to ruffled wings, all without Q consciously instigating the motion.

Bond noticed, but he held his tongue in that regard. It was noticeable that he relaxed slightly, though, as if the constant contact made up for the continued restraint. “That snare cut me up a bit, it seems, as did jumping through the window at the airport while glass was still raining down,” 007 admitted ruefully, wincing as he noted a headache, too, no doubt, “I don’t remember the blow to the head, but I think I have one. It explains the long gap where I don’t remember anything at all.”

“I’m not surprised about the glass. Your jump through the window was outside of my predictions of your actions, to say the least,” replied Q dryly. “And yes, you have a head-wound. Medical will want to see to it, for sure.” Now Q was stalling, not wanting to do what he knew came next. Finally, he sighed and grimaced. “I have to make sure Silva hasn’t hidden any orders in you. Do you understand?”

“You don’t have to use that Quartermaster voice with me, Q,” Bond rumbled almost amusedly, which Q scowled at. Bond just tried on a strained smirk in response to Q’s snarky expression. “You can be as official as you want, but in the end, I know that you’ve taken over my head enough times that you may as well have a key.”

“Stop being so flippant about this,” Q muttered, but it was halfhearted reprimand at best. He’d had quite a scare today, and no one but Q understood just how hard it was to even think about using his mental powers right now, after that long stint with Bond’s earpiece and Silva’s sadism today. Q just wanted to turn his brain off, forget that he had this power at all, and sleep for a millennium.
Perhaps Bond did notice, because his gaze softened to something less playful as he watched the haggard look to Q’s face, the way his glasses had slipped a few millimeters down his nose, the way he stood as if gravity had somehow increased and was pulling him down. “Go ahead, Q,” he encouraged, voice notably softer and more sympathetic now, “I don’t recall Silva doing anything but putting me under, but no one seems to remember anything until they try and kill someone.”

“I heard that.” 006 had come back in, and although he looked wary and tense, he was clearly happy to see James alive.

And James proved that he was alive and well by throwing back in good fun, “Don’t complain. If you hadn’t tried to kill him, how else would you have gotten back to Matsuda’s apartment?”

006’s grumbles were lethal-sounding, but go figure that Bond took them for declarations of friendship as 006 paced back out the door, gun still drawn.

Since Bond was still so restrained that even a burst of supernatural strength couldn’t get him out, he shouldn’t have been in a position to give anyone permission to do anything, but it still felt good to hear him accepting what Q had to do. So Q stepped forward, silent and unhesitant. Bond made an indeterminate sound in his throat as Q pressed forward purposefully to stand between his legs, meaning 007 could have reached out and touched him in any way he wanted had his hands not be cuffed, and Bond had to tilt his head back a bit to look at him. Q’s face looked tired but centered, his longish mop of hair casting shadows over his eyes as he, in turn, looked down at 007. In a steady and unhurried movement that felt almost like the next step in a dance, he lifted his hands and placed them smoothly on either side of Bond’s head, giving the man a moment to wince as the Quartermaster’s fingers touched the impressive goose-egg he was sporting just past his hairline.

“Ready?”

And it wasn’t a question, because with it, Bond felt his focus fused with Q’s, and the next words obliterated everything but their own ringing sounds and the powerful will of the Quartermaster behind them.

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Chapter End Notes

I think I haz cuddlez planned for the next chapter :3

And the chapter after that...you might even find out what Silva's 'message' is that he had Bond unwittingly bring in...
Art Break

Chapter Summary

Just a quick picture of a random scene in which Bond and Q are sharing a couch. Actually, Q is sharing the couch, Bond is overtaking the couch.

Just art. No story.

Chapter Notes

I'm doing a quick art prelude because this next chapter just doesn't want to come out of my fingers, and I've got such beautiful plans for it!!! I don't want to ruin it, so you might have to wait a few more days :P

But until then, you have this *hands over picture*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter End Notes

I apologize for my inability to draw Q's face *smacks head on desk and groans* I don't like how it turned out, but at least it's recognizable as Q!
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Q has to face the consequences of going on missions without permission.
Bond has to face the consequences of Q being able to break into houses.
The latter is incalculably more enjoyable.

Or perhaps the hottest chapter I've written yet.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long gap - I hope the picture kept you guys happy! I would have called this a cuddles chapter, but I think this goes beyond cuddles.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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MI6 was in an uproar, although it had a positive outlook now, at last, as the missing Quartermaster returned – with a recovered 007, no less. 006 grumbled and said that Q was hogging all the credit, but then realized a gift when it was handed to him by using the lack of attention to escape back to Aiden’s apartment. The report would probably be late and probably poorly written, but that wasn’t anything new for Alec Trevelyan. Besides, Aiden would probably make him write the report. Eventually. Aiden might have had the professional logic to make 006 write a report, but Alec had more than enough skills to make 004 forget about that for quite some time, he wagered.

Q and Bond were both ushered into an interrogation room, and Q got a good dressing-down from M. In between explaining himself, he also pointed out that he’d managed to clear up any hidden commands Silva might have twisted into 007’s head – thus preventing an unnecessary trip to the holding cells for 007. Instead, the man was excused to Medical while the Quartermaster’s rebuke continued full-throttle. It was only after M had made it quite clear how little she liked her Quartermaster’s racing off into the bellies of beasts unannounced that she sat back and ordered him to report. It was a long, painful process, and did a lot to ensure that Q never hared off again without going through the proper channels.

Meanwhile, 007 went through Medical, who patched him up quickly. They were secretly thankful, in a guilty sort of way, that he was so wrung out, because a tired 00-agent didn’t grow cantankerous in Medical so swiftly. As it was, Bond didn’t start getting stroppy until the last few scrapes and cuts were being tended to, and one of the nurses suggested that he might be developing an unexpected fever. Bond, never one to let something like a fever keep him down (especially one that Medical hadn’t had time to prove yet), quickly began making a thorough nuisance of himself, his wings
snapping out all over the place and basically making use of their wingspan to make 007 intolerable. Medical finally threw its hands up in defeat and released Bond and his bloody great wings.

After that, he keenly avoided anything like an MI6 higher-up, knowing that there were probably people that wanted a more extensive report from him. He could always write one up, but those somehow always ended up being dismally late for some reason…

Instead, the agent let his feet turn him towards Q-branch, and once he was there, unabashedly began walking towards Q’s office. It was a surprise when one of the usually-timid Mundanes stepped forward and stopped him. When the podgy little man stepped in front of the 00-agent, Bond naturally narrowed his eyes, but it turned out that the boffin wasn’t foolish enough to think that he could deter 007. Instead, he was actually trying to be helpful. “Um…I suppose you’re looking for the Quartermaster?” the fellow stuttered, and everyone was staring in awe at the minion who had somehow found the guts to talk to James kill-anything-that-moves Bond. Mundanes and Angels mixed well enough in some settings, but ever since that time 006, 7, and 8 had crashed Q’s training session of his minions, there was a healthy level of wariness in Q-branch.

When it seemed that Bond was quite content to just stare at him with those unsettling pale eyes, the boffin nervously tapped his fingers against one another before pulling together the courage to continue anyway. “Well…um…yes, of course, yes… See, Q isn’t actually here. I think that after M was done talking to him, he was supposed to report to Medical, but he turned up here instead. M herself came in and ordered him home.” The memory made himself and fully three-fourths of Q-branch blanch, and truthfully, the Quartermaster himself had gotten a frozen, wide-eyed look as M had hunted him down in his own turf and then verbally flayed the skin off him. It was no surprise that he’d then quickly packed up his stuff and slunk out of there, in accordance with M’s orders (and with M watching the whole time like an eagle staring down a mouse from its perch). In remarkably short time, Q-branch had been staring at the retreating, wingless back of their Quartermaster. With a self-satisfied little snort, M had turned on her heel and disappeared as well, and Q-branch was still silent and rattled long after her silver wings had disappeared.

A flicker of disappointment went though Bond at having missed Q, but he accepted it philosophically. He’d hoped to catch Q and talk to him from pretty much the moment Q and Alec had rescued him, but it wasn’t like 007 had made this wishes known to anyone outside his own head. Shrugging to signal his acceptance, he thanked the round little minion in a ‘no harm done’ sort of tone, then left with all the politeness of a gentleman.

As with M, Q-branch watched the space he’d occupied long after he’d left, some parts of them unable to believe that an Angel could leave a place with so little mayhem in his or her wake.

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Bond escaped MI6 entirely with just a little bit more smooth talking and an attentiveness to his surroundings that allowed him to evade M. He actually could, despite all logic to the contrary, tell Angel energies apart. Q couldn’t, and none of the other Angels Bond knew could, but by some stroke of chance or luck, 007 could often guess with reasonable accuracy just what Angel he was sensing nearby. It was a new trick, acquired during the time he’d spent slowly getting to know Q.

Without fanfare or excitement, Bond went home. He had a fairly maintained flat for being in it so rarely, and was glad for it now, the thought of familiar surroundings prickling his interest keenly. He parked the car and entered his apartment, entering just far enough to kick off his shoes and flop down
on the couch, head dropping against the back and wings stretching out to either side, feathers brushing upholstery.

Immediately, his senses told him that another Angel was in the house.

Bond didn’t actually flinch as he noticed this, nor did he stiffen in the slightest from the boneless sprawl he’d acquired on the sofa. He simply sat and waited, a faint smile playing at his mouth as he heard light footsteps shuffle out of a back room. It was the Quartermaster, hands wisely raised to show them empty, palm forward. “It’s just me.”

“I know.”

Q was slightly behind the couch, and visible only out of the corner of Bond’s eye when Bond bothered to open his eyes at all. The lowering of his arms and the puzzled glare were more than noticeable, however. “What do you mean you know?” Q shot back.

The tension that Q had brought with him into the room had already dissipated and faded when it became clear that Bond didn’t plan on shooting an intruder on instinct and then asking questions later. For just about anyone else, Bond would have, but not Q. “I recognized you.”

“You only just saw me.”

“Yes, but I sensed your energy first. I’m trained to be aware of my surroundings, remember?” came the reply with light – but playful – sarcasm.

Q didn’t chase the issue, the sigh issuing from his nose making it clear that he saw the futility in arguing with a double-o. Instead, after a half-step hesitation (one foot moving forward, whole body stopping, then whole body moving forward), the slim younger man came forward and perched, stiff-backed, on the arm of the couch to 007’s right. There were tiny bandages around some of the fingertips on his left hand, and the Quartermaster looked exhausted and worn-down around the edges. Actually…more than the edges. Especially as Q sighed and lowered his head, he looked worn out right through to the core.

“Do you want something to drink, Q?” Bond asked when the Quartermaster didn’t say anything even though the silence had stretched on for easily three minutes.

Q roused enough to blink and reply, “Yes, that would be fine,” but Bond honestly didn’t think it mattered one way or another. Still, the man got up, walking past while tucking his right wing back so as not to knock Q off the chair-arm in passing. With the way Q was acting right now – a sort of fragility to his character, as well as a bone-deep exhaustion that was somehow worse than that evening in Q’s office – Bond somehow didn’t think that unbalancing the Quartermaster physically or mentally would be appreciated.

In passing, he paused, however. In a low, neutral murmur, Bond forewarned, “When I come back, chances are high that I’ll ask why you broke into my apartment.”

Q apparently had just enough energy to be snarky, as he commented without shifting his gaze from the middle-distance, “I’d barely call it breaking in. Your security system is pathetic.”

“Well, I’m the most dangerous part of my security system.”

The other Angel just grunted, the equivalent of conceding the point, because there really was no arguing that. Q still didn’t seem very guilty about it, but Bond had planned to disappear into the kitchen anyway, leaving the Quartermaster on the arm of the couch. Bond began going through his
fridge for something to drink, then on to his cupboard for suitable glasses.

Now that he already knew that the Quartermaster was in his house, Bond dropped his guard, essentially allowing himself to lower the defenses that kept him alive during missions. Keeping constantly alert was tiring, and it had been a long time since Bond had counted Q as a stranger. This lack of paying attention to where Q was led to a slight twitch of surprise as Bond heard footsteps at the last minute followed by a forehead thunking into the middle of his back. The reflexive tensing of Bond’s wings had them brushing against Q’s shoulders, but not enough to dislodge the wingless Angel. Q sighed.

“I’m sorry for breaking into your house.”

Still facing the counter, hands on the cupboard door, Bond calmly evaluated the situation in his head, mulling it over a moment before picking his words with care. When he spoke, his tone was low but gentle, “No harm done. I assume you have a reason for being here?”

He felt the Quartermaster’s head shake back and forth against his back, accompanied by another gust of weary air. But instead of coupling the negative shake of his head with a verbal ‘no’, Q spoke suddenly and quietly, the edges of his voice like tattered cloth, “…You have no idea how hard it was to hear you like that.”

Angels were in no way empathic, but Q’s supernatural energy had been strange since Bond had met him, and it swelled with the impossible agony that was only now breaking loose. Bond slowly turned around, shifting his body so that he was soon facing the Quartermaster standing on the edge of broken in his kitchen. Head hanging, shoulders unable to decide whether to be tense or droop resignedly, Q didn’t even react, until Bond reached out strong, possessive arms and pulled him in without waiting for permission. Chances were high that the Quartermaster would protest, as his professional ego had urged him to before, but instead he just exhaled in a relieved, almost painful rush against Bond’s neck. “You really are here, aren’t you?” Q asked almost dazedly, as if this long day had been a nightmare and he was now waking up from it, “I really did save you from Silva.”

“Yes,” was all Bond said, nodding before turning his head to press his nose and mouth against Q’s wavy mop of hair. After a moment, he added, “Did you know, it was your voice saying my name – saying ‘James’, not 007 or Bond – that held me together? It was strings and cobwebs to hold off a knife, but it did hold it off for a little while.”

The chuckle Q emitted was almost more of a bitter sob, and the words it evolved into were definitely wry, “It was a hopeless game from the beginning. All I probably did was drag the torment out for you, and believe me, I know what that torment is. Silva took great delight in mucking about with my head, too.”

Untroubled, Bond nodded, but then finished candidly, “It was still nice to hear you saying my name.” And it was clear that, despite all logic that said the effort had been useless, James had appreciated the Quartermaster screaming desperately in his ear, determinedly trying to keep him safe even when the world said it was impossible.

Sometimes, the most treasured people were the ones who would be willing to deny the will of the world for you.

Q still hadn’t responded to being held, so Bond weighed the two sides of his own nature: the demanding, possessive side, which could conceivably take whatever he wanted from Q without feeling guilt, and the patient, compassionate side, who recalled quite clearly that Q had explained that a relationship between the two of them was not going to be accepted. There was no denying that there was something between them, and Bond liked to think that the heat he felt came from both of
them. “If I kissed you right now, would you push me away?”

The way Bond’s voice was half a rumble, vibrating where their bodies connected, made Q shiver. Weariness compounded with strain to make him slow, and he didn’t have time to answer before Bond was steadily pushing on to another question. This time, he’d bent his head close, some of that sexual tension expressing itself in the way his body shifted and muscles flexed and tightened to pull Q a little closer. The man just seemed to move when he wanted something. He mouthed the shell of Q’s ear. “If I took off your shirt, would you ever forgive me?” Somehow, the question was completely serious, even somber, despite the way that anyone would have expected a teasing or suggestive tone. Bond was being entirely serious about this, and it unstrung something inside of Q.

Q’s breathing had hitched, and somewhere along the way his hands had lifted of their own accord, not meaning to touch Bond but brushing the hem of his shirt anyway. “You wouldn’t even kiss me on the mouth before,” he had the capacity to think up as an answer, his tone falling a little short of its usual dry self. His own body was responding, shifting slightly against the cage of muscle Bond had created of himself, and Q didn’t know if he was trying to get closer or subtly find more personal space.

One of 007’s hands came up, dragging along Q’s back heavily so that his shirt rucked up without actually lifting more than a few inches from where it had been tucked all day. The cloth lifted, wrinkled, and fell as the calloused palm and fingers slid along it. The possessive side of Bond was winning, but the fingers that found Q’s nape were considerate as they rubbed gentle circles around the protruding knobs of vertebrae. “I didn’t know you wanted me to,” Bond replied honestly.

Q had to concede that he really hadn’t known either, because he’s been so exhausted out of his brain that making decisions was totally beyond him. He said so: “I don’t think yes or no was in my vocabulary at that point.” Voice rueful and a little embarrassed, he ducked his head to speak against Bond’s shoulder, “A fact that I’m glad you didn’t take advantage of. Thank you.” The admittance that he’d been so lacking in defenses was a little embarrassing, but he felt the tension in his stomach loosening as he recalled Bond’s restraint at the time, such as it had been. “At this moment…I’m a little more capable.”

“Are you sure?”

Also a very poignant question. But Q found himself getting frustrated with beating around the bush, so he lifted his hands until they had hold of Bond’s wrists, guiding those large hands up until they cupped the sides of his head and face like some sort of shield against his own words. In fact, 007’s warm hands did a lot to muffle sound as they cupped his ears, turning Q’s words into a faded echo in his own head. “Right now, I just want to convince myself that you’re alive and well, and the only way I can think to do that is by being so bloody close that I can’t breathe without noticing you.” The words had found an opening in his control, and were all making a break for it, a wave passing his lips. “So even if it wasn’t obvious that I have feelings for you when I was yelling in your ear earlier, yes, I’m sure-!”

He didn’t get time to say more as Bond’s hands tightened of their own accord, going from passively cradling Q’s head to possessively gripping it and tilting it. His mouth caught Q’s in a heated, nearly ferocious kiss, stealing all of his air as the Quartermaster gasped. Suddenly Bond reminded Q of a Murcielago – going from zero to blindingly fast in less time than it took to think it. And Q didn’t mind.

The kiss started fast and heated slowly, but somehow 007 still managed to capture the heat as if it were a ball of fire caught between their lips, and Q found himself straining forward, wanting more contact. His hands were still mindlessly locked around Bond’s wrists, feeling the tattoo of the man’s
pulse. They stopped for breath, foreheads leaned together. “Do you believe that I’m here now?” Bond asked, only joking a little.

“Do you believe…” Q wasn’t sure what he wanted to say, but he wanted to reply in kind, and had a question sizzling painfully in the back of his mind. He bit his lip, comforted and further aroused by the kiss Bond almost unconsciously placed on the outer edge of his left eyebrow. Still, the Quartermaster’s voice was a whisper as he said, “Do you believe that I’d have saved you from that if I could? From having Silva in your head like some sort of…some sort…!” Quite without meaning to, furious anger had come to the fore, until Q was shaking and he was squeezing down on Bond’s wrists with Angelic strength, and he might have flown apart at the seams had not Bond brought him in close again.

“Hey, hey…shhhhh,” 007 began to mumble in soothing, urgent repetition, folding his great wings around them right there in the kitchen, his muscled body absorbing the violent shudders going through the Quartermaster’s taut frame. Q relaxed only a fraction, and then let some of the frustration bleed off by pressing hot, open-mouth kisses to Bond’s neck (within easy reach), which Bond responded to quickly by angling in and catching Q’s mouth again. They destroyed the tension together with teeth and tongue and lips, one of Bond’s hand tangling in Q’s hair while the other slipped to the small of his back, pulling the wiry figure in until they were seamed together from hip to chest. Q growled and his energy flickered, a recalcitrant storm that finally slipped out and bit Bond with a visible spark.

“Ouch!” Q said even as Bond yelped in surprise, both of them pulling back just enough to look down at Q’s hand, the bandaged one.

“What did you do?” Bond finally asked, his hunger momentarily put on hold but his eyes still darkened with lust. He’d noted the neat little bandages before, but hadn’t thought to comment. The skin visible around the bandages was a little enflamed, but that could have been because of how much use Q was putting them to. “A sharp edge in a control box I took apart to get to where you were,” Q explained, frowning at how his energy had slipped out. Both of them were remembering that last time Q had done that.

Bond raised an eyebrow minutely, and asked tactlessly, “Are you going to pass out?” Still, it was an obvious question. Q had been a veritable invalid after using ‘lesson two’ that Silva had inadvertently taught him.

“No,” Q said slowly, “But I can’t promise that won’t happen again.” He blinked, realizing, “I don’t even know why it happened now, to be honest. Maybe I’m coming down with something.”

“You are a little bit hot,” was Bond’s reply, and it wasn’t until Q looked up incredulously that he saw the man was grinning roguishly at him. Q gave his chest a swat of mock anger, trying and failing to clamp down on a returning smirk.

“I call you James and you become insufferable,” Q berated him, refusing to admit that his tone was ruined by how relaxed and pleased he obviously was, feeling those arms and wings around him, “See why I always call you Bond or 007?”

Bond just hummed, something between a swallowed laugh and a deeply appreciative noise, and Q gave in without complaint as Bond stroked the backs of his fingers up Q’s throat until the Quartermaster relented to tipping his head back. The surprisingly gentle nips against the bare column of his neck made his toes curl, and the energy that had been so cantankerous in his core quieted right down. Q began to wonder if maybe both of them had a fever, so he was more than amenable when Bond’s hand began to edge under his shirt, raising it away from his skin. Deciding that fairness was
in order, the Quartermaster got daring, and let his dexterous fingers slowly untuck Bond’s shirt.

As the shirt slipped free, Bond moaned against the spot he was sucking on just under Q’s ear, chasing away any doubts Q might have had about whether he was doing this right. That moment also served as a catalyst, a subtle cue in which the Quartermaster pushed aside the last barriers of professionalism that he’d been putting up between them. The moment the skin of his thumb brushed the skin over Bond’s hipbone, Bond’s supernatural energy flared, and for a moment Q wondered if he was sensing pure contentment.

Bond let Q’s head drop and captured his mouth again, but it was Q who gave the first lick against 007’s mouth, which actually managed to catch Bond off-guard. In that little moment of surprise in which 007 drew fractionally back, Q opened his eyes languidly, breathing almost in reproach, “James…”

And 007 grinned. “Flattery will get you everywhere.” The name was like magic, and Bond opened his mouth to Q’s eager tongue, letting it dance across his teeth and play before he chased it right back. Bond’s wings were outstretched, usually a show of warning, but this time it was like a banner of pride, of triumph, and Q slid his hands around Bond’s back under his shirt, feeling the rippling muscles and following them up to where the feathered appendages attached to smooth, hot flesh.

Q felt a tingle of pleasant contact as Bond followed suit, likewise finding open skin beneath Q’s shirt. He only dragged his fingernails lightly, however, the teasing touch in sharp contrast to the hungry conquering of his mouth. Q nearly had to use supernatural energy to match the strength that Bond was using, the hand not tickling his spine being latched around the back of his neck to keep him close. The two of them barely had time to breathe, and Q found himself savoring the fizzle of lightheadedness that followed. He bit Bond’s lip in retaliation when the dizziness began to be annoying, and was shown Bond’s chivalrous side when the larger man obediently backed off. He continued to rain lighter kisses on Q’s cheekbones, as if paying homage to the artistic bone-structure of the young Quartermaster. As 007 noticed Q’s fingers idly scratching at the connection point of wings and back, he made a growling groan of pleasure and rolled his shoulders. The play of muscles that resulted was delicious, and Q found himself laughing – a somewhat husky but open sound. Obviously Bond liked it, because he pulled Q flush against his chest with two hands hooked on Q’s – wingless – shoulder-blades, thoroughly kissing the side of his neck again. Only when Q’s laughter subsided did Bond brush their lips together, pulling back teasingly to say, “I didn’t want to make you stop. You laugh so rarely, Quartermaster.” Q was strangely touched by the comment, and just blinked for a moment, and did nothing but watch as Bond brought their mouths together again, beginning a more patient exploration of his mouth. The hands under Q’s shirt began to ease it upwards while Q was pleasantly drifting on a wave of sensation. The last of his shirt came untucked, and Q shifted as he felt cool air on his spine, the lower edges of his shoulder-blades. Almost without thinking, Q freed up his arms so that he could raise them to be free of the article entirely.

As Bond slipped his shirt off, Q realized with a painful jolt that things were probably going to progress a little more slowly now. With James close enough and tall enough to see over Q’s shoulder, there was no way he’d miss the heavy scars that lanced in two rows down the Quartermaster’s back. Still aware of James’s body heat and close proximity, Q nonetheless looked down, breaking the kiss without warning. The heat that had nestled and grown between them went out, and Q’s expression became shuttered and unreadable except for a thin edge of defensiveness. He was perfectly aware that the knotted lines of scar-tissue down either shoulder-blade were grotesque, and the vulnerability in the knowledge that Bond could finally see them – who had scars, but nothing like the evidence of Q’s loss – made Q’s amorous feelings fade away despite his best efforts. He simply stood now, impassive, suddenly thinking of how Bond had to be taking in his thin frame (the loss of his wings had apparently made gaining muscle impossible, as well as giving him a
metabolism like no Mundane could believe), his pale skin (wingless birds took better to staying inside, and so did he), and the vicious scars lacing two lines down his back.

Bond had to notice the intangible distance that had sprung up between them, as well as the invisible walls that Q was pulling up around himself protectively. A bird without wings was aware of the extent of its vulnerability, even though Q very rarely acted like a bird without wings. Far more often he acted like a Komodo dragon who breathed fire, making this shift of temperament all the more poignant to Bond, who was observant anyway.

“Give me my shirt back, 007,” Q requested, his voice too soft to be a command but too professional to be much else. Q wasn’t looking at the larger man, instead focusing somewhere down and to the left as he stood there, open and half-naked in his winglessness. He held out a hand expectantly for the piece of clothing. His frustration was evident in the tightening around his eyes and the hardening of his frowning mouth as Bond, instead of acquiescing, paced around him a bit, a half-circle that took him (and Q’s shirt) further out of reach and more clearly in sight of Q’s scars. Q’s skin was pale but they were paler, twisted fingers of white where wings had once sprouted in all of their glory. Now there was an empty back, and Q had to clench his jaw viciously to keep from spinning around, hiding them. He had his pride, after all, even if the sensation of Bond’s eyes flickering over his scarred back made bitter claws hook in the back of his throat and pull.

“They’re not ugly,” Bond said, unexpectedly, and if Q didn’t want to believe his words, he had a hard time discounting the tone – which was low and husky, and was quickly followed by the sensation of open-mouthed kisses to his nape, down his spine, breath hot as a furnace where the chill of the open air had been. The Quartermaster shivered, feeling James’s muscular arms tighten around him in a glorious net. The sense of relief was dizzying, almost more so than Bond’s unrelenting kissing had been, and Q would have folded right to the ground if Bond weren’t holding onto him so strongly.

Bond was biting the side of his neck, his shoulder, brief forays of his skilled teeth extending right down to the scars which he then stroked with his tongue. As Q gasped – nearly sobbing, because the declaration that Bond was not disgusted with him had somehow stabbed right into his heart and let the emotions pour out – Bond leaned forward to put his head next to Q’s ear, panting a little as he ground his big body closer. “Nothing of you is ugly, Q.”

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Chapter End Notes

And you finally get to see Q’s scars!
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Q and Bond finally get the lovin' they both deserve

Chapter Notes

Edit***: Previously, this chapter was written by the lovely Archivist, Salios, detailing the bedroom scene. This was one of the first fics I'd ever written, and I wasn't comfortable writing smut yet, so Salios was kind enough to write a placeholder for me. Five years have passed since then, however, and now I've rewritten the chapter to what you see here :) If you're a past reader looking for Salios' chapter, comment, and I'll get it for you. For everyone else, I hope you enjoy my smut!

Things moved quickly after that, with feeling of inevitability, like this had been coming for a long time. James’ arms were still locked around Q’s middle, hands flexing against his Quartermaster’s lean sides while the heat of him veritably eclipsed the scars on Q’s back. Even if James’ declaration didn’t make it indelibly clear that he liked Q, it was very hard to feel self-conscious when so much of James was clearly hungering for so much of Q. The smaller agent twisted as much as he could without actually breaking contact, reaching back with a hand to desperately pull James’ head in for a sloppy, awkward, but somehow glorious kiss. Q didn’t have words for what he was feeling, but he knew that actions spoke louder than words anyway, even as he felt one of James’ hands sliding down his belly to rest meaningfully at the hem of Q’s trousers. Moments ago, Q had been uneasy about being just shirtless, but quite suddenly the opposite was true, and they both had entirely too many clothes.

“Do it,” Q demanded, in a voice that might have been commanding but was also breathy and edged with impatience. One hand still tangled in James’ hair because he wasn’t done kissing him yet, Q’s other hand joined James’ at his zip, because sometimes you just had to do things yourself apparently. Q nipped at James’ lips when the man smirked and chuckled at him, but then two work-scarred hands were undoing Q’s trousers. Q sighed happily as his cock was given a bit more room - then gasped as one of James’ hands slipped in. The warm hand curled around his cock, especially with Q’s pants still in the way, felt maddening, and Q closed his eyes with a groan.

“Tell me what you want, Q,” James whispered in his ear. His great wings had come forward again, a protective, possessive cocoon of dappled dark grey. Not for the first time, Q was humbled by the strength he could feel in the man all around him, and by the fact that James was nonetheless asking for what he wanted. This was a man who could do an awful lot of taking, and Q could already feel the hard line of James’ cock straining at the clothing between them.

So Q replied, with another quick peck of lips, “I already told you.” He was going to get a kink in his neck at this rate, kissing James so much over his shoulder, but he didn’t care. Another quick press of lips preceded Q’s next hushed words, “I want to be close to you in every way I can.”
James’ response at first was just a deep, almost subvocal rumble that made Q shiver all the way to his toes. The hand in Q’s trousers gave a maddening squeeze that had Q tipping his head back and gasping. “I think I can do that,” James finally murmured, low and intimate against Q’s ear. His other hand wandered, pushing Q’s trousers down lower, until they slipped under the push curve of Q’s arse. James’ still clad cock rutted against him slowly, and Q hummed and leaned into it, the feeling electric - even though he really wished that there was less clothing in the way.

“This… This would be easier…” Q said, having a bit of a time getting full sentences together when really all he wanted to do was drown in sensations after the long day he’d had. “If both you and I had fewer articles of clothing on…” Q’s trousers helpfully slipped further down his thighs of their own accord. “…And maybe if we were in a bed?”

“If I ever doubt your genius, Q,” James murmured, words only slightly garbled as he decided that he needed to mouth at Q’s ear, “remind me of this moment.” Of course, the agent felt the need to give Q’s earlobe an annoying tug before he did anything else, although by the time Q growled at him for that, James had already released Q and backed off. Awkwardly turning with his trousers halfway off and glaring because of course James was still a little bit of a brat, Q found the blond-haired man standing with hands and wings both spread innocently - but his smirk was anything but. “You look a bit disheveled, Quartermaster,” he observed as if butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth, although the glint in his eyes remained positively wicked even before he added, “Sexy and disheveled. It’s not a bad look for you.”

“You’re just asking for it, aren’t you?” Q snipped back with a grin that was half razors, as he quickly started hopping out of his entrapping trousers. The stressful length of the day was like a weight he could feel in his muscles, making him perceptively slower than usual, but this teasing with James… it felt normal. More so than all of the kissing and touching, it was making Q feel like the world was okay again.

“Oh, I’m asking for something.”

The combination of innuendo and challenge in that sentence had Q kicking free of his trousers and bolting after the agent, who immediately snapped his wings in and spun around to flee - but not before Q saw the entirely-too-pleased grin all over the man’s face. They were chasing each other like children, and apparently 007 liked it that way. If someone had told Q when he’d gotten this job that agents could be so childish (in good ways), he’d have laughed them out of the room. Now, though, Q in his socked feet skidded after a fully grown 00-agent and caught up with him perfectly in time to tackle James onto a bed. That might have been Bond’s plan all along, but Q wasn’t going to look a gift-horse in the mouth on this one. With Bond leaned back on the bed and Q straddling him, it was a bit of an effort to keep the agent’s wings out of the way, especially once Q began tugging stubbornly at James’ shirt. “Off with it,” Q demanded, all Quartermaster even in the face of James’ smug grin.

James pushed Q to sit on his thighs, giving the agent enough room to strip off his shirt with an indecent amount of elegance for a person who had to maneuver wings through sits in the back of his shirts. It was definitely something of a striptease, and Q was too tired to pretend like he wasn’t interested.

“You’re shameless,” he did comment dryly.

“Thanks,” was the equally shameless response, all smiles while Q rolled his eyes. James was quick to wipe away Q’s pretended exasperation with a kiss, however, although the return to snogging made it a lot harder to get out of the rest of their clothes - even as it simultaneously made it more important to get out of the rest of their clothes. As Q leaned forward, hands on the bare warmth of
Bond’s chest, he was suddenly wondering how he’d survived this long without the two of them naked and bloody hell why did they have so many limbs in the way-?! 

The third time that Q put a knee on one of Bond’s wings, the agent cursed colorfully and flipped them both over. Q only fought the transition for a second, before James made it up to him by shimmying out of the last of his clothes unimpeded - and then reached to hook his fingers at the hem of Q’s pants, which had somehow also stayed put this whole time. James looked up to meet Q’s eyes questioningly, to which Q answered by lifting his hips helpfully and nodding. Being naked felt fantastic, enough so that Q just relaxed, one hand tossed limply above his head and any natural shyness M.I.A. for the moment. He drifted for the pleasant span of three heartbeats before realizing that the room was still and quiet, and he opened his eyes again just to check that James was still there. Even before laying eyes on the agent, though, Q could sense his energy; James hadn’t left, merely gone silent as he knelt astride Q’s thighs. Blue eyes were dark and watchful, but oddly enough, what made Q squirm was the openly appreciative look in them. Flushing uncomfortably, Q tried to think of something witty to say about how James was really the one who deserved to be ogled - hot damn, the man was easy on the eyes, naked body on display, wings half-spread like the belly of a storm behind him - but when he opened his mouth what came out was, “Show me you’re still here, James.”

New emotions flooded James’ eyes, eyes that were usually shuttered and unreadable to the world. Now they were sad and fierce and fond all at once, and the tiny smile at one side of James’ mouth was a warm and heartfelt feel. “Done,” he said with quiet determination, immediately rocking forward until all of Q’s world was made up of muscle and bone braced above him, and a sky made of grey feathers. James kissed like he wanted to make himself at home in Q’s mouth, and even before Q reached up to touch him, Bond was lowering himself down closer until they both gasped at the friction of skin on skin. Q hooked his ankles behind James’ thighs, making it clear that he wouldn’t let him go. He’d come too close to losing him too many times already…

Distracting Q from the painful thoughts was the rock of Bond’s hips, dragging their groins together in a way that was almost too dry to be pleasant at the moment, but at the same time only made Q hungry for more friction. He arched his body up hungrily, biting his lip against a groan until James came back in to lick at his mouth, to coax that lip out and take it for his own. The little nips were making Q’s mouth tingle, and he dug his fingers into Bond’s sides to ground himself. When James suddenly leaned away, Q felt a bolt of panic and hooked one hand around the base of Bond’s starboard wing to keep him there.

“Just grabbing lube and a condom, Q.” James reassured even as the grip startled him. Q relaxed, feeling silly, but James didn’t tease him about it. Instead, the agent was back a moment later, all but lying on top of him and once again returning to snogging even though they had the tools to do more now. It was Q’s reflex to grumble and gripe at the weight, in the same way that it had been his reflex to keep all other Angels at a distance, but that reflex seemed less important now. In fact, James’ weight was rather nice, and it was definitely hard to imagine James out of reach and in danger when the man was so undeniably right there. James’ wings rustled and shifted, an absentminded bit of movement, and Q reached up with equal absentmindedness to lightly stroke the downy underside of one. James opened the wing up a bit, to provide more access, the equivalent of a cat allowing someone to freely touch its soft underbelly without scratching. The little bandages on Q’s fingertips impeded his tense of touch a bit, but didn’t impede his ability to realize how much trust James had in him.

Eventually, though, the kissing wasn’t quite enough. Q started to wriggle, and James broke the kiss to instead murmur huskily against Q’s mouth, “I really need to fuck you right now.” He sounded wrecked, and about as close to begging as Q had ever heard, which had Q unexpectedly choking on a laugh. There was something invigorating about knowing that he’d managed to undo the great 007
“Luckily for Q,” Q managed a prim and proper voice, even if his attempts at holding back a smile were failing, “I also really need you to fuck me.” He squeezed his legs around James’ hips again, digging his heels into the agent’s arse and pressing their groins more tightly together.

Bond smothered his answering groan against the side of Q’s neck, where Q thought that he could feel a smile, too. “Glad we’re not at cross-purposes,” he joked, then said with a bit more sobriety, “Roll onto your side, Q.”

While Q could find no reason to argue with this, he nonetheless favored James with a questioning look when the agent pulled back. James was good enough at reading his Quartermaster by this point that he answered the unvoiced question without a hitch, “Because I want to see your face, Q—” Before Q could comment that James already could, with Q comfily stretched out on his back, James added softly, “-But I don’t want you to hide your scars.”

As quickly as that, Q’s emotions were all on the surface again, raw as an unfleshed nerve. He wasn’t sure if it was the reminder of what he’d lost that did it… or the intense look in James’ eyes, which was so full of acceptance and determination and something else, something warmer, that Q didn’t know what to do with it. This was James proving that he loved all of him, and that he wouldn’t let any part of Q hide in the shadows.

“Okay,” was all Q ended up saying, very softly, even as he unhooked his legs from Bond’s waist and obliged to roll over onto his left side, still watching Bond a bit warily. The smaller Angel even held his breath a bit as James ran a hand down his back, sliding his palm across skin that even Q didn’t quite touch fearlessly. As James’ hand skimmed over the curve of Q’s arse, though, the anxiety turned to hunger again, and Q leaned up to start another kiss - and James chased him all the way back down, until he was braced over his Quartermaster yet again.

“Haven’t been with anyone in awhile,” Q warned, to which James only hummed acceptingly into their next kiss, the snick of the lube container lid audible. Q’s nerves fizzed with anticipation even before he felt the first slick, almost-too-cold touch of a lubed fingertip starting at his tailbone and teasing its way in closer.

Before Q could tense up, James broke the kiss to whisper, lips still brushing, “Touch yourself.” The blue eyes above Q were lidded, the pupil blown, the interest obvious. That in and of itself had Q blushing, but his cock had been crying for more attention for awhile now, so he only hesitated for a breath before reaching down and closing his fingers around his own length. He shut his eyes and exhaled noisily at the first slow pump of his fist, even as he felt James’ finger nudging at his hole, intrusive only because Q hadn’t done this in longer than he cared to admit. James distracted him by placing ticklish kisses against Q’s ear, moving down to bite playfully at his shoulder. The scrape of teeth made Q’s nerves sizzle, and he relaxed more. He decided that he liked this posture. Q tended to sleep on his side, and there was something so undemanding about just lying here like this, stoking himself just enough and letting James take care of the rest… There was no reaching or straining, no stretching or using up of strength that Q didn’t have much left of anyway. He sucked in a breath but relaxed easily around the first finger that breached him, although his own hand’s rhythm stuttered a bit when James eventually worked a second finger into him, pumping in and out steadily.

By now, James’ wings had come to rest on the bed around them, feeling more like a cloak than a rooftop, and Q reached out with his free hand to just barely touch the feathers in front of him. At the same time, James leaned around and pressed and open-mouthed kiss to one of Q’s scars, and Q had to close his eyes again with a little rush of breath. “You’d better get our cocks involved soon,” Q said to distract himself from thinking too deeply about wings he could touch but couldn’t have, “or
else I’m going to finish up myself, and you’ll be stuck masturbating while I fall asleep.”

“Not a bad fate,” James opined, but his voice had that low and husky quality that made Q think of hungry wolves or fire in a dragon’s throat. The fingers retreated, though, and there was the soft noise of the condom package giving way to hurried fingers. James kept close the entire time, and Q appreciated that most of all somehow. “If you fall asleep on me, I reserve the right to fuck you awake again.”

“You bastard,” Q said, but he was chuckling as he said it, so it came out more as a stroppy term of endearment as anything else. And then Q couldn’t think of anything to say, endearing or otherwise, as the tip of James’ cock nudged against his entrance and began to push relentlessly inwards.

While Q had rushed him at the end, James had prepped his partner well, making it possible for him to ease into Q in one long, slow stroke that nearly undid both of them. Q seemed to have forgotten how to breathe, mouth soundlessly open and head arched back, eyes closed; James in contrast was panting with his forehead pressed hard to Q’s shoulder, both hands braced on the bed and flexing as he fought for self-control. James managed to get himself fully seated without losing himself, though, and then Q released a moaning breath and a full-body shiver as he adjusted to the feeling of fullness. His hand was still on his cock, but squeezing now, showing that James wasn’t the only one trying to keep himself in check. “God, that feels good,” he eventually had the breath and brain-power to gasp dazedly, eyes blinking open to stare at nothing in particular.

“You have no idea,” James grunted appreciatively, seconding the opinion before lowering his body so that his weight was on his elbows and Q rather than on his hands, allowing him to hug his partner close while also snapping his hips out and in, driving deeper. Q keened, the noise sliding involuntarily up his throat as he was lit up by sparks from the inside.

Q had never felt so possessed, so consumed. James was fulfilling Q’s request to be all around him, his grip keeping Q in close even as the pounding of his hips rocked Q’s body. Perhaps another position would have given James more range of motion, but he’d had a lot of training in using his body however the situation allowed, and good god but the man knew how to use his cock. It dragged against Q in all the right places, a perfect combination of lubricant and friction, while Q made use of his free hands to jack himself off with one and grip the bed for dear life with the other.

It was almost overwhelming, having James wrapped around him and in him like this, wings another layer still around them… but it was also exactly what Q needed. James wasn’t in danger, wasn’t with Silva, far away and out of reach. James was right here, in a million ways that Q couldn’t ignore, and the euphoric sensation of it all felt like it was being tattooed into Q’s mind.

When Q came, it was like his brain short-circuited on the pleasure of it, but for once he didn’t care. Even if his brain was offline, he knew that James was there. They were safe, and this was where he wanted to be.

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Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Q’s morning in Bond’s apartment takes a turn that leads to them both going to Medical.

Or the chapter that starts with snuggles and ends with Medical all wondering if the world hates them. And the word marshmallow is used.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long gap! This chapter did NOT want to get written. That beings said, it is longer than my usual chapters, and turned out rather well. Enjoy the totally plot-useless cuddles! The plot is at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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Q woke with his face pressed into the rift between Bond’s shoulder-blades, comfort and warmth all around him. A wing shifted, its near edge nudging at his face, and Q groggily batted it back. He lay there for a moment longer, subconsciously breathing in tandem to the larger body pressed in front of his, before he realized where he was and whom he was with. His emotions went into an immediate tangle, but very few of them were negative, and he shifted happily just so he could feel skin on skin. He felt feathers, too – so many of them. Consider what they’d done last night and how Bond was lying now, 007’s wings were undoubtedly a mess. Bond was lying on his side with his right wing pinned between himself and the bed, his left wing arched back lazily so that it spilled over Q artlessly. If Q wasn’t careful, he’d elbow the poor wing trapped beneath Bond’s weight.

“So, are you really up this time, or are you going to growl at me?” came Bond’s voice, low and enticingly husky from sleep, but just smooth enough to indicate that he was more awake than Q.

Which was not hard to do. Miffed at the insinuation that he’d growl at a man who’d had such terrific sex with him last night (no matter how probable the insinuation), Q pushed at Bond’s calf with the toes of his left foot, feeling muscles tense and flex against the prodding. “When did I last growl at you?” he retorted, then made a frustrated noise in his throat as he heard the slur of his own words. His tongue always felt like it was made of lead in the morning.

“There – see, like that,” Bond replied easily, turning his head just enough to slant a blue eye at the smaller man pressed up against his back beneath the covers, “A genuine, Quartermaster growl. I asked you a question earlier, and that was the reply I got.”

“Why do you have to be such a bloody morning person?” Q got his vocal cords to communicate, burying his head against Bond’s backbone, relishing the sensation of heat, the feel of muscle, and the specific smell that was James. This time, when Bond’s left wing arched back so it rustled and nudged against him, he let it, because it felt like he was being enveloped in softness and warmth. He used to wrap his own wings around himself and feel much the same thing. “What did you ask me
Anyway?" he belatedly thought to question.

"Whether the alarm on your phone was important or whether we could just pretend it never happened."

Alarm…? Alarm, alarm, alarm… Work! Q bolted upright, sliding out from beneath blankets and feathers like an awkward hatchling coming free of its shell for the first time – he was just as uncoordinated. "What time is it?! We have to get back to MI6!" he demanded, trying to wake up and blink sleep from his eyes when what his body really wanted to do was tip back into bed again. Bond rolled lazily over onto his back, blankets pooling at the level of his navel as he lifted his arms and crossed them behind his head. Q didn’t have his glasses on, and since losing his wings, his eyesight wasn’t good, but it was good enough to paint a rather breathtaking picture of 007 in all of his self-assured, muscular glory. The man stretched out his wings, one cascading off the right side of the bed and the other extending behind Q.

"Are you seriously trying to convince me that you’re awake enough for work?" Bond deadpanned back.

Q had a choice of whether to get angry at that or accept the logic lurking there – days ago, he might have chosen the former, but he’d relaxed around Bond since then. For the first time, he didn’t mind sitting with his naked back facing another person, the scars laid bare. Making a sound between a groan and a sigh, the Quartermaster put his face in his hands so he could try to rub some wakefulness into his eyes. "Am I ever awake enough to do anything in the morning? I don’t know if you’ve figured it out or not, but drowsiness is actually a medical condition for me. Having supernatural energy but not the wings that go with it apparently wreaks havoc on a person’s REM cycle."

Bond was silent at that declaration, and Q just sighed again, feeling rumpled and sleepily flustered, wondering why he couldn’t have a 

good

morning every once in awhile. Then he heard Bond shift, and he must have slipped his hand from behind his head because there were fingers on Q’s back, blunt tips gently massaging just above the two dimples at his waistline. It was a soft, gentle motion, but it was somehow more soothing than an apology or a sign of sympathy. By the time Bond sat up, Q had dropped his hands to the blankets on his lap, just blinking and giving up on trying to make his brain work. His thoughts felt as though they were slogging through molasses.

A pectoral muscle touched the back of his shoulder, then lips and a soft tongue as Bond angled his head in to kiss Q’s neck and then lap at it gently. "So you always take an infusion of caffeine and three hours of being a zombie before you wake up?" he asked, somehow managing to sound more compassionate than joking, although there was definitely a smile hiding there.

"You’re-!" Q actually couldn’t find the word he wanted, and rocked his head back to stare shortsightedly at the ceiling as he admitted, "Finish that sentence yourself. All I can think is ‘incorrigible’, but that sounds too light for what I’m trying to say."

Now Bond was indeed laughing, a soft, gentle chuckle filled with untainted amusement – usually, a 00-agent’s laugh was layered in hidden meanings, but now, Bond’s laugh was clear and guileless, expressing only joviality. "Yikes, Q, isn’t there something Medical could give you for that?"

"Medical doesn’t know," Q admitted, running a hand back through his hair, untangling curls only to have them fall into a tangle all over again, a shifting yet unending puzzle. Q wondered how he could think something so profound about his hair yet he couldn’t get the thesaurus in his brain to pop up words besides ‘incorrigible’. "I figured they had enough on their hands trying to find medication for my wild phobia of planes."

Bond made a sympathetic sound, which Q felt right through his spine because Bond was pressing a
kiss that was mostly teeth to the back of his neck. Q arched and hissed at the wash of sensation, and 007 pulled back just before the pressure slipped out of the realm of pleasure into pain. “Am I helping you wake up?”

“No.”

“Am I convincing you to stay in bed instead of racing back to MI6?”

“Damn.”

It was more of a full-throated laugh than a chuckle this time as Bond quit his teasing and wrapped his arms around Q’s middle, pulling him back against his chest. Thanks to his slow waking process, Q just closed his eyes like a moody owl and allowed himself to be pulled back. Once the two of them were propped against the headboard, he promptly tucked his nose in under Bond’s jaw, because there was, indeed, sunlight coming in and poking at his eyes. Bond allowed his jaw to be prodded, tilting his head accommodatingly as the drowsy Quartermaster insistently sought a place to hide from the dawn. He slipped a hand behind Q’s torso, so he could drag a finger down one pale scar, which Q allowed as if he didn’t notice. “Is that also why your internal energy is so fickle?” Bond asked, tone quieter and somber now as he took Q’s admittances seriously, “I’ve noticed that sometimes it will act just like Alec’s or mine, but sometimes it just turns off.”

“You’re asking complicated questions,” Q mumbled to the underside of Bond’s jaw.

“No, I’m not. It’s a yes or no.”

By the tickle of eyelashes, Bond felt Q blink torpidly. “Before I forget the question entirely, or fall asleep again – yes. Yes, that’s the reason,” he admitted in a voice that echoed Bond’s – sober and serious. “I’m a little bit broken that way.”

Bond shifted, not liking that answer, obviously. Q woke up a little bit faster as he felt himself being manhandled, Bond using a little bit more strength than was necessary to move him. Q’s brain was simply too slow to think where he was being moved. “James! What the devil-?!?” And then 007 had plopped him on his face and was pinning him, his weight across Q’s shoulders and back.

“Now,” Bond growled, quite mildly, in his ear, “I’m not going to let you up until that sentence has been thoroughly erased from your vocabulary.”

“I’ve only been up five minutes!” Q argued, trying to push upwards but finding that having 007 lying on top of you made that nearly impossible without resorting to Angel strength. Q added in a grumble, part sarcastic but also part truthful, “I barely have a vocabulary as of yet.”

“You had enough words to call yourself broken,” 007 argued, then bit the back of Q’s shoulder before returning his lips to Q’s ear, “Which I disapprove of.”

Q gave up then. Arguing with a 00-agent was something he did in MI6 on a regular basis, but never when said agent had taken up residence on his back, probably twice his weight in naked flesh bearing down on him. Bond was holding himself off enough not to crush him, but he was an undeniable presence – like always. Bond was not a forgettable man.

And right now, he was being…sweet. After that first bite, which had been rather aggressive, 007 had resorted to careful, open-mouthed kisses along the back of Q’s shoulders and neck, and when Q braced his hands on the bed to push up, the man simply laid his on top of Q’s, lacing their fingers and pressing both into the mattress. He also didn’t say anything more until a minute had passed with no argument from the Quartermaster. “Are you going to try and push me off?” he asked calmly.
Q scoffed, “You great bloody lump, how can I?”

The shrug seemed to radiate from Bond’s shoulders through every inch of him, from his chest pressed against Q’s back to his arms to his hands against Q’s hands. “Angel energy. I sparred with you, remember?” This next kiss was as gentle as a moth landing, and Q knew it was just touching the top of his left scar – the contrast of the gentle kiss to Bond’s obvious mass and strength was enough to take Q’s breath away unexpectedly. There was something shocking about two polar opposites like that housed within one man, and Q fell prey to a pleasurable shiver.

“I might still be rather drowsy, but I remember us just talking about how my Angel energy isn’t exactly dependable,” Q replied logically, when in reality he was avoiding the fact that he could have removed Bond but hadn’t.

Bond wasn’t having any of it. “Hmm,” the man hummed, stomach muscles seeming to flex and vibrate right against Q’s spine at the sound, “I don’t think so. Try again, Quartermaster.”

Deciding that 007 was finally perhaps getting too full of himself, Q grumbled reproaches against the blankets in front of him and then, after holding his breath for a second, called up all of his energy in one go. It flushed his system like a crackle of a brushfire, and when he lurched up against Bond’s torso, it was like bucking off a cat rather than a full-grown man. Bond made a choked sound of surprise, but Q never did things by halves, and had made sure to act fast. With surprise on his side, he’d flipped Bond right off to the side before he could react.

And then, with a useless beat of feathers, right off the bed along with a tail of blankets.

If nothing else, Bond managed his impromptu flight to the floor without anything more than a huff of air and a grunt upon impact – although Q’s ego would have appreciated some sort of surprised yelp. Still without his glasses but able to make out Bond’s sprawled, recovering form on the floor well enough, Q moved so that he was lying on his stomach, peering over the edge of the bed. “One point to the sleepy Quartermaster,” he dryly declared.

James grumbled something unrepeatable as he pushed himself into a sitting position, wings flared out behind him as if he was afraid he’d lose his balance again.

“You know, it’s really rather lamentable – you just got ejected from the bed by a wingless Angel with a medical condition,” Q continued to point out, managing quite a jolly tone now that he had the bed to himself and no one forcing him to be particularly awake. He had enough brainpower to berate 007, and that was all he cared about. Plus, a naked James Bond on the floor looked just as good as a naked James Bond anywhere else, especially since the blanket he’d dragged down with him covered precious little.

That was when he started to feel dizzy.

He’d lost the small bandages on his cut fingers ages ago, but the faint sting of the cuts didn’t stop him from pressing both hands to his temples, elbows braced stiffly on the mattress as he slammed his eyes shut. Without warning, the world had tilted, and every muscle in the Quartermaster’s slim body clenched as he tried to keep his balance on a bed that felt suddenly like the deck of a ship. “Q?” he heard, Bond’s voice edgy and serious just as quickly. As if the words were a switch, Q could suddenly picture the man perfectly just by energy: he was a figure picked out in ice-blue, filled with supernatural energy that burned right through Q’s closed lids. He’d gotten very good at imaging supernatural energy – as proven by his first sparring match with 006, 7 and 8 – but nothing like this. It was almost as shocking as the dizziness, causing Q to hold his breath in wonder for a moment. He both felt and saw in his mind the motion of James’s body as the man got up and bent over him, wings out shieldingly and hands coming to cup Q’s against the side of his head. “Q? Are you all
right? What’s going on?” The last was definitely a demand, James the man leaving to be replaced by 007 the agent.

“The dizziness is fading,” Q gasped as it became true and he dared open his eyes, the heightened sense of energy having faded back to normal, too, as quickly as it had come. “I was just...tipping there, for a second.” He allowed himself to be guided up into a sitting position, aware that Bond was inspecting him with a tense, worried pursing of his lips. Q busied himself with idly straightening out Bond’s grey feathers, embarrassed by the attention and finally awake enough to think coherently. “Your hands are really warm.”

Bond raised on eyebrow. “So is every inch of you. I don’t think it was a joke that we both might have fevers, although from what, I have no idea.”

“Stress,” Q said, but didn’t believe it. He had a thought and tried to chase it to completion, but his mind was still just sluggish enough to befuddle the attempt. “Drat. I had a thought there, but I’m not awake enough to do anything about it.”

“A thought on what?” Having apparently decided that Q didn’t have any sort of head injury, Bond released his grip on the smaller man slowly. Once he was reasonably certain Q wasn’t going to topple off the bed, 007 found his pants and began pulling them on as they talked.

Q watched with a wistful air as bare skin began to disappear. He made no similar moves, being quite happy sitting naked on the bed. With his eyesight what it was, everything beyond James was a fuzzy blur, and James had already had sex with him – so embarrassment wasn’t an issue, he pleasantly decided. “How should I know what the thought was about? Half of me feels like a marshmallow,” Q said back with sleepy, halfhearted rancor.

That got Bond to snort in amusement, even as he pushed a hand up under the fringe of Q’s hair, eliciting a reflexive warning growl. “Well, either you have a very light fever, or we’ve both got fevers so I can’t do an accurate comparison,” Bond ultimately decided, before turning around and heading for the door, “As for that thought of yours bogged down in...marshmallow...” Bond sounded suspiciously like he was trying not to crack up on the word, and truly, ‘marshmallow’ wasn’t a word Q had ever pictured the infamous 007 saying. “-I’m going to get you some coffee. Strong coffee.”

Q watched Bond go reluctantly, at least until his eyesight wouldn’t follow the receding athletic figure with the low-slung jeans and nothing else on. Very few men could cut a ‘dashing’ figure with so little to work with.

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Q didn’t realize he’d fallen back asleep, but he should have expected it – it was a common occurrence in his day-to-day life. He was balled up in the blankets when a hand that smelled of coffee grounds pressed against his cheek. “Okay. That decides it. You’re going to Medical.”

“Wait...what?” Q slurred, eyes opening blearily and brain wondering if he should panic yet. “That...” This didn’t make sense: one moment he was happy, and dreaming, and smelling coffee, the next he was being threatened with MI6 Medical. He felt betrayed. “That escalated rather quickly. I didn’t even do anything to you.”

Bond chuffed a slight laugh, but was mostly serious at the moment – although he did take the time to comment in a slightly impressed tone, “You really are something else in the morning, aren’t you, Quartermaster?”
Q swore at him and burrowed his head under the blankets.

“Come on, Q.” Bond grunted as he used brute strength interspersed with careful handling to get the Quartermaster out of his bed, or at least out of the blankets enough that he could start wrestling him into clothing. He was lucky that Q, even in the morning, had enough self-respect and professional manners that he was soon helping rather than hindering. “You’ve got such a temperature now that I can feel it without trying,” Bond explained his actions, tossing Q his shirt and then sighing when it just hit Q in the face. “Your reflexes leave something to be desired in the morning, don’t they?”

“Shut it. I tossed you off the bed, didn’t I? While you were being a bloody great lump and trying to crush me, I might add,” Q replied tartly. At least he was talking more or less like a normal person now, although there was an edge of rustiness in his vocal cords that made it sound like he’d been asleep for years instead of just a few dozy minutes. He managed to struggle into the new article of clothing. His hair newly rumpled, the Quartermaster put his own hand to his forehead and admitted with an uneasy grimace, “But you might be right. I cannot say with certainty that I feel all that well. And you? You said you had a possible fever as well?”

Bond shrugged, already dressed. “Maybe. But not as bad as you, certainly. Hence the trip to Medical.” At the mutinous look on Q’s face, Bond offered, “If it helps, I’ll promise to come as well. Then Medical will have to divide its attentions between the two of us.”

“Oh, now doesn’t that sound like a riot,” Q said dryly, rolling his eyes and testing out his legs. He was usually uncoordinated in the morning, and today was no different – except for the fact that he now had 007 standing there to catch his arm as he swayed drunkenly. Giving off a small, embarrassed chuckle at his clumsiness and trying to hide how deeply frustrated it made him, Q pretended to hunt for his glasses as he finished his joke, “If we’re lucky, Medical will never want us back again!”

“Q?”

Q turned around, blinking like a mole. He’d walked away from Bond, and now could only see an outline of him. “What?”

“Just follow the smell of coffee, Q,” Bond sighed in fond exasperation, “I have your glasses in the other hand.”

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Q quite possibly dozed in the car, at least for the first half of the trip. The second half actually served as a time in which he finished the waking up process, knees tucked up and coffee-cup shielded behind them, gripped in both hands as it began to cool. It was his second cup. He’d drank the first one before Bond had finally managed to hustle him out the door. If Bond was bothered by Q’s perching in his car and no doubt getting shoe-prints on his seats, he didn’t comment.

“I’m beginning to rethink this,” Q said slowly, staring distractedly out the front window as Bond maneuvered through the grisly traffic of London. The Quartermaster was far more awake now, and chewing the inside of his bottom lip.

“About going to Medical?” asked Bond back with a hint of suspicious unease creeping in. Q noted his supernatural energy spike, and realized he was preparing to take Q right here in the car if he decided to put up a fight instead of going to Medical.

That wasn’t what Q was thinking about at all, thankfully, so he quickly sorted things out by snapping, “No – no, nothing like that, James! I mean about what I said earlier, that thought I was
chasing.”

“Oh.” Bond relaxed. Cars and wings didn’t necessarily go together, so it was quite understandable that 007 stretched out a wing without thinking – the fact that it nudged and then rubbed gently at Q’s shoulder was far less accidental, however, even if Bond didn’t so much as take his eyes from the road. “I thought you were too much a marshmallow to remember.”

“I’m not a marshmallow,” Q shot back, then realized he had the urge to laugh at the word, “And stop saying it!”

“Saying what?” Oh, how Q detested that faux-innocent face, ruggedly handsome as it was.

“Marshmallow.” Q narrowed his eyes, which was hard to do while saying such a squishy word and having an argument about a small, sugary, cloudlike food. “It’s like hearing the queen say ‘boobs’ or something. It’s so wrong my brain can’t take it on only two cups of coffee.”

Bond’s shaking was threatening to unhinge his seat, and it was all the worse for the fact that he was trying to hold it in. His wings were shaking along with his shoulders at the effort of not exploding with laughter. Q dropped his feet to the floor and sat up straighter, in an effort to appear more foreboding and professional. Obviously, it didn’t work, because Bond’s eyes were still glittering with mirth and the corner of his mouth was twitching tellingly. The wing still pressed flush to his arm and shoulder was mollifying, however, like a silent apology for 007 laughing at him, so the Quartermaster finally just exhaled and sunk down moodily in the seat. “Bugger all,” he grumbled, “There’s no dealing with you after sex and before coffee.”

The two cups he’d already had didn’t count.

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Medical was as much a nightmare as ever, although maybe what was worse was the way everyone noticed that James Bond was bringing Q in. There were many confused and curious stares, and Q internally groaned at the fodder the grapevine was getting this fine day. Still, he managed to walk with a professional air with Bond at his elbow all the way to Medical, as if this were all his idea – in fact, the head nurse must have first thought that 007 was sick, and Q was bringing him in like a dog to heel, because her eyes nearly bugged out of her head.

When Q succinctly and a little tartly explained his symptoms of this morning, however, things calmed down. Bond kept carefully silent, mutual agreement between the two keeping the previous night’s liaison a secret. All Medical had to know was that Bond and Q were both feeling under the weather and had just so happened to turn up at the same time. As Q had suspected, it was really the last part that caused the most fuss.

Not just 007, the terror of the field and Medical both.

Not just the Quartermaster, the snarkiest thing on two legs before you tried to take his blood pressure, never mind what he became after.

Both of them.

The world was very likely ending.

Bond had already begun to dislike his own plan of taking Q to Medical and gallantly accompanying him. In fact, he’d tried to renege at least once, but was kept in line only because Medical had imported a new nurse who looked suspiciously like a club bouncer. By now, Bond had also been diagnosed with a definite fever, something that was fairly rare for Angels, whose immune system
was as voracious and avid as their metabolism and healing rate. Q’s fever was higher, but it took three times as long to get a reading, because Q couldn’t keep his mouth shut around the thermometer – his acidic commentary had started up and didn’t look likely to slow down anytime soon. Sitting on the edge of the next bed over, Bond looked, quite frankly, impressed. It was rare for more than one of Medical’s ‘Black List-ers’ to be in at once, but to see the two of them together…it looked horrifyingly like they were taking notes on each other’s techniques. Q squirmed and Bond threatened, Q glared and Bond growled – ultimately, it was a bad day for everyone. To make matters worse, unexplained illnesses in Angels (in the 00-department or the head of Q-branch) had to be taken seriously, meaning they couldn’t just throw in the towel and let 007 and Q go like they wanted to. Desperately.

When blood samples had been taken, the two terrors were left along for awhile. They were very much like tantrum-throwing children in adult bodies, adult bodies imbued with supernatural speed and strength and the training necessary to use them. Now they were steaming quietly, long since grown tired of being poked, prodded, and asked questions. In Bond’s case, it was worse, because all he had was a fever – Q at least had nearly been felled by a fit of dizziness, so the trip felt more worthwhile.

Q had been quiet, sitting on the edge of the bed with his fingers unconsciously but steadily kneading the blankets and his head down. Bond’s litany of grumbled threats was a surprisingly welcome sound in the background, while Q’s brain whirred away beneath it like a fish steadily making its way along beneath the churning of the ocean’s waves.

Suddenly, his head shot up, fast enough that it immediately had 007’s attention.

“My hand. A blood-born pathogen,” Q said suddenly, in revelation. “That’s what this is.” He looked at Bond as if that answered everything.

“Full sentences, Q.”

Q stuttered as his mouth tried to catch up with his brain. “Th-The…um. The cuts – on my fingers!” he finally grasped where his train of thought had started, and indicated his healing fingertips. “I hadn’t thought anything of it, at the time, but there was no reason that I should have cut them open while digging through circuitry like I was.”

“Okay,” Bond followed, pale eyes still skeptical but following along.

Hands gesturing wildly but without apparent purpose, Q grew excited, warming to his topic, “It is very rare for Angels – even myself, with all of my bloody conditions – to get sick, but what if we had help in that, hm? You were cut up all over, but nothing serious, just enough that no one could touch an inch of you without getting red on them.”

Suddenly, Bond’s eyes seemed to focus an extra degree as what the Quartermaster was getting at clicked into place. Q smiled, somehow smugly proud and almost purring happily at the dangerously understanding look that suddenly came over his agent. It was the feeling of a proud teacher seeing the advancement of a particularly lethal student. “You think it was all planned – my capture, making me a vessel, then the lacerations to both our persons-”

“To ensure that what you had, I’d get,” Q finished with a triumphant nod. “If Silva were such a psychopath, I’d have to give him this one.”

Bond was thinking back, his eyes distant and moody as his mind went to another place. “How else am I supposed to get a message across to our little Quartermaster…” Bond murmured, and they both shivered, hearing the echo of Q’s words.
Now, the question was, what kind of message was it?

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Chapter End Notes

Well, the end is in sight - I'm lining up for the big finale! Considering my planning skills, that could still be ten chapters from now...but still.

Sorry for the cliffhanger! Once again, it was not meant to happen XP It just slipped loose.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

Bond and Q end up staying in Medical for longer than they think, and things go a bit crazy.

Or the chapter in which things go a lot crazy, and Silva’s message is finally revealed.

Chapter Notes

Ignore my interchange of the words virus/pathogen/etcetera. I actually take biology classes, but I'm vague here on purpose - in essence, read it however it makes sense to you. I'll do anything to keep the story moving, including butchering words which are NOT actually synonyms.

Anyway - try not to be bothered by it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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“Well, it doesn’t seem to be harmful – I mean, it’s not actually doing anything, besides the symptoms you mentioned,” said the rather puzzled doctor as 007, the Quartermaster, as well as M stood in the room looking at a large screen detailing what exactly they’d found in the two men’s system. Q was actually running the screen. He didn’t have a medical degree, but once he’d had the systems explained to him, he was able to manipulate the computer so that it practically rolled over backwards to show him images of what was wrong with him. Two images flashed up, side-by-side, and the doctor interpreted, “Oddly enough, you two appear to have slightly different conditions.”

“Tell them why,” Q demanded detachedly, still studying the screen with a grim expression that was partially due to concentration, partially due to the frustrating fact that he and Bond had become infected with something unknowingly.

The doctor looked to M. “Upon the Quartermaster’s request, we did more tests, and managed to deduce that the cut on Q’s fingers was the point of entry of one pathogen, and a second pathogen was hidden in Bond’s system. When Bond’s blood got into the open cuts on Q’s fingers, the Quartermaster acquired what Bond had as well.”

“But neither are life-threatening?” M asked sharply, needling her words right to the point. She couldn’t understand most of the chemical formulas and medical jargon on the screens, but she knew for certain that she’d have to laboriously change some protocol to prevent things like this in the future. Then again, where 007 and/or Q was involved, it seemed that no amount of protocol could keep them out of trouble.

The doctor shrugged and glanced back at the screens, replying, “Honestly, it doesn’t seem to be doing anything at all to Agent Bond, and the Quartermaster’s dizzy spell and hyperawareness haven’t
been repeated, so I’m inclined to think that it was a passing reaction. If it were anyone but the Quartermaster…” The doctor looked at Q almost apologetically, visibly wincing at the reminder of Q’s unique and frustrating physiology. “…I’d be able to tell you with more certainty. But honestly, there’s nothing about this pathogen that suggests it to be more harmful than the common cold.”

“I would still like it eradicated,” M immediately decided, glancing at 007 and Q in turn like this was their fault. It really wasn’t, but they both glanced away before she did, feeling like chastised children. “I prefer to have my agents and my Quartermaster free of foreign symptoms that they got courtesy of a maniac.”

“I don’t know what to tell you, Ma’am,” the doctor said with more guts than Q or 007 would have had, “It’s a virus – there’s not much we can do but make sure their immune systems are strong and let them work out the problem on their own. There are a few side-effects from the pathogen the Quartermaster required, but we practically have to invent new drugs to treat him.”

“I would prefer if you’d start doing just that then,” Q finally spoke up on his own behalf, causing everyone to look at him in surprise, especially Bond, who knew by now how much Q hated being poked and prodded in Medical. Poked and prodded he would be if Medical had to devise a way to treat his mystery condition. Still, Q spoke in his ‘Quartermaster voice’ that brooked no argument, and had already shut off the screen and stood, straightening his clothing in a businesslike manner while his cool eyes swept to the doctor. “After several dealings with Silva, I have a hard time believing that he’s done anything benign,” he quipped dryly, but Bond, watching carefully, saw that he was tense. Q turned to M, asking bluntly, “Do you want me quarantined? It would be best.”

M’s eyes narrowed at the candid, merciless self-assessment, but then turned to the doctor instead. “Is Q’s condition in any way catching? We already know that 007’s is, bloody inconvenience that he is.” Unconsciously, 007 took a mincing step away from her, in the same way a person sidles away from a dog that starts quietly growling.

“Oddly enough,” the doctor admitted, “Neither of them are. Bond’s system is already breaking down the pathogen in his system, to the point that it would take a lot of his blood getting into someone else’s bloodstream to transfer, and whatever it came into contact with in Q’s system from the cut on his hands turned parts of it dormant. I don’t believe that the Quartermaster is in any way contagious.” Sounding highly uneasy, the doctor finished slowly, “This is a very sophisticated pathogen.”

“Silva would have had to manufacture this somewhere,” Q said suddenly, eyes sharpening behinds his glasses, “I could hunt it down from Q-branch.”

“No more interest in being quarantined, Quartermaster?” M said in what sounded suspiciously like sarcasm.

It did credit to Q’s intellect that he seriously thought about the question, looking torn. He chewed at the inside of his lip and 007 had to fight to urge to place a hand on his shoulder to jar him out of the destructive habit. That would have required walking across the room, however, making the action very obvious, so he held back and acted the part of the cool, detached 00-agent that he was. “If I’m not contagious, then the benefits outweigh the risks, although I imagine it would be best if I stayed in Medical long enough for them to get a start on finding some drug to combat this.” The doctor actually gasped as the Quartermaster willingly gave himself up to their tender mercies. That made it twice in one day that one of Medical’s worst patients had voluntarily come to them instead of having to be dragged in kicking and screaming. Perhaps the world was ending.

M quickly agreed with Q’s words, finding the logic behind them sound, “It’s settled then. On the stipulation that Medical check you one last time before releasing you to Q-branch, just to be safe.
And Bond?

“Yes, Ma’am?” Bond almost comically jumped as he was finally addressed. M was eyeing him sharply, and he wondered if she could somehow tell that he’d spent the previous night in the Quartermaster’s bed. He tried not to look guilty, an easy feat, because he honestly didn’t feel bad about that at all. One way or another, after eyeing him shrewdly for a second or two, the woman simply twitched a silvery wing as if flicking off dust and then continued, “You are to stay in Medical as well. I imagine that a full quarantine would very well turn you insane in under ten minutes, but since you possess half of what infected the Quartermaster, you owe it to him to stay put.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” relented Bond without a fight, aware that he was simply repeating his previous statement without the question mark. The idea of being in a locked room for an extended length of time made his wings shift anxiously, and he counted himself lucky to be only stuck in Medical at the moment. Medical also operated on a separate air system, meaning that it was naturally quarantined to a small degree – no doubt M had had this in mind.

M nodded once, sharply, ending the conversation. “Good then.” Before she turned to leave, however, she skewered both Bond and Q with a stare that made them flinch. “Expect to have a very long and very unpleasant talk with me later about this, and how it happened, in more detail.” With that, she finally exited Medical, leaving behind two very queasy adult men and a very impressed Medical staff. If they could figure out how to cow 007 and the Quartermaster with just a few words, Medical would be a far less hectic place.

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Q prodded the new bandage around the inside of his elbow, disproportionately resentful for the blood that Medical had taken. He was so focused on being frustrated with this whole situation that he didn’t notice 007 – who’d been in the room and at the back of Q’s consciousness the whole time – step close enough to touch the back of his neck. As soon as Q’s initial jolt of surprise faded, the strong, blunt fingers kneaded the back of his neck carefully but firmly, and Q sighed and tried to relax. He didn’t succeed very well, though, because all of this had his muscles strung tight like piano wires beneath his skin.

“How do we get ourselves into these messes?” he asked, head tipping back, eyes closed. He was pleasantly surprised when the back of his head met Bond’s proffered shoulder, and glanced around discreetly to see if anyone else was around to notice. After a whole morning of being guinea pigs, however, the Quartermaster and 007 had been left alone.

Bond made a noise in his throat to convey something between wryness and bitterness. “I prefer to think that Silva got us into this mess, to be perfectly honest.” With Q now leaning close to him, it was simply easier to wrap his arms around him than to massage his neck, so 007 did so. Being that close was too good an opportunity to pass up for a kiss, however, so the 00-agent couldn’t resist lifting a hand to possessively cup Q’s throat. With his palm and fingers pressed flush to warm skin, nudging up against the underside of Q’s jaw, he tipped the Quartermaster’s head back farther until he could capture his mouth. Q gave in without so much as a twitch, glad for the momentary distraction. He also loved the way 007’s wings instinctively came forward, brushing Q’s arms and shoulders with grey tips. By the time Bond ended the kiss he’d started, he was looking into eyes darkened by interest. “How do we get ourselves into these positions?” Bond repeated Q’s words with a slight change, squeezing Q’s throat just enough to get the Quartermaster to suck in a surprised breath. It wasn’t a threatening gesture, merely a commanding one, and in response the snarky Quartermaster let his lips thin in a challenging little smile. That only caused Bond’s smirk to bloom into a full grin, as if he’d been given a gift, before he let go.
With Q now a lot more relaxed and perhaps still a little bit distracted, the two found perches in the waiting room they’d been dumped into. If anyone came in now, they would probably still find it curious that the Quartermaster and the 00-agent were sitting comfortably in chairs right next to each other, even though it was a known fact that 007 and Q had a bad track-record of not getting along.

“This is frustrating,” Q finally ground out after a few moments of silence.

Bond just hummed his agreement, not seeming near as tense. “Deep breaths, Quartermaster,” he advised, having been on enough missions that demanded hours of patience – he’d learned a few techniques to stop the stewing and the fidgeting. “You’ll be out of here soon enough, back to your nest of computers and servers and keyboards, where you can loose the dogs of war or what-have-you in the hunt for Silva.”

Snorting, Q didn’t say anything by way of reply, but his fingers ceased their tapping on the arm of the chair. Eventually, he changed the topic of conversation, “Your fever seems to be gone. You’ll be released from here pretty soon, 007.” Admitting to himself that he was insanely jealous of Bond for being able to escape Medical, Q’s lips quirked wryly. “What do you plan to do with your newfound freedom?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe check in with Alec. I imagine he’ll get a kick out of this fiasco,” Bond sighed, then corrected, “Actually, no. Now that he and 004 are in the same house, I might just leave them be. I don’t know what I’ll walk in on.”

Bond’s faintly scandalized tone had to be pure fiction, but it got Q to chuckle a little, and soon 007 was joining him. The man’s face said that he was honestly pleased to make Q happy, which in turn made Q flush, embarrassed to be watched by those intense, attentive blue eyes. “Get me a coffee?” he asked hopefully, while he waited for the flush to fade from his ears even if the smile sure didn’t.

“Understood, Quartermaster,” said Bond while still smiling cheekily. It reminded Q of the other times Bond had said that – namely, after their first embarrassing confrontation in the car with the bomb and the police officer. Q groaned at the memory and blushed all over again, wondering when it had become so easy to embarrass him. Bond chuckling echoed back to him down the hallway as the bigger man went in search of something caffeinated.

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“Doctor,” one of the underlings of Medical asked, “Someone is trying to get into our patient records.” Medical wasn’t anywhere near as sophisticated as Q-branch, but they had systems in place to prevent patient confidentiality from being lost, obviously. As meticulous as Medical was about detailing who came in with what problems, their computers housed quite a lot of important information.

The doctor leaned over his coworker’s shoulder. “The firewalls?”

“Just fine, although I think they buckled around some of the more recent records, if I’m reading this error report right,” the little man answered, leaning forward as if that would help him read better. “It’s a good thing we’ve got the Quartermaster in Medical today – he could make much more sense of this than I can.”

The doctor couldn’t quite understand this either, being a man of medicine and not electronics. “So someone wanted to know…?” He read a bit more as the underling (who thankfully was trained in computers somewhat, even if not to the level of Q-branch’s minions were) pulled up the poignant data. “…Who was in today? Why would someone want to know that?”
“I’ll go get the Quartermaster,” the underling decided, “If he hasn’t run out of the waiting room yet, he’ll want to see this, I imagine. Although it doesn’t seem as though anything else is happening.” Whoever had gotten curious and nosy had apparently lost interest before getting into the truly sensitive information logged in Medical’s servers.

The doctor nodded, feeling uneasy.

The underling was just a few hallways from where they’d cooped up 007 and Q when he stopped, smelling something off. It had a muggy, mildew sort of smell to it, but he didn’t immediately panic – all of MI6, especially Medical, had systems set up in the air-vents to identify and prevent most all toxic chemicals from getting in. For a moment, that knowledge calmed the little man, and he told himself he was imagining things.

Right up until he actually saw white smog coming out of the vents.

Startled, he just stared for a minute, thinking, ‘This cannot be happening.’ Apparently, he wasn’t alone, because it was nearly half a minute later before anyone else started shouting in alarm. This was happening all across Medical. Running towards the nearest intercom system (even though that had to be what everyone would be doing), the underling tried to notice any signs of what the foreign gas could be – but besides the smell, there were no clues. It was already falling down and filling the corridor with foggy white, but it didn’t cause any difficulty breathing, and any dangerous substances were supposed to be caught by the alarm systems – Q himself had set them up!

The problem was corrected swiftly. However this gas had gotten past the detection system, it was no match for the back-up systems that Q had had installed – a few buttons were pressed, and soon there were measures being taken to filter out the problem manually. Everyone was still fine by the time the air cleared, and that left the question: What had the fog been meant to do?

It was at that point that someone started shouting again, saying that they’d found the Quartermaster collapsed and thrashing on the floor of the waiting room.

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Q had been doing mental coding in his head – running imaginary programs just to focus his mind amid the hectic waves of emotions he was feeling. If he leaned his head back against the wall and closed his eyes, he could focus on just his thoughts and nothing else, and it managed to distract him from the humiliation and frustration of being so easily duped by Silva. It didn’t matter that the pathogen in his system didn’t seem to be doing any damage – it was still there, and there was no way that it wasn’t serving a purpose. Silva had gone so far as to kidnap 007 to set up the whole encounter, and Silva never seemed to do anything without purpose. Q just hoped that Bond wouldn’t suffer for his role, carrying half of the foreign substance now swimming inconspicuously under Q’s skin.

The new scent in the air didn’t immediately register. In fact, Q was too busy with the tangled snarl of thoughts in his head to notice anything at all until he felt a sudden headache start up right between his eyes. It came on so fast that he hissed in a breath, pulling his glasses off to rub at the bridge of his nose with his free hand.

Suddenly that little discomfort was put to shame as agony ripped through him in one breath: he may as well have poured acid into his lungs instead of breathing, and the pain was so consuming that he couldn’t even scream. Back arching as his insides lit on fire, he crashed off the chair onto the floor, still struggling to remember how to breathe, how to think, how to be. Everything had been consigned to pain as if a great hand had fallen and smothered him; it was a mercy when he felt – one by one, like stars at dawn – his nerve-endings blinking out. He felt each shut-off like a wave of
black rising towards his head, but he couldn’t bring himself to care because at least the pain would stop. The worst of the torment had migrated to his back, branching off his spine and jutting like needles into his scars as if trying to unstuff them. The Quartermaster was still choking on air as the pain held him in a stranglehold, but then his muscles began to seize, knotting and jerking beneath his skin.

Unbeknownst to Q, he’d taken five breaths of the foggy air, five breaths that sank into his lungs and sifted into his blood. Nothing deadly.

Just something cataclysmic.

Three steps to hypnotize a person.

Three steps in a puzzle that would make a message MI6 would never forget.

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Bond had started heading back to the Quartermaster as soon as he’d seen the off-color air coming out of the vent, leaving the coffee on the nearest table as he focused on moving quickly. Shortly thereafter, however, his progress was halted by panicking people as others began to notice the fog swiftly filling the hallways of Medical. Bond snarled and swore with frustration as he began to bump into running staff-members, none of them extensively trained for situations like this.

Because of these multiple hold-ups, Bond didn’t get back to the waiting room until silence had returned, only to be broken a second time by a shout that something was wrong with Q, and that he appeared to be having a seizure of some sort. Without thinking, 007 picked up his pace, the clearing hallways flying past him as he darted forward with a single purpose in mind: get to Q. Already he could see the door to the waiting room, people peering in, but the worst part was that he could hear the repetitive thump of limbs in spasm as they hit the floor, doctors inside already yelling. Things were getting muddles – too many voices shouting too many things, especially once the Medical staff saw 007 barreling towards them, wings half-spread like a foreboding, stormy dawn at his back.

Something suddenly made Bond skid to a stop, however, his feet physically refusing to move and catching on the floor instead. Shocked, he blinked, recognizing the feeling from all the times that Q had been in his head, grabbing his thoughts and twisting them. Right now, that grip felt desperate – inexpert. It flitted into his mind and then slid off like the wild grasp of a flailing hand, but in the next moment, all of the Medical staff in the doorway backed off, too, and the doctors within yelped.

Before Bond could regain his composure or figure out what had just happened – ‘I have to get to Q!’ – his pale-blue eyes widened as he sensed something. “Keep back-!” he bellowed.

The call was useless, as the supernatural energy Bond had felt building suddenly slipped beyond control and released into the room with a crack that sounded exactly like one would expect from a lightning strike within a building. Lights went out and those closest to the door screamed and fell back – one dropped soundlessly to the floor. Bond lifted a wing reflexively to shield himself as one of the long ceiling lights above his head exploded. A whole section of the hallway was thrown into darkness, and suddenly Bond wasn’t sensing any Angel energy at all. All sound faded except for a lingering ringing in everyone’s ears, and Bond took advantage of everyone’s shock to rush past and into the room.

With no illumination except from lights down the hall drifting in, it was dark, so Bond quickly flicked his phone out of his pocket and turned it on. It was a poor excuse for a flashlight, but it gave his eyes something to work with. The first things he saw were the doctors, previously trying to calm Q’s seizures but now lying in heaps on the floor. They did appear to be breathing, though, so 007
didn’t spare them another thought. He’d had enough training that he was able to push all compassion and sympathy aside in favor of focusing on a target.

On Q.

Unexpectedly, while casting around in the dark and trying to figure out which sprawled form belonged to the Quartermaster, Bond jumped at a pinprick of sensation in his mind – a flicker of Angel energy kicking back on again. He was surprised that he was sensing it already, especially since Q had been a dead-bulb for ages after the last time he’d pulled a stunt even vaguely resembling this. Immediately, Bond zeroed in on what he could sense, stepping over a groaning nurse to immediately drop to his knees beside a familiar, tousled head, glasses a few feet away as if dropped. The Quartermaster’s breathing was fast and labored, as if he’d just run miles, and Bond found himself hurriedly running his hands over the Quartermaster to check for injuries. He stopped suddenly when his fingers found something inexplicable in the darkness. After kneeling for a moment in shock, just blinking, he finally barked roughly, “Q!”

The reply was a moan and a restless toss of Q’s head. One of the Quartermaster’s long-fingers hands grasped at 007's knee, unconsciously clinging to something in the darkness. Bond’s phone was still creating enough light to cast harsh brightness across Q’s cheekbones and the tousled lines of his hair while he panted.

“Q!” Bond sharply called again, as if the volume of his voice could knock the world back into order again, “Wake up!”

The final yell made Q jerk and emit a thin noise of surprise in his throat a second before his eyes jerked open and suddenly a wing buffeted Bond across the head hard enough for him to see stars.

But not his wing. Clumsily half-raised and as tense as the rest of the Quartermaster, a wing of stark black and white caught what meager light was in the room – the white nearly reflecting it, the black so dark as to swallow it.

Still clearly dazed, Q just stared, while Bond knelt next to him and wished fervently for Q to explain all of this. Q still had one hand on Bond's knee, and it tightened spasmodically. “Bloody buggering hell,” was all Q said by way of answer as he stared round-eyed at what could only be a hallucination rising out of his back.

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Chapter End Notes

Yay! The chapter you guys have been waiting for - if it wasn't already clear, those are Q's wings. If you want to see what they look like, a picture was posted many chapters earlier.

If this 'message' seems ooc for Silva, recall how borderline infatuated he was with Q - Silva doesn't care much for Bond or the others, but he sees Q as a kindred spirit. An ally. And what do you do for allies?

Make them stronger, obviously.

If only so tearing them down later is more fun...
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

The aftermath in Medical - Q now has wings. Q also has new problems now to deal with.

Or the chapter in which you meet 001, who is unfriendly. Q deals with the problem.

Chapter Notes

A longer chapter! It's fun to write Q with wings, at long last - the first few lines were inspired by a commenter, who pointed out the irony of Q and 007 willingly going to Medical...and then this happens XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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M stood and listened while the doctor explained things to her for the second time today, actually rubbing her face at the pure, idiotic irony of this happening the one time that both Q and 007 behaved and willingly went to Medical. At this rate, they’d never go again.

“Although we’re still honestly puzzling over the original two contaminants in the Quartermaster’s system, we have identified the gas that got into Medical,” the doctor said, still looking very shaky. She’d been one of the people just outside the door when Q had released that whiplash of energy; those who had been right next to him were starting to regain consciousness, but it was possible they could have been killed had Q not mentally warned them all back. “On its own, the gas is inert and in no way dangerous – that was why it didn’t trigger any of our systems. Just like whatever concoction was put in Agent Bond-” The doctor indicated where 007 was standing just back and to M’s left, having given his report already. “-Is totally passive on its own, besides the mild immune response of Bond’s fever. The problem seems to be when all three of them came together.” The doctor turned to look behind her, where they’d left the Quartermaster in an unused patient room equipped with a long observation window on one side – he looked a bit on the verge of a nervous breakdown, but was physically quite well. In fact, he was pacing back and forth, hands behind his head tensely and wings – no one could stop staring at those wings, black as soot until they came to the last fourth, where they blazed white – spread out and getting in his way at every turn. Having been without wings for so long, the Quartermaster’s only problem thus far was figuring out how to handle the appendages again.

“I don’t know if you’d call it a problem,” the doctor finished with a tentative but awed smile before turning back to the conversation, and M, who did not tolerate distraction, “Quite frankly, we can’t find anything wrong with any of this – we just can’t explain it. We’d like to have the Quartermaster’s input, actually-”

At that moment, Q jerked and his wing snapped out so that it cleared a whole tray of instruments, sending it all to the floor with a stupendous crash. The interruption wasn’t a first – in fact, M had
already gotten a twitch next to her left eye from how often the Quartermaster was noisily bumping things with his new wings. Now, she’d obviously had it up to here with him.

“007, would you kindly go restrain your Quartermaster?” M said tersely, not even turning to look and see what the newly-winged Quartermaster had broken this time.

“Yes, M,” acquiesced the agent swiftly, knowing a curt dismissal when he heard one. He turned to go into the room without a pause. A 00-agent didn’t live long if they couldn’t sense M’s moods, and when she was on the brink of exploding.

Q was swearing colorfully and a little breathlessly when Bond entered the room, looking as though he didn’t know whether to laugh, cry, scream, or just faint to avoid all of the hassle. He was standing as still as he could manage, as if by sheer will he could keep his clumsy wings from breaking anything else. The effort had Q’s face tense and his wings twitching like hounds straining at leashes.

“Hello, 007,” he said with cheer that was so false it almost invited laughter. “And how is your day going? As totally boring as mine, I hope,” he finished in an ironic tone, and the sense that he very dearly wanted to break into hysterical laughter but was afraid he wouldn’t stop.

Ignoring the comments, Bond reached out towards the nearest wing as he approached, pausing right before he actually touched its smooth feathers. “May I?” Q looked at him for a moment, perplexed, before managing a jerky nod. Fingers careful and sure of themselves, Bond gently gripped the end of Q’s wing in what would be just beyond the wrist if this were an arm. Bond’s other hand gripped what would be the forearm, and gradually folded the two together, doing what Q had been trying to do for ages now and closing the wing against Q’s back.

“Thank you, 007,” Q said, subdued and a little embarrassed now, but also happily grateful for the help. Something about Bond’s tenderness and quietude had seemed quietly intimate as well, and Q’s emotions were all running on such a high octave right now that he felt his face flushing. Bond just looked at him, reading his expression and raising one eyebrow.

But he didn’t take advantage, choosing sensibleness over his usual charm. “All right now? Can you get the other one or do you want help?” he nodded to the remaining left wing, still stiffly outstretched.

Some of Q’s pride kicked in then, but as he looked at the wing – which felt familiar and yet not, disconnected for so long that the nerves felt alien to his brain – and recalled that everyone could see him through the observation window, he reconsidered. “I might appreciate that, actually,” he tried to say without flushing in embarrassment. He made a small effort to tuck in the wing himself, but it jerked instead, arching against his back with enough unnecessary force to make him wince. “Drat,” he said to himself, but by then, 007 had crossed behind him and snatched out to grab the offending appendage.

“Easy,” Bond said, fingers careful as they pressed against the feathers. He repeated the procedure from the first wing, coaxing unfamiliar muscles to buckle and relax.

“You’d think I’d remember how to do this,” Q gave a self-deprecating little chuckle as he watched someone basically take control of his wings for him, “I mean, they are connected to my brain, just like any other muscle.”

“A series of muscles absent for years,” Bond retorted as he got the second wing settled. He couldn’t seem to help it: he smoothed a calloused hand down the feathers, watching as his touch went from solid black to salt-white. Both shades were different than any other Angels he’d seen – Alec’s black
wings were glossy while Q’s were like the darkest charcoal, sucking in the light, and 004’s white wings always had a smudged look because of the grey bands near the tips. The ends of Q’s wings were stark and perfect, reflecting their newness, it seemed. “No one is blaming you for being clumsy.”

“I am,” Q groused, clearly frustrated, “It wouldn’t surprise me if Silva planned all this just to see me bumbling around like a fledgling pigeon – I sure would get in his way less.” His bad mood transmitted itself to his wings, and they shifted out of their folded position to instead hang forward, just enough to cap his shoulders. Q sighed in exasperation. “I’m serious, Bond – it took me years, but I was used to being the cripple I was. I was good at it.” There was no false bravado there: he had been. Even without wings and with many of his systems out of whack because of that, he’d been capable enough to continue living, becoming a force of nature as Quartermaster and a veritable dragon when faced with recalcitrant double-o’s. He’d managed to beat men more than twice his size by learning fighting techniques that would make up for what he lacked, and when that all failed, he’d fallen back on his mind. Now… “Now I feel as if I’ve been shoved back into a set of wings that I’ve spent years forgetting,” he finished while trying not to explode with impotent temper. He managed to keep his voice calm – just.

“Look on the bright side,” Bond said patiently after the Quartermaster’s words ran out, “Maybe you’ll be able to get up in the morning without first overdosing on caffeine.”

Q snorted. “If I can get to sleep at all. I’ve learned to sleep a bit like a washing machine – that much tossing and turning is in no way conducive to having wings.” For some reason or other, Q’s subconscious seemed to transmit to his new, feathered limbs, because they were making vague, gesturing motions by the time he’d finished talking. Bond grunted and moved aside as one flicked against his shoulder. A deft move of his own, much more controlled wings pushed it back to Q again. “Sorry. I know they’re there, I just…”

“Can’t quite believe it?” Bond supplied fluidly as he watched Q’s face.

For a second, Q went tense, but then all of the stiffness went out of him in a rush, and he stumbled back to sit down in the nearest chair. His new wings piled up behind him until one slipped free, giving him the look of an exhausted young bird after a too-long flight, limp and disheveled. One wing remained stuck between his back and the chair while the other poured over the chair-arm, cascading in black and white onto the floor. But when Q made a noise of frustration and went to put his forehead in his hands, there was a crackling, sparking noise and he jumped up again with a sharp yelp.

“And that’s another thing,” he panted as everyone inside and outside the room went into a panic over him, 007 just standing and staring at the sparks still igniting off Q’s fingertips. “I still feel like a downed bloody power-line on the inside. Before, I couldn’t turn my Angel energy on, now I can’t turn it off!!!”

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Medical continued to be stumped, and with the Quartermaster just barely under control in multiple ways – emotionally, physically, and now in regards to supernatural energy as well – the doctors seemed almost afraid to put him under a microscope. With 007 and M both there to keep him in line, Medical managed to get enough blood to run tests, as well as tissue samples from the wings, although Bond had had to physically hold one of the appendages to let them do it. Q hadn’t actually tried to fight them off, and had apologized the whole time, but the wings nearly had a mind of their own when it came to fidgeting. He’d nearly knocked people over just walking past them, and as he’d finally left Medical, he’d nearly clipped M, too. The horror of that was almost too much to
stomach, even if he had been given the all-clear to go back to Q-branch.

As soon as he and 007 were alone in a hallway, Q had turned around and fisted a hand in either of Bond’s lapels, pressing his face in close between them and exhaling raggedly. “Good God! I don’t know if I can handle this,” he confessed, about as far from the aloof, controlled Quartermaster as 007 had ever seen him. Head still pressed against the middle of 007’s clavicle, Q shook his head as if to deny all of this. “I mean, I wished – how I wished! – that I’d somehow get my wings back someday, but this is going to drive me mental. It was just one of those childish dreams that you never honestly expect to happen.”

“I think you need to stop thinking logically for awhile, Q.”

Q stuttered off a slightly manic chuckle. “You honestly think I can do that, don’t you? Turn off that side of my brain? I can’t. I’ve tried, you know, but it just doesn’t work. I’m going to be trying to ‘logic’ my way through this until my head hurts.” Both Q and Bond swore as energy leached out of Q’s fingers and into the muscle of 007’s chest, something that had ultimately been attributed to high emotional stress. The doctors figured (hoped) that at least that symptom would die down once Q calmed and got himself under control. Q wasn’t so optimistic. “Sorry, James,” Q sighed, pulling his hands back and rubbing his fingers.

With a sigh, Bond took over, taking hold of the Quartermaster’s long fingers and holding them as if it were a chore, even when his eyes said that he was more than happy to. In fact, despite the utter chaos that their morning had become, he was wearing that boyish smile of his that said he was just a bit too lazy and content at the moment to cause trouble. “Do you want me to stick around?” he asked, lifting questioning eyes to Q’s, “Usually now is when I go off drinking and whoring until M starts to wonder if I’ll ever turn up again. And while the first has its appeal, the second…” He purposefully trailed off, looking upwards as if perplexed, but his hands skated down Q’s knuckles to his wrist, one hand still clasping both of Q’s while the other slid between his wrists to purposefully stroke the vulnerable skin on the inside of his forearms. His grip and touch were warm, and his body close.

The obvious sexual interest behind the motion made Q laugh with a mixture of nervousness and blushing approval. He tried to push aside Bond’s focus by joking, “Is this your way of saying my prowess in bed appealed to your better nature?” He couldn’t escape Bond’s grip, but then again, he wasn’t really trying.

The suggestion of heat in Bond’s eyes ignited, focus turning into an intensity that burned away the rest of the world as Bond surged suddenly closer with a shift of muscle. “No, this is my way of saying all of you appealed to all of my nature.” His words were a husky growl, the last one swallowed up in a kiss as he moved one hand to Q’s neck to pull him into a hungry, devouring kiss. For a moment, Q was able to forget about all of the confusion and frustration of the day, focusing instead of the possessive, heated feeling of James’s mouth holding his. It was a heady feeling, and Q was once again grasping the front of Bond’s shirt where 007 was still loosely grasping both of his hands in one of his. If Q’s Angel energy sparked at all, neither noticed, and Q felt something like calmness as he closed his eyes and just let James take over.

Finally, they drew apart, Q breaking the spell even if he left his eyes closed for a breath longer. “As tempting as the offer is,” he said, a hint of regret given freely in his now-calm voice, “I have to do this alone. Go to Q-branch, that is. It’s my domain, after all, and if the Quartermaster can’t even function well enough to command his minions without help, well…” He shrugged, still standing close to Bond but now drawing back enough to show him a bold but dry smile. “…Then he may as well not be Quartermaster at all. Besides, Q-branch will be in enough of an upset with just one winged Angel in there. If I throw you into the mix, there might well he heart-attacks.”
With that, Q was back to himself: he managed to step back (Bond releasing him without hesitation or regret), straightening his clothes with little tugs and clearing his throat. His wings flapped disjointedly at his back in small jerks, mimicking the motion as if attached to a ruffled bird and not a ruffled Quartermaster. Looking at the noncompliant limbs, Q grimaced and retracted his earlier statement a bit, “Although, if you wish to walk with me, it would be wonderful if I could at least get these bloody things folded against my back by the time I reach Q-branch.”

Bond smirked cheekily, as if he’d known his presence would be requested all along. “Understood, Quartermaster,” he said congenially before falling into step with the other man, his larger frame making Q’s look more slender even as his storm-grey wings shadowed Q’s, helpfully stretching out to bring them back in after each wayward twitch.

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After much coaxing from Bond and even more frustrated concentration on his part, Q had found enough muscle memory to keep his wings, if nothing else, out of the way. If anyone were to ask him to so much as flap (forget flying), there would be a fiasco of epic proportions, but at least his returned appendages were out of the way for now. That was good, because Q-branch had been working more or less on its own since 007’s disappearance, and they’d been flooded with leads thanks to Severine, the woman Bond had rescued. The Quartermaster was needed to direct and focus the search for Silva.

He’d mostly banished himself to the Dungeons of Q-branch, because the danger of him accidentally lashing out with a wing was a greater issue around the delicate workings elsewhere – anything being made on these lower levels was probably tough, and had possibly been broken by Mothra at least once. Mothra was also the only existing creature that appeared untroubled by the fact that the Quartermaster now had a pair of wings sprouting from his back. Maybe it was all of those cat-treats…

“Quartermaster?”

Q’s wings shuffled of their own accord as he turned, but they didn’t knock anything over. The young Quartermaster nearly let loose an exhale of relief at that small triumph. It had taken a good two hours of being back in his branch again, doing the work he was used to doing, for him to reach this level of calm, but now that he’d reached it, it was easier to cope with his new ‘condition’.

“Yes?”

“It’s…001. I know you told us to handle her, when she reported in, but…” the young woman stuttered, radiating discomfort.

Mothra (who’d been sitting in qi tea docile fashion on the table next to Q’s laptop) looked up and then jumped off the table with a thump, drawn by the possibility of a new curiosity, but Q just looked up from his laptop to stare at the far wall and sigh. 001. He’d had very, very few dealings with her, as she rarely came in from the field, but the few he’d had…had been prickly at best. Her distaste for being ordered around by a ‘wet-behind-the-ears computer-geek’ was nothing compared to what 008 had expressed, but 001 was also of a wildly different disposition. 008 had always been fairly straightforward and physical – a bear of a man. 001 was a femme fatale, and therefore played a more abstract game. Her moves cut where 008’s had bruised. She also had a habit of being tenacious…

And Q had been getting reports of her harassing his Q-branch minions for the past half-hour.

It appeared that he wouldn’t be able to avoid a confrontation then.

Turning away from his laptop and stepping over Mothra as if it was second nature, the Quartermaster
pursed his lips and tried to resign himself to the trouble that was undoubtedly to follow. Originally, he’d hated dealing with the Three Musketeers known as 006, 7, and 8, but deep down 001 had always been worse. The three male 00-agents had at least been very open about their temperaments, but 001 had snuck in like poison – and somehow had a more painful bite for it. She had a worse record for sleeping around than 007 and a more vicious temper than a viper on drugs.

It was a pity she was so good at her job.

“I’ll handle it,” Q said in his calm, Quartermaster voice, ignoring the look of helpless relief that flooded across his underling’s face. The woman had clearly not wanted to trouble Q, when it was clear how much their Quartermaster needed peace and quiet right now, but the situation had apparently reached a point of no return on the main floor. The employees of Q-branch were not trained to deal with Angel agents.

Q moved around the minion, not having to look to scoot Mothra back so he didn’t slip past him and up the door. At some point, he and Mothra had become quite close companions, and it was possible that the big cat would follow him up and take on 001 for him. As amusing as that would be, 001 would probably kill the cat in the end, which would be unacceptable. So Q made sure Mothra stayed in the Dungeons while he went up to face what was likely to be a markedly unenjoyable altercation. If he could deal with 001 and still stay calm, he’d be ahead of the game for today.

If he didn’t…

It was entirely possible that he’d break, electrocute, or hypnotize something. Skills were horribly dangerous things to have when control was something you did not have.

Q appeared in Q-branch proper like the rightful owner of the place, fittingly unhesitant and even brash as he walked in and immediately strode to where 001 was. He’d scouted out where her energy was before he’d even gotten onto the right floor, glad that he was still as capable of sensing Angel energy as before – perhaps better. His senses felt as if they had an additional keenness, or as if the whole world was raw after the rebirth of his wings. 001 had been leaned provocatively over a table where Q-branch was supposed to be working on a new type of surveillance technology – one of the delicate projects that Q had been keeping his troublesome wings away from. Clearly, 001 had noticed where she was unwanted, and had purposefully stuck herself there until no one had any choice but to call the Quartermaster. Her broad, honey-gold wings spread out behind her like the tantalizing treasure she was so good at playing.

“Excuse me, 001,” Q said, keeping his tone professional but unable to keep it polite, “but is there a specific reason you are still here, or are you just intent on becoming an insufferable fixture here?” Now the rudeness was intentional, and it had the desired effect.

001 turned around.

She was, obviously, slimmer and smaller than the male Angels, but the inherent power of being an Angel still showed. She was a tall woman with an athletic physique, creating a dangerous beauty that drew in men because she seemed to challenge them. Now, she cast a challenging eye at Q, purposefully letting her eyes dance sensuously over his face – something that had always made him nervous and had threatened to make him flush – before letting her gaze touch first one wing then the other as it arched neatly over Q’s shoulders. “Oh, hello, Q!” she said blithely, turning around to lean her behind against the table. As daring as she was, appearing so relaxed, Q noted that she still kept her wings in careful check – she didn’t dare to sweep anything from the table while the Quartermaster was watching. “I was just handing in my tech.”

“That was thirty minutes ago, from what I hear,” he delicately challenged her. The frission of energy
just under his skin had increased a few notches, but he was still under control and calm, and hoped to continue to deal with things in that manner. “After that, I can’t imagine what you were doing, except deeply annoying my people.”

001 laughed, a bite coming into her smile that reminded everyone that she was dangerous. “Oh, your minions? They’re so skittish-!”

“And I assure you, I am not,” he immediately retorted. Behind him, one of his wings twitched, and it took a lot of energy just to keep that quiver from becoming an actual, disruptive movement. “Now what is it you want?”

“Simmer down, Quartermaster,” she soothed, but in a tone that Q was used to hearing on missions that said she was lying and making things up on the spot. Few people would have noticed it, but Q spent half of his life now listening to agents con, lie, and bluff their way out of situations. 007 did it better. “I just came to see these infamous wings of yours. They’re truly a treat to see.” Her smile held curiosity but also disdain somehow, as if she would still be obligated to mock him whether or not he had wings like she did.

Q felt his hackles rising, and he’d already been tense before he came up here. Now, although he didn’t realize it, his hands were in fists. “I’m sure you don’t hear this very often, 001, not with your bedroom record,” he rattled off succinctly and without giving much thought to the comments pouring out of his mouth, “But I want you to leave.”

The words were like a punch in the gut, and 001 lost her playfulness to suddenly stare, brows drawing together. “What?”

“I want you to leave. Possibly more than I’ve wanted anything in quite some time.” Q stepped forward, bravery getting the best of his commonsense again, and he swiftly came toe-to-toe with her to say while looking in her eyes, “You’ve bothered my branch quite enough.”

Her wings had shot out, broad curvatures of gold, but Q had never felt less daunted in his life. When 001 opened her pretty mouth to contradict him in some way, he snapped, “Leave!” When the word echoed around the room, he winced and stepped back, shocked and suddenly realizing what he was doing. 001 blinked at him, tense and itching to get away and unsure why.

Q had very nearly taken hold of her mind without realizing it, and that knowledge scared him more than 001 honestly did. “Since you obviously have no business here, I must insist you leave before I report this to M – or call in 007,” he fumbled words together, knowing that the last threat was a low-blow but not caring. 007 and 001 had fought once, he remembered dimly, and 007 had unflinchingly made mince-meat of her. Moral codes told many men not to hit a woman, but there were women…and then there was 001, and 001 had definitely deserved it. 007 had walked away with a lot of bruises and blood running down his face from his nose and mouth, but 001 had become famous for avoiding him since then.

Frankly, Q would have said anything – even the truth, that he didn’t know his own strength anymore – just to get her out of there. He was reeling from how close he’d come to releasing the power fermenting beneath his skin, and now his wings were hanging from his back, crooked at the level of his hips and twitching slightly. When 001 spoke, his hand clenched into a fist again, and the supernatural energy inside of him sent electric skitters up the bones of his hands and arm – threatening to breach the barriers of flesh.

“Y-Yes, Quartermaster. I apologize.” The winged woman didn’t sound particularly apologetic, but she did sound uneasy. Q’s boldness had surprised her almost as much as that strange feeling of power, as she’d never had such an explosive encounter with him before. Wings warily hunched
over her shoulders, the troublesome agent backed out. She never turned her back on the Quartermaster, people would later note.

With a bone-deep sigh, Q tipped his head back, nearly dislodging his glasses with the sudden motion. He flinched at the new sensory input of his feather-tips brushing the floor when his wings dropped a few inches more. There was silence in Q-branch, utter silence.

“I’ll be in my office,” Q said as calmly as possible, finishing internally, ‘Recovering. And trying to figure out when it suddenly became a good idea to face off with 001.’ The confrontation had done exactly what he’d been hoping to avoid: it had riled up his emotions again, and his carefully constructed wall of control had once again shattered into farcical pieces. Maybe he’d never had a hope of regaining control at all.

His energy was crackling so wildly about him that he turned off a computer with a fizzling snap as he came too close to it, and his sharp curse was the only thing to break the silence all the way until he’d locked himself in his office again.

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Chapter End Notes

So Q now has to deal with being a full-blown Angel again! And don't worry - I still plan to have a Silva explain his motivations, which are pretty unclear to everyone (except me - I'm omnipotent that way).
Art

Chapter Summary

Sorry, not writing! Just a picture of Q and his wings ;) A bit angsty/sad.

Chapter Notes

I'm a bit slow on this next chapter, so please take this humble offering of my art in thanks for your continued patience! And fear not, this image doesn't have anything to do with the plot...I think.

Honestly, I'm not sure exactly how the plot is going to go beyond the next chapter XP

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Chapter End Notes

On my DeviantArt account, this picture came with food for thought/a title:

'Why do people break beautiful things?'
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

Bond goes to check up on Q after the 001-incident gets around.

Or the chapter in which Bond is both sexy and calming in turns, and plans are made.

Chapter Notes

Hopefully this chapter will answer a lot of questions - if not, hopefully you all know that I answer practically any plot-questions via comments XP Beware of spoilers if you ask, though.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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The story with 001 traveled fast. Bond hadn’t actually known she was back, which was unsurprising, since the woman was very careful to avoid him after she’d tangled with him last time – she loved pushing people, and was supremely shocked when 007 pushed back without any apparent reserve. She actually stayed away from almost any person she didn’t know for certain she could take apart in the sparring ring or in bed.

Bond had to own-up to a certain protectiveness and temper he felt at the idea of 001 sauntering in and making Q-branch miserable – or Q in particularly, if he was being perfectly honest. He couldn’t properly sympathize with what it must be like to have something you’ve missed for years returned to you, but since he’d literally been in the Quartermaster’s presence from the moment he’d gotten his wings back, 007 thought he at least understood how much emotional tension Q was suffering from. 001 wasn’t conducive to a calm atmosphere or a relaxing conversation at the best of times, and if Q’s mood was still as raw as it had been in the hallway – when he’d pressed his head against Bond’s chest and admitted to fear and weakness – then dealing with the female Angel would have been like trying to eat an orange with sliced lips.

Using some tricks he’d learned in the game of subterfuge, Bond came into Q-branch and scouted out the situation first. He was amused to note that, after the usual moment of fright that seemed to come from the boffins at the sight of wings, the Q-branch minions actually seemed pleased – almost relieved – to see him. Apparently Bond had hung around Q often enough that some of the foreboding aura had worn off. Either way, the minions were quick to answer his questions, fleshing out what had happened and telling him that Q had been locked in his office ever since. Terse emails sent out at regular intervals proved that he wasn’t dying in there or otherwise in need. Perhaps Q’s underlings would still have tried to coax him out, but apparently the emails had been quite explicit that he be left alone for the safety of all involved. Q-branch had long-since learned not to take the threats of their Quartermaster lightly.

Of course, 00-agents were a different matter: they tended to take threats as personal challengers.
Smiling easily and jauntily at the minions, who tried their best but failed to dissuade him, 007 smoothly approached the door. If the minions were hoping the lock would slow him down, they were mistaken, as he fished keys out of his pocket and proceeded to open the door as if it belonged to his own flat.

Upon entering, Bond was glad that Q was, indeed, in good health, more or less. He was radiating stress like a heat-lamp, but was physically fine and sitting at his desk. He didn’t look up as 007 entered, because he seemed to be fighting with his laptop. Actually, it seemed that he was trying to get it to stay on, but his internal energy had other ideas as it sparked and sent the screen to flickering and blacking out.

Q made a sound of pure, loud exasperation as he flicked a wing inadvertently and its long feathers smashed over a waste-basket. Sitting at his desk, computer now completely dark and even smoking a little, the newly-winged Quartermaster shielded his eyes with a hand against his forehead. He was trembling with the force of keeping still and not just exploding in frustration. His black and white wing came back in slowly, as if of its own accord, looking like a recalcitrant child returning uncertainly towards a parent.

“Hello, 007,” said Q in a very strained tone, stating without looking up or moving his hand, “As you can see, I’m having quite a hard time at this.” He lightened his tone, but it only succeeded in sounding hysterical. “Come again later?”

Shaking his head at the state of emotional disarray the Quartermaster was obviously in, Bond slid the door shut with a rueful noise that might have been a chuckle. For some people, this level of distraction would be normal, but Q was a man used to such a high level of control that Bond felt sorry for him. He also was slightly amused, because Q was the only person he’d ever seen short-circuit a piece of hardware with their bare hands.

Q had moved his hand enough to brush tangled strands of dark brown hair up off his brow, also allowing him to pause and eye Bond with sudden suspicion. “How’d you get in, anyway?” he demanded. As he’d rolled his chair back from his desk in unspoken defeat, his wings had splayed out, hanging down right to the floor in a stark show of black and white. Like the Quartermaster, they were slim and sleek, and Bond wondered if they would have matched so well had Q been given the chance to develop more musculature in his early years.

“I still have your keys,” Bond eventually answered. He jingled them on his fingers unapologetically, his grin likewise unashamed. 00-agents were legendary for rarely being embarrassed about anything, so keeping the keys to the Quartermaster’s personal office was barely even a blip on Bond’s radar. “I figured they might come in handy.”

“And, lo-and-behold, they did,” Q finished for him dryly, then snarled another curse as an apparently-random muscle spasm sent his left wing sweeping across the floor to hit the base of a fan. Bond’s reflexes were put to the test as he stopped smirking and instead leapt forward to grab the fan before it toppled over. Q had his hands on it by then, too, being quick to the mark as well. “This is getting tiring,” Q complained a little breathlessly as the fan was set upright again, having thankfully been off anyway.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself, Q,” Bond suggested calmly, righting the fan but making no move to touch Q’s wings – despite the fact that they were practically tangling with his legs. All 00-agents had their quirks, and Q was coming to see that 007 observed a strange sort of etiquette around people’s wings…or perhaps just around the Quartermaster in general. While Q pondered this, 007 took up a seat on the couch, stretching out long, muscular legs and draping his grey wings to either side like a cormorant in the sun. “Don’t you remember what it was like to be little? To be a kid?
Your wings didn’t work so perfectly then either, and that passed.”

“Yes,” Q admitted, with a wry, tightlipped smile, “but at that point, none of my limbs were coordinated, and my wings were a good deal smaller. I was far less of a feathered wrecking-ball at that age.”

007 just snorted, patently unimpressed. He let his blue eyes skate up and down Q’s lean form. “I’d hardly call you a wrecking-ball.” Etiquette aside, Bond reached forward with a wing to flick it against a few of Q’s pale primaries. “A slightly inconvenient klutz at best.”

Since Q had actually been fairly coordinated before all of this, thanks to his training, it was still a step down from his usual standards – however, phrased like that, it also sounded a lot more normal. Compared to a 00-agent, it was practically an applause, especially from 007, who held records for the amount of damage his missions caused. But still… “You’re forgetting the fact that it’s more than a matter of limbs, James. All of those skills I…picked up…from Silva are now turned on full, and I very nearly hypnotized 001, for Heaven’s sakes, and-! Why are you smirking like that?” Q’s building rant stopped as he narrowed his eyes.

Of course, 007 just kept smiling. “You called me James,” he replied smoothly and confidently, the rogue.

Q’s eyes narrowed further before he deduced, “Denying it would get me nowhere.”

“Whereas accepting it could get you anywhere,” Bond added as the smile took on a more suggestive edge, his eyes glinting with both humor and something hotter.

“Everything’s an innuendo with you!” Q blurted to hide that he was both flattered and embarrassed. He was unaware of how his eyes were dancing around now, trying and failing to find something to fix on besides Bond’s athletic form gracefully sprawled on his couch. “Why in the world must you always revert to innuendo?”

“Do you want more of the same-” Meaning more bloody innuendo that would make Q turn red even as large portions of his blood went south. “-Or the truth?”

The last startled Q a bit, especially because Bond seemed abruptly serious. Arms draped over the back of the couch with his wings spread beneath them, showing off the strong lines of his shoulders and biceps as well as the powerful contours of his chest, 007 was looking at him with an atypically sober expression. It was that more than anything that forced Q to collect himself and answer calmly and a little bit more blithely than he intended, “The truth, of course. Always.”

Instead of saying something catty about how asking 00-agents for the full truth was risky business, Bond instead answered with immediate sincerity, “Because it distracts you.” For a moment, Q just sat there, vaguely stunned, not noticing that the steady, intense hum of energy in his system quieted a bit as if to listen – as if not sure he’d heard right. Bond, as unfazed as ever but his voice devoid of slippery humor for once, simply continued, “You’ve got more focus than anyone I know, Q, but the problem is that it doesn’t seem to have an off switch.”

“You’re right, it doesn’t,” Q admitted dully, remembering their conversation in the hallway. It was both surprising and rather nice to know that 007 listened to him, and even agreed with him on occasions.

“But I-” Bond continued, sitting forward with that subtle grace that came from muscles moving with oiled fluidity, a man at home in his body. His eyes were intense, but the burning in them wasn’t purely carnal this time – although much of it was. Just as much, however, came from the pure,
intoxicating intensity of interest and sincerity. “-Am an expert in creating off-switches where there aren’t any.” Some of his humor slipped back as he added with a small curl of his lips, “Granted, I usually do so with bullets, shooting until the problem turns off, but the training works for less brutal situations as well.”

“Oh, does it?” Q didn’t know where the challenge came from, but somehow he dredged up his dry tone from somewhere.

“Q, how many thoughts were going through your head while I kissed you in the hallway?”

That coaxed a shade of crimson onto Q’s face, as he couldn’t recall a single solitary thought in that moment, unless it had stemmed from pure sensation. He couldn’t very well say that he’d been thinking about how Bond’s aggressiveness sent off a charge of equal intensity down his spine like a rocket, or how he’d thought about how ‘silk and steel’ fit Bond so well, with his smooth demeanor and grace all wrapped around pure muscle. No, somehow he did not think those counted as thoughts… “One point to you, 007,” he said formally, but with enough chagrin in his voice to make it more familiar. “But the fact remains, my concentration is necessary, even if the rest of me is all over the place.”

Bond grunted, as close to an agreement as Q was likely to get. Still, the agent had conceded the point. “So, when do you think you’ll level out? Get-” He lifted a hand to vaguely indicate the Quartermaster in general, from his fidgety but elegant wings to his computer-killing fingertips. “-You back in working order? And don’t say ‘not a bloody clue’, just think about it for a minute.”

With Bond so suddenly switching from distracting Q to focusing him, it was obvious this was important. So while Q could not figure out 007’s motives just yet, he did as commanded, drumming his fingers on his knee while his lips thinned into a contemplative line. “I can’t see myself regaining any semblance of control – to say nothing of normalcy – for at least a week. Despite the fact that I’m knocking things over left and right, I’m actually getting better with these.” He flexed a wing in a gentle way to prove his point, avoiding the fan this time. “But my supernatural energy is another matter. That could take a bit.”

“But you’ve worked on that before?” Bond, canny as ever and trained to read people more that books, had read something hopeful in Q’s pensive expression.

Still looking into the middle distance, the Quartermaster – after a hesitant pause – slowly nodded. “In theory, it should be just like trying to harness my energy when mastering Silva’s decidedly un-delightful ‘lessons’, only with the power cranked up. I’d say for certain that I could handle this, but I never quite mastered ‘lesson two’.” He chewed the inside of his lip a moment before catching himself and stopping the habit in infancy. “But the tools are basically the same…” He drifted off in thought, working this new (and admittedly fascinating) problem over in his head until he felt a little trigger of sensation coming from one of his new limbs. The Quartermaster jerked his eyes over to find Bond idly playing with one of Q’s flight-feathers, smoothing out the barbs between his fingers before shamelessly roughing them up again. “Stop that,” Q commanded.

“You put it in my lap.”

“I-!” Okay, maybe he had. He simply hadn’t done it consciously. His attempt to pull his right wing back in was halted because Bond still had a hold of his feathers, and the light in his blue eyes said that it would swiftly become a game – a game Bond would win – if Q kept pulling. “Fine. Keep it then. But stop ruffing them up – I’ve been without wings for too long to remember how to straighten them.” Q had already turned back to his computer, completely oblivious to the fact that his fingers had stopped sending out sparks and disrupting it (although it was a miracle that the computer had turned back on at all, in its abused condition). Actually, the storm of energy had boiled down to a
steady simmer once again.

Q hadn’t noticed, but Bond did, and grinned triumphantly while Q wasn’t looking while he went back to sifting a finger down the longest of Q’s feathers. Unconsciously (seemingly), the Quartermaster swiveled his chair so that the two were closer, allowing the wing to settle a little bit more readily in 007’s grip.

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Mentally, Q was at a crossroads. He was pretty sure now why Bond had been asking when, conceivably, Q would come to terms with his new state of being – because if Q could guess at that, then Silva likely could, too, and it created a timeframe for when the man would make his next move.

The question was: would he attack before the Quartermaster had recovered, or after?

The obvious answer was before. It was only thanks to luck and a world of self-control that Q was as physically functional as he was, so it made sense that Silva would mount his next – and probably last – attack while Q’s internal energy and external new limbs were all giving him a run for his money. But that begged the question as to why Silva had taught him control over those powers in the first place. ‘Did he built me up to tear me down from higher?’ Q wondered distantly. But then his thoughts delved deeper.

Silva had shown an unhealthy interest in Q from the beginning, and as dangerous and often painful as that interest was, it still didn’t seem like it was born out of animosity. Quite to the contrary, Q was unable to forget how often Silva had treated Q as an ally, or as a slightly-wayward equal. Silva had treated Q like a valued prodigy, and had taught him like a rather promising…apprentice.

Just the thought made Q shiver, but the feel of Bond’s hands lightly touching his feathers still vibrated at the back of his mind, soothing even while Q’s attention was elsewhere. Even the man’s presence in the room seemed calming, 007’s supernatural energy serving as a sort of white-noise to dampen some of the chatter in Q’s mind. It allowed him to delve deeper into that thought while still thinking as concisely and calmly as a computer – yet another trait that made him the Quartermaster of legend that he was.

“He’ll attack before, but only because he wants me,” Q said suddenly but with iron surety, drawing Bond’s attention instantly. “I’m a project he’s fixated on, and while he may not be able to handle me once I’ve got my wings and my energy back under wraps, he’s got to know that I’ll be a wreck for… at least a week.” That timeframe still seemed solid. Q also knew that he wasn’t boasting when he said he’d be hard to handle once he gained his self-control back – Silva might have had a lot more practice at the skills they both had, but Q was aware of how far he himself had come. “Obviously, he’s been having a hard time reaching me directly, hence the kidnappings and breaking into more distal and less protected systems of MI6.” ‘Which I am going to totally overhaul when this is all over.’ “So this is his window of opportunity.”

“Then why not just weaken you in the first place?” Bond asked, but not in a tone that said he questioned anything of what Q had said. In fact, he seriously looked like he believed it all too well, but was asking necessary questions to ensure that Q’s brain approached the dilemma from every angle. “You’ve said it yourself, that you’ll be stronger after this is all over.”

“Yes, but when we dealt with Silva…” Now Q was delving into 00-territory – going on hunches. He bit his lip briefly before diving right in, “Did you get the impression that he was bored?”

Bond’s eyes narrowed, becoming unreadable but definitely not friendly as he remembered the pale-haired man. “I got the impression that he was psychotic,” 007 replied uncharitably.
Sighing at the theatrics and the unnecessary temper, Q rolled his chair so that he was facing Bond, sitting with their knees almost touching so Q could sensibly look him in the eye. “Silva didn’t have any interest in you and 006 besides how he could use you, because he saw you as beneath him. Do you agree with me?”

For a moment, there was a mutinous look in 007’s eyes, but he finally blew out a sigh and nodded his head. Sitting back in the couch with his hands draped over his lap, he looked like a recalcitrant teenager – one with a lot of muscle and a license to kill. Good thing Q was trained to deal with that sort of thing.

“Whereas he had a great fascination with me – whom he likened to himself…numerous times.” Now Q had to admit to a nervous shiver as the memory sent icy chills down his spine, and shadow-touches across the right side of his collarbone. “While I won’t deny that Silva greatly enjoyed putting me in my place, he also seemed quite interested in convincing me to see his way of thinking. Silva is a lonely mind.” Q looked at Bond, searching for understanding. “And he thinks he’s found someone like himself.”

“Then why give you wings?” 007 asked the million-dollar question. “If he wants someone like himself and hates winged Angels, then why force you to regain yours?” Bond’s ash-and-smoke feathers lifted to trail down Q’s charcoal-and-snow appendage, a reverent touch that was light enough to create a cascade of little shivers. “Not that I’m complaining.”

“I have two possibilities.” Q held up two fingers, having already thought this out. He knew that nervousness slipped past his usual façade of professional calm, though, because neither possibility appealed to him. In fact, both scared the daylights out of him. “One is that whatever Silva did to me, he has also done to himself, with the same effects. Since Silva was born without wings, due to a genetic defect most likely, it is possible that the same technique will not work. In which case-” Q folded down his middle finger so that only his index finger remained extended to indicate his last point. “-Silva is without wings, but sees some benefit to me having them. And the only reason I can see for that is if Silva sees me as some sort of pet project, one in which he’s outdone himself.”

Bond was still outwardly lazing back on the couch, but throughout Q’s explanation, every one of his muscles had started to become taut even as his supernatural energy – usually quite controlled – began to crackle and flair in his gut. It was clear by his narrowed eyes and foreboding frown just how displeased he was with the picture Q was painting. “I don’t think I care for you being ‘Silva’s project’,” he made his opinion clear.

Q snorted, a sound which tripped into a brittle laugh. “Well, I know that I bloody don’t, but if Silva actually had found a way to grow his own wings back as well, then he’ll be even more dangerous. At least with the second option, I theoretically have the upper-hand.”

“What?” It wasn’t a question – not quite – but it had the pull of one to draw out further explanation. There was also a great weight of disapproval and unease in the single word when 007 said it.

The unease was not unfounded. Q grimaced, but also dared to reach out a hand and stroke Bond’s knee in a calming gesture. It felt so odd to be using intimate gestures on what was, after all, a coworker, but since they’d been kissing often enough when no one was looking, he felt he could indulge. “Theoretically,” Q repeated with a nervous sigh, glad when 007’s hand came to cover his, pinning it to the curve of muscle just above his kneecap. “Ignoring my present state of being as uncoordinated as a baby gazelle, I presently have all of the advantages to being a fully winged Angel – but also the advantages to spending time without. It is even possible that I surpass Silva in some of those skills, such as the way I sense Angel energy to make up for these.” He gestured grouchily at
his glasses, wondering if perhaps his eyesight would start to improve now that his crippled condition had been reversed. That was a thought for another time, however.

Now he had to say the sobering truth, and was glad for the way Bond’s strong, scarred hand clasped around his, callous fingertips wrapping around Q’s slender bones. “But, just like any set of data, it doesn’t always apply cleanly to the real world. I might have more skills…”

“But Silva likely has more practice.”

“And often,” Q agreed with a somber nod, “quality wins over quantity. I don’t honestly want to go up against him and test that.”

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Chapter End Notes

Audience participation time! I'm not sure if I'm going to give Silva his wings back or not - I've set things up so it can go either way! My plans (tentative as they are, but getting more solid) will also work either way. But I'd like some feedback/opinions to help me decide :D
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

MI6 plans for the possibility of Silva's attack.

Or the chapter in which those plans don't go as planned, and Silva returns to the field...

Chapter Notes

Please ignore anything I say about guns - I have zero knowledge about the specifics. I know a few basic facts, but mostly...mostly, just remember that this is fantasy, and go with it.

And be prepared for the return of 006 and 4 in this chapter! Lol, and Mothra

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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The general worry was that Silva would attack one of the peripheral sections of MI6 again, as he’d done by weaseling through M’s email and Medical’s air vents. By this point, however, only Accounting had been left unmolested, and it was hard to imagine anything dangerous coming through that route – there simply wasn’t much to work with in Accounting. Nonetheless, Q was instructed to avoid the place and to instead stay in the heart of MI6. The Quartermaster had huffed at this, pointing out that Silva had been attacking blind-spots, which were, by definition, almost impossible to foresee. Bond had ignored the snark, patiently saying that blind-spots could be found, if one was diligent enough.

M immediately agreed with Q and Bond that an attack was likely to happen within the next week, and if not, it didn’t hurt to be prepared. There were quite a few double-o’s off-mission right now, too, making it easier to beef-up security. Usually, security personnel were comprised of Mundanes, but if you had lions, then why not use them instead of guard-dogs?

004, 6, 7, and 1 were all in London, and soon called in. No doubt having heard the story of how 001 and 007 had tangled once before, M assigned 001 to be her own guard – this was sensible, because even an attack meant to hurt/kidnap the Quartermaster could easily lead to collateral damage to the head of MI6. That, and the only person that 001 didn’t either try to seduce or drive to homicidal rage was M, who actually seemed to make 001 a little scared. Then again, M made everyone a little scared.

004, 6, and 7 would be spread throughout MI6.

“The biggest advantage that Silva actually has is the fact that he can sense Angel energy,” Q had said, as they’d planned, “If he gets close enough, he’ll be able to sense our supernatural energy and follow it.”
“Or avoid it,” Bond had added in, as if they were one mind, laying out the same ideas from two different, calm mouths. “If we spread out, he’ll be forced to treat each energy signature he reads as either friend or foe – he won’t know if it’s Q or a double-o.” There had been sage nods at this, and it was agreed that everyone would split up, except M and 001, and excluding the occasional check-in with Q when the Angels would meet up to make sure the Quartermaster was indeed fine. Clearly, the babysitting irritated Q, but he didn’t argue. He simply stayed for the rest of the planning and then left with 004, 6, and 7 in tow to outfit them, just like for any other mission.

As they began walking, Q watched Bond sidelong as they walked at each other’s shoulder. “You can sense individual Angels, can’t you?” he asked quietly, and when 007 looked over, those green eyes were giving him a speculative look. Q continued, just as steady, “You said as much at your flat, but I hadn’t really thought about it. But you really can.”

Before Bond could open his mouth to reply, 006 – walking just a few steps behind them with 004, suddenly burst out laughing. “You were in James’s flat?! Spot-on, James! I think you deserve a reward for this.” Alec, still grinning hugely despite the obvious, sizzling glare he was getting from Bond – and an even more menacing one from Q – added in a more suggestive tone, “Unless you already got your reward?”

Q, despite complaining that he couldn’t control his wings for the life of him, bunched the muscles of his back and set his jaw in a brief moment of concentration, sending his right wing out and back to slam solidly across 006’s chest and face. The force of it was quite spectacular, but was nothing compared to the surprise, which meant Alec was wholly unprepared for the assault from his deceptively fragile-looking Quartermaster. Sputtering and choking on a sound of surprise, Alec nearly fell right over as the slap of feathers on his face spun him.

004 dodged neatly to one side as his partner’s inky-black wings snapped out to full width in a reflexive attempt to defend and stabilize himself. While the pale-winged Angel seemed slightly put-out by seeing petty revenge from his Quartermaster of all people, he didn’t say anything.

“Problem, 004?” Q asked frostily as 006 recovered, wanting to know how 004 would take this attack on Alec.

But Aiden just returned his gaze calmly, blinking once and sighing. “He deserved it,” he said with mild regret, then continued walking. 006 shouted after him indignantly, but only 007 – watching carefully – saw the teasing smile coil up one side of 004’s mouth as he just let Alec run to catch up with him.

“He’s secretly a monster, that one,” Bond observed under his breath, quietly enough this time that he wouldn’t be overheard by the two Angels now walking in front of them.

“What?” Q turned, just catching the words himself and not understanding them a bit. His eyebrows were squirrelled up away under his hair in bemused query.

Bond just held a secret smile in the corner of his mouth, shaking his head and declaring, “Nothing.”

006 was (more or less) behaving himself by the time all of them reached Q-branch. That many Angels in one place nearly sent the minions scuttling, but the sight of Q walking – relaxed, at least, and for all intents and purposes in control – in their midst reassured the Mundanes. Just to be careful, Q took everyone down to the Dungeons anyway.

“What is this?” 006 asked while Q began pulling out weaponry. Alec was looking down at the large
tabby cat weaving in and out of his legs as if they were two catnip-scented fence posts. Alec didn’t seem to know what to do, and was even standing with his wings half out in a posture of defensiveness.

Q snorted, hiding it as delicately as possible, and returned to dump guns on the table. “Mothra. That’s Mothra. Don’t let your wings dip too low, or he’ll try to swat the feathers.”

Having nearly done just that, 006 arched his wings back up and in against his back, now glaring between the cat and Q, as if this were a personal attack set upon him. 004 gave another slightly exasperated sigh and approached the table. He didn’t have his arm in a sling, but it was obviously still in a light cast. 007 gave him a look. “Are you even able to shoot a gun?”

“If you’re asking if Medical and Psych have officially cleared me for duty, no,” 004 admitted with a wince, even while both James and Alec grinned, no doubt thinking, ‘We taught him well.’ But 004 quickly picked up a handgun in his undamaged right hand as he elaborated, “But M bent the rules a bit, since this is not officially a mission. We’re still inside MI6, after all.”

“Yes, but can you shoot a gun without hurting yourself, love?” Alec asked with a gentle smile.

004’s eyes hardened for a second (back to 007 and 6, but facing Q so the Quartermaster noticed), and then he swung to one side with the handgun gripped in his one good hand. The Dungeons weren’t set up for firing, but they were set up to survive a bombing and also had the perk of being mostly empty – 004 shot off a round into the far wall without needing to brace the weapon with his healing limb. A Mundane couldn’t have accurately (or probably even safely) done that, but with Angel energy rising and flooding his system, 004 shot one-handed without hesitating. He put the gun back on the table to refill the clip, left arm slow but not clumsy. 007 and 6 were both staring rather idiotically at the wall, where they could see – even from his distance – that the bullets had all imbedded in a tight cluster.

Before alarms went off, Q darted over to the intercom to call an ‘all-clear’, and although he didn’t chastise 004, he did shoot him an ‘I’m not amused’ look. With 004’s preferences now in mind, he brought out a few more weapons, although the close quarters of MI6 meant that larger, ranged weapons were out of the picture anyway. “Now that we’ve all satisfied our need for adrenalin this evening,” Q said tartly, and 004 had the decency to duck his head and flush, “let’s get everyone equipped so that I can get you lot out of my hair before you give someone a fright. Agent Bond, your personal gun.” He handed over the weapon keyed to his palm-print. “You did your level best to destroy it the last time I gave it to you, but you’ll be happy to know that, once again, I have worked a miracle. Now, if you could work a miracle and please return it?”

“You know me better than that, Q,” Bond grinned.

The Quartermaster let out a huffed breath and rolled his eyes. “I suppose I do. Try not to lose it at least. If you manage to ‘misplace’ a weapon in the heart of MI6, I might have to have Psych dock your IQ.”

“You can do that?” 006 looked up from where he was picking out something reasonably destructive.

“For certain levels of sheer idiocy, I imagine I could work something out.” Q informed him with the dryness of a desert but a disturbing level of sincerity. “Now: earpieces, all of you. The intercom system works well enough, but it’s easily compromised or damaged. The building isn’t big enough for me to lose any of you, but regular reports would be greatly appreciated.” He handed out the tiny earpieces, watching as the agents nudged them into their ears. Pulling out his laptop and setting them up, he quickly tested the feed, assured that he could speak back and forth with them. He also made it
very clear that all of them would be hearing each other at all times – he meant this as a warning not to do/say anything embarrassing, but 006 just grinned, 007 put on his patently innocent face, and 004 gave him a look that said he honestly didn’t know what he was getting at.

Q just had to give up some days, he honestly did.

As everyone began leaving to start their patient, predatory sweeps of MI6 (Mothra tailing 006 for a bit before *very* belatedly realizing he had no cat treats on him), 007 stayed behind, asking lightly, “What about one of those little radios, Q? I had one of those a few missions back, and rather liked it.”

Raising an eyebrow and giving him a deadpan stare, Q countered, “You crushed it and used the pieces as a lock-pick.”

“Exactly – see? I loved it. One of the most useful things Q-branch has ever given me,” Bond glibly returned without a hitch, then teased, “Don’t tell me Q-branch is all out?”

Sighing as his professional pride was so expertly pricked, Q turned to begin hunting for one of the little things. “I don’t see why you need it,” he griped as he looked in a low series of drawers, wings flaring out for no discernable reason except to take up space. Thankfully, there was nothing to tip over down here. “You’ve already got the earpiece, and if you get lost and I need to track you inside MI6, it’ll be a sad day indeed.” Nonetheless, he stood up, a tiny square barely bigger than the face of a watch nestled in his palm. “Fine then, have your toys. More to break, eh?”

“I don’t break *everything* Q-branch gives me,” Bond chided as he took the small device.

“Really?” Q drawled in disbelief, “Name one thing.”

Bond was fast – Q had to give him that. One moment they were standing across from each other, Q with his hands challengingly on his hips, the next Bond was kissing him rather thoroughly. Q’s thoughts scattered until all he was aware of were Bond’s lips, tongue, and teeth, and his own hands shifting restlessly across Bond’s shirt as if wondering why there was clothing between himself and hot, muscled flesh. He didn’t notice at all as Bond flicked on the radio signal and slipped it into Q’s pocket. Q was busy enough that he wouldn’t notice either the signal or the radio unless he looked for it.

Or unless 007 had to look for him.

“I didn’t break you, I hope?” Bond said huskily but with a jovial inflection as he pulled back just to hear Q’s quick breathing. What would be the wrist-joint of a human arm on his wings nudged forward, stroking down the sensitive under-sides of Q’s half-spread wings. Q shuddered and his eyes fell shut again, although they’d barely managed to flutter open.

“You might…” Clearly, the Quartermaster was having a hard time centering his thoughts and making them into ordered words. He swallowed, hands braced on Bond’s biceps in a tight grip, then got himself in order, “You might have a point, 007.”

“Please, call me James,” the agent said with a grin, ignoring the staring minions who had finally started to return to their work after 004’s little shooting exhibition.

But Q wasn’t quite that flustered. He shook his head, opening his eyes and looking away to deny that he was flushed, pupils more dilated than they had any right to be, voice rough enough that he had to clear it. “Nope. You’re enough of an insufferable menace today.” Looking up at 007 but not actually letting go of his arms yet, Q threatened dryly, “Maybe I should have hit you instead of 006,
Holding up his hands as if in defeat, 007 stepped back, rewarded by grudging smirk from Q. The Quartermaster looked like he wanted to smile and shake his head as 007’s antics. “Understood, Quartermaster. I will take my insufferable self elsewhere.”

“Inflict it elsewhere, you mean,” Q retorted, but his eyes were clearly warm behind his glasses. His voice reflected that as he spoke more softly, so his voice would carry just to 007, “Go on, James. I’ll see you shortly.”

And James just nodded, repeating more solemnly, “Understood, Quartermaster.”

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The first day was tense but ultimately dull. There were no attacks, and despite Q-branch working hard at the information Severine had given them, there was also no progress on tracking down Silva’s location. Q suspected that Silva was with an entourage, considering how easily and happily he hypnotized Mundanes into doing his dirty work, but if Silva had gone to ground alone…finding him would get exponentially harder.

“Needle in a haystack,” Q quipped as he sat back in his desk, knowing how trite he sounded. He put his hands in his lap and just stared at the screen for a minute, because he knew that if he became much more frustrated, his supernatural energy would start flaring up again. He’d already burned out two computers (for good – they showed no signs of renewed life), and didn’t fancy working on a third.

In his ear was the quiet chatter from 004, 6, and 7’s earpieces. 001 had an earpiece as well, but he had another minion monitoring her, just because he found he couldn’t stand the woman. Q was tense enough as it was without the help of the femme fatale, and at the moment tension-plus-Q equaled accidental electrocutions of hardware. The other three 00-agents had been verbally checking in at regular intervals, and Q had likewise been turning on his end of the intercom to check back – to say that he was still there, still fine, not kidnapped, etc. He relayed that to 001 and M, too. 007 seemed to insist on checking in personally, and while Q had to wonder if this was because of some discreet, secret order of M’s, he was mostly flabbergasted by how deftly the man found him. Q-branch was rather large, and Q moved through it almost constantly, yet Bond unerringly found him whenever he wanted to. The man looked awful smug about it, too, every time…

Determined not to give the man the satisfaction of…whatever it was…Q pretended to be immune to his looks and just kept working. Always politely (but usually also managing to be in Q’s personal space) Bond would ask how things were progressing. Sometimes Q would reply truthfully, sometimes sarcastically, although generally it amounted to the same thing: progress was simply not happening. Q wondered if Bond was actually there to assess his tension level, because the more tartly Q answered, the longer 007 stayed, although most of the time, when he left, the Quartermaster felt a bit more centered. 007 didn’t try to kiss him in front of his minions again, but sometimes he’d place a hand on his shoulder and gently knead the muscles that were drawn up tight beneath his grip. Sometimes an ashy wing would be guided along the edge of one of Q’s new ones, a seemingly unconscious point of contact. Perhaps because of this, Q didn’t blow out any more computers by the time evening set in.

It was then that things got a bit more interesting.

“Quartermaster, 001 reporting in with a disturbance,” the Q-branch underling who was monitoring the femme fatale called out calmly.
Immediately, Q stopped avoiding 001. Nodding briskly, he typed a few keys to bring her earpiece online along with the male 00-agents, another voice in his ear. He turned on his side of the intercom. “001. Report.”

“Shots fired, but I’m not sure how much of a threat level you want to consider this,” she said, the smooth edge of her voice hiding something more solid and steady, meaning she was on the job. But she didn’t sound tense yet. Then again, Q had heard 007 in the middle of a fire-fight tossing around jokes, so that didn’t mean much.

“Explain,” Q demanded calmly. The other double-o’s on the line had hushed up, listening as they were trained to and cutting out the background chatter.

“It’s an attack from outside MI6 – the only reason I’m paying any attention at all is that they’re aimed at us,” 001 said, sounding cold but slightly annoyed, “Mundane security is already on it, but M’s been in contact with the police force as well. I count about twenty gunmen, on the northeast side.”

“Casualties?”

“Only a few windows, Quartermaster, although I can only give you a report from inside. Do you want me on-site?”

Q thought about it, knowing that he was growing tense again as the joints of his hands ached, little crackles of energy jumping between the bones. He made a decision after barely pausing for four seconds, “Negative, 001. Unless M has something else to say on the matter that might convince me otherwise, I want you inside. If a group of Silva’s men are indeed trying to break in from outside-”

“That seems highly likely,” came 004’s brief voice, followed by the staccato beat of three shots. Unprepared for the bursts of sound, Q flinched, but 004 was talking again soon, “Sorry about that. I’m on the opposite side of the building from 001 and M, but another group just shot out the windows next to me. Returning fire.” More shots, calm and controlled, like 004 himself.

Q didn’t have to wait for the following words to identify the growl in his ear that preceded them: 006. “I’m going to back him up.”

“You will do no such thing, 006, until you’ve done a sweep of the perimeter to see if these are two localized attacks,” Q swiftly and coldly commanded, his mind working at a thousand miles a minute. “We already know that Silva can hypnotize and control very large groups of people at once, so as foolish as it may seem, he may truly have the numbers to attack MI6 from the outside without failing completely.” The thought made him slightly nauseous, because he honestly hadn’t considered this possibility – he hadn’t thought Silva was foolish or daring enough to do it.

“And why didn’t the local populace or authorities notice nearly two-score gunmen converging on MI6?” 007 asked in a low, menacing tone. By his tone, he hated this – hated how things had swung out of their control as swiftly as if they’d tossed the script out the window. Q rather hoped that 007 and the authorities didn’t meet up – clearly Bond was not happy with them.

001 answered. Having her with M meant that they had a direct line to the political arena. “M said that there were no reports of disturbances. It’s as if they materialized out of thin air,” the woman said as blandly and detachedly as if she were commenting on a person’s rather lamentable wardrobe choice.

Then 006 was back and talking again – apparently he’d actually done as the Quartermaster asked, which managed to surprise Q. Part of him was still used to the 00-agents disobeying him at every possible turn. “There’s at least one more attack. At this rate, I hope that the police haven’t got
anything better to do with their evening.” 004 must have turned his earpiece down, because they could only barely hear him in the background, barking out orders. 006, not being a pinnacle of group leadership, just started shooting. He gave his location and what statistics he could on this third attack-point.

“M had already informed the local authorities to keep on high-alert as soon as we labeled Silva as an imminent threat,” 001 came in, and for once Q was happy that M was both pragmatic and more than a touch paranoid. “So these attacks might have gotten the drop on them, but at least they’re ready.” It was almost possible to picture the beautiful woman rolling her eyes, because 001’s disdain for local authorities was legendary.

“Q?” Bond’s voice.

“007, I want you to continue sweeping the building – but make your way to 004,” Q immediately gave him direction, bringing up feed from the cameras around the building to take a look at the situation himself. “Where are you?”

“West wing.”

“Then you’re nearest 004 anyway. With his injuries, I don’t want him to be holding a position alone, especially since the police are having a hard time reaching the area thanks to traffic.” Q didn’t mention civilians; he didn’t want to think about it. “And before you ask – I’m fine. For once, being in the windowless belly of MI6 appears to be an advantage.”

There were multiple grunts and chuckles of amusement that sifted through the intercom, but Q listened most to the low, soft laugh of James, saying that Q had managed to appease him. “Fine. On my way.”

“Glad you feel like following orders today.”

“Some days there are only witless orders,” 007 replied flippantly, sounding like he was on the move, “I make a habit of never following witless orders.”

Q smiled a wry smile, hoping Bond could hear it in his voice even though he couldn’t see it, “I’m the one usually giving those orders, 007.”

Bond didn’t seem repentant: “And some days you’re witless. Don’t let it hit you too hard, Quartermaster – even those of us with a monstrously high IQ have our off-moments.”

“Speak for yourself, 007,” Q couldn’t help but smile and snicker, before moving to turn off his side of the connection, “Report whatever you find. Q out.” And he pushed the button, hearing the 00-agents in one ear but now able to talk freely to his own branch. He got them all monitoring the situations, many computers now instead of just his showing video feed of the attacks. Q himself began diverting traffic, because manually changing traffic lights had always been a secret love of his. That, and removing as many civilians as possible from the equation uncoiled some of the worry in his belly. By now, it took an immense amount of effort just to keep his Angel energy under control, enough so that he could feel it eating away at his focus and making his hair stick to the back of his neck with sweat. His wings fidgeted, but by now, everyone just ignored it when one bumped into them – just another hazard of the job.

As Q-branch began to settle into a rhythm, the Quartermaster’s momentum finally catching everyone up in his wake until they were one big wave, Q backed off to let them work and to let himself breathe. He stood back out of the way a bit, taking deep breaths and rubbing his temples with his fingertips. The double-o’s seems to have everything handled, M was fine, 004 wasn’t shooting
anymore but had also reported back that he hadn’t strained any injuries, always a plus. 006 had sounded unguardedly relieved, the big softy.

But what was really on Q’s mind was that this didn’t quite add up. Sure, Silva seemed to have a lot of people, but in the middle of London with the police already on the alert, this still seemed like nothing more than a suicide run. Q couldn’t ignore the threat of that many people shooting at MI6, but he also found he couldn’t believe they’d get in.

He jumped, feeling something brush one of his wings, looking…down, only to see, of all things, Mothra. The big tom-cat had batted at one of Q’s primary feathers as the wing had drooped.

“Mothra…?” Q asked, leaning down reflexively and giving the cat a little pet, pulling back before the cat could ‘playfully’ swat him. Q couldn’t take his eyes off the feline, confusion twisting his features. “You’re supposed to be in the lower levels. How did you get up here?”

And then it hit him like a sledgehammer to the chest: Mothra was always trying to follow people upstairs, or anywhere, but anyone native to Q-branch had learned how to sidle through doors to keep Mothra from leaving the Dungeons. Earlier, 006 had nearly let the cat out, but only because…

He’d been a non-native entity in Q-branch territory.

Q immediately jumped up and found the nearest computer, punching keys to turn on the receiver in his earpiece as quickly as possible. Voice sharp and tense and hard, he rapped out without preamble, “001, 4, 6, and 7, I have a possible breach in Q-branch. I repeat, a possible breach—” He was forced to cut off with a yelp as a bullet tore through the computer in front of him, sending bits of wiring and metal flying. Q’s wings actually did what he wanted them to, for once, jerking up like slim, feathered shields around his chest and face.

“How inconsiderate of you, Q, ruining the surprise,” came an all-too-familiar voice, rolling consonants and honeyed vowels creating a smooth, poisoned whole. Q’s wings clumsily dropped and he swung around to find Silva, standing at the entrance to Q-branch where he’d come up from the lower levels – right out of the earth like some weed. He had dozens of men at his back, pouring past him, aiming weapons at anyone that moved until Q felt that he could sense every pound of pressure being put on every trigger in the room, like spots of painful light amid darkness. Silva was smiling darkly, fit to split his face in half. “Why, it hardly even looks like you missed me, Q. What a shame.”

The Quartermaster tensed, frozen and helpless for the moment, watching as his employees faced down guns.

Silva – wingless, Q noted, without feeling any particular satisfaction – raised his hands invitingly, a parody of friendship that was ruined by the acidic malice in his eyes. “We’ll have to change that.”

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Chapter End Notes

The readers have spoken! By an overwhelming number (backed up by very good logic, if you can apply logic to fantasy), it seems that Silva is doomed to be forever wingless. Although I would have dearly enjoyed writing an aerial dogfight between Silva and Q, the commenters reminded me that neither of them would likely be able to fly. Touché,
commenters, touché.

*rubs hands together* And now we get down to the final hour. I hope you enjoyed the ride, because we've got one more rush before it's over! *dives into typing*
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

Q faces Silva in Q-branch, and everything eventually ends up in the tunnels.

Or the chapter in which Q does what he must to keep his minions safe...and pays the price.

...Or the chapter in which Q blows up Q-branch. Yup.

Chapter Notes

I am once again pushing the limits of technology (i.e., Bond's phone) - as always, just go with it! I write fiction, not fact.

It's a longer chapter! I've got...well, there might be one chapter after this (not counting some sort of fluffy epilogue)...which means it might become two or three chapters, considering my habits. Enjoy! Thanks to my wonderful commenters for giving me many of the ideas for these last chapters \(^u^)/

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Q charged forward, heedless of everything but the need for action. For once, he was fairly sure he put common-sense completely on the back-burner as he literally leapt over a desk. He wasn’t anywhere near coordinated enough to fly, but mental threats and a lot of determination got his wings to flap powerfully, giving him enough lift to clear the desk and the computers on it. One nearby server went crashing to the floor as he dropped on the other side, wings following clumsily, but he didn’t have time to care.

The nearest of Silva’s gunman was aiming his weapon at a huddle of Q’s people, and the Quartermaster snapped out a hand without thinking as the two of them collided. Before a shot could go off, the gunman shrieked as Q’s hands turned into live-wires, sending the bullet up into the ceiling a second before sending the gunman to the floor. Briefly kneeling over the now-unconscious enemy, Q spared a second to be pleasantly surprised that that had worked – and that he himself was still more or less fit and able. Apparently, getting his wings back had leveled out his energy enough that he wasn’t going to blow a fuse inside of himself for doing this. The Quartermaster jumped up again, wings splayed around him to keep people at a distance even while he tried to replicate that feeling of his Angel energy surging through the bones of his fingers. “Get out! Everybody out!” he yelled as he continued to create a distraction, daring to move towards another gunman. Silva hadn’t ordered anyone to fire, and was instead watching with something like patient fascination.
Good. If Silva’s men started shooting within Q-branch, it would be a massacre. “Find 007!” he barked automatically to a young woman as he raced past, pausing long enough for a panicked nod before fleeing.

Silva laughed. “Now, really, Q – do you think any of your precious 00-agents will be able to get here in time?” People were still trying to escape: Q-branch was not made for evacuations like this, and was cluttered and crowded. “You may have sounded off the general alarm, but some. Things. Take. Time.” He lightly slapped the back of one hand against the palm of another in emphasis, as if teaching a slow but promising student a somewhat tricky concept. “And sadly – time has rather run out for your poor little minions.”

“Leave them alone, Silva,” Q warned, noting that Silva’s men were keeping a safe distance from him now that Q had taken down a second one of them. Q’s hands and arms tingled, but he didn’t feel as though he were going to black out – always a good sign.

Silva tsked. “So demanding! But you’ve had your turn being in charge – now it’s my turn.” He raised a hand to beckon his men to shoot.

Q felt a surge of horror flood his system a split second before his instincts took hold of the emotion – something spiky and painful wrapped in adrenalin like a wildfire – and found an outlet for it. Q’s raw nerves sparked and crackled as his energy (as it had been doing all morning to a smaller degree) reacted to his emotional tension.

Earlier today, he’d just been anxious, and he’d thrown off sparks.

A moment ago, he’d been startled and desperate, and he’d knocked two men unconscious in rapid succession.

Now, he saw no other way out, and if he didn’t do something, dozens of people would die.

Q screamed in rage and agony and fear as all of the supernatural energy he could muster expanded, slicing out past his skin in violent arcs. He felt it actually singe his clothing and ruffle his feathers up, and things began exploding all around the room – lights, computers, anything with glass or an electrical connection.

But what mattered was that people got caught up in it, too, crying out and dropping in seizing heaps as one single Angel turned the room into a lightning storm. He knew that he was getting his own people, too, but they were further away – hopefully, as he’d heard happened with the blowout in Medical, he wouldn’t kill anybody. And if he did…it would be those nearest him, and those were Silva’s men, so he couldn’t bring himself to care.

It all lasted about ten seconds, ten seconds of the world being torn apart before it imploded into silence. Q’s ears were ringing, and he was only aware of collapsing to his knees by the jolt of discomfort that rocked up from his kneecaps. He swayed, familiar by now with the aching, hollow feeling that came with having scraped himself empty on the inside. He didn’t know if the room was dark or if his vision had cut out, but he knew that he could sense impending blackness edging forward from the back of his brain. Since he didn’t hear any more gunshots and nothing but the most distant of moans from where some of Q-branch had made it almost out the door, it meant that his gamble had paid off, though. He’d taken out a room full of gunmen in one horrendous, reckless stroke.

And now he was losing consciousness. He swayed, unable to maintain his present posture as the darkness in his skull pushed forward; there was a dark blanket being drawn over his thoughts, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.
“I can’t say that that is something I’ve ever seen before,” came Silva’s voice suddenly from somewhere ahead of him, one point of perfect awareness in a sea of unconscious bodies. Q had somehow toppled over on his side, but the jolt of panic at Silva’s voice – alert and awake, untouched by what had essentially conquered an entire room in seconds – overshadowed any pain of hitting the floor. Dark oblivion pulled the depleted Quartermaster the rest of the way under, to the tune of footsteps picking their way to him, and a jovial voice applauded, “Well done, Quartermaster.”

As soon as 007 heard Q’s knife-sharp voice in his ear, everything fell into place: ruse, distraction, real target. Q. Silva wouldn’t attack from the outside if his target was at the core. Bond had no idea how Silva had managed to end up in the middle of MI6, but he’d heard talk of tunnels, and now cursed whoever had built the warren of twists and turns beneath the city. M had said they were all sealed off, but apparently she’d been wrong.

“I’m going to Q-branch,” Bond said, making it clear that no one was to argue with him.

Instead of arguing, 006 chimed back merrily, “Since it would be a crying shame to let you have all the fun, I’m going, too. 004 is fine on his own, big boy that he is.”

Bond hadn’t made it to 004’s position yet, but wasn’t surprised that 006 had disobeyed orders to hunt down the pale-winged Angel. He heard 004 sigh at being referred to as a ‘big boy’, but at least he wasn’t being called worse names or endearing terms. “The police are starting to come full-force. I can coordinate things with them, and probably get this under control before it progresses much further. 001.”

He’d meant to ask her to relay all of this back to M, but 001 cut in, “M knows, and is sending me to Q-branch. She’s tapped in to the earpieces, so, just so you boys know, you’re all on speakerphone, as it were.”

Her saucy tone would have lightened the mood if Bond weren’t so disturbed by the sudden silence from Q’s end of the connection in his ear. “Q?”

“No one is getting anything from Q-branch, 007,” came M’s succinct words, making him wince and pick up the pace. “So I suggest you all bloody hurry, because you know how much I hate losing Quartermasters.”

“You’re hate’s got nothing on mine,” Bond gritted as he virtually raced down the halls.

“What the-?” 007 just heard 006 gasp in shock as Alec reached Q-branch first, skidded to a halt and nearly forcing Bond to run into him. Bond didn’t give the words any thought as he swiveled and ducked around the other Angel, only to nearly trip over a groaning body of a minion he recognized as one he’d sent to get coffee for Q way-back-when. His eyes jerked up, seeing things clearly for what felt like the first time since he’d heard Q’s panicked voice.

Q-branch was completely dark save for where light seeped in from different, more distant rooms – and where some wires were sparking. 001 had arrived by that point as well, her beautiful, sculpted brows jumping upwards towards her hairline.

“A bomb?” Alec asked, helping up a nearby Q-branch employee who was regaining her senses, slowly.

“What kind of a bomb would do this without also tearing everyone up with shrapnel?” snapped 001
back, tetchy but also sensible. She’d walked past 007 boldly into the room, while he remained cautious, thinking. She dug around in a drawer (lit by the hallway lights, barely) until she found a flashlight. “I don’t see enough dead people for it to be any bomb I know,” she stated callously.

Bond had put all of the facts together. “It wasn’t a bomb. This was Q.” Once again using his phone as a source of illumination (looking at the screen, actually), he waded forward, forcing himself to ignore the other people in the room. They didn’t seem dead, but some weren’t moving. Triage would have to wait for people more patient than Bond. When 001 opened her mouth with an argumentative look on her face, he cut her off, “This is almost an exact repeat of what Q did to Medical when he got his wings back, only on a larger scale. He’s been short-circuiting things all day.”

“Short-circuiting?” 006 repeated, clearly incredulous, “Bond, if he did this, he blew out an entire room!”

At that point, 007 had found what he wanted: he hadn’t sensed Angel energy in the room, meaning Q wasn’t there, but the scent of a fired weapon had tickled the back of his nose beneath the scent of fried electronics. Now he drew his own weapon, rolling over an unfamiliar body with his toe. “A bit muscular for a minion, don’t you think?” he asked before moving on. His cold blue gaze stayed on his phone, which was presently running a [stolen] program to track the radio that was hopefully still in Q’s pocket. Right now, the signal was flickering in and out as if it were too far to read.

007 explained as he went, intent on finding the Quartermaster or some clue as to where he was now. “Q must have tried to take out the enemy. See if any of those bodies belong to Silva.” ‘What makes me seriously doubt his body will be here?’ the thought lingered in Bond’s head, tight and prickly as a ball of nettles.

“Forget ‘tried’,” 006 began to praise Q’s work as he checked bodies. Further back, 001 was checking out the more lively bodies – who turned out to be Q-branch employees, most of them starting to twitch and moan a bit. 006 always seemed to have zip-ties on his person (a necessity in this job, he said), and disarmed the man nearest him and tied his arms behind his back with the ease of much practice. “I think our little boffin bloody succeeded! I don’t think any of these fellows are dead, but they seem to have gotten the worst of it.” 006 actually laughed, the light of his phone casting his sharkish grin in sharp relief as he shook his head.

“If he succeeded,” cut in 001 like the mood-killer that she was, “then where is he?”

“And where is Silva?” 007 growled, and then bolted towards an open door that he knew led downwards, into the lower levels – that explained why the radio’s signal was so faint. He didn’t stop to explain himself, except to shout, “Tunnels!” before disappearing. He felt as much as heard the two other Angels with him jerk to attention and scramble into motion. If he knew 006, he’d possibly want to shoot the few gunmen he hadn’t had time to secure, but since everyone had been briefed on Silva’s hypnotic powers, he’d hopefully refrain – 006 could be a bit of a monster, but he usually stopped before slaying unconscious civilians who’d had no choice in what they’d done. That thought was proven true as 001 came in at 007’s heels, panting, “006 will catch up,” before demanding, “Where are we going?”

“Stop asking questions and keep up.”

“How do you even know where we’re going?” 001 snarled at being reprimanded, and Bond nearly slowed down to look at her, his eyes dangerous.

Fortunately, 001 got the message loud and clear just from the brief glance he lanced her with in the deepening dark: ‘I wouldn’t mess with me right now.’ And 001 was smart enough to slam her mouth shut and meekly follow behind him. 007, wishing he had Q’s skills with tech, continued to follow
the little red dot on the screen of his phone.

He wondered if Q had felt like this when Bond had disappeared.

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“007, or anyone listening,” came 004’s professional tones, “Be warned that the shooters are withdrawing. It’s not because of anything we did, so I’d imagine it has something to do with your end. Silva made any moves?”

“Have you found Silva, James?” asked 006 hopefully, still behind and making sure that none of Silva’s cronies woke up with free hands to shoot a gun. It was shocking how many people Q had knocked unconscious in one go, although it looked like the Q-branch minions at least were all lacking permanent damage.

007’s panting was all that was heard for a moment, then 001 answered in his stead, “If we had, you’d have heard gunshots. But we’re in pursuit, I think, in the tunnels beneath MI6.”

At the mention of the tunnels, everyone had gone silent, the possibilities slapping them in the face like a slosh of ice-water. M actually could be heard swearing softly, then she was suddenly barking orders to 004 – she might have overlooked the possibility of un-blocked tunnels, but she had enough blue-prints nearby that she could find out some of the most likely exits. There were too many exits to effectively set up an ambush at all of them, but they had to do something. With 004 working with her and the police, they had begun doing what they could. The fact that there were still scores of retreating attackers at MI6’s front steps (who’d likely come up out of the tunnels themselves, giving a clue as to how they’d appeared out of nowhere) made it difficult.

“Can you sense their energy, Agent Bond?” M asked as she instantly picked up who was in charge between the two. On another occasion, a few people would have laughed, because 001 was usually quite a control freak. That served her well on missions, where taking control kept you alive, but back at MI6, it just drove everyone batty.

That need for control showed as 001 answered again for 007, her tone suspicious more than it was snarky, “Neither of us can, but 007’s apparently got something on his phone that tracks Quartermasters.”

There was silence from everyone at that, as M stood and blinked. With the earpieces still linked, everyone heard 006’s throaty chuckle – clearly approval, as he muttered something along the lines of, “Naughty, James,” and 004 hushed him through the line. Bond said nothing, goading M to eventually lift her voice again, “Have you anything to say for yourself, 007?”

007 sighed gustily as if he couldn’t see why they were going through this right now. “Look, I stole the tracking program from Q-branch and stuffed one of those little radios in Q’s pocket. It’s on, and I’m tracking it, so do you really want to argue about how I came to have it?” he snapped.

“No, 007,” M replied in as close as she came to an apologetic tone, “Carry on. Keep me appraised of your status.” And she turned off her end of the connection, standing back to take a deep breath and listen. And wait. To keep herself occupied, she turned her attention back to the gunmen being subdued outside MI6, and the Medical team being sent down to Q-branch.

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The tracking program was not made to be run on a phone, no matter how ‘smart’ said phone was, and the depths of the tunnels made the signal spotty and weak. It was giving them only vague
directions, and with Q-branch literally down for the count, they didn’t have anyone to feed them directions from up above either. If Bond lost the signal, it was entirely possible that he and 001 would end up lost down there, which would be not only devastating but embarrassing as hell.

“007!” 001 stopped suddenly, a wing snapping out and flicking one of Bond’s to signal him to halt as well. She was tense and alert, and even as she said it, Bond felt a light flare in his mind’s-eye: “I can sense another Angel. This way.”

While all Bond wanted to do was charge to the rescue, he forced himself with iron hands to stay still – long enough to gaze at the tracking program on his screen. He’d been heading for another tunnel, because Q’s signal went off in that direction. There was nothing in the direction where they were sensing another Angel now, and besides that, Bond didn’t feel the familiar shiver and pulse of the Quartermaster’s energy. “It’s not Q,” he informed the female Angel flatly.

“Good, then it’s Silva,” was the utterly unperturbed answer, as golden wings flicked dismissively before arching faintly, a hint of predatory body-language seeping in. When she looked back archly and saw that 007 was not following her, but instead looking torn between the two tunnels, she tossed her hair back and rolled her eyes. “Really, 007! If we take out Silva, then we’ll have all day to find your Quartermaster! Cut off the head of the snake and all that jazz.”

For a moment, 007 looked inclined to agree. The predatory set to 001’s stance became echoed in his, lethal energy radiating off both of them like wolves sensing a kill. But then, 007 backed off, forcing down the killing urge to see Silva bleeding away at his feet. “I wasn’t sent down here to apprehend Silva. I was sent to retrieve Q.”

001’s mouth twitched, unsure how to respond to that, before she finally settled on saying, “More fun for me then. I’ll track down Silva – you get Q.” With that, she turned with feline grace and disappeared down the side-tunnel, absolutely silent and gun already out and ready.

Sighing, Bond spoke irritably to his earpiece, “Bloody 001 is still in pursuit of bloody Silva.”

Typically, Alec was quicker to respond than anyone else, his tone only teasing because he was far, far away from Bond’s reach, “And what is ‘bloody James’ doing?”

“Not getting bloody, which is a crying shame,” he dared answer as he went back to tracking, “I’m still following Q, unless someone else is traipsing through these tunnels with that radio.” The thought had crossed his mind more than once, making him grimace. “If that happens, I’m going to skin alive whomever I am tracking.” Despite the fact that M had to be listening, no rebuke came through regarding his attitude. “I’ll get in contact when I can.”

That was the general phase that meant, ‘I hate chatting while on a mission, so I’m turning my earpiece off.’ When no one was fast enough to argue, 007 did exactly that, letting the silence sink in, matching his careful footsteps to the all-pervading quiet. He still wasn’t close enough to be able to sense whether the radio was connected to Q anymore or not, but he was gaining, hope and trepidation pounding in equal measure through his heart. He could understand 001’s choice to go after Silva: the end to that chase was a well-practiced game in which the only loss could be your life. It was a steep price, but it was a chip that 00-agents played poker with every other day of their lives, and in the sweet storm of violence, those stakes seemed just about right. Even if 001 lost, she could go down swinging, replete in the knowledge that she had at least a little bit of victory spiraling down to the grave after her. It was a simple game: kill or be killed.

That option was so tempting Bond felt it like an ache of need at the back of his teeth. He could practically feel Silva’s neck beneath his hands, his bones grinding and then giving with a sickly sound that always harbored the end. After all that Silva had done, Bond craved nothing more.
No, that was a lie. He cared about Q more, the uppity young Quartermaster he’d originally been unable to stand but now couldn’t get enough of.

So Bond was taking the more difficult path of hunting what he loved rather than what he hated. Here, he had more to lose – he could die, or his prize could be taken from him. Permanently. It was a game in which the wins and losses were made up of the same entity, and it was all or nothing. If 001 failed, she might die, but she might also live, and in the latter case she’d lose nothing but pride. But if Bond lost…then Q lost, too, and he didn’t know if he could swallow that.

Just when it seemed that he was doomed to follow a little red dot for the rest of his life (Bond was truly beginning to respect Q for his patience, seeing as the man likely did this at least as often as Bond killed things), Bond once again felt that tickle at the back of his mind that signaled his sixth sense coming on line. He became more alert instantly, still hearing nothing beyond his own breathing and cat-soft steps, but now sensing Angel energy.

Familiar Angel energy.

“Hold on, Q,” he murmured, now using his sense more than the tracking program as he cut a path through the tunnels, taking more than a few wrong turns but always heading back towards his target. He didn’t realize that he was moving faster and faster until he leapt out into a wide, open space so swiftly he nearly tripped. His phone wasn’t enough to do more than create a pool of light around him, hinting at curved walls expanding around him – fortunately, they showed a musty old breaker box, and he threw switches to cast the place suddenly in yellowed brightness. His eyes already knew where they wanted to be looking.

There were four men at the far end of the massive room, blinking and yelping at the sudden eruption of light. One of them almost stumbled and fell, but his nearest comrade steadied him, along with the limp, dark-haired shape thrown over his shoulders, body swiftly trussed up to keep his black and white wings tightly encased against his body.

“Q!” Bond shouted without thinking, all of his fear transmuting into frostbitten rage. He drew, aimed, and shot without any conscious thought going into the motion, and the man farthest from Q dropped like a stone.

“Now, now, James,” Silva’s confidant voice appeared right out of the echoes of the gunshot, on the other side of the room, creating a triangle: Bond, Silva, and the men holding Q. Silva’s grin was brilliant and triumphant beneath the sickly light. “Play nice with Papa’s things!”

Bond clenched his jaw, gun raised but no longer sure of its target: whenever he moved it away from Q’s captors towards Silva, they started slipping away, yet every instinct Bond possessed screamed at him to keep Silva in his sights. Only some intervening pipes kept him from shooting the man right now and finishing the job. Apparently, 001 had failed, since there was no sign of her. He could see just enough of Silva to see him smile. “You want to shoot me, don’t you, James? I can tell you-” He sounded like he was actually wagging his finger at James, jutting. “-Anger like that is bad for your health.”

“And I suppose a bullet in the brain isn’t?” 007 managed to sound calm as he called back conversationally, still making it clear that any move on the part of Q’s captors would result in another shot. In reality, proximity and distance made the risk of hitting Q too high. “Why don’t we compare notes – me and my anger, and you with your brains splattered all over the wall.”

Silva chuckled. “I’ve always hated you Angels and your pride, but you? I like you, James. Your sense of humor is…” He mulled it over, picked a word: “…Invigorating! But, alas, a conversation between us is not meant to be. I assume you want the Quartermaster?”
There was no way it was that easy. “That is the idea,” he admitted, never lowering his gun so much as a fraction, wings loose behind him for flight – the room was big enough. As a winged Angel, he had the advantage.

From what Bond could see of Silva’s face, the man’s smile had turned cold and malicious. “Then we are at cross-purposes, James, because I won Q fair and square,” Silva said as if regretfully, and then something was stepping out from behind him, shooting so fast that Bond had only time to jerk aside and swear, pain lancing up his arm from his hand. His gun clattered away into the shadows, torn from his grip by the bullet that had ripped a furrow up the back of his hand and forearm. He clenched his teeth against the roaring pain and looked up to see who was such a good shot.

Silva’s delighted laughter met 007’s priceless look of surprise as 001 stepped out into full-view, her gun at her side again and her eyes calmly focused, seemingly oblivious to the blood drying down one side of her beautiful head. In that one look, Bond knew that she was going to try and kill him. Silva’s almost melodic words were like needles in his skin, impossible to ignore as the man declared smugly – and as the people holding Q began to slip away, “I know that I said taking over an Angel is hard, but there are some days when you just get lucky, yes? And head-injuries really help with the process. You’d be surprised how much more…malleable…a mind is when you forcibly remove a few of its defenses.” 001 leapt forward and took to the air in seconds, dodging around the intervening pipes to zero in on 007 as if he were her whole world.

Half-turned to go after the people carrying the Quartermaster – whose energy still flickered faintly, proving he was unconscious but not dead – Bond had time only to widen his eyes before she hit him. Bond flared his wings, muscles and sinews snapping, and one powerful beat kept him from hitting the ground, although his shoes skidded on the rust and dirt of the floor. 001 was far stronger than she looked, a fact he remembered from his last fight with her. No doubt thanks to some sick order from Silva, she wasn’t bothering to try and shoot him, although she instantly cranked her hand back to try and club him with it. 007 just barely dodged, feeling as though things had gotten out of hand so fast that the world must have stopped turning beneath his feet.

“Awww, the last. Two. Rats,” Silva said, making some obscure reference Bond couldn’t follow, although the amused tone set his anger alight again. It burned away some of the rising panic. He was sure that Q was being carried out of the room right now, but he couldn’t do anything with 001 at his throat.

And then Silva was leaving, too, just walking away with smooth steps as he called back kindly, “Another time, James – if you survive, of course!” He disappeared, leaving behind a well of growing violence in a room occupied only by two Angels, both with a license to kill and training to do it. Locked together like two eagles, they spiraled through the room, blood and feathers speckling floor and walls.

Silva would give them a while to fight, to see if that cat 001 could really take down the dog of MI6.

Then he’d blow the explosives.

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Chapter End Notes

*whew* I'm just cranking out chapters! Since I'm going home, though, until Wednesday, the next chapter might take a bit longer (any of you who've been reading
my notes this whole time know that my output suffers when I go home XP )

But I'll try not to leave you hanging! Be ready for pet-Q in the next chapter, those of you who asked for it ;) *I regret nothing*
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

Q and Silva have a talk. Bond fights 001.

Or the chapter in which everything starts going down the tubes...

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait! I'm at home, and not very productive at the moment - and for those of you watching 001, I have tried to explain her a touch better. She's got flaws, but she's still deadly.

The only other thing I have to say is...poor Q...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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“Q? Q, dear, it’s time to wake up,” the playful, cooing voice floated into the Quartermaster’s consciousness, instinctively making him squirm and try to get away from it, because he immediately recognized the voice as Silva’s. Like water rushing back into a lake, Q’s consciousness came back to him, with a brief moment where everything seemed wrapped in gauze before it all snapped into focus. He was in a room, unsteadily kneeling on the floor, with his hands and wings tied behind him and an emptiness in his gut that came from using up so much energy. His mind registered these things as cold facts before fear ignited in him, finding ready tinder. The Quartermaster shivered and shifted, belatedly aware of Silva prowling around him. He forced himself not to cower as the pure horribleness of the situation began to sink in. There was nothing but himself and Silva, and he couldn’t sense any other Angels anywhere.

“Beautiful, just beautiful!” Silva applauded for no reason Q could discern. Thankfully, the wingless Angel seemed to like the sound of his own voice, because he explained swiftly, “You’re already waking up more quickly, even though your records indicate you usually have a hard time of it.” Q had almost forgotten that this had all started with Silva getting hold of Medical’s records on MI6’s Angels, and while Q knew that information on himself was spotty, the information was there. It was also a bit of a surprise to realize that, yes, he had just gone from unconscious to fully awake in under a minute. While Q paused to just marvel at that, Silva gave away more information, seeing no reason why not to, “I had a problem with that, too, you know? For years!” He made a little noise and shook his head as if in lament at the memory. “My mother was always saying, ‘Silva – why can’t you get up?’ But she never understood.”

Silva had stopped right behind Q, making the Quartermaster’s spine stiffen involuntarily as he refused to turn his head, instead cataloguing the things he heard in Silva’s voice: musing, melancholy, fake regret mingling with real regret in a strange, abnormal mixture like oil and water. He actually appeared to have paused, sadly reliving whatever memory he’d resurrected in his head. Then he was walking and talking again, brushing history aside, “That was just when I was little,
However, and I grew out after a horribly long time. One of the benefits to genetic anomalies over physical removal, yes?” Silva leaned down from Q’s left, catching his eyes to smile his pleasant, too-sweet smile. Behind his glasses (still miraculously on his face), Q narrowed his eyes even while he was forced to clench his jaw and push down rising fear. He could feel that his breathing had picked up, adrenalin ratcheting up a notch as well until it throbbed through his veins. All of the various aches and pains he’d gotten from blowing up Q-branch were pushed into the background.

“You’re usually so talkative, Q, what’s the matter?” Silva noted next with some dismay, standing up and backing off to tilt his head, as if trying to study Q for the answer.

And, somehow, Q found words. “Well, to be entirely truthful, I’ve never been one for bondage,” he joked back as if this were perfectly normal. All of this he did to hide the fact that he was trying to twist his hands in the ropes, finding no give but still resolutely searching for a knot of some sort with numbed fingers.

Unfortunately, that only made Silva smile placidly again, looking like nothing so much as a shark in waiting. He was simply standing and watching Q, like a man avidly studying a board game or a new and enticing enigma. The interest made Q’s skin crawl. The muscles in his wings bunched unconsciously, pulling at the rope carefully wrapped around them until the bindings creaked. It took a moment for Q to focus enough to get his new appendages still, and the frustration brought a bit of a flush to his cheeks that he tried to ignore. After all this, and he still couldn’t work his wings!

“Ahhhh, just look at you!” Silva gasped delightedly, and Q found he preferred silence. He also preferred it when Silva kept his distance, but the man was walking towards him again, and apparently Q had been kneeling long enough that his legs had gone to sleep: when he tried immediately to rock from his knees to his feet, he failed so stupendously he nearly fell over. Only Silva’s quick fist in the neck of his shirt kept him upright, and then the Quartermaster was left to flush in anger and embarrassment as the man laughed.

“What do you want, Silva?” Q finally made himself snap, having enough coordination of his body to at least shake loose Silva’s grip. The man relinquished it too easily, only to – after a pause – move his hand back in and gently stroke Q’s head. Q pulled back violently, nearly unseating himself again but managing to balance at the last minute. As pathetic as it sounded, he was getting used to balancing with his arms and wings restrained, knees pressed on hard concrete.

“What I want is what every master of his art wants – the satisfaction of seeing the culmination of his work,” Silva said in reverent awe that made Q’s throat go dry and a sick feeling coil slowly in the pit of his stomach. He was already leaned too far to lean further away when Silva now decided to direct his petting to one tense and shivering wing. One finger stroked a sleek feather at the curve of Q’s wing, one of the feathers that served as a transition between colors – half black, half stunningly white.

“I’m not a project,” Q tried to say calmly, but realized that his voice had weakened. Fear was cracking it.

“Don’t be so testy, Q dear,” Silva admonished him, “Why not a bit of thanks? I gave these to you.” Q yelped and flinched as Silva’s tender caressing turned into a solid, biting grip, his large hand clenching around the peak of Q’s wing. “So you see, Q,” Silva said more softly, almost in a whisper, as Q panted and the wingless Angel loosened his grip, “I have good reason for viewing you as a beautiful thing I have made. Truly, I could have hoped for no better! You picked up those lessons so quickly, like a little duckling taking to water.”

Still aching from where Silva’s fingers had dug cruelly into his wing, bruising muscle, Q tried to come up with some response that...would distract Silva maybe? His training, both as an agent
before and as a valuable member of MI6 now, told him to bide his time and keep his captor occupied until someone came to rescue him. Unfortunately, Silva already seemed occupied – with him. So he wasn’t sure what to do, while fear was clawing its way up his throat. “I learned because you found it particularly rewarding to bash me over the head with your lessons.” Where Q was finding his dry, faintly sarcastic tone, he had no idea, but he must have been pulling it out of thin air, because inside he was nothing resembling calm. “I can’t say much for your teaching methods, except they’re archaic and barbaric.” Okay, so maybe now he was pushing it…

“Sometimes it takes a bit of pain to reach the reward you want,” Silva said philosophically, unperturbed by Q’s sharpness except for a hard glint appearing in his canted eyes. It was that cold sharpness that had Q’s gut clenching.

“So,” Q pressed when the silence finally proved more painful than talking, if only because words distracted him from Silva’s eyes, which were taking him apart, “What do you want to hear from me then? That you’re a genius? You must already know that you are – neither myself nor Medical have any idea how you managed this. Do you want me to thank you? For giving me my wings back? All of that would stroke your ego, I’m sure.” Especially since part of the gratitude would be sincere – no matter the circumstances, Q felt a flair of wild elation every time he caught the sight of black and white feathers out of the corner of his eye, knowing they were his, that he wasn’t wingless anymore.

But Silva’s answer surprised him. “No, I don’t want you to thank me, Q – you don’t understand,” he said in a lower voice now gripped around the edges by anger. “Not such a clever boy, are you?” He shook his head. “You can’t see what I’m trying to show you at all.”

This was making Q even more uneasy, more uneasy than just kneeling on the floor with only a psychopath for company. “What don’t I understand?"

“I taught you so much!” Silva was clearly becoming emotional, which seemed a dangerous proposition – it made his energy crackle inside of him. Q was still practically a dead light-bulb, but he was more than alert enough to sense the Angel energy in Silva. Before now, Q couldn’t actually recall the man getting so worked up, but now the smile had fallen from his face, the playful light in his eyes replaced by intensity as he stared at Q. “I taught you how to control minds, and what did you do with it? Nothing. You used it to clumsily break my work – No, no, no!” Silva began shaking his head emphatically with every measured, rebuking negative, but it was the steps forward that had Q trying to stand up again. The hand that reached down and grabbed his jaw in a vice-like grip stopped that.

“Don’t play games with me, Q dear – I know that the only way to break my control over another is to take control all over again,” Silva cooed, leaning down so his breath wafted across Q’s face from close range, making the Quartermaster close his eyes and grimace. He would have liked to turn his head away, but nothing short of a massive influx of Angel strength was likely to break Silva’s grip. Q’s power was coming back, but it was still a flickering candle to Silva’s bonfire, so Q was slow to trust it.

Besides, Silva’s words were like will-o-the-wisps, leading him down a path he didn’t know the destination to, on a journey that he somehow knew he shouldn’t take but couldn’t resist.

“So unless 007’s ridiculous loyalty to you is actually a sign of you wielding power over him, you’ve gone and wasted your time. And mine, really,” Silva sighed, flicking to a regretful mood now. The sickly enjoyment hadn’t yet re-ignited in his eyes again, which was somehow more terrifying than anything else. “Because I took the time to teach you.”

“Not everyone is like you,” Q gritted carefully. The hand still locked on his jaw made talking
difficult, and dogged temper was the only thing that was able to push through the fear tightening his throat.

“Exactly, Q!” Silva responded with excitement instead of negativity, giving Q’s head a little shake before letting go to stand up and pace. He turned back to his prisoner only long enough to say with passion, “Only you are like me!”

Q swallowed. This, at least, was territory he’d been through before: almost every other time he’d encountered the large, pale man, they’d inevitably touched on how they were different from most Angels. Now, however, Q was not – not really, or at least not as much. He still had all of the ‘lessons’ Silva had taught him, but he now inexplicably had the things that Silva hated as well: wings.

Before Q could formulate some sort of answer, Silva’s excitement withdrew again to the penetrating, dark look. “But you don’t understand what a gift it is to be what you are – better than those around you. You keep acting like 007 and his ilk are on a level with you. For shame.”

“I admit, 007 is not on a level with me in many regards,” Q tried to calmly return to the conversation, knowing he had no control if Silva was simply running his mouth like a river, Q washed passively along. Besides, every time he heard '007', a painful thread of longing – frantic and desperate and immune to logic – twisted in his heart. ‘James, where are you?’ “For example, I’m sure he has no skills at coding. But there are some areas where he undoubtedly exceeds me. In temper, for example.” Q couldn’t think of how James Bond or anyone could possibly find him now that Silva had taken him so neatly, but talking about him somehow lent Q strength despite the circumstances. “When he finds me, I imagine he’ll tear you apart,” he said in a deceptively placid voice. He was terrified by his own verbal daring, but childishly hoped that talking about the man would make him appear.

“Oh, he already found you, Q,” said Silva, and somehow...somehow, that answer was worse than any Q had anticipated and mentally prepared for. The Quartermaster couldn’t stop his eyes from widening comically behind his glasses as Silva continued pleasantly and toyingly, “Good-boy James tracked you down in the tunnels beneath MI6 – very impressive! But I got him tangled up a few turns back.”

Q’s throat was dry, and he had to swallow once or twice to get words to come out. “What are you talking about?”

“Come now, Q dear – you need to let go of these frivolous connections-”

“Did. You. Kill. Him?” Q gritted with rising fury. He began to test the ropes with more vigor, wishing he had more supernatural energy at his beck and call – because ropes were never made to hold an Angel. And suddenly, Q wanted nothing more than to use his Angel strength to tear loose and wrap his hands around Silva’s throat, never to let go until death.

“No!” Silva growled and looked skyward as if this were the most childish thing, beneath him and Q. “As a matter of fact, last I saw James, he was quite alive.”

That calmed Q – in fact, it was so laughably reassuring that he nearly didn’t care about his own situation for a moment. ‘James is fine,’ his mind repeated, ‘And I kept anyone from getting shot in Q-branch.’ Those small victories somehow managed to overshadow the fragile emptiness where his energy should have been and the burn where ropes dug into his wings and wrists.

But Silva’s next dialogue burned all of the relief away.
“Come now, Q, let’s not get off-topic. I was trying to tell you something important, hmm?” Silva had come forward again, until his impeccable shoes – barely dusty despite everything – were right in front of Q’s knees, with the larger man looking undoubtedly straight down at him. “What so many people cannot see – what you cannot see – is that losing our wings was not actually a loss. It was a gift, Q.”

Refusing to kink his neck to peer up at Silva, like some dog at his master’s feet, Q kept his eyes on the man’s knees even as he felt preemptive unease shiver through him. ‘A gift?’

“You lost your wings once, and didn’t realize the favor that had been done to you. Maybe when you lose them this time-“

Q’s mind – no, his entire world – ground to a halt. The world shifted under him and his heart failed to recall the simple task of beating.

Implacable and unfazed by his own brutality, Silva simply continued his soothing litany, “-You’ll finally understand that wingless is how you are meant to be.” Q still hadn’t remembered how to draw breath, his eyes wide and fixed, when Silva leaned down to whisper in his ear, “I didn’t give you these wings as a gift, Q, I gave them to you as a punishment.”

The silence and shock of Q’s world was broken as he screamed, feeling the grinding snap of bone in one wing beneath Silva’s clenching hand.

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There were a lot of things to admire about 001: she was lethal, beautiful, competent, uninhibited in a job that often would make people cringe or blush, but 007 had always found her slightly hesitant. She did not commit. There was a level of hesitancy that often showed in her when push came to shove, causing her not to fully commit all of her strength to an attack. She was strong and sharp and deadly until it seemed like something was likely to shove back – then, she’d pull back.

That was probably what gave 007 an edge over her, because Bond instinctively gave his all for everything. His missions were more overt than hers, so if he ever hesitated, he died. M had seen 001’s weakness long ago, and had tailored missions to that.

The problem was, when Silva had taken over her mind, he’d wiped away all uncertainty in it.

Gone was that last-minute withdrawal, that hesitancy as she saw the possibility of failure and began to rethink her strategy. Now, as she surged towards 007 again and again, she was as focused and driven as a star falling. She never pulled back and she no longer paused when it seemed she stood a chance of losing. Silva had made a greater weapon of her than MI6 had ever been able to.

007 knocked the gun out of her hand, a move that would have shaken her resolve before. Now, she simply moved forward as if that was an acceptable loss: easily two stories in the air, 001 let her empty hand fall and struck Bond across the face with her other hand. Their wings hit each other at the close range, and Bond nearly lost his altitude as the blow sent spikes of pain right into his teeth. He was being forced to remember that, beneath the moments of pride and snideness, there was a reason this woman was a 00-agent. He’d simply forgotten over the years, seeing only the bully in her when she was back at MI6.

Now, she was in the dank tunnels beneath MI6 with blood in her hair and a psychopath’s orders sitting like poison in her mind, and more than a match for the infamous 007.
Bond backed off with a heavy flap of his wings, watching as 001 rode the gust and watched him with cold, empty eyes. The moment he had enough space in the air for a full flap, however, Bond used it to drag himself upwards and over – so he could drop down more-or-less on top of her. He was heavier than her, and knew how to use that to his advantage. Folding his wings in and giving in to gravity, he plummeted at her, feet-first.

While Bond was heavier, 001 was milliseconds quicker, and 007 hadn’t had time to gain as much altitude as he would have liked. 001’s golden wings swept forward in a gorgeous, metallic stroke, pulling her body backwards and out of 007’s path. Realizing that she was lining him up for a shot as he came past, 007 swore and hurriedly snapped his wings back out again – and braced for an attack, because he still wouldn’t stop fast enough to avoid ending up in front of her. As Bond struggled for aerial balance, 001 rained kicks and punches at him as soon as he came close enough to reach. No emotion flickered across her face: no uncertainty, no fear, no glee. Human weaknesses had been torn away and replaced by words in her battered, bloodied head.

Letting his body absorb the first few punches he could not parry, Bond grunted with effort and did something reckless – he made a weapon of his wing. Generally, Angels had to be careful of their feathered appendages, because they were more easily damaged than they looked. 007, however, had a reputation for using any means necessary to get the job done, and he’d never been particularly slowed by thoughts of personal injury. So instead of hitting wings by accident as they got too close, he put some effort behind it and slammed grey feathers into her on purpose.

001 was nearly knocked out of the sky, instantly dropping her body-length as Bond disrupted the rhythm of her wing-beats. An emotion showed for once on her face – shock – but she was instantly recovering. With a jerk of her wings that probably hurt, she regained control. Bond growled, forced to recall that both of them had extensive training in sublimating pain.

When he’d fought 006, the man had at least showed some personality and had talked a bit, but apparently the blow to the head had made 001 both easier to hypnotize and more of an automaton, less of a living, breathing woman. The blood had seeped to cover one side of her face, plastering down her hair and making the white of her left eye stand out like a star amidst an incarnadined sky. It dripped off her chin, telling Bond that this fight had a time-limit: eventually, 001 would lose enough blood that she wouldn’t be able to function, regardless of the commands chained around her thoughts.

That made 007 think, though. True, he was usually the no-holds-barred agent, the one with no hesitancy, but with 001 now as unbridled as a storm, he took up the position she’d vacated. After all, if 001 were so successful despite her tendency to back off, then maybe there was something to rethinking a plan…

Bond backed off a bit, playing a defensive game, trying out logic instead of force while 001 continued to coldly try and kill him. After looking more closely at how much blood was running from the gash in 001’s head, Bond actually figured that she wouldn’t be able to keep fighting for that much longer – so had Silva planned on her killing him that quickly?

No. Silva wasn’t that foolish, even if he had an ego that 007 wanted nothing more than to pop with a stiletto through the heart. It was foolish to think that one 00-agent would be able to kill another in this length of time, regardless of either’s skill. So unless Silva didn’t mind the risk of 001 succumbing to blood-loss before doing away with 007, then obviously he had some other means to ensure that Bond didn’t make it out of here alive.

Trying to find a second source of impending death was difficult while trying to fight off a lethal female Angel. More than once, he’d considered getting the gun lying on the floor below them –
because as much as he cared about 001’s survival, the drive to reach Q was a constant yank of steel around his heart. Bond could no more put Q’s wellbeing second than he could sit back and let 001 kill him.

001 managed to feint midair, and 007 was foolish enough to fall for it – his reward was getting shoved backwards right into a pipe, which bent and shot steam above his head with a wild hiss. Bond was lucky that he wasn’t very high up in the air at the moment, because he crashed right to the floor after that. He couldn’t even hear his own cursing over the ringing in his ears.

Right about then, he remembered another time when his ears had been ringing, another time when he’d felt like he’d been hit by a truck. There had been quite an explosion and a lot of shrapnel involved, but being slammed into that pipe brought back the knowledge that Silva (before he’d been known for hypnosis and a fanatic interest in de-winged Quartermasters), had been known for his obsession with bombs.

Visceral fear drove Bond to his feet despite how his entire spinal cord still felt the imprint of the pipe he’d broken. 001 was diving towards him, golden wings peeled back and feet just starting to swing forward in a kick. Somehow, looking at her cold, detached eyes – one surrounded by blood – Bond didn’t think that she’d care or listen if he tried to tell her they might be buried by a bomb sometime soon.

And trying to look for a possible bomb would be nearly impossible with 001’s deadly attention focused on him like a gold-winged, Bond-seeking missile.

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Chapter End Notes

I blame the commenters for what I'm doing to Q! They gave me these ideas! Okay, so I guess I wrote it...but I regret nothing :3 More pet-Q in the upcoming chapter. Hopefully this explains Silva's actions.
004 Art

Chapter Summary

Sorry - not a chapter XP Still need to start it... Just art for today!

Chapter Notes

But I was just sketching up some wings for Archivist Salios (the wonderful writer responsible for the 'Behind Closed Doors' chapter), and accidentally drew 004! He only has one wing in this picture purely because I loved how his back and arm turned out, and couldn't stand covering that up XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Chapter End Notes

Hopefully another chapter - possibly the last, but there's no telling - will be up before the week ends!

Also - because people have asked, I shall answer! Question: What actor do I have in mind when I think of 004? Answer: The best I can think is a very young (and serious) David Boreanaz, and maybe Nico Tortorella. Google those hot young fellows and you should see where I get my 004 ideas! Boreanaz definitely has 004’s hair...
Chapter Summary

I'm not going to give anything away. Q gets more time with Silva, and Bond gets more time with an explosive...

Chapter Notes

Warning: this chapter is probably a bit more graphic than the others! I don't know if I need to add more tags/warnings...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Pain swam from nerve to nerve, a sea of pain that threatened to entirely blot out his sense of self and mind.

That hand stroked his hair again, making him hiss in a breath and grimace as it shifted his world. The nausea was almost as bad as the pain, making every breath unbalance him and every touch lock him in this battered body.

He was sitting on the floor somewhere; he didn’t know what he was doing there; the agony all radiated from his back like fire and spikes, and he knew that that was a bad thing. In fact, if he struggled and pulled his thoughts together from wherever they had scattered to, he could even remember the specifics of why.

Silva had brought in a chair, although he sat in it himself and simply coaxed the failing Quartermaster into leaning into him. All of the snark had been forcibly shattered by pain, and that same pain made tremors run through Q’s body so violently that he’d lost the ability to even kneel. Nonetheless, Silva looked like nothing so much as a proud teacher as he looked down at the young man sitting at his feet, legs half-tucked under him and head helplessly resting on Silva’s leg – a parody of trust and servitude. He ran his big hand through sweat-tangled locks of hair, smile broadening at how Q’s breath sped up in proof that he wasn’t completely out of his head yet. There was blood on his wings (although meticulously none on Silva’s hands), dripping down the feathers in a glistening stain; one wing hung at a crippled angle, and while the other still moved, it suffered from intermittent quivers that rattled the fearful feathers.

“Such a pity they didn’t come back all white, hmm?” Silva said, just another sentence in a long litany of chatter that he’d kept up. Q tried to shake his head: all of Silva’s words were like a swarm of gnats enshrouding and smothering him, but no sooner had he shaken off one sentence than another line took its place. He couldn’t fight as the hand on his head moved to his wing, although the lance of new pain slashed through some of the fogginess of his mind. For at least now, it was Q who opened his eyes, in pain but aware.

He was therefore aware enough to hear and understand Silva finish his proposal, fingering and then
yanking one black feather. “With most scars, the hair or skin grows in pale, but you still have so many of these black feathers. Tsk, tsk, tsk. It hides the blood.”

Q couldn’t help the whimper that crawled up his throat, making him squirm and attempt to get away. He didn’t have the strength, though – pain had sapped it, and Silva had never untied his hands. The ropes binding his wings had fallen prey to the same knife that had bitten into flesh…

The memory came too vividly, a visceral flash across the back of his eyelids as he slammed them shut. “No…!” It came out as a moan, even though it was a scream bouncing off the walls in his head. The true, horrible parody came when Silva hushed him, as gently as a parent, and stroked fingers down his face as if he cared.

“I would never hurt you, Q,” he assured the Quartermaster with so much belief in his voice that Q’s mind nearly strained itself with the dichotomy, “I’m helping you.” Silva continued to pet him soothingly, shifting his knees so that Q slipped weakly in between them, his left shoulder bumping the edge of the chair, his face falling forward onto Silva’s left thigh. Another easy, oh-so-gentle shift, and Silva had pulled his legs together just enough to lightly cushion Q, front and back. Q had lost his glasses somewhere during the struggle of Silva attacking his wings and Q trying to defend them, but the will to try and find them was absent for once. No matter how he tried, he couldn’t find the will to do anything at all – he tried to coax it into life, but it shriveled and died not long after birth, a seedling without sunlight to sustain it. Q wondered if he’d ever see daylight again.

“I killed Bond, you know.” And somehow Q wasn’t surprised. Despair had nestled in his heart, and somehow, with his world so thoroughly shattered, the end of 007 just seemed to fit. He hadn’t the will or energy to fly into a rage, but found tears leaking out of his eyes, running down the line of his nose to soak into the fine material of Silva’s trousers. The pain had made Q cry already, but those had been unavoidable tears – pulled loose by strain and desperation – but the news of Bond’s death was the only pain he accepted, and allowed to make him cry. ‘James,’ he said goodbye silently in his head – the only sanctuary he had. He felt regret, but not frustration or anger, because he realized he’d never expected Bond to find him anyway. How would anyone find him in a maze of tunnels like this, when no one had even seen him dragged away?

Then even the inner quiet and privacy of his mind was breached as fingers slid under his chin, tilting his head uncomfortably until he was facing Silva with wet, blurry eyes. The man was leant close to him, body almost cocooned around him with false protectiveness, the image of a mothering bird. A wingless one. Like Q was going to be soon. “Q?” Silva said in his cooing, sing-song voice, smiling at his little game, “Q, dear, can you look at me? That’s a good boy. How would you like it if I took the pain away, hmm? Would you like me for that?”

No, Q wanted to say, he would not like Silva for all of the favors in the world, but his denial extended no further than the confines of his head. He had enough strength to grit his teeth with a pained breath and try to pull back, eyes narrowing to slits at the throbbing from his wings – the limp one, broken and dislocated in two places, kept rubbing against Silva’s right knee.

Silva’s hand on his chin was insistent, however, and since when had Silva ever asked for what he wanted? Taking worked better.

The smile should have warned Q, but he hadn’t the strength to fight anyway. He flinched as the thin slice of teeth showed across the man’s amused, merciless face, right before he said, again, “Q, dear.”

The words echoed like a verbal shudder, and Q swore in his head as he felt his attention snapped up like fish-bait by the hypnosis. He tried to break loose, using every trick he’d ever used and even some that he’d watched 007 use (against Q), but wasn’t in any condition to fight – Silva had made sure, once again, to stack the odds in his favor before wading into a fight with the other Angel.
The next words flowed into the next two steps, taking Q’s focus and twisting it into something Silva wanted as he soothingly said, “It doesn’t hurt.” It was a fact of life: lies would be swallowed if there was enough power behind them. Silva just had the power to make that statement literal, as Q felt his mind crumble before the false information being shoved down his throat. He couldn’t break contact with Silva’s eyes until the command had latched on, but once it did, they rolled up in his head. It was…wrong. He felt the pain, but he no longer seemed capable of believing it was his, or that it was there. He began to breathe faster and faster as the two opposing sets of data went to war inside his skull. It was enough that he didn’t notice Silva’s thumb move from caressing his cheek to gliding over his parted lips. Something akin to panic was struggling behind Q’s chest, but it couldn’t gain purchase.

“There, see how much better that is?”

“No, it’s not better. You didn’t lock down the command correctly.’ Where Q had energy for logic, he didn’t know – the disgruntled, icy fact escaped from somewhere at the back of his head. He also had noticed that Silva had yet to command him without physical contact, despite plenty of opportunity. All the hypnosis to ignore the pain had done was to free up some of Q’s will to think logically again – to think like a Quartermaster.

Q’s physical energy was all but nonexistent, the pain draining him like a massive crack in a dam – his Angel energy was another story, however. It was rebuilding itself, steadily but slowly, leaving Q with a faint inner warmth instead of the yawning emptiness he’d had before. He clenched his hands behind his back, feeling queasy when he noticed blood sticking and sliding between his fingers. In trying to escape Silva’s intentions, Q had struggled wildly, pulling at the ropes with all of the supernatural energy he had left in him. All he gained, in his drained condition, was to rub his wrists raw – so the blood congealing over his hands could very well be from his wrists. Either that, or his wings were bleeding more profusely than he’d thought, and he dripped all the way down. The thought was horrifying and sickening, especially because Silva hadn’t even taken the final step yet – to sever the wings altogether. The larger man was doing this slowly, to beat the lesson into Q harder this time.

Damn Silva and all of his lessons.

Focusing on the energy inherent to his Angel frame, using his own terror as the best spark he could manage, Q tried to get something like the little bolts of energy that had been turning off computers all day. He didn’t succeed at that, but felt a definite tingle rush along the back of his knuckles, a little nip of energy that wouldn’t have hurt even if he hadn’t been bombarded with pain already. Good…good. There was hope then. The slimmest hope this side of the moon, but something to keep him from giving up right then and there. It wasn’t enough energy to electrocute his captor – he instantly knew that much to be true, especially since he channeled the energy best through his hands, and it would be awhile before he even had the strength to snap simple ropes. He’d never felt so helpless.

The pain was like a constant sawing into the nerves of his back. He tried to catalogue and/or remember what damage he’d accrued to his wings, but swiftly gave up. His mind had started shutting out disturbingly early in Silva’s lesson, right about when the criminal had pulled out a knife. Memories of his past and the horrific pain of the present had combined to nearly shatter Q’s mind, to say nothing of his body. He remembered fighting, then he remembered screaming, then he remembered a blurred world conglomeration with senseless dashes of red. Now, his mind was back, but there had still been so much damage…

Q whimpered and tried to pull his wings in, a gut–response to danger like this. Common-sense had nothing to do with it. When Silva just reached out callously and pulled the nearest wing back by a fistful of feathers, the Quartermaster couldn’t help but loose another scream.
But he didn’t try to pull his wings back in again.

“Good boy, Q,” Silva applauded, sounded sincere in his praise as he moved his hand to rub up and down Q’s neck. Now the man had blood on his hands, from ripped flesh, and Q quivered and nearly gagged at the sensation of it being smeared along his nape. He wanted to get away, but only succeeded in pressing closer to Silva’s left leg. “Sometimes geniuses can be such slow learners when it comes to the basic things,” Silve hummed, “but you’re really doing very, very well. Next thing you know, you’ll forget all about your irksome agents, too.”

That startled something of the old Q to life again. He’d been melting helplessly into Silva’s grip – weakness seeking strength, because it feared it would fall apart otherwise – but now remembered how to tense his muscles. “No,” he grated. His voice was almost enough to stun him: it was as rough as wet gravel under someone’s tires, his throat torn up and alien from shrieking. But the one thing that it contained that was recognizable was violence, violence and denial.

One word was all he was able to yank out, and it still felt like he’d raked his throat over barbed wire after that. Blinking back tears of pain again and swallowing painfully, he let his head fall, ignoring that it had to rest against Silva’s knee like a lover’s. He’d used up what physical strength he had at the moment.

“Not forgetting your agents?” Silva clarified, sounding peeved at long last, voice low and grumpy. He was quite astute, however – or maybe he just liked prodding open wounds, physical or psychological. “Or not forgetting 007? You’ve wrapped that one all around you like a blanket, and I’m almost sorry to take you two apart. But like I said: I’ve killed 007 already.”

It hurt to be reminded, especially now that Q’s mind was a bit clearer. He clenched his jaw and refused to shed more tears. Instead, he braced himself against the discomfort of talking, and grated out, “Really? Others…have tried.” The words were hard-won, sticking in the torn wreck of his throat, but he got out what he wanted to say. Mostly, he was trying to convince himself. Surely, if the image of Bond in his head was still so vibrant and unstoppable, the real world could not be so different?

“Ahhhh, but the difference is in the outcome, because I have succeeded. Since when has another Angel tried their hand at killing agents, hmm?” Silva said, victory a scalpel-edge to his voice. Q was beginning to feel as if there were ants under his skin, riled up by the way Silva refused to stop touching him, hands constantly on his head or body – acquainting themselves with Q, making everything his. “You don’t believe me,” Silva sighed, reading something apparently in Q’s expression or posture, “Fine. Have it your way! I’ll explain: he and 001 decided to come after you, and when 001 got to me first, I took her over.”

Q groaned, already seeing where this was going. ‘Bloody 00-agents,’ he griped with feeling in his head, squeezing his eyes more tightly shut than before even, ‘When will they ever learn? Every bloody time they go somewhere without me…’ Sadly, there was no turning back time, and Silva was happily laying out the rest of his vicious work.

“Completely hypnotizing an Angel is hard work, as I’m sure you’re aware,” he said as if asking for sympathy, “But one thing I never told you was that head-injuries make it easier. So, I took over that wonderful creature 001, and sent her after 007. It was quite a beautiful thing to watch, really. She’s the vixen, he’s the dog.” Silva chuckled, and the sound felt like it sent pricks of discomfort into Q’s eardrums and skin. “I’m not sure what animal would win that fight, especially when the dog might hesitate to kill the vixen, but I made certain that 001 wouldn’t hesitate to do away with 007.”

“You’re wrong,” Q rasped, trying to at least sit back up on his knees again so he didn’t have to leave against Silva. Defiance wasn’t so much lending him new strength as it was tying all of his remaining
strength together. Rocking unsteadily and with pain (or blood-loss) putting blots of black at the sides of his vision, Q managed to pull back enough to totter and glare at Silva. He still had to keep the back of his left shoulder propped against the man’s knee to prevent falling over, and he still had to tilt his head up to meet the man’s eyes, but he’d gained that small sliver of pride as he narrowed his eyes venomously. “There’s a reason...001 is put on the missions she is...and a reason 007 is given his. They are different,” Q forced the words out, wishing that the pain hadn't reached through his skin to wrap around his lungs and throat. “007 is the fighter. And if he has to kill 001...he will.” That thought was disturbing and sobering, but Q couldn’t find anything wrong with the logic of his last sentence – both in the professional world and in bed, he’d had a taste of 007’s aggressive, possessive behavior, and how the worst (or best) of it was directed towards the Quartermaster. In fact, Q was fairly certain that James would hurt even Alec Trevelyan if 006 were to become a threat to Q.

No – if Bond had to, he’d kill 001 in the blink of an eye and worry about regretting it later. In his line of work, hard decisions like that were made every day.

Which left only one other conclusion after that: “And after that, Silva...you have to know he’ll be after your head.”

The hand cracked across his mouth, hard, sending him reeling to the floor. If Q had had his glasses, he might have noticed the way Silva’s face had been slowly growing rigid and stern, his eyes losing their sickeningly amused spark to instead become hard and flinty. He didn’t like being reminded of 007, perhaps because he could hear how connected Q was to the man just in his voice – and perhaps because that delicious fear in the Quartermaster’s voice melted away when he talked about Agent James Bond. Either way, an ugly sort of temper had risen up, and it was only abated by the sound of Q’s choked, high-pitched cry as he fell away, landing crookedly on one abused wing. There was now a smear of blood no the floor, giving Q what looked like a third wing painted in red.

“That’s how it is, is it?” Silva demanded, standing to tower over his captive, who was lying very still and breathing shallowly as he tried – and possibly failed intermittently – not to pass out. Dark lashes fluttered against pale cheeks as the Quartermaster fought to stay on this side of the darkness pounding through his head. “You tossing agents’ names at me, refusing to believe what I tell you? I’ve done many things, Q dear, but lie to you isn’t one of them. Your agent is dead, I’m afraid.”

Again, that sorrowful voice and pitying eyes – so wrong for this situation and for that hated face that Q felt that he was going to vomit. The wing under him had a broken bone, and it was grinding into him...creating stars behind his eyes...but this wasn’t the broken wing.

Q stopped breathing for a second, intentionally, as he tried to center his senses. They were scattered, but he brought them in line long enough to deduce that something not related to his wing was digging into his leg. He was so focused on this and so bewildered by it that he almost didn’t catch Silva’s final, patronizing words: “I don’t know how he found you to begin with, the clever boy, but the bomb I set off on him and 001 will make sure James doesn’t try again.”

The mention of the bomb, oddly enough, barely fazed Q – 007 was nearly indestructible, and the last time he’d had a bomb go off near him...well, Q had been there for that. James had come out of that surprisingly well-off, and Q had no choice but to believe he could avoid death-by-explosion yet again. It was either that or accept that James had been killed, and Q wasn’t sure he wanted to live after that. He’d become attached to the insufferable, charming, intense man more quickly than he’d anticipated.

What the battered Quartermaster instead focused on was the mention of 007 mysteriously finding him. As quickly as that, Q knew what was hidden in his pocket, and wondered just when he’d started slipping enough that a 00-agent could sneak something into his pants without him noticing. Then again, since James had already ‘gotten into his pants’, maybe he had an edge. Q didn’t want to
admit a soft spot for a man as dangerous as 007, but he probably had one.

So if 007 could track him, and he hadn’t died— ‘No!’ Q viciously shook his head, ignoring the pain totally now without needing the spotty help of Silva’s hypnosis. ‘I won’t believe that he is dead! He’s bloody survived this long, so he can damn well survive a bit longer!’ All Q had to do was make sure that Silva didn’t notice him coming when 007 came for Q, because come for Q he would.

As much as he could with the damage he’d sustained to his person, Q began to think and to plan. For all of Silva’s strengths, he had weaknesses, too—he was just careful to give the impression that he had none, that he was invincible. The wicked game with Bond (Silva taking over his mind while Q listened and fruitlessly tried to stop him) had been a clear example of Silva flaunting his strengths until it seemed ludicrous to even question what he could do. Surely he was stronger than Q, the inexperienced one, when it came to these abilities?

And yet, when 007 had regained consciousness after Silva had first captured them, Silva had shown that he couldn’t detect the subtle shift. Q had missed it at first, but had the attention to fine details that ultimately allowed him to note the change in supernatural energy. It was that attention to fine detail, in fact, that made Q such a good Quartermaster as he untangled code and repaired delicate bits of tech. Silva was smart on a broader scale, and his skills reflected that.

At the same time, Q also tentatively wondered which of them had more brute strength. Not in body, of course—that ball was firmly in Silva’s court, his frame being even bigger than Alec’s—but in Angel energy. With the possible exception of when he’d first knocked 007 out cold back in the Canadian woods, Silva had always used touch or extremely close proximity to take down the defenses of a victim’s mind and take them over. Q had taken over two Angels at once without touching either of them, although he’d at least had eye-contact with one, and Bond had just narrowly escaped a bullet to the brain.

All Q had were hypotheses, some of them quite useless, considering how weak his energy was at the moment—returning at a pathetic trickle. But his ability to sense Angel energy around him was still quite active and effective, so there was a chance he might be able to sense Bond first. Precisely what he’d do then…

Q had no idea.

But he wouldn’t—couldn’t—believe that Bond was dead and wouldn’t come, so he began to plan anyway as he lay crumpled on the floor, wings bleeding out their own bloody shadows and arms tied behind his back.

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Bond’s ears were still ringing. He’d never admit it, but the only reason he’d been able to tell where the bomb was in time to avoid the worst of it was from how many times he’d watched Q disarm the bloody things. That, and he’d just started running, as soon as he’d suspected Silva’s plans. Anywhere but where he was now sounded like a good idea, and proved true as he’d folded his wings and literally clipped the edges of a tunnel mid-dive (001 right behind him) to the tune of an almost merry click, followed by a horrendous blast.

That didn’t mean he’d completely escaped the destruction, sadly, so he was picking himself out of the rubble yet again. Considering his track-record for mayhem, this didn’t even top his list of dangerous situations, so he stood up and gave his wings a hard shake. Dust and rubble cascaded off, the finer particles no doubt making an absolute travesty of the neat barbs of each feather. Medical would no doubt scream at him later, but personal hygiene (no matter how crucial in the upkeep of wings) was something 007 had learned to put aside until after missions.
He turned, sensing 001. Q was uncommonly good at noticing the finest minutia about a person’s energy, down to the tilt of a fist as a punch swung in, but all Bond could sense was that this was 001 and she wasn’t dead. He wasn’t sure if it was just professional courtesy or something more akin to worry, but he quickly made his way to her, wary of another attack. As it was, she appeared down for the count.

At long last, Bond turned his earpiece back on, hoping a signal could reach from here to MI6. “Alec?” he said in a no-nonsense tone, unapologetically tearing strips of fabric from 001’s shirt to tie around her head. She was still bleeding, but all the explosion seemed to have done to her was knock her unconscious at long last. It seemed 007 wasn’t the only one who was indestructible.

Just as Bond heard an intake of breath, most likely signally Alec getting ready to reply, M interjected along the shared comm line, “James, is that you? Report. And I hope you have the Quartermaster with you.” Someone was going to blow a blood vessel today – he couldn’t remember the last time he’d heard M so tense and stroppy.

In all truthfulness, Bond wasn’t exactly a picture of calmness himself. After pulling 001 clear of the last bits of crumbled rock, he pulled her own belt loose and used it to secure her hands behind her. “Quartermaster pending,” he grunted, batting at one of 001’s wings with his own and sending a shower of dust with the movement. “I’ve been a bit held up.”

“Whatever by?” M snapped as if this were all his fault. 004 and 006 and anyone else who might have shared the line were silent, proving that M’s temper had likely beaten them into submission before 007 stuck his head in.

It was all so…normal…that Bond almost laughed. Only the thought of Q still being in Silva’s grasp prevented any levity from getting a toe-hold in his mind. “001, if you must know. Does everyone have to go after Silva by themselves?!” He grunted as he pulled the belt tight and cinched it off, having looped it multiple times to help the restraints stand up against Angel strength. “Silva got her alone and managed to injure and take her over. I was fighting her until the ceiling caved in.”

M paused, but her tactful and tight reply was, “Dare I even ask?”

“A bomb, James?” 006 guessed quickly.

“A pretty well-hidden one,” Bond admitted, “Probably made to cover his trail.”

“Or bury two fighting 00-agents,” was 004’s predictably serious, calm response, and Bond could almost imagine his tightlipped and sober expression.

That was all Bond cared to say on the topic, because it felt too much like wasting time. He noticed that 001’s earpiece had been switched off, and turned it back on again – providing a link to her, should she wake up. “I’ve stabilized 001 – she’s unconscious and has a head-wound, but I’ve stopped the bleeding. Her earpiece is on, but that’s all the help I can give you.”

“We’ll take care of it, 007,” M said immediately, “Enough of Q-branch has woken up that we’re already putting together a team and mapping out the tunnels. 004 and 6 will be on your tail shortly.”

‘Not soon enough.’ Out loud, Bond simply said in a voice that brooked no argument, “I’m going on ahead. I’ll make contact again when I find Q.” And he would find Q. There simply was no other option.

“Good luck, Bond,” was M’s last comment, and then Bond turned off the gadget in his ear again, and checked to see that the tracking program in his phone was still working. Q was close...but no
longer moving.

Fear spurred 007 onward as he gave his wings – which ached in a few places but were otherwise undamaged and operational – one last hard shake and started running again.

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Positions had returned to where they had been earlier, with Silva – his movements a sick farce of gentleness and concern, where all Q could feel was smugness and possessiveness – coaxing Q to once again lean against his legs. This in itself was a brother to hypnosis, Q knew, with Silva trying to desensitize him to the nearness. His constant touches served to blunt the edges of Q’s fear, showing kindness where Q had come to expect brutality. Logically, Q knew all of this, but he could feel how weakness and pain had tattered the edges of his common-sense, and he wondered how long it would be before he started to tentatively cling to the soothing stroke of Silva’s hand or the melodic cooing of his voice.

Q shivered. It would probably still take a long time, and a lot more violence, but if 007 truly was dead, then Silva likely had that time.

Blood-loss was making Q sleepy, but Silva had been careful: a Mundane would have been in danger from so many open wounds, but Q was merely…inconvenienced. He’d survive the damage done to him, but he didn’t have the strength to fight back. Q’s greatest fear, however, was concerning when he stabilized, because he didn’t doubt that that was when Silva would finish his work – finish removing his wings.

“Shhh, shh, Q. No need to get excited,” Silva assured him calmly as Q began to shudder, muscles twitching with the wild but useless need to get away. “You’re safe now, Q! With someone who understands you better than you understand yourself.” Q swallowed the taste of bile that rose in his throat, and squeezed his eyes shut against the hand that brushed his hair back from his forehead. The other hand cupped the back of his neck – still smeared with blood and sticky – so Q couldn’t lift his cheek from Silva’s knee. He kept imagining what a picture they made: the master and the devoted servant, the latter leaned trustingly and lovingly against the former. It was such an utter lie that his stomach clenched. The only silver-lining to any of this was that Silva was so repulsed by wings that, now that he’d damaged them enough for now, he refused to touch Q’s. The pain hadn’t faded in the slightest, but at least Q didn’t have to put up with Silva’s hands all over them – at least until he got bored and started cutting again.

Which Q feared would be soon. If Silva waited too long, Q would start getting noticeably stronger again – so far, Q’s theories had been proving correct as Silva failed to notice the minute building of Q’s supernatural energy. Only a fraction of Q’s attention was on that, however, as he focused all of his being on sensing the world around him. He was a drifting consciousness in a dark world, looking for a star.

And when he caught one – just the barest flicker at the edges of his sensory range – he nearly broke down and cried with relief.

Q didn’t have whatever it was that allowed 007 to tell people apart simply by their energy, but it certainly was moving like Bond: fast. The man had never been patient with anything. That meant that he’d soon be getting close enough for Silva to sense him, too. It would be inevitable even if he slowed down, because no amount of sneaking could hide one Angel from another. Q had to work fast.

“Q?” Silva called his name, dragging the single syllable out as if he found the taste of it both amusing and addictive. He’d heard the sob, and instead of reading the relief in it, had taken it as a sign that
the indomitable Quartermaster was finally breaking down. The man’s hand had been loath to leave Q’s face this whole time (even if the Quartermaster had been stalwartly ignoring him), and Silva’s fingers slid into Q’s hair until he could grip it, once again turning Q’s head up to look at him.

And this time, when Silva sought his gaze, Q met it, snapping his eyes open with a flair of whatever power he had.

“Stop it!” he hissed like a whip cracking, desperate power seething so wildly beneath the surface that Silva – taken completely off-guard – could only stare at the broken thing that had suddenly become a viper on his lap. Without waiting for his power to slip or his fear to take over, Q focused his power to truly use it, helplessness somehow added to his viciousness. The first sentence hadn’t done anything besides give Silva a smack in the face, but now Q moved on.

Three words.

Three words to take a man’s mind.

“I’m-”

“-Not-”

“-Weak.”

Silva roared and broke free, standing up and breaking his connection with Q’s eyes so quickly that the chair toppled over backwards. Q felt feverish, but still flushed with power – even though he knew he was just running on fumes. He managed not to fall over, bracing on his knees and hunching over as he panted against the pain of movement. His eyes never left Silva, and he knew that he’d try his best to hypnotize the man again if he had a chance.

“You little minx,” Silva accused, trying to sound light and failing. He’d stumbled away from his captive, and now kept his head turned away as if Q had a Gorgon’s petrifying eyes.

“I can take over someone’s mind without eye-contact, you know,” Q threatened, not because he thought he had the strength to right now, but because he knew that it would further distract Silva – and the other Angel was getting closer. It could have been anyone, for all Q knew, but he happened to know more Angel allies than enemies, and chances were still high that it was 007 in such a hurry.

Knowing that Silva doubted Q’s strength at the moment, Q made a gamble. Leaning against Silva’s knees had allowed him to angle his own legs a bit, so they weren’t just losing circulation tucked beneath him. Ergo, he could actually feel his legs, and now clumsily unfolded them and got to his feet. It was a battle of will, and at numerous points he thought that he’d end up making a spectacular fool of himself instead of achieving an upright position. But he made it – somehow, wings drooping bloodily to the flow and face ashen, the Quartermaster gained his feet.

“You’re going to regret making me stronger, Silva,” Q panted softly, already instinctively sensing where the man was by energy instead of sight, just as he had in any sparring match without his glasses. His legs shook and the spikes of pain from his wings traveled through every inch of him.

But when Silva opened his mouth to retort something, his eyes went past Q instead, and Q couldn’t help a dry little smile. He knew what Silva was sensing. The Angel – Bond, for sure now, because Q recognized the way he held his gun, the way he walked, the way he held his wings back without a twitch – was right outside the doorway.

The smile lasted until Silva drew a gun and shot out the lights.
Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger! I'm really, really, REALLY close to finishing this, and if I hadn't gotten distracted by watching 'Howl's Moving Castle', I would have probably gotten to the Epilogue XP

At least one chapter left! On a happier note, a wonderful commenter drew some fanart for me - since I cannot draw a Q-face that actually looks like Q XD Check it out: http://kvg.cl/personal/q.jpg
Chapter Summary

Bond, Q, and Silva.
One last time.
No mistakes.
Another vague summary for your enjoyment :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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For Q, this didn’t complicate things unduly – standing between two Angels, he could sense each quite clearly in his mind. But if it truly was 007 on his way through the door, he’d be met with two energy-signatures lined up, especially as Silva swiftly stepped forward and grabbed Q by the arm. It would be like looking up into the sky and trying to see two stars, but having them almost one behind the other – creating one glow.

Silva had obviously given 001 no orders to follow them, because he didn’t even pause to consider that this incoming Angel might be an ally. Instead, he made assumptions as he kept Q close and aimed the gun over the Quartermaster’s shoulder. The pain of having his damaged wings pinned between his back and Silva’s chest sent flashes of white-hot pain across Q’s vision, and he cried out, inadvertently causing Bond to give himself away.

Still on the other side of the door (no doubt made wary by the gunshot, and the way the light had disappeared suddenly from beneath the door), Bond called out, “Let him go, Silva.” The edge in the man’s voice was harsh and grating, proving that he’d heard Q’s whimper of pain and wasn’t happy about it in the slightest.

“Ahh, James! I wasn’t expecting to see you so soon,” Silva replied in his falsely-light voice. Q, through shudders of pain he was trying to push back, along with the threat of passing out, could easily detect the heightened tension hidden beneath the tone, however.

“You weren’t expecting to see me at all.”

“True,” Silva admitted without remorse, before his voice deepened with smug menace, “Good luck, James.”

Now 007 was growing suspicious, even though Q could sense from his energy that he was still crouched, stock-still and ready. He managed somehow to keep his voice light and disinterested, however, as he replied, “Now why would you do a thing like wish me luck, Silva? You have to know that I want to put a bullet in your head. And a million more bullets everywhere else in you.”

Q shivered at the threat, warmed by it despite the fact that he knew he should be chastising 007 for unprofessional and excessive violence. With his own blood dripping to the floor, however, he found
it hard to care. Silva’s grip tightened punishingly on his arm as the larger, wingless man answered Bond, “You can’t see in the dark, James, and even a trained Angel can’t tell apart two of their own without the help of eyes.”

This fact made a bolt of fear shoot through the Quartermaster – with Silva and Q literally pressed together, he doubted that even 007 would be able to pick them apart through sensing energy alone. Even with the lights still intact to cast light, it would have been a dangerous, tricky situation, possibly even an impossible impasse.

And yet Q felt nothing but fierce hope as 007 – brash as always, determined as a terrier – shouldered open the door without preamble.

Q immediately jammed his shoulder to one side, hitting Silva’s gun-arm and immediately sending a bullet winging off into the wall. It hadn’t taken a genius to know that Silva would be waiting to shoot Bond the first chance he got. Bond had to have known that, too, meaning he’d either trusted Q to disrupt the shot, or he simply hadn’t cared what happened to him. Time seemed to slow as Silva snarled, knowing he’d missed but thinking he’d get another shot as 007 hesitated.

It was a space of eternity. Q was between breaths, holding the air in his lungs as if it stopped time, eyes cloaked in darkness but senses painting out the shape of Bond’s body: standing in the doorway, wings in tight to make himself as small a target as possible, gun in both hands. For a horrifying second, those hands turned the gun right towards Q, so that he could imagine the muzzle pointed at his face. He and Silva were just a mass of supernatural energy, after all, predator and prey merged grossly into one, impossible to distinguish.

“Shoot, James,” Q said quietly, not sure if he even spoke or just desperately thought it, but Q noticed James’s head twitch. Q just wanted him to pull the trigger, because, while he wanted to come out of this alive, what he wanted more was for Silva to come out of this dead. And he didn’t care if Bond had to shoot right through him to do it. The pain he was already in didn’t leave room for much more, and he knew about the agony of a bullet tearing through a body – and he didn’t care.

If someone had to shoot him to kill Silva, it may as well be James. He just wished he had time to tell Bond not to feel guilty if the price of Silva’s death was Q’s.

But then there was another minute shift of Bond’s energy, and then his hands moved fractionally – not in a gesture of hesitation, but in an action of lining up a shot, and there was the bark of the gun going off. Q didn’t even have time to flinch.

“Wha-?” he heard Silva demand, and second before they were both falling, Q too tied up and stunned to do anything but fall over backwards as Silva’s weight dragged him down. They landed in a tangle of limbs and broken wings, with Q almost instantly seeing white as the pain – impossibly – skyrocketed. None of it was coming from anywhere new, however, because Bond had missed him by millimeters and caught only Silva instead.

“Q!” Bond barked, instantly coming closer.

Q noticed that Bond had lowered his gun, however, while his own senses were telling him that Silva wasn’t dead – close, but not quite. Rolling over (off Silva and onto the hard floor) with a groan, the Quartermaster managed to grunt out a command for 007 to halt. At the sound of Q’s ‘Quartermaster voice’ as opposed to a more familiar tone, the blond agent immediately froze in his tracks, gun coming up again.

“You won’t need it, Bond,” Q rasped, clearing his throat to even get the words out. His wings were screaming and his hands nearly numb from being bound, but he managed to find Silva’s head – wet
with blood – with his knee. In the dark, eye-contact was a moot point, but he still focused on the
point of contact as he called up his powers one more time. He felt Silva twitch to fight back, but
didn’t pay it any mind. What was Silva going to do? If the man tried to hurt him, Q would barely
even notice, on top of the pain he was already feeling – and Silva’s hypnosis was still partially in
effect, flummoxing Q’s nerve-endings. If Silva tried to fight him off, 007 was also hovering in the
wings, radiating energy at a level that begged for violence.

But Q had had enough violence. Everything was quiet once again, and thanks to Bond’s uncanny
and inexplicable ability to tell Angels apart by energy, Silva had a hole in him and Q didn’t.

“Time to sleep,” Q croaked, and when Silva made a noise of confusion – a remarkably pathetic
sound for a man who had been such a titan, such a monster – Q centered his power for a simple
command. “Lights-” He tied Silva’s consciousness to his. “-Out.” And turned off all the lights in
Silva’s head just as Silva had blown out the lights in the room. A simple command like that didn’t
even need three words, and Silva relaxed from his head to his toes with a long, sighing breath.

Q sat down suddenly on the floor, his rump hitting the concrete and somehow not jarring his head
out of the fog that had descended on it. “Is he dead?”

“No,” Bond said slowly from the darkness, as if walking on eggshells, “You can tell that from his
energy.”

“Hah,” Q said humorlessly, as even sitting became difficult. He began to sway, and bloody Bond –
why wasn’t he over here already to hold him and tell him it was over?! That it was okay?! “Easy for
you to say. You aren’t so burnt out you can’t think. I can barely sense

[partial text]

That last hypnosis had taken the last dregs out of him, leaving a fragile, bloody shell behind. Nonetheless, he listened
and could hear 007’s footsteps, barely a scuff on the rough ground as he finally approached. The
man circled Silva, wary as he had been taught, but ultimately came to Q’s side.

He put a hand on Q’s shoulder. “This is 001’s gun, not mine, but I know what it’s meant to do.” His
voice was low and deadly. “Silva deserves worse.”

“M will want him alive for questioning,” Q pointed out, leaning into the hand as 007 crouched down
next to him. Bond could tell Angels apart for some reason, but he didn’t have the attention to detail
that would allow him to realize just how broken Q was until he began to manually check him over.
After touching blood, he stiffened, although he didn’t stop his exploratory touches until Q choked on
a cry of pain.

“Sorry,” the man said uncomfortably, returning his hand to the safe position on Q’s shoulder. There
was the sound of rustling cloth as he dug his phone out of his pocket, turning it on to cast some light.
Q winced away from it, his short time in darkness combining with the general headache thundering
behind his eyes to make the sudden brightness unbearable. Bond saw what he needed to see,
however, and swore under his breath before continuing, “Whatever M wants will have to wait. I’m
getting you out of here. Silva will have to live or die on his own.”

The light from the phone cast as much shadow as it did light, and without his glasses, Q couldn’t tell
where Bond had hit Silva – only that Q himself had survived without the slightest graze. That was
good, because he couldn’t imagine another injury. He hissed and bit the inside of his cheek fiercely
to try and keep from crying out again as Bond worked to stop the bleeding, shucking his shirt to tear
into make-shift bandages. “Oi!” Q yelped, “That one’s broken! I…I’d rather if you were careful with
it.”

“Sorry, Q,” Bond apologized again, this time in a rather overwhelmed sigh. “Here – can you contact
M and give her a report?” He pulled out his earpiece to hand to Q, intent on bandaging.
Frankly, Q replied, “I’d really rather not.”

“Good,” grunted the agent, “Me neither. Now, how many other breaks?”

“No clue, but at least one dislocated joint, b-before the knife came out.” The memory made Q cringe, cowering and pulling in to himself without meaning to. He was deeply grateful when 007 didn’t press for clarification, but instead shifted his body, so Q could lean into his chest, forehead to bare skin now that 007’s shirt had been sacrificed for binding up wounds beneath broken feathers. The man’s hands finally found the bindings around Q’s wrists, breaking them with a flash of strength rather than waste the time hunting up a knife. Q felt the flex of muscles around him, but simply sat still, legs crossed and body folded exhaustedly forward. As Bond knelt up, Q’s forehead slid lower, resting on his breastbone, feeling each slow and powerful inhale and exhale. He clung to that:
inhale…exhale…inhale…exhale. “I’m lucky you can tell me apart from Silva, just by energy,” he found the calmness to comment, trying to distract from the fact that tears were weaving relieved trails down his face and onto James’s skin.

“And who said I could do that?” the other man chimed in.

Q huffed a laugh as he pulled his arms – free at long last – in front of him. His muscles protested horribly, but he still managed to laugh at 007’s blithe comment. “I’m not an idiot, 007.”

“Back to ‘007’, are we, Quartermaster?”

“Hush-up, we both know you’re insufferable when I call you James.” The light banter was a life-saver – soothing and wonderful and normal. Even though everything still hurt, like fire sprouting from his back instead of wings, he knew that everything was going to be all right. “You’re doing it again,” he smiled warmly.

Bond had done what he could to wrap up Q’s wings, mostly just folding them carefully together and wrapping them that way: Q could not stretch them out, but that also meant he couldn’t worsen matters by moving them, and much of the blood was staunched by the wrappings. Now, the agent settled back on his heels again to take Q’s ragged wrists in his calloused grip, meeting Q’s nearsighted gaze as the two gained some distance. “Doing what again?”

“Distracting me. I never truly appreciated it, but it’s wonderful now.” As the last remnants of 007’s shirt were used to wrap Q’s wrists, the Quartermaster squeezed his eyes shut against another wave of pain. “Continued efforts would be just brilliant,” he gasped as consciousness fluttered almost out of his grip.

Bond’s hands were immediately on his face, cupping either side of his jaw and moving their faces so their noses touched, breath fanning against breath. “Hey – Q, stay with me. You’re here with me, and we’re going to get out of here soon. Just hold on while I lift you.”

“No…” Q panted, “…going to ask if I can stand?”

A snort was his answer: “Not on your life. If I crouch with my back to you, can you wrap your arms around my neck? On my back, I can carry you without bumping those wings of yours.”

Not bumping his wings sounded heavenly. He even thought he could do what Bond said. “Understood, 007,” he murmured, opening his tired eyes just enough to catch James’s gaze as the man flashed a surprised smile – Q had returned the phrase that usually Bond used. Without further ado, 007 turned around, spreading his wings to present the line of his back in between them, tanned and bare and straight. Q used up the last of his physical energy to sort of topple forward, latching his arms around Bond’s neck in an unrepentant death-grip. Bond helped by reaching back to catch Q’s
knees, pulling the lean limbs around his sides and snuggling them in close before standing.

Q kept his half-open eyes on Silva, so still on the ground and painted in red that might have been his, might have been Q’s. He noticed that Bond didn’t even spare him another look, focused entirely on leaving. With the phone lighting their way so quaintly, Bond was soon exiting the room. “Okay, Q?”

“As close as I honestly thought I’d get,” the other admitted with a slightly hysterical giggle. “I might even fly again, can you imagine it? Medical is full of sadists, but with our fast healing, they might be able to undo...this.” He didn’t so much indicate his wings as he fluttered his fingers against Bond’s clavicle. Of their own accord, his fingertips danced to the scar on Bond’s chest, finding it and pressing close until he could feel the heartbeat beneath the skin.

“Of course I can imagine it, Q,” said Bond gently and without hesitation. Q just sighed – tired, in pain, but somehow content – as the man’s short, blond hair brushed against his when Bond leaned briefly to the side to make contact. “Medical would have to bloody well answer to me if they failed to put you to rights.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Q had the strength to chuckle, then he added, “You should really check in to M.”

Bond just growled, making it clear that he didn’t want to – or that he just didn’t want to share Q with anyone else. Faced with 00-obstinacy, Q just lifted a hand and turned the earpiece on himself, despite the fact that the earpiece was back in Bond’s ear and 007 squirmed. “This is...er...well, this is 007’s earpiece, but this is Q, reporting in.”

“Q!” M’s voice was immediately there, showing more outright worry than Q had ever heard her express before. “Status – what’s going on? Are you all right?”

“Injured – Silva thought that...” Saying it was almost too much, but Q knew that if he couldn’t speak of it now, he never would – so he broke through the fear like a pane of glass, ignoring the cutting shards as he said in a detached, frigid voice, “Silva thought that removing my wings a second time would teach me some lesson of sorts.”

“He didn’t succeed,” 007 cut in immediately, thumbs rubbing gentle circles against the outside of Q’s knee as they kept moving. “But tell Medical to be ready to treat broken bones, dislocations, and lacerations.

“Bond, tell me that you paid Silva back kindly for damaging our Quartermaster,” said M in a silky, black-edged voice like nothing Q had ever heard before. It honestly sent shivers down his spine.

“He’s got a bullet in him, and Q incapacitated him. We left him in the tunnel behind us,” 007 said with obvious reluctance.

004 chimed in then: “I’m on it. I’m near your position, and thanks to Q-branch, I think I know where you’re talking about.”

“I’ll go with you,” 006 agreed immediately, and then conspicuously turned his earpiece off. Bond knew what that meant: it meant he had plans that he didn’t want M to hear. Good. Bond was fine with that, because he very much suspected that those plans included a lot of blood on Silva’s part.

“I’m bringing the Quartermaster in. The situation is under control,” 007 finished, and thought he heard M sigh. 007 turned his head far enough to just brush a kiss against Q’s head, murmuring, “Just a little farther.”

Q didn’t remember anything past that, as he drifted into an exhausted netherworld somewhere between unconsciousness and sleep.
Bond was standing outside Q’s hospital room, where he could see him through the propped-open door but not block the constant flow of doctors and nurses. They were fixing Q’s wings, but honestly, the fixing looked worse than the breaking. Q had barely made it back into MI6 and he was enshrouded by people with antiseptic, thread, scalpels, and needles. At least Q had been unconscious from the start, and the IV in his arm assured that he’d stay that way. Logically, Bond knew that Medical was undoing what Silva had done, but that didn’t stop the irrational urge to spirit the Quartermaster away to somewhere safe and quiet where Bond and Bond alone could protect him.

“Hey, James!” It was 006, walking up with 004 behind him like a placid shadow. The two seemed natural and comfortable around each other, despite having started out as stark opposites, and still being different in more ways than could be counted. It had been at least three hours since Bond had talked to him, back in the tunnels. “How’s our boffin doing?”

For once, Alec wasn’t grinning, instead looking truly concerned. Bond looked back once over his shoulder before deciding that his looming was doing nothing but make everyone – himself included – uncomfortable. “The last nurse I cornered said that we were in luck: wingless or not, Q’s healing has always been up to snuff, and with Medical’s help, they think he’ll be all right. It’ll just take time.” Walking towards 006 and 4 and down the hall, Bond said without looking at either of them, “Silva cut him up like a cat on a canary.” Anger resonated in his voice.

Alec’s voice, by contrast, was quiet and lethal and smug. “Good. We did the same to him.”

Startled, Bond stopped and spun to face his old friend, who met his gaze with a broad, shark’s smile. It was 004 who spoke next, however, voice calm and professional as always, “What are you talking about, 006? We didn’t recover the criminal called Silva. The chances of him being alive are pretty slim, however.” Not batting an eye at 007’s admittedly gobsmacked expression, the so-called goody-two-shoes of the 00-devision finished, “It looks like that explosion Silva set up had repercussions – the room you and Q had left him in collapsed. Shame the body will never be found.”

James looked between Alec and Aiden, reading between the lines easily but still no less stunned by what he was reading. “So you never got a chance to bring him in for questioning?” he asked 006 with feigned nonchalance.

006 matched it, shrugging his broad, dark wings, “Nope. I wanted to do to Silva every thing he’d done to our Quartermaster, but I couldn’t, obviously. I mean, he was probably dead already, before the cave-in, right?”

Slowly, a wicked smile was spreading across James’s face. “Very right. Couldn’t agree with you more. What did M say about this?”

“That it was a pity that she’d never get her turn at him, whatever that meant.”

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Chapter End Notes
*whew* There's still an epilogue to go - where I get to check in on 001, as well as 004+006 *winkwink* and 007 and Q. If you have any specific requests for that, feel free to comment, and I'll see what I can do. But the next chapter will definitely be the last, as I tie up loose ends and write some long-awaited cuteness for the happy couples ;)

I'm sorry if Silva's end seems abrupt - this was simply poetic to me, with Bond's skill coming into pay, and 006 and 4 getting to play a part.

I hope you've enjoyed the ride!
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

That's all, folks! In this chapter, you'll find some 007 and Q time, some much-deserved 004 and 006 time, and even a few cameo appearances of 001 and Mothra.

Chapter Notes

Before you dive in, here is another lovely piece of art by yukitan, who also did coverart previously for this fic :D It's divine, and a lovely way to end this. yukitan art (Sorry if the link doesn't work... I'm not a tumblr person, so I can't track it down :( )

More by yukitan here

^^ If this link is not working, check here instead

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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“Well, this feels familiar,” Q observed, standing in the training room on the sparring mats across from 007, who was smiling and lazily crossing his arms as Q experimentally flapped his wings. They felt like they’d been wrapped in splints and bandages forever, but they were finally pain-free and mobile. “You’re not going to throw me across the room like last time, are you?” finished the Quartermaster with a small, teasing twitch of a smile. His eyes were bright and mischievous behind his glasses, which he still needed but not as much. Medical was also having a much, much easier time handling him and treating him now that his body had started accepting typical Angel medications.

Bond’s wings were still and quiet, but he snorted, “Not unless you bloody my lip like you did Alec’s, and I don’t think that will be necessary. I just want to see how much muscle-mass you’ve lost from inactivity.”

“But then you’ll take me out flying?” Q pressed, still feeling almost giddy at the prospect. He rocked on the balls of his feet, shifting his wings as he did so just to feel the new – or, rather, old – balance he had to work with. He gave Bond a look of mock-rebuke, “You did promise.”

“My, my – is our Quartermaster really pouting?” returned Bond cattily, failing horribly at holding back his chuckle, eyes trailing along the lower lip that Q was jutting out slightly. Again, there was that heat in 007’s gaze that Q had become so used to, although it still caught his breath and made him shiver.

Q straightened his back to regain some of his dignity, not about to let Bond take control of the
situation so easily, no matter how sexy he was. “No, I was merely reminding you of your solemn duties – you promised to take your Quartermaster out for some much-needed flying, a task that will no doubt require supervision, as I literally haven’t flown with wings in years.”

Still quite jovial, the blonde agent gave in, “All right, I guess I can’t be neglecting solemn duties, can I? Step forward then. The ceiling here isn’t high enough for real flight, but it’ll be good enough for me to test your strength a bit. Stand in front of me, like this.” He positioned Q so they were standing quite simply in front of each other, and Q gave Bond a questioning look as Bond looked over the Quartermaster’s wings with a careful eye.

“What are we going to do, exactly?”

Not answering, Bond let his hands fall on Q’s shoulders. Briefly, his strong hands squeezed, just enough that he no doubt could feel the lean muscle wrapped thinly around the Quartermaster’s bones, then sliding down sensuously. Q’s lids lowered, but he didn’t move, fairly certain that 007 would have taken him somewhere else besides a sweaty sparring room if he’d wanted a purely romantic encounter. Soon, Bond’s calloused fingers were wrapping lightly around Q’s wrists, brushing against his pulse before rotating to coax Q into gripping back. “It’s very simple: you’re going to hold onto my wrists, and see how much lift you can get. No grace is needed here, Q – just pretend you’re taking off and trying to lift me.”

“Lift you?” Q parroted in disbelief, letting his eyes roam freely up and down the muscular frame of the other man: Bond was taller and heavier than him by a large margin, all muscle and bone. “I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed with my efforts quite quickly, Agent Bond.”

James still got a challenging glint in his eye whenever Q reverted back to calling him by a professional title, even when they were in MI6 and that was what was expected – Q liked that glint quite a lot, so he prodded Bond often. This time, Bond let it go, though. “The goal isn’t for you to lift me, Q, don’t worry. I’ll be able to feel how much lift you get, though, when you try. So – up you go!”

The patronizing command was warmed by 007’s cheeky smile, which Q was hard-put not to return. He instead focused on the task, however, seeing the logic in doing it. Turning to look left and then right, as if reassuring himself that both of his wings truly were in working order again, the Quartermaster took a deep breath and spread them. He looked back forward in surprise when he heard a small intake of breath from 007, and found the larger man looking at Q’s wings with an unexpectedly reverent expression.

“They’re beautiful, Q,” he said without the slightest prompting. One thumb stroked the soft underside of Q’s wrist, pushing back his sleeve to get at more skin. “I haven’t taken much time to tell you that before, but they are.” Then his eyes returned to Q’s, crystalline blue as ice but somehow as warm as sunlight. “And so are you.”

“Let’s get this flight test done with before you end up kissing me,” Q said briskly to try and hide the blush painting itself across his cheeks and the tips of his ears, aware that 007 would notice it anyway. The chuckle that reverberated low in the man’s throat backed up that assumption. Q just started flapping his wings, a sharp, uncoordinated beat at first, just to feel the stretch and pull of tendons. He was relieved when no pain surfaced, only the steady, pleasant burn of muscles going to work. “Okay…” he said, getting himself worked up to do this, and hoping he didn’t just make a fool of himself, “Okay…here I go.” He began to beat more strongly, his wings listening to him for once and soon finding their old rhythm as they did what they were built to do: destroy the ties of gravity. Q found himself gasping, then giggling, then laughing uninhibitedly as his feet left the floor, the rush of air setting up a gusting roar in the room. “Yes!” he crowed in a very un-Q-like fashion, setting Bond
to laughing in return.

Then Q got serious: he’d already lifted himself high enough to raise Bond’s arm, in his grip with no resistance, but was reaching the point where the larger 00-agent would begin anchoring him to the ground like a bloody anvil. While Q had no illusions of actually lifting 007 (not after spending so long hospitalized after the Silva Incident, and no flight experience for ages before that), he definitely planned to put the man on his toes for once. With a feisty growl that he hoped no one would pick up on the security cameras, Q began plying the air more and more strongly with his wings, fingers digging into Bond’s wrist to make sure he didn’t let go. Eyes fierce, a little smirk curling knowingly at one side of Bond’s mouth, 007 gripped tight in return and held his ground.

Although the ceiling wasn’t far above him, Q flapped his wings as if he had nothing but open sky above him, soon feeling the heat of strain in his wings. His shoulder and arms felt it, too, taking on Bond’s muscular weight, but it was worth it to see the flash of surprise in Bond’s eyes as he was dragged a step forward. Grey wings snapped out for balance as Q got a little clumsy in the air, not always pulling straight up, but often slewing to one side or another. “All right! All right!” Bond surrendered, squeezing twice on Q’s arms to make his point, even though he was smiling quite proudly, “I think that’s enough of that! If you can land without crashing, we’ll call that good. I’ll help you down.”

The gentle offer of assistance was wonderful, but only slightly necessary – Q was decently sure he could have landed without breaking anything. Still, never let it be said that the Quartermaster complained as he was eased out of the air, Bond pulling him close even though Q never tripped or missed his footing as his wings slowed. Breathing fast with excitement and light exertion and now standing close, Q looked up into Bond’s eyes, measuring the emotions exposed there. The pale blue was lit with warmth verging on heat, even though the smile was still small and secretive on the agent’s face – a telltale curving of his mouth. The possessiveness was there, a double-edged sword that came with being James Bond, yet Q wasn’t worried. He knew that he had more than enough moxie to make 007 work to come anywhere near possessing him, and balancing that demanding side was a considerate, caring love that had him even now holding back. 007 was built to take things and to break them, but that wasn’t all he could do.

Bond shifted his grip on Q’s wrists, easing the long, artistic hands onto his chest and lightly pinning them there, as if Q needed the support of his steady, powerful frame. “Ah, thank you, 007,” Q said drily and airily, “I was surely going to fall forward any second, wasn’t I?”

“Cheeky imp.”

“Although I must admit, the ache I’m going to feel later will be something to write home about,” Q noted more morosely, looking over his shoulder to where his back muscles were already beginning to feel the exercise. Q was distracted from the overworked muscles by suddenly finding 007’s hair brushing his jaw, the man ducking his head right into the collar of Q’s shirt to bite hotly at juncture of neck and shoulder. The Quartermaster gasped and arched his back involuntarily, no longer needing Bond’s coaxing to keep his hands in place as he gripped 007’s firm chest.

“It is a good kind of ache?” Bond asked without really pulling back, his words in fact slightly garbled by openmouthed kisses. His words were tauntingly bland, as if he were asking about groceries. To add double-meaning to his words, he lathed his tongue over the new – and pleasantly aching – bite-marks he’d so unrepentantly placed on Q’s skin beneath his shirt-collar.

“I thought you said it wouldn’t be necessary for me to bloody your nose,” Q said without rancor, head tilting back to just let him enjoy the sensation. There was something deliciously terrifying about having a trained assassin huff amusedly against his bared throat. “You’re getting remarkably
unprofessional.”

“Do you want me to stop?” By now, 007 had pulled the two of them so close that they were touching from thigh to chest, his strong arms slipping around Q while the Quartermaster fisted his hands in the material of Bond’s shirt.

Q didn’t even open his eyes as he frowned, “Bloody hell, no – where did I give you that idea?” Q moved his arms enough to snake them around Bond’s body in turn, sliding up 007’s back until he was able to kneed his fingertips into the thick cords of muscle that laced up either side of the man’s spine, leading to those broad, smoky wings. When that earned him an appreciative sound from somewhere deep in the agent’s ribcage, Q finally lowered his head, capturing the kiss he wanted. “Honestly,” he chastised as they pulled back for breath, “I thought they trained you 00-agents to be perceptive.”

Their next kiss was stopped by a throat being cleared behind them, and both very, very belatedly noticed the energy of another Angel standing behind them. Q immediately felt embarrassment surge through him like an electric charge – one that did not, thankfully, transmit physically from his skin to Bond – as he glanced, wide-eyed, over 007’s shoulder and wings. Bond, typically, saw no reason to even turn around, and simply straightened from where he’d been leisurely trying to invade every inch of Q’s mouth. “001,” he said with frosted cordiality but without any outright deadliness in his voice.

The woman stepped a little further in, one perfect eyebrow winged upwards into her bangs. “I’d ask if I was interrupting something, but I obviously am. If I didn’t have another pressing appointment after this, I’d have let you go at it,” she said smoothly, quickly going on with the same light, feline drawl, “Don’t get uptight, Quartermaster, I’m not your mother, nor am I Bond’s. I just wanted to say something to you. To both of you.”

Q noticed how she got uncharacteristically nervous with those last few sentences, and that more than anything cooled the embarrassed little fires in him. Feeling curiosity instead, he moved past Bond a little. The two still kept close, unconsciously maintaining several points of contact, and 007 turned with him. “What is it, 001?” Q asked, professionalism firmly in his grasp yet again.

The beautiful agent stepped forward, bearing still proud but her eyes lowered for once – not demurely and enigmatically, but almost deferentially. “I wanted to say…thank you, and to apologize for my behavior after you got your wings back. It was uncalled for.”

Q couldn’t have been more surprised if she’d started clucking like a chicken, and could only stand there, performing stunned blinks behind his glasses. He could understand the thanks – after he’d recovered enough to move around (his wings much-bandaged), he’d been told that 001 was recovering as well, but under heavy security until he could ‘clear’ her. So he’d gone in, performed his little hypnosis trick, and had left 001 with the knowledge that her head was her own again – the last bit of Silva was thus destroyed. Q would have appreciated the tiny, final victory more if evidence of Silva’s obsession weren’t still writ large into his wings, hidden beneath bandages and a plethora of stitches. 001 was obviously grateful for having the man’s controlling touch out of her head, however.

That still didn’t mean he apology was any less shocking – 001 and apologies were almost as rare as 007 and a mission without collateral damage. And then things got monumentally weirder as she turned to face Bond now, meeting his schooled expression of relaxed calm. “The same for you, 007. Thank you, and I’m sorry.”

For a moment, Bond seemed to chew on this, brows lowering a bit until he finally had to say, “I’d like to accept your apology, but even more, I’d like to know exactly what you’re apologizing for. I’m picky like that.”
001 flashed him a smirk. “There are so many things to apologize for, aren’t there?” she flirted, causing Q to automatically and quite unintentionally glower. Maybe Bond didn’t have the monopoly on possessiveness…

Thankfully, Bond was more than smart enough to know when not to return a seductive advance, however innocent it was. “Yes, and many that I’m not at all ready to forgive you for. So, again: why are you apologizing to me? And thanking me for?”

Finally, 001 stopped playing the role she’d been trained to portray – the seductress, the vixen – and went back to being surprisingly human. “The apology is for trying to kill you,” she said frankly.

“Not your fault.” Bond was nothing if not magnanimous about things like that – people tried to kill him on a daily basis, after all, and since no one had succeeded, he didn’t hold it against many people. He generally tried to kill them back, so it was all in the name of the game. He shrugged now.

001 nodded as if this was an acceptable response. “And the gratitude is two-fold: for not killing me in return when you had such reason to, and for not letting me kill you.” Now 001 was smirking again, her pride back in the haughty set of her hips and flash of her eyes.

Being a gentleman, 007 returned the look and the comment in kind. “I’d surely have had to let you, since you could hardly have killed me on your own merits. But I’m more than happy not to die, so you’re welcome,” he said airily. Q huffed and rolled his eyes at the two, entirely sure that the strutting and posturing was actually taught to 00-agents at some point in their training. He’d never reached that stage in his career, and was quite glad of it.

“Having you on my kill list would have made me too famous anyway,” 001 made sure to have the last word, although her smile was slightly rueful now, “and not in a good way. Your friend Alec Trevelyan would have had my head.” That got everyone to chuckling softly and a bit nervously, knowing that that assessment was true. Alec had a loyalty-streak a mile wide, and it didn’t stop to pander to morals very often. “Speaking of 006, I think I owe him a thank-you, too. I’m trying to… get my act together, you might say, and I heard he was the one who carried me out of the tunnels,” 001 finished, finally giving a reason to her inexplicably nice words.

Ignoring for a moment that 001’s inveterate cattiness might finally be at an end, Q spoke up, “Actually, I’m thinking that was 004. He came as back-up to 006, and despite his arm, was able to carry you. If you’re thanking people, thank him.”

“But he’ll be with 006,” Bond assured her with a secret smile, making a ‘run along’ motion with one hand, “so there’s no difference.”

The female Angel raised one eyebrow but couldn’t see any lie on 007’s face – because there wasn’t one – so she nodded stiffly and turned. She’d apparently used up the last of her good manners for today. Hopefully the wake-up call of being taken over by a psychotic Angel had done a bit to make her keep trying at friendliness, though.

Bond turned at Q’s side, pulling and folding Q’s right wing against himself in a manner that couldn’t be called anything but ‘cuddling’ it. “I still hate her,” he breathed into the feathers.

“Stop treating my wing like a teddy-bear,” Q said absentmindedly, still watching the space that 001 had vacated. Despite his words, he didn’t free his wing as he turned questioning eyes on James and demanded, “Why the mischievous look when you told 001 where to find Alec? Don’t lie, I know that look you get when you’re up to no good.”

“You’d know best, wouldn’t you?” Bond said in a throaty growl as – one hand still holding Q’s
nearest wing against his chest, he dragged his other hand delicately along the back until he could run
his fingers up and down Q’s spine. The touch made Q shiver, but before his eyes could fall closed at
the tantalizing strokes, Bond broke the peace by saying openly, “She has no idea that Aiden and
Alec are together.”

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001 had gotten some rather cryptic and nervous answers from various Mundanes about where to find
004 and 6. From what she could tell, both of them were in one of the break-rooms, but no one else
seemed overly eager to venture there. Perplexed, the woman sauntered down the halls, pushing
against the door which was usually propped open to allow anyone to wander in and out for coffee.

She stopped dead at the sight of 004 pushed up against the wall, pleasantly being snogged senseless
by a very happy, very demanding 006. Trevelyan had both hands braced on the wall by 004’s head,
one trapping the smaller man’s compliant wrist. The black-winged agent was enthusiastically laying
siege to 004’s mouth, but what made 001’s jaw drop was the sound of 004 growling into the kiss, a
sharp inhale from 006 showing that it was definitely a give-and-take situation. Boring, order-
following, polite-as-pie Aiden Matsuda had his free hand up under 006’s shirt, rucking it carelessly
up to his chest so he could scratch his fingernails sharply down the man’s ribs. 006’s broad wings
beat and spread out, a dark fan of pleasure even as he tried to get closer. Instead of looking crowded
there against the wall, 004 looked calm and appeased, eyes closed and the faintest smile tilting at his
mouth when kisses allowed.

001 had been ready for Q and Bond – everyone who was anyone knew that those two were thick as
thieves, especially since 007 had been making no secret of how attached he was. Due to her
particular missions, 001 was embarrassed by practically nothing…but she was occasionally caught
off-guard.

And having her mental image of 004 completely turned on its ear was not what she’d been prepared
for today.

Without a word, the woman turned around and left, closing the door behind her. A few rather
nervous-looking Mundanes gave her looks that said she was a courageous soul indeed for walking
where the two male Angels had dared to tread.

And to make-out.

And probably later to have sex.

No one was venturing into that break-room until both 004 and 006 left it.

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On another note, Mothra found a home. He had enjoyed the Dungeons of Q-branch well enough,
but he was a cat of adventure – or, if not that, a cat who was quite happy with moving from dank,
underground tunnels to a nice, carpeted flat. In place of mice to hunt down, he had long beams of
sunlight from the windows to keep his attention, and if Q fed him enough, the tomcat quite forgot
how amusing it was to chew on wires and eat metal washers. Cat-treats were tastier anyway.

Q got up – early, just as he liked it now, since he’d firmly gotten over his previous condition of morning lethargy – and walked into his living room in his housecoat, only to snort quietly into his tea. There was 007, sprawled on his couch, one wing hanging to the floor and the other tucked against his side. In the lee of his wing and bare chest, Mothra was curled up and looked to positively be smiling, the whiskered rogue. Q had not, of course, heard Bond come in, but that was to be expected of a 00-agent, recently off a mission. The day before, the Quartermaster had talked Bond through the end of a mission which had included two bombs, a druglord, and no fewer than six separate car-chases in which Q had expertly tracked everything through cameras while he simultaneously diverted traffic to prevent accidents. He’d turned off the earpiece once Bond had assured him that he was on the plane and on his way home.

Home, as in, to Q’s flat. Q had gotten quite used to it, and almost wished that 007 had been less chivalrous, and had woken him – there was something exciting and wonderful about having 007 (still rumpled from travel and often smelling of gun oil and smoke) stumble into his room and more or less collapse onto the bed. Sometimes James was awake enough to capitalize on Q’s general state of nightly undress, sometimes he wasn’t, but Q always pulled in close to him, the two moving until wings and limbs were all arranged to exhausted satisfaction. Q would go to sleep with Bond breathing deeply against his neck, the kind of deep sleep that 007 had told him few agents got – not when they’d just spent the last days, weeks, or even months sleeping with one eye open and one finger on a trigger. But Bond slept deeply for Q, when he was too tired to even run a hand through the boffin’s hair.

Still, as wonderful as after-mission sex would have been, it was worth it to see Bond passed out on the couch with Mothra plonked on his chest like a happy, furry tumor. Q chuckled quietly to himself and went back to the kitchen to make some more tea, broadening his wingspan to catch a stray beam of light that slipped like pale gold through the window. It matched the contentedness that nestled in his heart.

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Chapter End Notes

This ending turned out more beautiful than I had even hoped for - so I hope you agree (^u^) I'm going to be on hiatus for a bit, with classes starting up to take over my life, but I might dart onto Archive to post a few new 00Q fics I've been starting in my spare time (including a sequel to 'Leash').

For anyone who liked Silva (even just a bit), listen to 'Evil Angel' by Breaking Benjamin. It almost feels like...a requiem.

Thanks for everyone who went along on this crazy ride with me! It's over, but man, was it fun :)

Works inspired by this one: [Cover for No Rest for the Wingless by yukitan](#) [Against the Odds](#)
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!